

NUCMC and the Local Repository

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FAMILIARLY KNOWN AS NUCMC, the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* was devised to provide information to the researcher about the location and character of manuscript collections in repositories throughout the United States. The eleventh volume in the series (1972) "brings the total number of collections described to date to 31,256, representing holdings in 883 repositories."¹ This realization of a dream of historians, archivists, manuscript curators, and librarians, the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* had its beginnings with a grant of \$200,000 from the Council on Library Resources in November 1958, and agreement by the Library of Congress to house the project.² All of the earlier efforts to initiate a national register of manuscripts came to fruition.

An essential element in the participation of the Library of Congress in this massive undertaking was the standardization of the information from all local repositories to make a truly national catalog. The Library of Congress made standardization a condition and then proceeded to make it a reality by publication of the *Rules for Descriptive Cataloging in the Library of Congress: Manuscripts* (1954).³ Robert H. Land's article on the *Catalog* in 1954 described the development of these rules.⁴ Land ended his article pointing out that "even if nothing more should come of our efforts than adoption of our rules by repositories, the Library will have made a contribution towards the creation of a union catalog of manuscript collections—by providing, as the first step, the means for nationwide uniformity in describing manuscripts."⁵

Paul S. Dunkin, foremost critic and teacher of American cataloging practice, has pointed out that standardization and simplification of cataloging rules result from

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¹L. Quincy Mumford, in Preface to *The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*, 1972 (Washington: Library of Congress, 1974), p. iii.

²The development and growth of the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* may be followed in: "Report of the Joint Committee on Historical Manuscripts," *American Archivist* 15 (1952): 176-80; Francis L. Berkeley, "History and Problems of the Control of Manuscripts in the United States," *American Philosophical Society Proceedings* 98 (June 15, 1954): 171-78; Robert H. Land, "The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections," *American Archivist* 17 (1954): 195-207; David C. Mearns, "To be enduring: The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections," *College and Research Libraries* 20 (1959): 341-46; Lester K. Born, "Manuscript Catalog is in Operation," *History News* 15 (February 1960): 52, and his "The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections: Progress," *American Archivist* 23 (July 1960): 311-14; Arline Custer, "The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections," *Library Resources and Technical Services* 8 (1964): 188-220; Frank G. Burke, "Manuscripts and Archives," *Library Trends* 15 (January 1967): 430-45, and his "Automation in Bibliographical Control of Archives and Manuscript Collections," in *Bibliography and the Historian* (Santa Barbara: Clio Press, 1968), pp. 96-102.

³Library of Congress, *Rules for Descriptive Cataloging in the Library of Congress: Manuscripts*. Preliminary edition (Washington, 1954). Cited as *Preliminary Rules*.

⁴Land, "The NUCMC," pp. 198-204.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 206.

several causes. The main cause is the movement toward union catalogs requiring standardization; simplification follows quite naturally. He said:

Detailed description of the manuscript as a physical object, like detailed description of the printed book, was a necessary tool for the scholar in the days of private libraries, difficult and expensive travel, few and costly methods of reproduction. . . . But, just as with printed books, elaboration collapsed of its own weight. It demands that the cataloger be a scholar and each entry a monograph. This takes time. Cataloging backlogs mounted and accessions were stepped up, particularly in the United States. Finally, as with printed books, there was a machine, the typewriter, and an increase in authors to be reckoned with. Few large libraries which attempted full-scale cataloging on an elaborate plan were able to keep the pace.⁶

What has been the effect of the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* on the cataloging practices of the participating institutions? Some of the effects had been predicted, or hoped for, during the formulation and infancy of the project. Some of the effects have been decried by critics. By comparing these predictions and criticisms with the demonstrable effects of the *NUCMC*, we may determine which were justified, allowing us to evaluate the role of the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* in the local repository.

One minor effect hoped for by some initial commentators was that *NUCMC* would tend to raise the status of manuscript materials in libraries and make it easier for librarians (particularly) to devote more attention to them. "Manuscripts are all too often the stepchildren of the library, ignored because they require some special attention. The call for them to be identified and counted for a national register, with the prospect of a printed catalog, will appeal to parental pride, however, and the stepchildren may yet be dressed and groomed to be paraded in the sun."⁷ The growth of the catalog over the last sixteen years may lead one to suspect that this has indeed happened, yet the curious cry arises: "Come on, let's get those reports sent to *NUCMC*!"⁸ Some librarians, it is true, have dragged their manuscripts out of damp closets, dank basements, and dusty attics for presentation to *NUCMC*, but many have not. Or, if they dressed and groomed them for a parade in the sun (hopefully under an ultraviolet shield), they have not yet followed up with the report to *NUCMC*.

