

# Preface

*Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts*<sup>1</sup> has served the U.S. archival community as a content standard for catalog records for more than two decades. The advent of new technologies and descriptive tools, including the Web, XML, and EAD, have encouraged archivists to go beyond placing basic catalog records in online systems to putting full descriptions of their holdings, frequently enhanced with digital images, on the Web. Archival descriptions in an online environment, where not only researchers but other archivists can see them, have highlighted differences and similarities in practice between repositories and brought to the fore the need for a content standard for finding aids.

As a descriptive standard of the Society of American Archivists, *APPM* was placed on a review/revision schedule in the early 1990s. By the time EAD was launched in 1996, it was apparent that any revision of *APPM* should incorporate rules for finding aids as well as for catalog records. It was also thought that the two international standards, the *General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G))*<sup>2</sup> and the *International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons, and Families (ISAAR (CPF))*,<sup>3</sup> should be accommodated, and that perhaps a joint Canadian/U.S. standard could be created.

To that end, discussions with descriptive standards experts in Canada began with a week-long Bentley Library Research Fellowship Program project in summer 1996. The results of that project were promising enough that the discussions continued and, in 1999, the Gladys Kreibel Delmas Foundation funded another joint meeting in Toronto, which produced the “Toronto Accord on Descriptive Standards.” It seemed that there was enough common ground to pursue a joint project.

## The CUSTARD Project

In 2001 the Society of American Archivists received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, which was augmented by the Delmas Foundation, to embark on a joint U.S.-Canadian descriptive standard project called CUSTARD (Canadian-U.S. Task Force on Archival Description). The project as envisioned would produce a content standard that would replace *APPM* and possibly the Canadian *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)*,<sup>4</sup> accommodate all the data elements of *ISAD(G)* and *ISAAR (CPF)*, and be applicable to all types of archival descriptions. To do this, eight Canadian

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Hensen, comp., *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1989). The first edition was published in 1983.

<sup>2</sup> ICA Committee on Descriptive Standards, *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ottawa: International Council on Archives, 1999). Available online at <[http://www.ica.org/biblio/cds/isad\\_g\\_2e.pdf](http://www.ica.org/biblio/cds/isad_g_2e.pdf)>.

<sup>3</sup> ICA Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards, *ISAAR (CPF): International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families*, (Ottawa, International Council on Archives, 1996). Available online at <[http://www.ica.org/biblio/isaar\\_eng.pdf](http://www.ica.org/biblio/isaar_eng.pdf)>.

<sup>4</sup> *Rules for Archival Description* (Ottawa, Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1990). Available online at <<http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/archdesrules.html>>.

archivists, seven U.S. archivists, and the project manager<sup>5</sup> met four times over two years to draft a set of rules.

By spring 2003 it had become apparent that there were enough significant differences between Canadian and U.S. practice that a joint content standard was not possible at this time. Consequently, the Canadians are using the CUSTARD project draft as the basis for a new edition of *RAD* (*RAD2*), and the U.S. archivists have distilled the draft into *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (*DACS*). Despite continued maintenance of two separate national standards, the dialogue between Canadian and U.S. archivists will surely continue.

## Relationship to other Standards

*DACS* is related to three other groups of standards. Descriptions created according to *DACS* may be stored and exchanged electronically using the syntax of data structure and communication protocols like *MARC 21* and *EAD*. Various thesauri and authority files may serve as the basis for indexing *DACS* records as described in the Overview of Archival Description. Most significantly, *DACS* is associated with other descriptive conventions, notably *APPM*, which it supersedes. That relationship is detailed in the following section. There are also close connections to the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* (*AACR2*) and with the two conventions promulgated by the International Council on Archives: *ISAD(G)* and *ISAAR(CPF)*.

Like *APPM*, *DACS* was developed in part as a replacement for the skeletal rules in Chapter 4 of *AACR2*, which itself acknowledges the need for other cataloging codes. Its Rule 0.1 states, “These rules are designed for use in the construction of catalogues and other lists in general libraries of all sizes. They are not specifically intended for specialist and archival libraries, but such libraries are recommended to use the rules as the basis of their cataloguing and to augment their provisions as necessary.” In this way, *DACS* provides more specific guidance in the description of contemporary archival materials and eliminates some of the less user-friendly aspects of *AACR2*, including many abbreviations and the coded recording of uncertain dates, conventions necessitated by the space limitations of 3x5 catalog cards but no longer helpful or necessary in modern information systems. It also provides syntax for the recording of names when families have been identified as the creators of archival materials. While not included in *AACR2*, the use of family names as creators in the description of archives was part of previous bibliographic cataloging codes, has a long tradition in archival descriptive practice, and has been officially sanctioned at least since the first edition of *APPM* was published by the Library of Congress in 1983.

All 26 data elements of *ISAD(G)* and *ISAAR(CPF)* are incorporated into *DACS*, in some cases virtually word for word. The exception is the exclusion, for two reasons, of the Level of Description element from *ISAD(G)*. While five levels of arrangement and description are recognized in *ISAD(G)*, experienced archivists understand that complex holdings often include many more levels of hierarchy.

