Authority Files in an Archival Setting

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The Minnesota Historical Society is one of those great midwestern historical organizations that encompass a little bit of everything relating to history. It includes the state historic preservation office, an archaeology program, historic sites throughout the state, a publications and research program, education programs, and a museum — not to mention the archival collections.

Museum collections management at the society is administratively part of the Division of Historic Sites and Museums. The "flat stuff" and the staff that go with it are all part of the Division of Library and Archives. This division of Library and Archives now operates along functional lines with the following departments: Acquisitions and Curatorial; Processing (cataloging); Conservation; Reference; and Administration (which includes the support staff). In addition, there is a State Archives Department, whose four staff members are responsible for the acquisition and transfer of state and local government records. They also provide preliminary arrangement and description, but otherwise depend on the other functional departments for support.

Until two years ago, however, we were organized less by function and more by type of material, with archives and manuscripts in one division and libraries and special collections in another. Hereafter, I will refer primarily to an archival setting in the old Division of Archives and Manuscripts, with a technical services staff of about a dozen.

Within our archival (e.g., non-Library) collections, now totalling more than 75,000 feet, we often speak of manuscripts, state archives, and railroad records (Great Northern and Northern Pacific archives) as three different collection management groups.

Within the manuscripts group, you can trace the historical development of inventories and catalogs, along with several different classification systems and shelf arrangements. The acquisition of 15,000 feet of railroad records in the late 1960s and early 1970s gave us strategic experience in managing large

modern collections. It also moved us into a new building — literally a warehouse. The State Archives has been with us since the mid-1970s, and its finding aids are probably the most uniform. Our present approach to bibliographic control and access has three features:

1) A separate finding aid available for every manuscripts collection and every archival series. Each finding aid contains at least a summary accompanied by a container list where necessary. Many are more detailed.
2) A commitment to provide access to finding aids by cataloging them in some form.
3) A written compendium of descriptive standards and cataloging rules.

In practical terms, this means that we have a wall full of looseleaf notebooks containing the finding aids (about 70 linear feet); a card catalog for the manuscripts finding aids; an RLIN terminal, which since 1986 has been the catalog for the State Archives finding aids; and a processing manual that contains guidelines for physical processing as well as for description, cataloging, and authority work.

Creating the Cataloger's Catalog

The physical separation of manuscripts catalogers from the catalog led to the development of authority files within our division in the early 1970s.

Before about 1970, the public catalog was used as the authority file. To determine the authorized form of a heading, the cataloger consulted the manuscripts card catalog for precedents. New subject headings were derived primarily from *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (LCSH). New name headings were formed according to a few principles consistent with library cataloging rules. In cases involving names or topics of statewide significance, catalogers might also consult the separate library catalog or authority file. They recognized the

desirability of maintaining consistency with the library for the sake of users.

But when most of the manuscripts processing and cataloging staff moved to a different building, they had to find another way to maintain continuity and consistency. A volunteer typed a "heading only" card for each heading, including the cross-references, used in the existing catalog. Voila! Michael Gorman's "protoauthority file".

Developing the Authority File

Gradually this separate file became more than a list of headings. As the staff and the catalog grew, it became more important to control the creation of headings and to document choices made. Although the staff included several people with library training who appreciated the value of an authority file, it is unlikely that anyone consciously said "we have a collocation problem here; maybe we need an authority file to help us distinguish names, show relationships, and document decisions." There was no cataloging impact statement. It just happened.

On personal name cards we began to record identifying information, generally occupation or place of residence and dates. We also routinely established personal names in their fullest forms, along with birth and death dates when they were ascertainable. Having such information in the authority file makes it unnecessary to search further in finding aids or entire collections to determine, for instance, whether the E. S. Pettijohn represented in a new acquisition is the same as the Elias Steele Pettijohn already named in the catalog. Occupation and place(s) of residence have proved fairly reliable identifiers in such cases.

Subject headings had long been derived from LCSH, but we began explicitly to indicate on the subject authority card the source of the heading. The more we deviated from LCSH, the more we needed to record how and why we did it.

We began to record scope notes to explain how and when a heading was to be used, to distinguish among related headings, or to document the substitution of current headings for obsolete ones. We also began to annotate our copy of LCSH to show which headings we had used and to record there any significant local variations from LC practice. Then, when the catalogers searched LCSH they would discover whether we had used a heading before, or whether we had decided to use another heading instead.

We continued to depend on the library's catalog and authority file to verify some headings, primarily personal and corporate names. But since that catalog was in another building, we did this only for those "prominent" persons and organizations whose names

seemed likely to recur in our collections.