Of greater significance is the influence of *NUCMC* practices on the cataloging and description of manuscripts in local repositories. Repeatedly it was expressed that standardizing of cataloging rules, reporting to *NUCMC*, and subsequent editing at the Library of Congress would raise the level of manuscript cataloging. The benefits to the reporting institutions of a standardized catalog are repeated in several articles and reviews. Howard H. Peckham predicted that the *NUCMC* "will serve to regularize cataloging procedures in our libraries, especially in small historical society collections." He felt that it was particularly the smaller, poorly funded, and understaffed repositories that would benefit most. Standardization would benefit these institutions because "an example in a form adopted after considerable study will be placed before them. The amount and kind of information wanted will be

⁶Paul S. Dunkin, "Arrangement and Cataloging of Manuscripts," *Library Trends* 5 (January 1957): 352-53.

⁷Howard H. Peckham, "Manuscript Repositories and the National Register," *American Archivist* 17 (October 1954): 321. The same sentiment was echoed by Redmond A. Burke in his review of *NUCMC* in *Library Quarterly* 37 (1967): 246-47.

⁸Title of an article by Robert L. Brubaker in *Newsletter* of the Midwest Archives Conference 2 (January 1974), quoted by Arline Custer in "Reporting of Manuscript Collections Subject of Archives Session," *LC Information Bulletin* 33 (April 12, 1974): 124.

clearly evident. The relative brevity of it will encourage rather than discourage work." The *NUCMC* format was seen as a model to emulate. Peckham added: "I look for widespread imitation of the proposed register entry in local cataloging, because the form will not challenge the capacity or the time of harried curators."⁹

Another commentator seconded this view and spoke to proposed influence on the local repository. "An incidental benefit of the register will be the influence that it will have in stimulating regional depositories to prepare meaningful catalogs of their own collections. Many depositories, including some of the larger and older ones, do not have comprehensive and easily usable descriptions of their collections. The register may well stimulate directors of these depositories to refine their cataloging procedures and bring their inventories up to date."¹⁰

Standardization, and therefore improvement, of local manuscript cataloging was seen as an admirable side effect of the *NUCMC*. David C. Mearns expected that the cataloging rules would be "capable of adoption by repositories generally, and that procedures for descriptive cataloging will be standardized throughout the United States."¹¹

At a 1965 SAA workshop, one speaker reported that "the *Catalog* 'has developed some degree of uniformity in organizing and processing collections.' Dr. Gibson [Curator of the Phillips Collection, University of Oklahoma] believes that this may well be one of the most useful results of the entire project. He stated that the internal operation at the University of Oklahoma has been greatly improved by adopting these procedures and that the reference service has become much more effective."¹²

In 1969 Leonard Rapport, in a review of the new *NUCMC* volume, commented on its effect. "All over the country," he said, "librarians, curators, archivists, volunteers in county historical societies, and other custodians of documents are learning to describe their collections and are becoming familiar with a descriptive form they can apply to all their holdings."¹³

These praises of the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* must be tempered with the realization that not everyone saw unalloyed bliss in the nationwide adoption of standardized manuscript cataloging. Although there are those who have repeatedly criticized *NUCMC* because not all institutions report, and some do so only partially, few critics have contributed more significant discussion. One figure stands alone among the critics, raising the specific question as to the effect of the *NUCMC* format on the local repository. In two major articles, Richard Berner has opposed the adoption of the *NUCMC* standard for local cataloging.

In a 1964 article in the *American Archivist*, Berner first raised his criticisms, expressing a concern for the lack of an archival approach to the description of manuscripts.¹⁴ Berner contended that the 1954 *Preliminary Rules* were drawn up by the old guard of manuscript librarians without proper attention to more recently developed archival approaches to manuscript materials. Four years later, with the adoption of the *Preliminary Rules* into the new *Anglo-American Cataloging*

⁹Peckham, "Manuscript Repositories," pp. 321-22.

¹⁰Bell Irvin Wiley, "Historians and the National Register," *American Archivist* 17 (October 1954): 328.

