The Arrangement and Description of Manuscripts

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T HE MAIN OBJECT of this article is to discuss a basic method for arranging manuscripts groups to meet the diverse needs of the researcher. Since it may be presumed that the prospective user of manuscripts should receive primary attention in the arrangement of manuscripts, a basic system of arrangement for multiple use has been developed to meet his requirements. Collaterally, it will be argued that arrangement according to this method is better suited to the long-run convenience of the repository than are standard methods. A method of descriptive cataloging has been developed to capitalize on the potentialities of this system of arrangement. An analysis of these descriptive techniques constitutes the second part of this article.

Because the repository's rather than the user's convenience generally receives priority, two of the most commonly practiced methods for arranging manuscript materials have been (1) arrangement according to the rule of provenance [1] and (2) arrangement in chronological order. Both methods are based on short-run views of what constitutes the wisest use of the repository's economic resources.

The first part of this article will criticize these two methods of arrangement. This critical section will be followed by a presentation of a basic system of arrangement for multiple use.

ARRANGEMENT

The rule of provenance rests in part on three important assumptions: (1) that the main purpose of the user is biographical; (2) that the order given a collection by its creators is the best for this purpose; and (3) that the "given order" reflects in some significant way the personality of the creator(s).

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[1] "The more a collection is the product of extended activities, the more significant is its original arrangement, and the more applicable is the basic archival principle of provenance that records should be preserved in the order given them by their creators." Theodore R. Schellenberg, *Arrangement of Private Papers*. Reproduced by the U. S. General Services Administration from an article published in the *Journal* of the Archives Division of the Library Association of Australia.

With regard to the first assumption, the researcher usually has objectives more limited than biographical when examining a given manuscript group. Typically he wants a specific bit of information that relates to his subject, and he has reason to expect to find pertinent information in a given manuscript group—for instance, the letters of a particular person or material relating to a specific event.

Even assuming a biographical purpose on the part of the patron, it is questionable that the order given by the creator is best. It frequently is not. Materials are received in as many different arrangements as there are individual collections, but usually they are arranged by subject, alphabetically by name of correspondent, chronologically, or according to combinations of these. It is doubtful that any particular arrangement is wholly satisfactory to the researcher using the biographical approach. Furthermore, the order in which the papers are received is not necessarily a useful index to the personality of the "creator," unless he was preoccupied with the problem of arrangement. This is not likely to have been the case, but even so it is questionable that the order in which the papers are received should be retained if a more satisfactory one can be devised.

The rule of provenance, as applied to the arrangement of manuscripts, was probably inspired by the application of that rule to public archival work, where its currency is more valid. In this respect archival techniques have had unfortunate consequences for manuscript work. Because modern manuscript groups resemble archives in their mass, complexity, and completeness, there has been a temptation to permit the rule of provenance to operate without adequate qualifications. These fearsome proportions also inspire a defeatist attitude, and the easiest rule to follow is that of provenance.

In at least one important respect, however, the archival quality of many manuscript groups has had healthy effects. Reverence for the single piece has surely been weakened. To the extent that irreverence occurs, simplified arrangements have developed that provide for effective bibliographical controls free of unnecessary and tedious description, which too often have preoccupied workers in this field. The manuscript librarian has behaved too frequently like a frustrated historian or an antiquarian inclined to founder in a quicksand of detail. One consequence has been to complicate that which sorely needs simplification.

If a given manuscript group is not to be immediately processed when it is accessioned, some form of bibliographical control should, of course, be established. In this instance, the rule of provenance is temporarily applicable. A preliminary inventory should be made,

accompanied by a brief description of the order of arrangement of the group as received. On the basis of this preliminary inventory and guide, catalog cards can be composed. These, however, should be regarded only as tentative descriptions.

Besides following the rule of provenance, another standard practice is the use of chronological arrangements. For example, the incoming and outgoing sequences of the correspondence series are often arranged chronologically. Notes are taken on the correspondence by the sorter and the supervisor. These notes provide the basis for recording information about the correspondence, such as the names of the "important" correspondents and the subjects treated. Selection of "important" correspondents, however, is a highly subjective process. No sorter is sufficiently knowledgeable to make these judgments except in the most obvious instances. Yet, when this practice is followed, the sorter and/or the supervisor are presumed to possess the requisite qualities. In the process, the sorter and/or the supervisor make judgments that should be left to the researcher.

Other objections to a chronological arrangement of incoming and outgoing letter series are:

1. Only one approach to a collection is provided the researcher.

2. There is no systematic and objective method for revealing names of correspondents.

3. The letters of those authors of incoming letters who are noted are scattered through the series, and there is no guarantee that all letters by each person will be retrieved when needed.

