

of the author of the re-mentioned described thesis
to the University to which it was
submitted. The extent of the text derived from it may
be determined without the prior written consent of the
author or University (as may be appropriate). *Short
quotations may be included in the text of a thesis or
dissertation for purposes of illustration, comment or
criticism, provided full acknowledgement is made of the
source, author and University.*

**ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION, STANDARDS AND THE
ENCODED ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION (EAD) STANDARD:
AN ASSESSMENT OF EAD IN RELATION TO SOUTH
AFRICAN SPECIFICITIES**

Deborah Ann Wilson

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand,
Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts by course work and research report.
Johannesburg, 2002**

ABSTRACT

The report investigates South African archival description in order to identify a South African standard. It then tests the extent to which a South African collection can be marked up to the Encoded Archival Description Document Type definition as a format standard.

The report uses theoretical literature, published research articles and the International Council on Archives' *General International Standard Archival Description* to analyse South African descriptive practices. The archival description on the *National Register of Manuscripts* is referenced in the analysis of South African archival description. Technical texts concerning EAD and other standards are referenced for EAD markup. The inventory of an African National Congress collection, and its collection-level description on the *National Register of Manuscripts*, are marked up to the EAD standard.

The research identifies that there is no South African archival description standard. It suggests a way forward in the establishment of such a standard with reference to international standards development.

ABSTRACT

The report investigates South African archival description in order to identify a South African standard. It then tests the extent to which a South African collection can be marked up to the Encoded Archival Description Document Type definition as a format standard.

The report uses theoretical literature, published research articles and the International Council on Archives' *General International Standard Archival Description* to analyse South African descriptive practices. The archival description on the *National Register of Manuscripts* is referenced in the analysis of South African archival description. Technical texts concerning EAD and other standards are referenced for EAD markup. The inventory of an African National Congress collection, and its collection-level description on the *National Register of Manuscripts*, are marked up to the EAD standard.

The research identifies that there is no South African archival description standard. It suggests a way forward in the establishment of such a standard with reference to international standards development.

ABSTRACT

The report investigates South African archival description in order to identify a South African standard. It then tests the extent to which a South African collection can be marked up to the Encoded Archival Description Document Type definition as a format standard.

The report uses theoretical literature, published research articles and the International Council on Archives' *General International Standard Archival Description* to analyse South African descriptive practices. The archival description on the *National Register of Manuscripts* is referenced in the analysis of South African archival description. Technical texts concerning EAD and other standards are referenced for EAD markup. The inventory of an African National Congress collection, and its collection-level description on the *National Register of Manuscripts*, are marked up to the EAD standard.

The research identifies that there is no South African archival description standard. It suggests a way forward in the establishment of such a standard with reference to international standards development.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation/thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Heritage Studies in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

DEBORAH ANN WILSON

_____ day of _____

To my sister, Hilary Wilson,
for her enduring belief in my ability to stay the course

To Verne Harris, Professor Carolyn Hamilton, Sue Krige, Dr Alex Nice and
Professor Rory Doepel
for the challenges and encouragement

To Carin Smit, David Hirsch and Jean Beater
for their support

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Feedback from the reader of my proposal, Professor Wendy Duff of the University of Toronto, Canada, provided much needed assistance in narrowing the scope of this research paper. Her comments also assisted in finding greater clarity in positioning EAD as a standard and in the selection of XML for the markup of the case study.

This study, which applies both theoretical and technical criteria in its analysis, presented a challenge in the identification of suitable material in a vast list of resources. Verna Harris, my supervisor provided valuable assistance in identifying relevant texts. Professor Wendy Duff and Margaret Hedström suggested further reading and electronic resources.