¹¹David C. Mearns, "Comments on the Symposium on the Manuscript Sources of American History: Problems of their Control, Use and Publication," *American Philosophical Society Proceedings* 98 (June 1954): 186.

¹²Harriet C. Owsley, "The SAA Workshop on the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections," *American Archivist* 28 (July 1965): 396.

¹³Leonard Rapport, review of *NUCMC* in *American Archivist* 32 (July 1969): 273-74.

¹⁴Richard C. Berner, "Archivists, Librarians, and the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections," *American Archivist* 27 (July 1964): 401-9.

Rules,¹⁵ Berner again warned that the solidification into “rules” of outmoded practices would retard the development of archival methodology in hundreds of repositories across the country.¹⁶ He had several specific objections to *NUCMC* and the proposed rules: that they were based on item description (like book cataloging), that they encouraged a card format rather than inventories for basic description, and that they denigrated provenance. He stated that “it does not follow necessarily that uniformity of end product, which is desirable at the national level of bibliographic control, should be required at the repository level itself. It is perhaps unfortunate that the ‘Anglo-American Rules’ imply that it should be.”¹⁷ The other side of the same problem, according to Berner, is that the internal use of the *NUCMC* data sheet tempts “the reporting repository to catalog its own holdings simultaneously and to do so by cataloging directly from the manuscripts themselves rather than from the synopsis of the manuscript groups, whether the synopsis be a register, inventory, guide, or similar finding aid.” Berner, decrying this apparent intent of some of the early promoters of *NUCMC*, continues, “The important step preceding that of ‘cataloging’ should be, in the judgment of many, production of a register, guide, or other synopsis that is to be cataloged, not the cataloging of the manuscripts themselves.”¹⁸

It is interesting to note that this same point was touched upon in the preliminary edition of the cataloging rules in 1954, the introduction to which said “it is assumed that more extensive records of collections, such as indexes, calendars, guides, accession lists, etc., will be available at the owning institutions.”¹⁹ Except by implication (see Rule 207E), this statement is not included in the *Anglo-American Rules*.

Examination of the cataloging rules indicates that Berner is essentially correct, that *NUCMC* does not take into account archival approaches to manuscript description. However, there is a problem of terminology and practice affecting this relationship. There has been no adequate delineation of the difference between manuscript *cataloging* and *description*. In fact, the confusion between these two separate, though closely related, activities has resulted in their being considered one and the same thing.

Manuscript cataloging is a specialized branch of manuscript description which is the provision of access to manuscripts through detailed finding aids. In common usage, description has two meanings: (1) a brief paragraph describing (in the broadest sense) a manuscript group, its form, contents, and arrangement; and (2) the more extensive description more usually known as a finding aid. It is this second definition which has been adopted by the SAA Committee on Terminology in its recent glossary.²⁰

Cataloging, on the other hand, more closely approaches the first of these forms of description, particularly in its brevity. Cataloging is a formal and standard methodology presenting in a brief format a “description” of a manuscript group. It therefore lacks the specificity present in the extended description, the finding aid. In

¹⁵American Library Association, *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*, (Chicago, 1967).

¹⁶Richard C. Berner, “Observations on Archivists, Librarians and the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections,” *College and Research Libraries* 29 (1968): 276–80.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 278.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 277.

¹⁹*Preliminary Rules*, [1].

²⁰William L. Rofes, editor, “A Basic Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers,” *American Archivist* 37 (July 1974): 421. See, for instance, the glossary definitions for *inventory* and *register* for an indication of the extent and thoroughness of the description of manuscript groups in these finding aids.

essence, cataloging summarizes the descriptive elements of the finding aid in a brief and quickly apprehensible format.

We can see an analogy in library practice if we consider the standard library cataloging, as exemplified in the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*, as a stripped-down version of what is proposed in Fredson Bowers' *Principles of Bibliographic Description* (Princeton, 1949).

While it is possible to catalog a manuscript group from the papers themselves, it is much more efficient to abstract the descriptive elements from the more extensive finding aid and summarize them for the cataloging.