4. The fact that the letters of some authors of incoming letters are not noted may mislead the researcher by implying that letters of a particular person are not in the collection.

5. The collection as a whole is impoverished in the midst of its riches, for there is no systematic way to compensate for not being informed that the papers of some significant person are in the collection. To illustrate the point: if John Smith's family did not preserve the papers of their father, a local political leader, it is difficult to document events with which he was associated. Yet John Smith corresponded with persons whose papers are in the repository. But, because all letters are arranged chronologically and the sorter's judgment must be relied upon to note the letters of Smith, there is no guarantee that the presence of his letters will be uncovered. The sorter may not realize the significance of Smith, who is relatively "unimportant" but a local celebrity.

At this point in my discussion, a basic system for multiple use is offered as an alternative to these standard practices.

A Basic System of Arrangement for Multiple Use [2]

In this system the point of departure from standard practice lies in the arrangement of the *correspondence series*, usually the most revealing and typically the most important series in any given manuscript group. Other series (documents, business records, court papers, and the like) can be arranged satisfactorily in a number of ways. The discussion that follows is concerned, therefore, with the arrangement of the correspondence series.

If there is a relatively large file of *outgoing letters* covering a relatively long time span, a *chronological arrangement* is preferred. The *incoming letters,* however, should *always* be arranged *alphabetically by writer* unless the writer is acting as agent of another party, in which case the letter should be filed under the name of the party for whom he is acting.

This arrangement offers more than one approach to the collection. The outgoing letter file (chronologically arranged) meets the needs of the biographer and those of the researcher interested in a particular event. The user of the chronological file can refer to the incoming letter file (alphabetically arranged) when the letters of a particular person are needed.

The alphabetical file concentrates all the letters from a given person in one place in the manuscript group. Enclosures are excepted, however; they preferably are separated from the letter (and noted) and filed according to the form of the enclosure (letter, document, article, etc.). If the enclosure is a letter it preferably will be filed in a letter-enclosure file under the name of the sender, if the sender is known. (Enclosures are more fully discussed below.)

The subjective element can be minimized by this type of arrangement. There is built into the sorting process a guarantee (1) that names of all authors will be noted and (2) that an unusually large proportion of authors' names will appear in the card catalog as added entries, with a minimal intervention of subjective judgments.

The practice in the manuscript section of the University of Washington Library is to establish a quantitative basis for judging whether a name should be noted as an added entry in the card catalog; qualitative judgments are made only in exceptional cases.[3] A

[2] Based on practices employed at the Bancroft Library. These practices were developed through the joint efforts of Prof. Robert E. Burke (historian) and Mrs. Julia Macleod (cataloger).

[3] No added entries are made for authors of routine letters (letters of acknowledgment and the like) if that type only is represented; writers of one or a group of letters less than the minimum standard should be noted as added entries only when a letter (or a few letters) have special significance. By this system the subjective element is minimized but, of course, not eliminated; it never can be.

minimum standard is set whereby the name of a writer is quasi-automatically noted as an added entry if he wrote a certain minimum of letters (2, 3, 5, or some other determined number). In other words, *the basis for judgments is transferred from the sorter to the sorting process*; major substantive judgments are reserved for the researcher.

A complement to this technique for bringing out author added entries is the large-scale accumulation of references to persons whose papers proper are not within the repository. The claim here refers to scale, not to uniqueness of practice. Repositories generally mention authors by author added entry cards, but such mention depends upon the judgment of the sorter or his supervisor. Given a chronological arrangement (the typical one), bibliographical control of a particular author in a manuscript group will be inherently inexact and unreliable unless the cataloger notes every instance in which letters of a given author appear in the manuscript group. This practice would consume gargantuan amounts of time, yet it still would not guarantee that the accumulated references were complete, because the letters of any particular author are likely to be scattered throughout the chronological (or subject, or combination) arrangement.

If the outgoing letter file is a small one or spans only a brief period of time, an alphabetical arrangement is preferred—that is, alphabetical by name of addressee. Since a biographical purpose is less usefully served by a file of letters covering a relatively short period of the "creator's" life or sparsely covering fragments of his life, it is believed that the most useful arrangement is alphabetical. Corollary to this reasoning, it is believed that under these conditions *the name of the addressee is more important than the date.* In this arrangement, too, selected addressees can appear in the card catalog as added entries.

Outgoing letters are frequently bound in letterpress copy books; these volumes usually have indexes to names. No useful purpose would be served in disturbing this arrangement, which is inherently chronological. Names of recipients can be found in the indexes, and can be noted as added entries if deemed necessary.