As they came to our attention, we reconciled conflicting headings that existed in the catalog before the construction of the authority file. Generally, this resulted in a "see also" reference in the public catalog and a usage note ("use this heading; don't use that heading") in the authority file. We avoided actually *changing* headings on cards unless they were inaccurate. Finally, we integrated authority work into the process of cataloging by requiring catalogers to create and file new authority cards as new headings were added to the catalog.

The concern for authority work in manuscripts and archives coincided with the development of a body of internal rules and guidelines codified in our processing manual. This, too, arose from the need to train new people as the staff grew and the interests and inclinations of the manuscripts processing staff.

Rarely, until recently, have we questioned the value of maintaining our authority card files. But, until recently, we have created only skeletal authority records. Choice among variant forms has not been documented as thoroughly as in a *Library of Congress Name Authorities* record, if at all. Few records contain full cross-referencing.

Improvement or Dead End?

Even before the opportunity to join RLIN arose, we assumed we would eventually convert existing records and current cataloging to the MARC format. We could also see down the road — and it's still considerably down the road — the potential for an integrated catalog within our own institution. So we began to consider ways to support cataloging and access in the new environment.

First, we rearranged the authority card files into separate alphabets for personal names, organizational names, geographic names, and topical subjects to correlate with the MARC fields.

We created a machine-readable copy of the topical subject file using a word processor database. This produced an updatable file that we could make available in book form for the use of catalogers and reference staff.

In the process we also classified headings according to several broad subject categories. We entered two-letter category codes in a special field in each record in the database. For example, the heading "abstracts of title" was assigned classification codes for Land (LA) and Law and Judiciary (LJ); the heading for "abused wives" was coded for Social Welfare (SW), Law and Judiciary, and Family (FA). We thought that a classified list of headings could make it easier for catalogers and catalog users to locate the "right" headings. A researcher could scan

a list of broadly related headings for appropriate headings to search in the catalog. A cataloger could scan the same list for headings to use in added entries for a collection. Although this seemed like a good idea, time and technical difficulties prevented the project from progressing beyond input and initial printed copy, and we are at the point of abandoning it.

Using "Library" Standards

We have been favorably disposed toward standards; once they are established you have only to implement the appropriate rule, not reconstruct it for each usage. However, changing from one set of rules to another has required adjustments.
ıu We eased the transition from internal guidelines to external standards by starting with the State Archives, for which no previous catalog existed. Further, as a result of our earlier participation in the SPINDEX Midwest State Archives Guide Project, we had already traded some autonomy in descriptive practice for the prospect of updatable indexed guides. The guides never materialized, but this project left us with a fairly consistent database and renewed appreciation for the role of descriptive standards in maintaining consistency.

We now have over 10,000 State Archives series description records in RLIN, the bulk of them loaded from our SPINDEX database. This time we were prepared to trade even more autonomy for online access to our records, to the records of repositories across the country, and incidentally, to the *Library of Congress Name Authorities* file. Participation in RLIN has *required* us to use the library standards, *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*, 2nd edition (AACR2) and LCSH.

Adoption of AACR2

I found AACR2 much less intimidating after encountering Michael Gorman's "Most Concise AACR2", which occupied a single column in *American Libraries* . It is no substitute for the "verbose" version, but it certainly clarifies the general principles, including the one that most concerns archivists.

According to the rules for corporate names, subordinate units are to be entered under their own names when they are distinctive, rather than in a form reflecting the entire administrative hierarchy to which they belong. For instance, there is a Division of Forestry within the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The division's name is distinctive because there is not likely to be any other Minnesota state agency with the same name. Thus its AACR2 form is "Minnesota. Division

of Forestry." But names that are *not* distinctive, like "Planning Section," are entered in a form that *does* reveal administrative hierarchy, e.g., "Minnesota. Dept. of Public Safety. Planning Section." This apparent inconsistency, though logical in terms of the rules, is difficult for the noncataloger to comprehend. And archivists are understandably reluctant to lose the informational value of explicit hierarchy.

Direct entry, as opposed to hierarchical entry, need not create access problems, though, because even if you enter records under an agency's own distinctive name, you have the option to create added entries for "parent" agencies, and notes to explain administrative relationships. For example, the Minnesota Division of Vocational Rehabilitation was first part of the Minnesota Department of Education and later part of the Minnesota Department of Economic Security. The main entry for any series of the division's records would be "Minnesota. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation." Records series generated by the division while it was part of the Education Department could also have an added entry for "Minnesota. Dept. of Education" as the parent agency responsible for their creation. A note in the bibliographic record could explain the relationship between the division and the department.

Alternatively, if information about the administrative context of a name can be provided in an authority file record, one iteration is sufficient for all the bibliographic records in which the name appears. Of course this really works only when authority records can be linked to bibliographic records.