We must look also at the relationship between the cataloging rules for manuscripts, and the *NUCMC Data Sheet*. The first version of the *NUCMC Data Sheet* had twenty-two questions to be filled out about each collection. Each question was labeled with the applicable rule from the *Preliminary Rules*. When the data sheet was revised and simplified, the notation of rules was dropped. They were included in the first place because of the concept that *NUCMC* was to be, in addition to a register of manuscripts, an educational tool literally teaching curators how to catalog manuscripts according to the new cataloging rules. To many, even today, the *Data Sheet* "automatically" catalogs material entered on it. To some this process seemed not only to catalog the manuscripts but, in some mysterious way, also to arrange and describe the material. This problem might not have arisen if the early boosters of *NUCMC* had not been so optimistic concerning the positive benefits of its adoption, and had considered the *Data Sheet*, as we do today, as merely a tool providing information summarized from the manuscripts or the inventory/register to prepare cataloging information. The data sheet does have a local use, however. It is just as useful a format for the local cataloger as it is for the Descriptive Cataloging Division of the Library of Congress in preparing *NUCMC* entries. But the rules for composing those entries are to be found in the *A-A Rules* and are not inherent in the *Data Sheet*.

The distinction between description and cataloging is a function of their varying purposes. The finding aid leads the researcher through the intricacies of the arrangement of the manuscript group to the proper folder or container which may be of use. At the level of manuscript cataloging the researcher is merely trying to discern which manuscript group out of the thousands available in repositories is going to contribute to the research project, which finding aid for which group of manuscripts it is worthwhile to examine. This can only take place at the level of summary description, or manuscript cataloging. Manuscript cataloging is apparent in three kinds of research tools. The first is the union list, such as *NUCMC*; the second is the institutional guide, such as those published by Washington State University Library and the Wayne State Labor History Archives;²¹ and the third is the institutional catalog which may be on cards, sheets, fiche, or electromagnetic impulses. Each institution has a need for summary descriptions providing comprehensive overview of its total body of material and providing name and subject access. This indexing may be at the most superficial level or may be so extensive as literally to index each individual item. The main use of the catalog is in providing access to the

²¹Washington State University Library, *Selected Manuscript Resources in the Washington State University Library* (Pullman, 1974); Warner W. Pflug, *A Guide to the Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974).

finding aids which give direct access to the container, folder, or item in the manuscript group.²²

It is unfortunate that there is no separate term to distinguish manuscript cataloging from manuscript description, both terms laden with connotations from other disciplines. Cataloging and bibliography have specific meanings in connection with books, but comparable terms do not exist for manuscript description.

Berner's criticisms of the implementation of the *NUCMC* format (based on the manuscript cataloging rules) in the local repository stem from his uneasiness over the adoption of a superficial descriptive program, an uneasiness arising in early years when *NUCMC*-promotion stressed that repositories would automatically catalog their holdings and prepare thorough guides to their resources. Dependence on cataloging information is at the heart of Berner's criticisms. Rather than basing the institution's descriptive program on catalog cards, following the *A-A Rules* and the *NUCMC* format, Berner feels that "the inventory/guide and register, which are basic archival finding aids, should be seriously considered as the basic finding aids for manuscript collections as well."²³ Cataloging would be returned to its rightful role as summary description and access at the broadest level. Berner's questions concerning the relationship between cataloging (which he equates with a card catalog) and other finding aids have not generated answers delineating the true function of cataloging.²⁴ However, his proposal for the development of the card catalog as we know it does not take into account its role as a part of his "integrated descriptive system" on a completely different level of description from a finding aid.

Berner's criticisms of the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* have not generated significant response. Although respected, his views have been treated gingerly and have not drawn forth reasoned rebuttal or dialogue on the nature of manuscript description.

One who did attempt a response was historian William C. Binkley who stated that librarians were not "permitted" to determine *NUCMC*'s character, for it was the historians who saw the need and proposed the solution: the national union catalog. "It is important, however, to point out that from the beginning the historians and curators emphasized the fact that because these manuscript collections were more complex and more refractory than the materials with which the librarians and archivists were concerned they would require a special type of cataloging procedure."²⁵ Binkley's comments ignore the fact that historians, who are not manuscript curators, archivists, or librarians, often have little concept of the requirements for *bibliographical* (for lack of a better word) description of the three or more kinds of material. A consumer who perceives a need for a service and makes known his concern is in the same position as the historians were in regard to the national union catalog prior to 1958.

More recent criticisms of the *NUCMC* have concentrated on rather superficial aspects. Walter Rundell's compilation of quotes from interviews with history

²²The progression from one level of description to another is described in more detail in Terry Abraham, "Manuscripts: A Continuum of Description," *Georgia Archive* 2 (Winter 1974): 20-27. Much this same point has been made by Richard Berner in his "Manuscript Catalogs and other Finding Aids: What are their Relationships?" *American Archivist* 34 (October 1971): 367-72. Another approach is detailed in Amy Wood Nyholm, "Modern manuscripts: A Functional Approach," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 14 (Summer 1970): 325-40.