For our library, the papers of Richard A. Ballinger posed a special problem in the application of this rule. A discussion of its use in this instance will suggest its flexibility. The Ballinger papers fall broadly into two time segments: 1907-8 and 1909-11. The letters were already arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent. Ballinger had consistently attached his replies to the incoming letters. We accepted his arrangement. However, if a

longer time span had been covered (say 1904-11) we should have felt justified in segregating the incoming from the outgoing letters and setting them up according to our basic system (using appropriate annotations). Some recognition was given, however, to "time." Ballinger was Secretary of the Interior, 1909-11, and had been General Land Office Commissioner, 1907-8. Because he kept separate files of these offices and of pre-Department of Interior papers, and because the Ballinger-Pinchot controversy of 1909-11 brought Ballinger's legal practice and land office practice into question, it was decided, in accepting Ballinger's arrangement, to divide the correspondence into two time sequences: pre-Department of the Interior and Department of the Interior. If the Ballinger papers had been arranged chronologically or by subject, the papers would have been rearranged according to our basic system.

Subject Groupings for Correspondence

In general, subject groupings of correspondence should be avoided, because the practice causes fragmentation of the collection with resulting loss of bibliographical control. There are instances, however, when subject groupings of correspondence can be more useful than the dispersion of letters to otherwise appropriate files.

Incoming letters, which are sometimes grouped by the creator around a given subject (and are limited to only one subject), may be meaningfully kept together as a unit if their writers are not represented elsewhere in the manuscript group. For example, letters of advocacy are often received by an administrative unit in government or by a holder of a political office. Such letters are often from persons who ordinarily do not write to the administrative unit or to the holder of political office, and frequently such letters will be grouped by the recipient in a separate file unit. It is probably better to leave such a group intact and make an added entry for it in the card catalog.

The Manuscript Unit of One or Few Items

Such items should receive individual attention commensurate with their importance. (The method of arrangement for multiple use, which is advocated in this paper, is concerned with the problems posed by manuscript groups of great mass and complexity.)

Enclosures

Enclosed letters or other forms of correspondence (memoranda, circular letters) specifically referred to in, and attached to, an in-

coming letter should be kept with the incoming letter, *or* when the sender is unmistakably indentified the enclosure may be filed either in the incoming letter series under the name of the sender or in a separate enclosures file under name of sender. Correspondence items neither specifically referred to in nor attached to an incoming letter can be treated as enclosures and placed *in a* separate enclosures file. This last form of enclosure should be filed under the name of the addressee if the name of the sender is undetermined.

Speeches, articles, reports, and legal and personal documents should be separated from the incoming letter and the incoming letter and enclosures should be annotated.

Printed material should be separated from the incoming letter unless the item is a leaflet or some such small enclosure or unless it is an item that will not be kept by the repository if sent to that section of the repository where printed material is processed. Small printed items may be stapled to the incoming letter. Separated printed items to be kept with the manuscript group should be annotated, and separated printed items to be sent elsewhere in the repository should be accompanied by an identification. The incoming letter should be appropriately annotated in any case.

Financial Papers

Financial papers achieve importance primarily to the extent that they bulk quantitatively large in a manuscript group. Their quality is in effect largely determined by their quantity. Incoming bills should be arranged alphabetically by name of the billing party and outgoing bills should be arranged chronologically. The description on the catalog card should be brief, and added entries should be limited to subject entries (Lumber trade—Washington, etc.) unless justifiable exceptions can be made. Receipts have less importance than bills and can usually be satisfactorily grouped in a miscellaneous financial section, requiring a minimum of attention from the sorter. Other financial materials can be similarly treated.

Business Records

Business records, including inventories, journals, ledgers, profit and loss statements, trial balances, special reports, and memoranda (that is, records of the business of a person or organization) should be grouped according to subjects (inventory, trial balance, etc.) and arranged chronologically within that grouping.

Estimate of Costs

An objection may be raised that the system of arranging manuscripts as advocated in this article is too expensive. True, if com-

pared to the expenses incurred by application of the rule of provenance, the system of arrangement for multiple use *is* more expensive. But a chronological arrangement is also more expensive. As indicated above, however, arrangement according to the rule of provenance is generally unsatisfactory except as a convenience to the repository.

The problem seems to be centered upon the advantages of the basic system for multiple use as compared with a chronological arrangement. Specifically, *the problem centers upon the use of an alphabetical arrangement for the incoming correspondence series.* If we concede the superiority of an alphabetical arrangement, it may be argued that it is too expensive to apply.

