

Arrangement and Description: Some Historical Observations

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THE CORE OF ARCHIVAL THEORY AND TECHNIQUE lies in the origins of archival and manuscript sources; their acquisition, arrangement, and description; and their utilization. This paper assumes that what personal papers in a manuscript collection and public and corporate archives have in common lies in their origin as documentation of activity extended over time. The focus is upon archival theory as it relates to arrangement and description. It is in part a survey of twentieth-century literature, but mainly it is an analysis that tries to identify historical trends and their sources.

In the early twentieth century, traditional library theory and practices prevailed as the means for gaining intellectual control of manuscripts and archives. The legitimacy of librarianship was not seriously challenged until the late 1930s, by the emergence of an archival profession. Subsequently, theories and practices derived from the intellectual management of public archives were often combined with those of librarianship.

Before the twentieth century, most manuscript collections in the United States fell under library management directly by being collected by libraries or by library units in historical societies; and state archival materials were similarly managed when they were acquired at all. Before about 1950, state archives tended, in a formal sense, to be managed within the framework of librarianship, whether or not they were placed under administration of a state library or a historical society. In addition, state archives were separated from management of current records. Archival theory and practices developed in Europe and Great Britain had no real effect on practice in the U.S. The leading proponent of European practices, Waldo Gifford Leland, had no archival vehicle through which he could influence the management of public records in the U.S. Leland, before 1910, had argued against the use of library practices in fitting public records into preconceived classifications separated from their origins in public administration. Arnold J. Van Laer, of the New York State Library and a pioneer in American archival theory, went further and insisted that the principle of provenance was applicable to the intellectual management of manuscripts as well as to the handling of archival materials.¹

¹ There are good historical treatments of this early period in Ernst Posner, *American State Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); O. Lawrence Burnette, Jr., *Beneath the Footnote: A Guide to the Use and Preservation of Historical Sources* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1969); and William Birdsall, "The American Archivist's Search for Identity, 1909-1936" (Ph.D. disser-

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The predisposition to consider all public archives as "historical manuscripts" in their origin reinforced the view that theory and practice derived from librarianship were applicable to the intellectual control of archives.² State archives, typically under some form of library administration, reinforced the inclination to approach the problem from the viewpoint of librarianship.

Two writers of manuals of major importance were John C. Fitzpatrick, assistant chief of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, whose *Notes on the Care, Cataloguing, Calendaring and Arranging of Manuscripts* went through four editions from 1913 to 1934; and Grace Lee Nute, curator of manuscripts at The Minnesota Historical Society and author of *The Care and Cataloguing of Manuscripts* (1936). Fitzpatrick's system was a "chronologic-geographic" one by which manuscripts were classed into "clean-cut logical groups." In her manual, Nute tried to "parallel the Library of Congress system as nearly as possible so that duplicate copies of the cards in the catalogue of the manuscript division may be filed in the public catalogue of the society's library." She wrote that "for purposes of cataloguing and filing, manuscript materials are divided into nine main groups." Although provenance is not specifically discussed, either in her sections on "cataloguing" or in those under "arrangement," she does infer that personal papers and organizational records should be kept together according to the source that generated them. Fitzgerald similarly implies a respect for provenance. What is lacking is any conception of record series and any attempt to relate the serial components of a collection to one another. A simple chronological arrangement without regard to series is considered ideal by each. Collective description, as such, is in the form of collection level or main entries as well as shelflist cards which are also represented on "inventory sheets." Nute recommends analytic entries to catalog single items of "great importance."³

We will see how this preoccupation with library technique and use of the card form of descriptive format governed the development of the descriptive cataloging rules for making entries in the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* (NUCMC), and in the writing of chapter 10 of the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (AACR) (1967).

A dissident and articulate voice of opposition at this time was that of Illinois State Archivist Margaret Cross Norton. Her concern lay with the continued management of public archives as though they were historical manuscripts ame-

tation, University of Wisconsin, 1973), hereafter referred to as "Search." See also Birdsall's derivative article, "Two Sides of the Desk: The Archivist and the Historian, 1909-1935," *American Archivist* 38 (April 1975): 159-73. Birdsall's dissertation is the only one that provides an extensive history of the Conference of Archivists, and is the only one to deal with the conflict for intellectual supremacy between the American Library Association and the Society of American Archivists. Theodore R. Schellenberg gives a useful account in *The Management of Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), ch. 3. Robert L. Brubaker provides a good survey in his "Manuscript Collections," *Library Trends* 13 (October 1964): 226-53. Frank B. Evans, "Modern Methods of Arrangement of Archives in the United States," *American Archivist* 29 (April 1966): 241-63, hereafter referred to as "Modern Methods," is particularly useful for Evans's coverage of internal issues and developments in the National Archives, 1934-41. See also Lester J. Cappon, "Historical Manuscripts as Archives: Some Definitions and Their Application," *American Archivist* 19 (April 1956): 101-10.

² Waldo Gifford Leland, "Some Fundamental Principles in Relation to Archives," *American Historical Association, Annual Report, 1912*, pp. 265-67.