²³Berner, "Observations," p. 278.

²⁴See Berner, "Manuscript Catalogs," pp. 369-70.

²⁵William C. Binkley, "A Historian Looks at the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections," *American Archivist* 28 (July 1965): 404.

faculty and graduate students, librarians and archivists, presents few substantive criticisms. After quoting or citing seven expansive and enthusiastic responses to *NUCMC*, Rundell reports on its effect on repositories, some of which “have had difficulty filling mail requests for photocopies from reported collections unless the collections were indexed.” Then he reports complaints about its “ironbound rules and the inadequacy of its library headings or tracings.” He continues: “In addition to posing some problems for reporting agencies, *NUCMC* has certain deficiencies that readers should be aware of.” For example, one history professor “considered *NUCMC*’s indexing poor and its organization frustrating.” A manuscript curator appropriately cautioned that use of *NUCMC* is no substitute for a visit to the repository. Rundell considered this a “deficiency.” Another “deficiency” is “spotty coverage” resulting from what is called “a lack of resources to fulfill the good intentions of the manuscript repositories.”²⁶

In justice to Rundell, his admittedly quick review of *NUCMC* as a tool for historical research was not intended as a comprehensive critique. His only recommendation regarding *NUCMC* was that “repositories should give first priority to reporting to *NUCMC* so that informational control over the nation’s manuscripts may eventually be attained.”²⁷ In addition he reports suggestions that “foundation support could be sought to enable a team of manuscript specialists to visit depositories around the country arranging, cataloging, and reporting collections to *NUCMC*.”²⁸

Another critic, and one who based his conclusions in part on Rundell, is Edward C. Papenfuse. Papenfuse states that *NUCMC* has been a “failure” because of “the disappointing participation of contributing repositories.”²⁹ He feels that *NUCMC* reports are neglected in favor of separate institutional guides, even though *NUCMC*’s growth rate appears to refute this statement.

The following year in another article Papenfuse again attacked *NUCMC* for its “organizational flaws.” He feels that *NUCMC* should be issued in a “looseleaf format with a separate index. Its entries could be organized by state and within states by repository number under which collections would be described in order by their collection number.” He adds, unjustly, that “for a variety of reasons, including lack of funds, and in the face of criticism, *NUCMC* instead continues to be published with indexes and collection descriptions bound in an unhelpful random sequence, with the awkwardness of the volumes compounded by the indexes cumulated over three issues which renders useless one-third of the total number of pages printed.”³⁰ The criticism he refers to is obviously that of Walter Rundell and not the substantive criticism by Richard Berner.

Rundell and Papenfuse have attacked superficial inadequacies in *NUCMC*’s presentation. They have not addressed the more serious problems of the nature of manuscript cataloging and description which are, in fact, setting standards throughout the profession. In both articles Papenfuse castigates *NUCMC* for its successes. He uses *NUCMC* as an illustration to emphasize his point that there is a

²⁶Walter Rundell, Jr., *In Pursuit of American History: Research and Training in the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), pp. 239–40.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 250–51.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 257.

²⁹Edward C. Papenfuse, “Finding Aids and the Historian: The Need for National Priorities and a Standard Approach,” *AHA Newsletter* 10 (May 1972): 15.

³⁰Edward C. Papenfuse, “The Retreat from Standardization: A Comment on the Recent History of Finding Aids,” *American Archivist* 36 (October 1973): 539.

need for a national system for finding aids. His novel solutions to this problem do not seem to be either adequately considered or to take full account of *NUCMC*'s role as a source of summary description of manuscripts, a catalog. He does suggest that "each repository should be encouraged to issue its own guide, with descriptions in a standard format, such as that provided by the *NUCMC* description sheets,"³¹ indicating that he accepts the *NUCMC* data sheets and, by implication, the *A-A Rules* as standards of description. In fact he indicts the Library of Congress for not providing the authoritarian leadership necessary to enforce standardization at this level of description, an indictment bearing no relation to Berner's critique of *NUCMC* descriptive practice and its effect on the local repository.