Other problems arise when archivists try to establish headings for people or organizations that never published anything. Ironically, when the "work in hand" is an archival collection or series, archivists very often have available much more material with which to document a predominant form of name than book catalogers. The rules and conventions for citing sources, however, generally presume that published sources will be used. We were assured by our head library cataloger that even when creating *Library of Congress Name Authorities* (LCNA)/ National Coordinated Cataloging Operations (NACO) headings, it is perfectly acceptable to cite information found in company letterheads, organizational minutes, or other unpublished materials.

Long-standing internal use of non-AACR2 forms of names, perhaps for special purposes, can also cause problems. Prior to the publication of AACR2, we had established our own standard names for Minnesota state and local agencies and used them to file our paper finding aids alphabetically. The names are concise forms, dependent on their context within

the file of Minnesota State Archives finding aids, e.g., "Public Safety Commission" rather than "Minnesota Commission of Public Safety." They show hierarchical relationships, e.g., "Conservation Department: Forestry Division" rather than "Minnesota. Division of Forestry." Since we expect to use the paper finding aids, without rearranging them, for some time to come, we want to retain the names for filing purposes. We have finessed the problem (at least temporarily) by adhering to the rules when creating main entries and other headings but enter our "filing title" form in a local field, with a special subfield marker designation. Thus, we can always find or isolate these names and, if necessary, modify or eliminate them from a machine-readable catalog without affecting other headings.

For state agency names, we prepared a cross-reference list that refers from each filing title to a corresponding AACR2 form (and potentially vice versa). As a result, it is unnecessary to consult the *Library of Congress Name Authorities* file each time to verify the form of a Minnesota state agency name that comes to the cataloger in "filing title" form.

Our solution to the filing title problem might be considered a violation of the principles of authority file construction if you regard the filing title truly as an alternate form of name. Alternate forms of names belong as cross-references in an authority file, not as added entries in a catalog. But catalogs should make cross-references available to users, and our RLIN catalog does not. We have chosen a reversible compromise by making the added entries now, but identifying them for later removal.

We were able to reconcile our old practices with AACR2 until we came to establish Minnesota township names. There are several categories of headings, including those for governors, state courts, and townships, that are constructed according to arbitrary conventions, no matter how they appear in bibliographic items. Thus, governors' administrations take the form "Minnesota. Governor (1971-1976 : Anderson)", where state, last name, and dates of tenure vary. Minnesota state courts take the form "Minnesota. District Court (Crow Wing County)", where the county varies. Township names take the following forms: "Inguadona (Minn. : Township)", where there is no conflict between two townships with the same name; or "Maple Ridge (Beltrami County, Minn. : Township)", where the county name is added to resolve a conflict with a Maple Ridge Township in Isanti County.

The arbitrary form for creating township headings seemed wrong, as well as ungainly, since we could document that in Minnesota the use of "Township" as part of the name is certainly predominant. With the help of our head library cataloger, we prepared

a rule interpretation that construed the rules for application to Minnesota township names. We felt that as principal holder and cataloger of Minnesota township records, the Minnesota Historical Society ought to assume responsibility for establishing their names. We discovered, however, that early in the development of AACR2, the Government Printing Office Library and the LC Geography and Map Division argued that it was impossible to determine with certainty the official names of townships from forms found on publications. As a result, AACR2 rule (RI 23.2A 2) follows the practice of the *Rand McNally Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide*, which is the LC standard for U.S. place names, and omits from the heading the term indicating the type of jurisdiction. This arbitrary choice takes precedence over any other existing documentation.

Eventually, we will take advantage of our library's status as a NACO contributor to establish new name authority records in the *Library of Congress Name Authorities* file for Minnesota-related personal names, Minnesota government agency names, and Minnesota geographic names. When we do, we must follow the rules, even the arbitrary ones.

LCSH and Subject Access

We have used LCSH for a long time and consider its headings fairly acceptable, perhaps because we have a general collection, perhaps because we haven't found anything better. We have also used headings from an authority file created by the Hennepin County Library (HCL), a Minnesota public library, because its headings tend to be more current than LCSH and they more closely approach natural language. The HCL list is LC-based, and in each case where headings differ from synonymous LC headings, the differing usage is noted.

If we have problems using LCSH as an authority for subject access to archival collections, it is primarily for reasons other than inadequacy of the authorized headings.

First, LCSH lacks comprehensive syndetic structure. There are too few cross-references from unauthorized synonyms, making it difficult to locate authorized headings. There are two few references to broader, narrower, and related authorized terms, making it difficult to select an appropriate level of specificity.

A second problem arises more from the nature of the materials being cataloged than from the choice of authorized headings or the structure of controlled vocabularies. Strictly speaking, a subject heading is supposed to stand for a subject — what a "work" is *about*. But in cataloging archival records we seldom deal with "works" as traditionally defined, and we struggle to use subject headings for attributes that

are not truly subjects at all.