The case study necessitated the setting up of a technical infrastructure and I am greatly indebted to those involved in the development of the EAD. The markup of the ANC Collection was done using templates, stylesheets and other technical resources made available on the Internet by Daniel Pitti, Michael Fox, Chris Prom and their colleagues. These sources also pointed to proprietary software available from commercial companies. These include NoteTab Light published by Fookes Software, Adobe Acrobat Reader V5 from Adobe, and Microsoft's Internet Explorer 5 and Development Kit (SDK) Java V4. Handbooks and guidelines were referenced on the EAD Help Pages sponsored by the Society of American Archivists. These included *EAD Application Guidelines for Version 1 Homepage*, *EAD Cookbook* and *EAD Cookbook for NoteTab Light* with additional procedures and templates. The EAD DTD V1.0, adopted in July 1995 and revised in 1997 was applied in the markup, while *Tag Library* published by the Society of American Archivists in 1998 was the principle technical reference.

Clive Kirkwood and Letitia Calitz of the National Archives of South Africa provided extensive background information about the history and processes of the National Archives and the use of the National Register of Manuscripts (NAREM).

Razia Saleh supplied information about EAD resources available on the Internet and supplied copies of manuals and training material from Daniel Pitti's South African workshop. Tony Clifford of the South African Information Technology Association explained NAREM's technical infrastructure.

Michele Pickover and Carol Archibald of Historical Papers described the use of NAREM and cataloguing, indexing and creation of an inventory at Historical Papers. Michele Pickover, Verne Harris of the South African History Archive and Tony Rodrigues of Witwatersrand Technicon provided valuable background information on the South African archiving profession and archival standards in South Africa.

My supervisor, Verne Harris, was unfailingly supportive and patient in the development of this research report.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
DECLARATION	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
CONTENTS.....	7
LIST OF TABLES	10
LIST OF FIGURES	10
LIST OF EAD ENCODING EXAMPLES	11
APPENDIX A OVERVIEW.....	12
LIST OF ACRONYMS	13
CHAPTER 1	14
Introduction.....	14
The Context of the Development of Description Standards	14
The Foundations of Archival Description.....	16
The Development of Descriptive Standards.....	22
American Standards Development.....	24
Canadian Standards Development.....	29
International Standards Development	30
Other National Standards Development Initiatives	32
Encoded Archival Description (EAD) and Encoded Archival Context (EAC)...	33
Content, Context and Questions	36
Archival Description in South Africa.....	36
The EAD Standard and its Technical Application	37
A Case Study in EAD Markup	38
The Findings of the Research	38
CHAPTER 2	39
An Overview of South African Descriptive Practices	39
The South African National Archives, NAREM and NAAIRS	39
Outline of Analysis	40
Metadata and Meaning	41

NAREM Content and Context Analysis.....	44
Cross-Database Analysis	48
Conclusion	55
CHAPTER 3	59
The EAD and its Technical Application.....	59
The Origins of the EAD Document Type Definition	59
A Multi-Dimensional View of Standards	60
The EAD DTD	66
EAD Header Element	68
Front Matter Element.....	68
Archival Description Element.....	69
Intersection of the EAD with other standards	73
Interjections to the EAD design	76
CHAPTER 4	79
A Case Study in EAD Markup.....	79
The Format and Assumptions for the Markup Specifications	79
EAD Header (<eadheader>)	80
EAD Header Attributes	80
EAD Identification (<eadid>).....	81
File Description (<filedesc>).....	82
Profile Description (<profiledesc>).....	84
Revision Description <revisiondesc>	85
Front Matter (<frontmatter>).....	86
Archival Description (<archdesc>)	87
Descriptive Identification (<did>)	88
Contextual Elements in <did>.....	89
Description of Subordinate Components.....	92
The Markup of NAREM to the EAD Standard	95
Conclusion	98
NAREM and the EAD	98

The ANC Inventory Markup and the EAD.....	99
CHAPTER 5	104
The Findings of the Research.....	104
NAREM and the EAD.....	104
The EAD in Context	105
South African Archival Description and the EAD.....	107
The Way Forward.....	109
Content, Context and Description.....	109
Standards Compatible with Goals	111
A South African Road Map	112
Conclusion	115
APPENDIX A	117
NAAIRS Documents	117
APPENDIX B	125
BIBLIOGRAPHY	126
Standards and Application Guidelines	126
Interviews.....	127
Articles and Books	127
Other Electronic Sources	131