The promotion of standardized rules for the cataloging of manuscript groups, touted by early supporters as the dawn of the millenium for manuscript description, was a promotion not without birth pangs. In spite of the hopes of early promoters and the more recent assumptions of both boosters and critics, the nationwide use of the *NUCMC* has had a pronounced effect on cataloging practices in the local repository.

Among the first institutions to feel the effect of the new cataloging rules adopted in 1954 was, surprisingly enough, the Library of Congress. With the agreement to house and support the *NUCMC*, LC determined to take the lead also in reporting its manuscript groups to *NUCMC*. In an excellent article on the development of automated descriptive systems, Frank G. Burke recounts the effect of this decision on the internal practices of the Manuscript Division.

Two of the chief sources for material for *NUCMC* and the N.H.P.C. projects [the *Hamer Guide*] were the National Archives and the Library of Congress Manuscript Division. The holdings of both repositories were very large and significant, and they were conveniently located in Washington, the logical testing ground for both projects. The staffs of the National Archives and the Library of Congress Manuscript Division began to feel the pressures exerted by both the editorial staffs in their efforts to make their publications successful.

The Manuscript Division was not prepared for the onslaught. In formulating pertinent questions of universal interest, the *NUCMC* staff and planners were not considering the cataloging idiosyncracies of any one repository. Standards were established, and participating contributors were asked to make adjustments in their traditional practices for the sake of conformity. Since manuscript collections and archives are unique, it was necessary for the *NUCMC* staff to send questionnaires to each repository. These forms, or data sheets, eventually contained eleven questions, to be answered as fully as possible, about each of the collections at the repository. When the Manuscript Division began to receive these questionnaires it realized that supplying the requested information was going to be no easy task. There were three thousand collections for which priorities of reporting had to be established. Administrative responsibilities had to be assigned to insure the smooth flow of data sheets from the Division to the *National Union Catalog*. Decisions had to be made about reporting collections that had not yet been fully processed, or to which the library had not yet received title from the donor. The minimum number of documents constituting a collection had been set at fifty for the purposes of reporting to the *Catalog*. The Division, therefore, had to establish which of its collections contained fewer than fifty items. There was a number of other questions, many purely administrative in nature, that were raised by the commitment to supply a continual stream of *NUCMC* data sheets to the editors. Because of this commitment it was necessary to analyze the administrative and bibliographical procedures of the Manuscript Division, and thus began the first side effect of the *NUCMC* project.³²

³¹Papenfuse, "Finding Aids," p. 18.

³²Frank G. Burke, "Automation in Bibliographical Control of Archives and Manuscript Collections" in Dagmar H. Perman, *Bibliography and the Historian* (Santa Barbara: Clio Press, 1968), pp. 96-97.

The initial experience of the Library of Congress with *NUCMC* was soon repeated in manuscript repositories across the country. Robert H. Land's survey uncovered little evidence that *NUCMC* resulted in any radical change in the descriptive mechanisms in the various repositories. With two exceptions, all of the comments received by Land indicated that the proposed cataloging rules were similar to those already in use. The lowest common denominator was indicated in B. E. Powell's comment: "Your rules as we interpret them allow enough latitude to permit us to report most of our findings with a minimum of revision of entries."³³

In one instance the new rules were put to an immediate practical test. The William L. Clements Library wrote that "An attempt has been made to describe the collections [of the Clements Library] according to the tentative rules for cataloging collections of manuscripts issued by the Library of Congress."³⁴ A comparison of entries in the new Clements Library *Guide* and the 1959-61 volume of *NUCMC* indicates success. The only difference between the two descriptions is that the *NUCMC* entries are perhaps better edited.³⁵

A. M. Gibson, already noted as an enthusiastic supporter of the *NUCMC* rules, also modeled his subsequent guide after them:

Since the Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library, is participating in the Library of Congress National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections Project, the *Guide* format has been adapted to the Library of Congress Project rules. While the collection descriptions in the *Guide* are generally more detailed than the Library of Congress Project reporting requirements call for, a digest of each will subsequently appear in the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*.³⁶

The Maryland Historical Society also acknowledged the influence of the *NUCMC* format on their internal procedures:

by September, 1966, much of the material had been entered on forms provided by the Library of Congress for use in compiling the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*, published annually. Use of these sheets had a healthy tendency to make the cataloging uniform, and they form the basis for the entries of this volume.³⁷

Others, while not acknowledging their debt to *NUCMC* in their published guides, in articles on processing practices have mentioned *NUCMC*'s influence. Among the most prominent and forthright is Lucile M. Kane. She writes of four main considerations in determining the kind of bibliographic control necessary for manuscripts:

The fourth consideration, the requirements of the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*, is important to the service of scholarship. The objective of the *Union Catalog* is to centralize information about manuscripts by gathering in the Library of Congress entries for collections from all repositories participating in the venture, by incorporating the cards into a catalog, and by publishing volumes describing the materials.