The subject of press releases issued by the governor's office is the activity of the governor. But such materials are also potentially useful as evidence in research concerning public relations. Is public relations a legitimate subject in this context? The Minnesota State Archives holds a series of nominating petitions, signed by voters and filed with the Minnesota Secretary of State in order to enter a candidate's name on the ballot. Should the subject heading "nominations for office" be included in the catalog record? The series is evidence of a nomination process, it might be an example of nominations for office (as a form of material), but only by inference is it about nominations for office. Do users make such distinctions? Do archives users and library users expect different kinds of results when searching for "subjects"? Do we need to separate works about maps from things that are maps? Do we want to bring together works about auditing with actual audit reports?

Amidst such unresolved issues, we must also consider the use of RLIN as a public catalog. Although RLIN was never intended to function as a public catalog, it has been used for that purpose despite major deficiencies. In order to search for a subject you must know at least the first three letters of the authorized heading, which is hardly an improvement over the card catalog. Since it contains no cross-references, it may even be a regression from the card catalog. To compensate, catalogers tend to proliferate access points, hoping that users will find *something*. Rigorous authority control may be compromised, although for practical and user-friendly reasons. An online public catalog with no syndetic structure and no linked authorities may be better than no catalog at all, but it is not a good catalog.

Steps Toward an Integrated Catalog — Implications for Authority Work

In a few years the Minnesota Historical Society will move into a new building, where we are committed to providing a central reference service. As we anticipate the eventual development of an integrated catalog for different formats (and, we hope, with linked authorities), our institution seems to be moving away from our present manual authority card files, and toward greater emphasis on formal authority work.

One of the first things we did after the Division of Library and Archives was created was to bring staff together for a series of refresher workshops on AACR2 and *Library of Congress Subject Headings,* our common tools. When the principal catalogers using each format met to discuss what we could do

to promote common practice with respect to name headings, we agreed not to build a single central authority file. Instead, we would concentrate on establishing most new headings (with emphasis on Minnesota-related headings) to submit to LCNA via NACO. They would then be available both to our RLIN catalogers (for archival materials) and to our Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) catalogers (for books, serials, maps, artworks).

A second series of workshops is designed primarily for manuscripts catalogers, focusing on the MARC format and on the new, more formal approach to name authority work. Finally, a new processing manual will accompany the transition.

During this period, I've found it very helpful to be able to draw on the expertise of our head library cataloger to clarify and interpret some of the rules and conventions with which we must now contend. But although archivists may be new to MARC and AACR2, we are not brain-dead when it comes to cataloging. Archivists have brought new perspectives to the whole process, most notably the concept of collective description of materials. Eventually we may help the entire cataloging community to go beyond subjects, authors, and titles to provide better and easier access to the information in our collections.

AUDIENCE DISCUSSION

DAVID BEARMAN:

How do you choose the most appropriate places in which to exercise authority control, and how does that depend on what your objectives are, whether it's to control the file best for your users, or for the other parts of your own institutions, or for the network that you belong to? Are those conflicting objectives, or are they, in fact, harmonious?

MARION MATTERS:

I think I can say a little more about why we have chosen to deal with *names,* and why we have decided to deal with them by establishing most of them under NACO for the *Library of Congress Name Authorities* file.

It benefits us internally because we have catalogers working in two separate buildings using different systems, OCLC and RLIN. By establishing Minnesota-related names in either our archives unit or a library unit and then adding those records to the *Library of Congress Name Authorities* file, we make them accessible to each other through the OCLC and RLIN systems, even though we have no common internal authority file. The *Library of Congress Name Authorities* file becomes our common authority file for Minnesota-related names. I also think we are choosing to do this because it's *possible.*

DAVID BEARMAN:

So, you're choosing to augment an external authority file in order to achieve common internal authority?

MARION MATTERS:

Yes.

FRED STIELOW:

We have mentioned name, place, media, genre controls. Is anybody going to talk about subject thesaurus control?

DAVID BEARMAN:

I heard Marion say that subject authority control worked reasonably well from LC authorities because their collections include very broad subjects, but why don't you respond to that?

MARION MATTERS:

So far, we have done little with subject authority control beyond using authorized headings from LCSH. As I mentioned earlier, we experimented with a classification of subject headings to try to bring together headings relating to a broad category like agriculture so that you could scan them and find the "right" headings. We were trying to find our way around a list of terms that has little syndetic structure. But printed lists and card files really are outdated tools for authority control in an automated environment. You should have a better tool in SIBIS, since it can link your authority records and your bibliographic records. I think in order to make progress in subject authority control we have to have the following things: more automated systems to manage authorities, authorities linked with other authorities as well as with bibliographic records, and some kind of local participation (like NACO?) in establishing headings and making cross-references in national subject authority files.