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<sup>5</sup> The group comprised the members of the Canadian Committee on Archival Description (CCAD)—Hélène Cadieux, Tim Hutchinson, Bob Krawczyk, Lucie Pagé, Mario Robert, Gerald Stone, Marlene van Ballegoie, Wendy Duff (who substituted for Kent Haworth), and editor and project manager Jean Dryden; and U.S. members Michael Fox, Steve Hensen, Lynn Holdzkorn, Margit Kerwin, Kris Kiesling, Bill Landis, and Lydia Reid.

At this time, there is no consensus in the U.S. as to how existing terminology might be applied when there are more than five levels of arrangement. There is no benefit in prescribing data that cannot be applied consistently, especially when such uniformity is a primary requirement for the use of the information. Moreover, the simple recording of the level element, even if it could be assigned in a standardized way, is obviously insufficient for linking together information in the various parts of a multilevel description. As a more pragmatic solution, Chapter 1 of *DACS* simply requires that an information system employ some means of linking together the various levels of description. This could involve linked *MARC* records, nested components in *EAD*, associated tables in a relational database, or some other local solution.

## Comparison to *APPM*

Those accustomed to using *APPM* will have little difficulty adopting this new standard. Everything that was in the second edition of *APPM* is here, and more. While *APPM* was a content standard intended specifically for the creation of catalog records, *DACS* can be used to create any type or level of description of archival and manuscript materials, including catalog records and full finding aids. In addition, *DACS* moves away from the bibliographic model represented by the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*<sup>6</sup> and to a certain extent followed by *APPM*, to reflect a more thoroughly archival approach to description.

Structurally speaking, *APPM* is divided into two parts and *DACS* three: *APPM* comprises Part I. Description, and Part II. Headings and Uniform Titles; *DACS* comprises Part I. Describing Archival Materials, Part II. Describing Creators, and Part III. Forms of Names. The organization of the data elements is different in several instances. Many of the elements in the *APPM* Note Area (1.7) are now rearranged into different conceptual areas or even separate chapters in *DACS*. For example, Biographical/Historical Note (*APPM* 1.7B1) is now Chapter 10 Administrative/Biographical History in Part II of *DACS*. In this, as in many other cases, significantly more guidance as to the content of the data element is provided. In addition, the numbering system has been simplified in *DACS*. Within each data element, only the rules themselves are numbered. The exceptions to this are Chapters 12-14, which, as they are drawn from *AACR2*, follow that standard's numbering system. Further, *DACS* simply omits areas mentioned in *APPM* that have little or no relevance to the description of archival materials, such as bibliographic series, parallel titles, statements of responsibility, etc.

The Statement of Principles, a revision of the principles developed early in the CUSTARD project, provides a concise articulation of the nature of archival materials and how that nature translates into descriptive tools. The statement forms the underpinnings of the rules themselves.

## *DACS*

The Overview of Archival Description discusses various types of descriptive tools and the importance of providing access points or index terms to lead researchers to them. While names of creators and

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<sup>6</sup> *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2002 revision (Chicago: American Library Association; Ottawa: Canadian Library Association; London: Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2002).

functions are powerful access mechanisms for the context of materials, the importance of topical subjects, documentary forms, geographic names, and other types of index terms are emphasized in this section.

Chapter 1 outlines the *DACS* elements that must be included in different levels of descriptions, “level” referring both to the hierarchy of the materials themselves (i.e., whether a given description encompasses the entirety of an individual’s papers or a single letter therein) and to the amount of detail provided in the description. The chapter articulates specific data elements that should be included in descriptions ranging from accession records to full finding aids, from a collection-level MARC 21 record to a fully encoded EAD instance. “Requiredness” of specific data elements was cumbersome to articulate in the context of each rule due to varying needs and practices at different levels of description, so this information has been placed in text boxes on pages 8–11.

*DACS* also contains a “commentary” for many data elements and occasionally for a specific rule. The commentaries serve to amplify, explain, or provide greater context for the element or rule, particularly in areas where archival practice has been less than uniform in the past.

*DACS* integrates rules for describing archival and manuscript materials and collections. Gone is the notion of the “artificial” collection. Materials that are gathered together by a person, family, or organization irrespective of their provenance are intentionally and consciously assembled for some purpose. Most repositories in the U.S. have such collections, and they need to be handled and described the same way as materials traditionally considered to be “organic.”

*DACS* contains no specific rules for the description of particular media, e.g., sound recordings, maps, photographs, etc. Standards for the description of such materials are created and maintained by other groups in the library and archival communities, and to reproduce these rules or try to supersede them here would be both presumptuous and a maintenance nightmare. Archivists who need such specialized rules should consult media-specific standards, which are listed in Appendix B.

Finally, while *DACS* is designed to be output neutral, it nevertheless provides examples encoded in both EAD and MARC 21 for each data element in Part I, and for Chapters 9 and 10, as these are the two output systems currently used by most archivists.

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