To speed the information of the *Union Catalog*, repositories must incorporate into their cataloging systems certain essential data arranged in specified form. The Library of Con-

³³Land, "The *NUCMC*," p. 203.

³⁴Colton Storm, Preface, *Guide to the Manuscript Collections in the William L. Clements Library*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: Clements Library, 1953), p. vii.

³⁵Compare, for instance, *NUCMC* Ms 59-5 and Clements, II-95; Ms 60-1465 and Clements, II-299; Ms 60-318 and Clements, II-52.

³⁶A. M. Gibson. *A Guide to Regional Manuscript Collections in the Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. vii.

³⁷Avril J. M. Pedley. *The Manuscript Collections of the Maryland Historical Society* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1968), p. ix.

gress, with the assistance of manuscripts experts from other institutions, has made a beginning in promulgating cataloging rules.³⁸

All registers, brief or full, should include the basic elements needed for entering the collection in the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*.³⁹

Bordin and Warner, in *The Modern Manuscript Library*, although not identifying NUCMC's influence on their sample cards, mention the usefulness of the NUCMC data sheets in preparing the comprehensive guide to the manuscripts of a repository.⁴⁰

A NUCMC report states that their compilers have received evidence of the effect of the project on local repositories:

Some repositories, both large and small, have used the existence of the NUCMC program as a welcome lever to obtain money and personnel to enable them to join the cooperative effort. Some have found the program gave them a chance to study and record their material in a systematic manner. One mid-western curator wrote: "This preparation of NUC forms (the data sheet) is a great blessing to us, for we now will know what we have. Due to the erratic filing of our predecessors, we never have known before."⁴¹

The American Philosophical Society reports that, although they did not use the NUCMC format in their guide, they were conscious of the needs of reporting to the union catalog:

Our entries will be alphabetical, under author, collector or primary person represented in the collection and will contain the same material, greatly augmented, that was furnished the Library of Congress for the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*.⁴²

It is necessary to assume, in many of these instances, that there is some relationship between the repository's published guide and their internal finding aid system. Some institutions have based their general guide on their card catalog which essentially follows NUCMC practices, pointing up the essential usefulness to the repository of NUCMC procedures. The level of description obtained by the NUCMC system is sufficiently general that it can be used as the overall repository finding aid whether published as a guide or merely filed as an internal catalog. It cannot, however, take the place of the more specific descriptive mechanisms such as registers, inventories, and container lists.

Arline Custer, former NUCMC editor, listed the advantages to the individual repository of participating in the NUCMC program:

(1) With our questionnaire (or data sheet) we help the manuscript curator to decide the essential elements of description. (2) While answering our questions he familiarizes himself with his material. (3) We relieve him of the preparation of the formal catalog entry and present him with twenty complimentary copies of 3x5 cards of each of his entries. (4) He may use them as a card catalog, or (5) he may assemble them and print a catalog of his own collections. (6) Altruistically he will find that the appearance of his manuscript collections in a national union catalog makes his material known outside his community and not only enhances its usefulness and value but also that of his repository; and (7) the most practical, time-saving, factor is that the printed description releases him from repetitious correspondence.

Many of these benefits to the individual library or repository apply equally to the general benefit. First, I think, the NUCMC program is providing a uniform pattern and standard for

³⁸Lucile M. Kane, *A Guide to the Care and Administration of Manuscripts*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1966), p. 52.

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

⁴⁰Ruth B. Bordin and Robert M. Warner, *The Modern Manuscript Library* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1966), p. 94.

⁴¹NUCMC, *Report* (July-December 1968): 2.