The following defense is made against this argument:

1. Retrieval of discrete bibliographical units is much less expensive, because all letters written by a particular person may be found by the combined use of the card catalog and the inventory record and guide.

2. A long-run view of economy is substituted for the short-run view. Although the initial expense of sorting is in many cases greater for an alphabetical arrangement, the collection as a whole is made simpler and easier to administer. Administrative expenses are a continuing cost and must be seriously considered.

3. An alphabetical arrangement eliminates the necessity for the minute notation and cross-references that must be employed in an effective chronological arrangement. In fact, if a thorough job of notation and cross-reference is done for the chronological arrangement it would be much more expensive than an alphabetical arrangement. In addition, it is cumbersome, complicated, and unreliable. Unless thorough notation and cross-references are made, a chronological system is unsatisfactory.

DESCRIPTION

A technique of descriptive cataloging has been developed to conform to the characteristics of the basic system for arranging manuscripts for multiple use. This type of description is not intended to be applied to the description of individual manuscripts. It may, however, suggest methods of simplifying the description of individual manuscripts in the direction of eliminating descriptive detail superfluous for the researcher.

Attention here is centered upon manuscripts groups of the archival type, that is, the type for which the basic system of arrangement described above is adapted.

The basic unit for manuscripts groups of the archival type is the *series*. Some examples of series are: correspondence, business records, and others noted in the first section of this article. Although

interfiling of discrete items in a series within a given group deprives the discrete item of some of its uniqueness, it nevertheless makes it possible to describe that item usefully in common with other discrete items in the series. If this form of arrangement and description were not applied the alternatives would be to describe each item or surrender to chaos. Obviously the former alternative would expend a needless amount of time without fruitful purpose. The latter no one wants.

In addition to series it is frequently necessary to create *sub-groups*[4] within a manuscripts group. A subgroup does not share the characteristics of the main body of papers in the particular manuscript group, but for special reasons it is decided to keep it with the group. For example, the University of Washington Library was given the papers of Thomas Burke. Included were the personal papers of Burke and the papers of various law firms and businesses with which he was identified. Since it would have been confusing to interfile all of these papers within one series (all incoming letters of Burke and his law firms, for example), it was decided to segregate his personal papers from the papers of his law firms. Consequently, the following forms of description were made:

For the papers as a whole three cards were written.

Mss   Burke, Thomas, 1852-1925.
10   Papers, 1876-1925. 25 cartons.
                    Gift of Thomas Burke's estate, June 1, 1935.

Burke was generally identified with attracting outside capital to Washington. In these efforts he was active in Democratic and Republican party politics; with local railroad developments; as counsel for the Great Northern Railroads; and other regional economic developments. These papers reflect all of these activities.

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Mss   Burke, Thomas, 1852-1925.
10   Papers, 1876-1925. 25 cartons.

Arranged in the following series: correspondence; documents; court papers; business records.

Sub-groups for: Burke, Shepherd, & Woods, law firm, Seattle; Burke and Haller, law firm, Seattle; Wenatchee Development Co., Seattle.

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[4] This term should not be confused with *subseries*. The latter refers to subdivisions of a given series. For instance, "Incoming letters" is a subseries in the entry: "Correspondence. Incoming letters, 1870-1890."

- 3 -

Mss　　　　Burke, Thomas, 1852-1925.
10　　　　　Papers, 1876-1925.　25 cartons.

See entry for each series, and each sub-group for description of that unit.
See Inventory Record and Guide for comprehensive description.

Before passing to the form of entries for the series and sub-groups, it is important to discuss the information contained in the above example of the "general entry" catalog card.

1. Since the manuscript group is focused upon Burke, his name was chosen as the focal entry; thus,
　　　　Burke, Thomas, 1852-1925.

2. The title is a general one that applies to the manuscript group as a whole; thus,
　　　　Papers, 1876-1925.　25 cartons.

3. The source from which the group was acquired is noted. This note is not made on the series entry cards, nor on the subgroup entry cards. It is made *only* on this *general* entry card.

4. The scope and contents note includes pertinent biographical data and a cursory description of the arrangement.

5. Reference notes refer the user to the series entries for specifics about the particular series, and to the Inventory Record and Guide.

6. Tracings: With one exception (not applicable to the above example) no tracings are made on the general entry card. They are made only on the series entry cards, where they can be more specific. The exception is for *collectors*. If a group of papers is acquired from a collector, and if the papers are not entered under his name, the most appropriate way to trace him as a collector is on the general entry card.

In passing to a discussion of the form of catalog entries for the series and subgroups, attention should be drawn to the use of *a main entry as a form* for both the general entry and the series entry. If this is not done much needless complication is introduced. In the course of elaboration this point will become clearer.