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - Element Map - NAREM to <i>ISAD(G)</i>	42
Table 2 - Description Content Comparison.....	45
Table 3 - Results of Cross Database Query.....	49

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - Three-dimensional Matrix of Standards Applicable to Archival Description.....	61
Figure 2 – Mandatory Elements in the EAD DTD.....	123

LIST OF EAD ENCODING EXAMPLES

Encoding 1 - Header - Case Study (XML)	80
Encoding 2 - EADID - Case Study (XML)	81
Encoding 3 - EADID - Union Template (SGML).....	81
Encoding 4 - FILEDESC - Case Study (XML).....	82
Encoding 5 - PROFILEDESC - Case Study (XML).....	84
Encoding 6 - FILEDESC - Union Template (SGML).....	84
Encoding 7 - REVISIONDESC - Union Template (SGML).....	85
Encoding 8 - FRONTMATTER - Case Study (XML).....	86
Encoding 9 - ARCHDESC - Case Study (XML)	87
Encoding 10 - DID - Case Study (XML)	88
Encoding 11 - DID Contextual Elements - Case Study (XML)	89
Encoding 12 - Subordinate Components - Case Study (XML).....	92
Encoding 13 - Subordinate Components - Union Template (SGML).....	93
Encoding 14 - NAREM Markup - Case Study	95

APPENDIX A OVERVIEW

Document 1 - African National Congress (ANC).....	117
Document 2 - African National Congress collection.....	118
Document 3 - JS Moroka Accession.....	119
Document 4 - Portraits of ANC Leaders	119
Document 5 - ANC Accession	120
Document 6 - African National Congress (ANC).....	120
Document 7 - Praat met die ANC	121
Document 8 - Praat met die ANC	121
Document 9 - African National Congress (ANC): Strategy and tactics, adopted at the 49 th National Conference, December 1994	121
Document 10 - Argiefnuus. Jaargang XXXV; Okt. 1992; Nr. 4.	122
Document 11 - Natal Indian Congress.....	122
Document 12 - RGN-versameling.....	123
Document 13 - Jeanette Schoon	124
Document 14 - Confidential. African National Congress and Similar Organisations	124

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AACR2	Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules
ANC	African National Congress
APPM	Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts: A Cataloguing Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries
EAD DTD	Encoded Archival Description Document Type Definition
HTML	Hypertext Markup Language
ICA	International Council on Archives
ISAAR(CPF)	International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons, and Families
ISAD(G)	General International Standard for Archival Description
ISBD	International Standard Bibliographic Description
ISO	International Standards Organization
MAD	Manual of Archival Description
NAAIRS	National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System
NAREM	National Register of Manuscripts
NISTF	National Information Systems Task Force
RAD	Rules for Archival Description
RLG	Research Libraries Group
SAA	Society of American Archivists
SGML	Standard Generalized Markup Language
UNIMARC	Universal Machine-Readable Cataloging
UNIMARC AMC	Universal Machine-Readable Cataloging Format for Archival and Manuscripts Control
WGSAD	Working Group on Standards for Archival Description
XML	Extensible Markup Language
XSL	Extensible Stylesheet Language

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Context of the Development of Description Standards

Over the last three decades, the international archival community has placed increasing importance on the development of standards for archival description. Description practices and the application of archival theory have been the subject of debates about the interpretation and application of archival principles, the development of manuals to provide guidelines in arrangement and description and the setting of standards to translate description into automated formats. The United States, Canada, Britain and Australia, among others, have researched current practices and finding aids and have developed national standards to fulfil their local archival requirements. The scope of standards development has now been extended to international standards with the publication of *The General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G))* 2nd edition, by the International Council on Archives in 1999.¹