⁴²Murphy D. Smith, "Preparing a Manuscripts Guide for a Learned Society," *American Archivist* 25 (July 1962): 329.

describing manuscript collections. Second, the opportunity to publicize holdings nationally is creating more local support for collecting, preserving, organizing, and servicing manuscript collections. Third, from the information in the catalog, regional or subject catalogs can be built.⁴³

The key to *NUCMC*'s influence on the local repository is in the element of standardization. Aside from its use in reporting to the union catalog, standardization of cataloging information has had three results: (1) it provides a standard for measurement that is a powerful influence on an institution whether or not the standard is adhered to; (2) it provides a level of common approach, vocabulary, and format among researchers and manuscript archivists when comparing and evaluating manuscript groups; and (3) it has encouraged the development of inventories, registers, and other finding aids providing more detailed access to the manuscript groups by shifting the concern of cataloging away from the single item approach. Cataloging is no longer seen as the methodology of primary control and access but as the most economical way to ensure wide distribution of summary description of manuscript groups. The fact that these summary descriptions are in a standardized format increases their accessibility.

Even now, however, not all institutions have adopted the whole of the *A-A Rules* for describing their holdings. Even so, the minimal level of description provided for by the *Rules* gives one a basis for judging the efficiency and success of these institutional systems. Do they provide the information needed to evaluate the research potential of the collection? If not, is it possible to identify the missing elements? Standardization has provided a uniform basis for the kind of evaluations made by every researcher seeking source material. If the description of papers in one institution appears incomplete, one may tend to devalue their usefulness and rely instead on other materials in other repositories where the evidence indicates a better chance for a successful research venture.

The *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* has changed research methods for a whole generation of scholars. But what of the new generation of manuscript archivists? In the twenty years since the Library of Congress first presented the manuscript cataloging rules, *NUCMC* has emerged as the institution dominating manuscript description. The effect of this institutionalization has been to increase one's expectations of both the *Catalog* and the reporting, and nonreporting, repositories. The preparation of *NUCMC* reports is now a professional obligation. As its influence has permeated the profession, the *Catalog* itself has receded into the background. Francis L. Berkeley, Jr., put his finger on the issue at the height of the initial excitement over the union catalog proposal when he "pointed out that the two characteristics of an effective control of unpublished source material would be its national scope and its emergence as the product of the routine activities of the normal staff of repositories."⁴⁴

The effect of *NUCMC* on the local repository has taken two forms: change in the course of manuscript description and provision of a standard for evaluation. Before *NUCMC* and the *Preliminary Rules*, manuscript cataloging consisted primarily of item description regardless of group boundaries or provenance, a holdover from library-dominated practices. *NUCMC* itself seems to retain some of these character-

⁴³Arline Custer, "Cooperative Reporting and Cataloging as Exhibited in the Program of the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections at the Library of Congress," in *Materials by and about American Negroes*, Annette H. Phinnee, ed. (Atlanta: Atlanta University School of Library Service, 1967), pp. 44-45.

⁴⁴Land, "The *NUCMC*," p. 204, summarizing Berkeley's article in the *Proceedings* of the American Philosophical Society (June 15, 1954).

istics.⁴⁵ The postwar growth of manuscript collections set the stage for the adoption of an archival methodology. The development of the inventory at the National Archives, the summary report at the Huntington Library, and the register at the Library of Congress provided a methodology for the description and control of large manuscript groups. Giving a brief summary description in a standardized format, the *Preliminary Rules* and *NUCMC* provided a method of cataloging these groups.

The development of these cataloging principles provided a format giving the researcher the location and character of manuscript groups and a basis for evaluating their effectiveness for particular research problems.

In the future, repositories will of necessity pay more attention to the preciseness of their descriptive terms in describing manuscript groups. At the same time we can expect *NUCMC* to grow and change. It will grow through accretion and change through adaptation. As it grows it will necessarily develop approaches to a broader level of description. In another ten years *NUCMC* will have grown to over twenty volumes, leading again to difficulties in providing access to the multitudes of descriptions. The development of computer-assisted control over the information will undoubtedly affect the rules for manuscript description. The effect of the MARC tapes on the bibliographical description of books gives ample precedent. As more institutions turn to computers to handle the storage and retrieval of information about manuscripts, the call for standardization will undoubtedly arise again. The question to be answered now is whether or not it is possible to develop more specific access to manuscript groups at the broad level of description represented by the *NUCMC*.

The solution will probably not be developed by *NUCMC* which has another role to fulfill, but any answer must take into account the requirements of the *National Union Catalog of Manuscripts*.

While prediction is unwise, it is probably safe to say that *NUCMC*'s effect on the local repository will continue as strength builds on strength.

⁴⁵See *NUCMC Information Circular No. 2 Revised* (August, 1966).