Series entries are made according to the following pattern:

Mss　　　　Burke, Thomas, 1852-1925.
10　　　　　Correspondence.　Incoming letters, 1876-1919.　6 cartons.

Alphabetically arranged by name of author. Those given individual folders are recorded in the card catalog by added entries.

See Inventory Record and Guide for complete list of authors.

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Mss	Burke, Thomas, 1852-1925.
10	Correspondence. Incoming letters, 1876-1919. 6 cartons.

1. Democratic Party—Washington (Ter.). 2. Democratic Party—Washington (State). 3. Great Northern Railroad Co. 4. Railroads—finance. 5. Railroads—management. 6. Republican Party—Washington (State). 7. Seattle—real estate business. 8. Political parties—Washington (Ter.). 9. Political parties—Washington (State).

A *subject added entry* from this series entry would be made according to the following pattern:

<div align="center">Democratic Party—Washington (Ter.)</div>

Mss	Burke, Thomas, 1852-1925.
10	Correspondence. Incoming letters, 1876-1919. 6 cartons.

An *author added entry* would be made according to the following pattern:

<div align="center">Brainerd, Erastus, 1858-1922.</div>

Mss	Burke, Thomas, 1852-1925.
10	Correspondence. Letters to Burke from Brainerd, 1896-1914. 35 letters.

In the above examples, representing a group of catalog cards from one series, the incoming letter series in the Thomas Burke papers, *the following features should be noted:*

1. The source of acquisition is omitted.

2. Only subject tracings are made.

3. Author tracings are omitted because their inclusion would tend to redundancy and would add unnecessary bulk to the catalog.

4. The *subject added entry* refers to the series as a whole. If an attempt were made to refer to particular letters or groups of letters the user would be led to believe that these are the only letters in the papers on the subject.

5. On the *author added entry* card the statement that follows "Correspondence" refers to the individual group of letters by a particular writer and gives the inclusive dates covered by those letters.

The form of entry for subgroups is made according to the following pattern:

Mss	Burke, Thomas, 1852-1925.
10	Papers of Burke, Shepherd and Woods, law firm, Seattle, 1892-1902.
	1 foot.

Through this firm Burke handled his business as counsel for the Great Northern Railroad Co.

Contents: 1. Corresp. Incoming letters, 1896-1902. 150 letters.
2. Corresp. Outgoing letters, 1892-1902. 4 letterpress copy books.

- 2 -

Mss	Burke, Thomas, 1852-1925.
10	Papers of Burke, Shepherd and Woods, law firm, Seattle, 1892-1902.
	1 foot.
	3. Court papers, 1896-1900. 15 items.

1. Burke (Thos.), Shepherd & Woods, law firm, Seattle. 2. Great Northern Railroad. 3. Railroads—finance. 4. Seattle—real estate business. 5. Political parties—Washington (State).

Mss	Burke (Thos.), Shepherd and Woods, law firm, Seattle
10	Burke, Thomas, 1852-1925.
	Papers of Burke, Shepherd and Woods, law firm, Seattle, 1892-1902.
	1 foot.

Comment on the above card: Although papers of this firm could justifiably have been segregated from the Burke papers and processed as a separate manuscript group, it was decided to keep them with the Burke papers and treat them as a subgroup. The reason for this choice was that their significance lies primarily in the relationship they bear to the main body of Burke's papers. Their meaning and significance are more fully preserved by keeping them with Burke's papers.

Two subgroups in the Burke papers were segregated into independent groups: Daniel H. Gilman's papers and John J. McGilvra's papers. Each of these subgroups represents a unit of material that is relatively self-contained, and can be meaningfully segregated from the main body of Burke's papers, provided that adequate cross-references are made. Since one of the difficulties associated with the problem of added entries for subgroups in a larger manuscript group is indirectness of reference, this problem can be avoided conveniently by segregating subgroups when such groups are relatively self-contained.

An author added entry for a group of letters may be made according to the following pattern:

Mss	Wilson, Henry Lane, 1856-1932.
10	Burke, Thomas, 1852-1925.
	Papers of Burke, Shepherd & Woods, law firm, Seattle.
	5 letters from Wilson to Burke, Shepherd & Woods, 1892-1898.

A variation and expansion of this pattern, not here illustrated, is one for company papers. For instance, the "Private papers of the Executives of the Port Blakely Mill Company and Mrs. Sarah M. Renton" constitute a subgroup in the papers of the Port Blakely Mill Co. The author will be glad to send any interested reader examples of these cards.