The South African archival community, in contrast, is characterised by a parochial approach to description, and no attempt has been made to develop national standards. Years of isolation under the Nationalist Government, the small number of professional archivists and the lack of cohesion among South African archival professionals have contributed to this.² This situation parallels the early years of description debates among overseas archivists. Lisa Weber said, in 1989, that archivists saw standardised description as impossible because archival materials differ.³ Automation, according to Hugo Stibbe, has acted as a catalyst in archivists' attitudes.⁴ The development of the Machine-Readable Cataloging or MARC format in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s made it

1 *ISAD(G)*, 2000

2 Pickover, 2002

3 Weber, 1989, p511

4 Stibbe, 1992, p110

possible to electronically encode catalogues for the exchange of data between organisations. The possibilities for increased access to national holdings attracted the participation of many in the archival community.

Paper-based systems such as registers, card indexes, inventory lists and printed catalogues are the mainstay of archival management in South Africa. The country's single most important finding aid⁵ is the National Archives National Register of Manuscripts (NAREM). It provides access to inventories of manuscript collections through the Internet, but does not exploit electronic or descriptive tools fully. The development of national standards should precede the development of electronic finding aids; where there is no standardisation, utility is lost. The encoding of archival materials requires markup standards, but also broad agreement on the application of archival principles and descriptive standards. The release of the Encoded Archival Description Document Type Definition (EAD DTD) in 1998 offers a point of departure for South African archivists to join international initiatives in examining and reaching agreement on descriptive standards. The possibilities of creating greater access for the user, exchanging information with other organisations about holdings and enhancing the management and control of collections require co-operative initiatives.

The EAD DTD does not explicitly define descriptive standards. The EAD DTD is an encoding format for encoding of archival description data and the maintenance of contextual information. A study of descriptive information used by numerous archival organisations predicated the EAD DTD design and development. A process for submissions for changes followed the publishing of the beta version. This gave archivists a voice in the development of the format, which is a vital part of the development of a standard.

The Working Group on Standards for Archival Description (WGSAD), appointed by the Society of American Archivists (SAA), reported in 1989 that the fundamental concepts are key to standards development. The establishment of

⁵ Harris, 2000, p15

common ground is a prerequisite as, "successful development and implementation of standards require co-operation and collaboration among all affected parties" and "...co-operative efforts usually require consensus on standard practices and procedures."⁶ As South African archivists move into the international mainstream archival community, the journey towards a national standard can be shortened by the international experience. Reference to debates and studies leading to the development of descriptive standards can assist in finding a fast path through a process that has taken more than 30 years.

The Foundations of Archival Description

The development of descriptive standards is founded on agreement on the definition and purpose of archival description and the application of archival theory to descriptive practices. In the 1970s, understanding of the definition and purpose of archival description was narrow, emphasising control of the repository. This changed as finding aids developed and it became more apparent that description was essential in communicating successfully with the user. The application of archival theory to description generated debates over different interpretations of basic archival principles as the reality of maintaining archives in the modern organisation clashed with traditional practices. The role of archival description became central to providing the contextual information that was previously embedded in traditional methods of arrangement. Further requirements for standards were suggested as the purpose of description extended to "service requirements"⁷, an example being the provision of understandable information to the user. Description then goes beyond the representation of the archival material to the identification of activities surrounding the material.

⁶ Klaassen(ed.), 1989, p451

⁷ The term 'service requirements' was used by David Bearman in "Documenting Documentation", *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), p35.

The changing role of the archivist over the last three decades is evident in the changing definition of archival description. The first explicit definition comes from the SAA in their 1974 glossary, with the definition of archival description as "the process of establishing intellectual control over holdings through the preparation of finding aids".⁸ Luciana Duranti traces the embellishment of the definition from this "product-oriented" focus⁹ to the process-orientated focus of the WGSAD definition, that "archival description is the process of capturing, collating, analyzing, and organizing any information that serves to identify, manage, locate, and interpret the holdings of archival institutions and explains the context and records systems from which those holdings were selected."¹⁰ Frederic Miller's later definition includes "...origin, context and provenance... filing structure... relationships with other records and the ways in which they can be found and used." Duranti views this last as comprehensive and adds that a context-centred preliminary definition of the WGSAD adds the final aspect of description.¹¹ Control is no longer the only function of description and the user is more central to the definition. The archivist has to fulfil process-oriented functions, including the management and arrangement of archival materials, and keep product-oriented goals in view, such as the understandable representation of materials needed by users and the standardised formats for data exchange.

The 1992 International Council on Archives (ICA) *Statement of Principles Regarding Archival Descriptions* defined the purpose of archival description as "...to identify and explain the content and context of archival material in order to promote its accessibility."¹² Description of contextual information has become more prominent as the interpretation of basic archival principles has changed. The principle of provenance is a recurring theme in modern archival theory. Initially, the application of the principle of provenance was bound to the

8 Duranti, 1993, p47

9 as described by the Working Group for Archival Description Standards

10 Klaassen(ed.), 1989, p440

11 Miller, 1990, p7 (cited in Duranti, 1993)

12 ICA, 1992, p10

observation of the principle of *respect des fonds* otherwise known as the principle of provenance. The definition of this principle in the *Dictionary of Archival Terminology*, that "...records of the same provenance must not be intermingled with those of any other provenance"¹³, provenance being defined as "the agency, institution, organisation or individual that created, accumulated and maintained records in the conduct of its business..."¹⁴, demanded the discrete arrangement of papers from a single administrative entity as distinct from other entities and dictated the basis for arrangement and description.¹⁵ In the past, administrative entities had stable internal structures and functions. Modern administrative entities are dynamic, their functions and internal structures change. The result is that the application of archival principles is not as clear-cut as it was for archival practitioners of the past and the relevance of *respect des fonds* is contested.

The ICA's Commission on Descriptive Standards maintains the importance of the *fonds*, but leaves some room for manoeuvring within its use, saying, "The Commission ...considers the concept of the *fonds* to be both helpful and necessary... encourages national initiatives to determine how in practice the concept may best be applied"¹⁶. Traditionally, the principle of provenance is applied to arrange and describe an internal archival unit. This ensures that documents created, accumulated or used by a person or organisation during its activities are physically maintained in one place, the *fonds*. The parameters of the *fonds* are dictated by the identification of the original creator of the records. The principle of provenance is then applied within the *fonds*. This creates a practical problem where responsibility for a function is transferred to another organisation or agency, as the continuum of records is lost as a new "records creator" defines a new *fonds*.

¹³ ICA, 1988, p121

¹⁴ ICA, 1988, p125

¹⁵ Cook, 1993, p2

¹⁶ ICA, 1992, p10

The Australian archivist Peter Scott had to devise a method for dealing with the changing administrative structures of the Australian government. He viewed the adherence to the concept of *fonds* as distorting the application of the principle of provenance.¹⁷ It was not possible to get a view of the continuum of the documents for a single administrative function. At first, Scott's ideas were not well received. However, in 1993, Terry Cook wrote that the *fonds* should be regarded as an "intellectual construct". He added that there were a number of factors, other than the identification of the creator of records, which led to the choice of *fonds*. These include identifying the controlling organisation which exercised administrative control and the nature of the function that is central to the creation of the documents.¹⁸

The Australian Series System, used to preserve, describe and manage public records, applies provenance by replacing the *fonds* as the highest level with the record series. The series contains all the records produced for an administrative function, allowing different records-producing entities to take over or inherit a function. In order to preserve the continuity between the agencies that produce the records, agency administrative history, the relationships between series, and the history of the function are described for context control and records control.¹⁹

In 1993, Cook expressed a view that was gaining hold in the archival community: "For a significant number of personal papers, for the vast majority of corporate and government records and for almost all electronic records... the straightforward relationship between a single creator and a few closed, complete series of records simply does not exist. The old physical and conceptual correlation within the simple *fonds*, has, ... become extremely tenuous..."²⁰ In short, the principle of *respect des fonds* has evolved. The application of the

17 Cunningham, 1998

18 Cook, 1993, p33

19 Cunningham, 1998

20 Cook, 1993, p24-37

principle of provenance takes place within a virtual *fonds*. This allows continuity from the original creator to creators that inherit a particular responsibility or function.

As *respect des fonds* was instrumental in providing a holistic view and reinforcing the context of the archival items, the evolution of its physical definition to one of an intellectual definition necessitates very wide-ranging descriptive techniques to provide the contextual data and maintain the relationships between records and their creators. Provenance is described and maintained in the hierarchical structure of the description with additional contextual information for the control and access of archival items and groupings.

Bearman argued that descriptive techniques that focus primarily on describing the archival item are inadequate and that the item's function and context must be described.²¹ He emphasises that generation of records is a by-product of activity and the activity provides part of the context. The need for description stretches to the records creator's activities, and to the archivist's activities. Ideally, description concerning information about the records-creator should be researched at the time of the records-generating activity. The common practice is to research this after the acquisition of the materials. An assumption in the ICA's *Statement of Principles Regarding Archival Description* is challenged by Bearman, that description takes place on completion of arrangement.²² Activities that affect the material can be described prior to arrangement. Archival activities may affect the materials after arrangement and after description: the physical location of items change for preservation purposes; contextual information about the records-generating entity may change; items are digitised.

The boundaries of context extend even further, to the archivist's individual context. Fox writes, "...cultural context is defined by the collection's provenance, or source, rather than by publication data. Here, intellectual description centers

²¹ Bearman, 1992, p40-45

²² ICA, 1992, p13

on the title and explanatory notes about such matters as the material's origin, organization, arrangement, scope and content. These are supplied by the cataloger based on the "interpretation, extraction and interpolation"²³. The archivist interpretation creates context in arrangement and description, and information about the archivist's decisions assists the user in understanding the materials within the archivist's context. A case in point is the difference in arrangement done by an archivist who follows the traditional provenance and *respect des fonds* approach and one who applies the series system. This has a material influence on the representation of the material to the user and this contextual information illuminates the user's view and informs the user's research.

In *Documenting Documentation*, Bearman equates description with documentation and says that documentation of documentation provides the glue between the activities that have to be fulfilled to bring description to the user. He writes, "Articles on the use of archival descriptions noted that user access begins with the researcher's knowledge of the context in which the activity generating records took place, but failed to connect this directly to principles for data content...²⁴". Bearman brings other activities and standards requirements surrounding archival materials to bear. The archivist regularly acts as an intermediary between a researcher and the catalogued material. "Service requirements" such as the user's requirement to identify sources has the implication that description has to be defined in relation to the way that users query the database of descriptions. This involves a study of users, the sort of questions they ask, how they use finding aids and the development of a greater understanding of how description needs to be adapted to fulfil that service requirement.

23 Fox, 1990, p18 cites Hensen, (1983)

24 Bearman, 1992, p33-35

The provision of content-based archival descriptions provides the representation of the material and is a recognised archival activity. The role and definition of contextual archival description is receiving much attention, with changes in the interpretation of *respect des fonds* and the application of the principle of provenance within a virtual *fonds* rather than an actual *fonds*. Context is wide-ranging, from those people or organisations that create, aggregate, or acquire the records to the activities of the archivists, and the users of archives. The emergence of electronic records has added further demands on context, as electronic systems need more than descriptions of the archival materials to manage them. Administrative functions and the service requirements of access and exchange have different description requirements. The increasing focus on the user necessitates a more outward-looking approach from archivists as user requirements extend to how, why and what the user needs for successful access.

The Development of Descriptive Standards

Early exercises in electronic applications for the encoding of archival description were dominated by the use and adaptation of bibliographical cataloguing methods, which were more advanced than archival methods in providing an avenue of information exchange between organisations. This involved the adaptation of archival descriptive content to library cataloguing requirements and illustrated the differences between archival and bibliographic requirements. An overriding problem in representing archival description in a purely bibliographic format, is that the assumptions on which library cataloguing is based are not readily adaptable to the maintenance of archival principles and fail to provide meaningful representation of archival materials.

Library materials are controlled and described at item level while archival materials, arranged into groups, are inter-related to maintain the principle of provenance. Library materials such as books are mass-produced, needing only a single bibliographic entry, while archival collections usually contain numerous unique items, such as personal letters, each needing an individual entry. The

bibliographic item, such as a book, is an end-product, consciously developed by the author and understandable as a discrete item. Items in a collection are the by-products of individual's or organisation's activities. Contextual information, including the related activities, is essential in providing a greater understanding to the user. As a discrete item, a book has a complete identity within itself: its author, title and contents are all readily ascertainable, and these description elements are meaningful to the user within the bibliographic context. The user of a manuscript needs contextual information beyond the visible content of the manuscript as it provides only a trace of an activity.²⁵

In the United States in 1978, the Library of Congress issued *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2nd edition (AACR2). The *International Standard Bibliographic Description* (ISBD) sanctioned by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions was incorporated in AACR2. It was not well received,²⁶ as archivists had difficulty in fitting description into the format. Matters observed that, "Trying to get around the system constraints leads primarily to creative interpretations".²⁷

"Creative interpretations" resulted from the standard being set without reference to the professional users of the standard. Archivists were reduced to filling in the empty spaces in the input format to satisfy the need to catalogue. The standards required detailed data for the item in prescribed formats, compulsory entries, and enforced item classification according to the Dewey Decimal or Library of Congress classification schedules.²⁸

Archivists had to translate bibliographic descriptive terms into archival equivalents to apply AACR2 rules. The bibliographic encoding of a set of volumes was elevated to register a group of archival materials. Data elements such as title and author are essential when cataloguing a book but are not

²⁵ Roe, 1990, p147-148

²⁶ Klaassen(ed.), 1989, p446

²⁷ Matters, "Reconciling Sibling Rivalry in the AACR 2 Family", 1990, p90

²⁸ Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1985, p10-11

necessarily factual, objective features in archival description. An archival title may be derived and relate to the context of a group of items and not the individual item. An additional limitation in the bibliographic context is that archival holdings do not always catalogue each individual item, but instead describe the materials as a group. Limited resources and the sheer volume of material make this summary-level description necessary. Headers that group archival items and aggregate descriptions then provide the information necessary for the user to understand and identify relevant material. Contextual information is needed about the entity that produced the material and the activities affecting the material and historical background. In contrast, library materials are catalogued once and are static; changes to library entries are the exception. This cannot be assumed with archival records where material can be transferred, altered, expanded and re-arranged, while other activities such as preservation and digitisation can alter or add to the description.²⁹

In 1985 the Canadian Working Group on Descriptive Standards analysed the cataloguing process and concluded, "the library model as it stands does not apply completely to archival description" as one of the overriding omissions in the library model is its inability to represent different levels of description.³⁰ The development of electronic encoding of inventories has resulted in greater clarity of the issues of content and context. Electronic records are unforgiving; their use rapidly reveals the inconsistencies and missing descriptive content and context. The use of computer systems has been an important driver in the development of standards worldwide and in the 1970s and 1980s data exchange added further impetus to the development of descriptive standards.

American Standards Development

The Universal MARC Format or UNIMARC, developed in the 1970s, provided a format for machine-readable bibliographic data. In 1973, the Library of

²⁹ Roe, 1990, p152

³⁰ Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1985, p14

Congress published MARC Format for Manuscripts so archival collections could be entered into the UNIMARC format. The Format for Manuscripts was not widely adopted as archivists found it inadequate.³¹ Work towards the development of standards at the data element level led the Council for the Society of American Archivists to appoint a National Information Systems Task Force (NISTF) in 1977. This body researched finding aids and the data needed for archival description. NISTF produced a Data Elements Dictionary and sponsored the development of the USMARC Format for Archival and Manuscripts Control (USMARC AMC). The NISTF described its efforts as descriptive rather than prescriptive and viewed the development of a data content standard as a process requiring the attention of professional archivists.³² It recommended that archivists evaluate systems and practices to "determine how comprehensive descriptive standards and practices can be made to satisfy all members of the user community"³³.

MARC AMC introduced a format that is not media-specific, solving a major shortcoming in previous formats. This has particular relevance to archival materials, as collections can include materials consisting of different media. MARC AMC described any archival unit at any level with intra-record links. References to the changes resulting from activities performed in the archival processes could be added to the record.³⁴ In 1983, the Library of Congress, the SAA and the cataloguing standards committee of the American Library Association, approved its use.³⁵

Computerised systems can be inflexible to archivists' requirements, with rigid rules about length of text fields and relationships between data items. MARC AMC had its limitations. "Some archivists... have found themselves in the

³¹ Weber, 1990), p118

³² Bearman, 1992, p36

³³ Spindler and Pearce-Moses, 1993, p332, citing *Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago; Society of American Archivists, 1986)

³⁴ Weber, 1990, p122

³⁵ Duff and Haworth, 1990-91, p28

uncomfortable position of artificially breaking up collections in order to enter them online. In other cases, a narrative field such as the scope and content note has to be broken into several repetitions of the MARC 520 field in order to circumvent field length descriptions. The extent of this information can also be problematic for screen displays, since most library systems assume... one or two screens".³⁶

The use of MARC AMC initiated debate about descriptive standards and archival methods resulting in the refining of methods and techniques. The need for standards for archival description became apparent as archivists still had difficulty when entering descriptions into the MARC AMC format. The development of the MARC AMC "...forced the archival profession to confront its practices for describing archival materials. The uniqueness of archival materials has long been an excuse to perpetuate the profession's idiosyncratic descriptive practices"³⁷.

Bearman raised concerns about standards development efforts, saying that MARC AMC and bibliographic practices were inadequate in reflecting the importance of contextual information concerning people, corporate bodies and functions that generated records. He viewed the MARC AMC limitations as resulting from the record-centred approach. The MARC AMC data content satisfied an "unarticulated interchange service requirement; ...that rules for content and data representation make sense in the context of purposes of actual exchanges or implementation, not in abstract, and different rules or standards for end-products may derive from the same principles."³⁸

American archivists had serious doubts about the usefulness of existing descriptions for user access. Divergent practices resulted in divergent views. Many recognised that little was known about the ways users sought information

³⁶ Roe, 1990, p154-155

³⁷ Weber, 1990, p140

³⁸ Bearman, 1992, p37

and that there could be a need for controlled vocabularies for different data elements.³⁹

In 1988, the Working Group on Standards for Archival Description (WGSAD), comprising 16 archivists, was formed in response to concerns raised with the SAA about descriptive standards. Their work provided tools for understanding and evaluating standards. A matrix provided a framework that showed the interrelationships between different types of standards. They compiled a list of criteria for evaluating the use of a particular standard, and a draft of seventeen specific recommendations. The WGSAD did not recommend specific standards but provided the means for archivists to establish a process for standards development. An important factor in their work was that it covered standards in the information arena. The chairman, Dowler, makes the point that "once one begins to consider standards for description, and even more, the standards needed to communicate information about archives beyond one's own institutional walls, other people's and other professions' standards necessarily come into play".⁴⁰ The range of standards under consideration included electronic standards, library standards, emerging standards for different forms of material or the same kind of material described from a different professional or user perspective.⁴¹

The WGSAD made a number of recommendations including the establishment of a board and the employment of archivists in researching standards, liaising with working groups in other countries, and working with organisations such as the Library of Congress and other standards-generating organisations. Recommendations concerning specific standards for archival description included: the endorsement of Hensen's *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts: A Cataloguing Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries (APPM)* as a standard for archival descriptive

39 Bearman, 1992, p37-38

40 Klaassen(ed.), 1989, p435

41 Klaassen(ed.), 1989, pp433-435