³ John C. Fitzpatrick, *Notes on the Care, Cataloguing, Calendaring and Arranging of Manuscripts* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913, 1921, 1928, 1934). Citations are from 3d edition, 1928. Grace Lee Nute, *The Care and Cataloguing of Manuscripts As Practiced at the Minnesota Historical Society* (St. Paul, 1936).

nable to processing according to theories and techniques of librarianship. In 1929 at a meeting of the American Historical Association's Conference of Archivists she read a paper, "The Archives Department as an Administrative Unit of Government," pointing to the fallacy of regarding archives as historical documents in their inception. She indicated that the source of this preconception was the key role played by historians in preserving public records. Norton, echoing the words of Leland in 1912, contended that archives were extensions of administration, serving public officials primarily and historians only secondarily. She contended that because public records originated in administrative activity they should not be divorced from the documentation of that activity by being forced into preconceived classification systems that ignored their origins, violating their provenance.⁴

Although Norton's message was not widely acclaimed at the time,⁵ three critical developments in American archival history occurred in the 1930s which provided a fertile ground for germination of her views. The National Archives became operational after 1934; the Society of American Archivists (SAA) was established and the Historical Records Survey (HRS) got underway, both in 1936.

Norton herself was chairman of the SAA's Committee on Cataloging and Classification. In the introduction to the Illinois State Library's *Catalog Rules: Series for Archival Material* (1938), she wrote that the earlier Illinois code (1936) had been rendered obsolete because "much study has been given to archival cataloging problems by the National Archives, by state archivists, and particularly by the Historical Records Survey of WPA." Her committee had requested that she revise the 1936 Illinois "code" to reflect this fresh thinking about archival description. In her revision she wrote that the "unit of cataloging is the series . . . its origin is in the department [of] whose archives it forms a part The classifier keeps each series . . . inviolate as a series." This form of description represents a collective form that recognizes the record series as the key element in gaining intellectual control below the collection level. Item level treatment is at the periphery, not the center as is the case when library technique is applied. Series level description provides intellectual access to a mass of records that are related parts of a series and which relate one series to another. For her, the catalogable unit is the series, identification of which is normally sufficient to lead to items within the series. It is worth observing that there is a self-accessing characteristic in series description because it capitalizes on the inherent relationships of items to one another by reason of their being in the same and associated series.

At this time the National Archives itself was organized with library-style divisions of classification and cataloging. But members of the National Archives staff were involved also in the HRS, and the HRS was probably the catalytic agent out of which there developed a challenge to the legitimacy of librarianship in the intellectual management of both public archives and manuscript collections.⁶ Some of the survey forms used by the HRS (but not including those used for

⁴ Thornton W. Mitchell, ed., *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival and Records Management* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), pp. 3-17, hereafter cited as *Norton on Archives*.

⁵ Birdsall, "Search," pp. 186-88.

⁶ Birdsall, *ibid.*, pp. 230-31; Evans, "Modern Methods"; Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives*, pp. 56, 265.

item description) were probably the first systematic recognition of what has come to be known as collective description, an archival concept distinguished from item description which is a focus of librarianship. Furthermore, the HRS used these forms to survey manuscript collections as well as public records, thereby underscoring the applicability of archival concepts to the description of manuscripts.

Although World War II cut short the HRS, the archival ferment of the late 1930s was to benefit the National Archives which abolished the divisions of cataloging and classification in 1941 and established the record group as the basis of arrangement. Cataloging was displaced by collective description at the record series level in a page-inventory format.⁷

After Solon J. Buck, influential member of the National Archives committee that was responsible for the above changes, joined the Library of Congress (LC) as chief of the Manuscripts Division, he found its manuscripts catalog to be a "jumble of cards for individual documents, accessions and other groupings." He found item description adequate for "ancient and medieval manuscripts" but not for "controlling the great bulk of modern manuscript material in the custody of this division and of other repositories in the United States. . . . The crux of the problem of getting modern manuscript material under control is identification and delineation of the appropriate units or groups for description. That process has never been carried out in the Manuscripts Division."⁸

In response to Buck's criticism, the Library of Congress developed procedures for better handling of their modern manuscripts. Katherine Brand's two influential articles that appeared in *The American Archivist* in 1953 and 1955 reflect these changes.⁹ The library had adapted the page format of the National Archives' "Preliminary Inventories" into a register. As with Norton's proposal, the register focuses upon series description, providing more detail than can be conveniently given on catalog cards. Following Brand's recommendations the register was produced for major accessions, offering a supplement to the card catalog. There was no attempt, however, to integrate the card catalog with the registers; the register was just another "finding aid." This pattern was to be followed by other manuscript repositories having modern manuscripts.¹⁰ This combination of archival and library techniques appears to be the accepted method for handling modern manuscript collections.

Paralleling this development in the early 1950s was the work of the Library of Congress in formulating cataloging rules which would be used both for a "national register" (to become the NUCMC) and for adoption by the American Library Association (to become chapter 10 of the *AACR* in 1967). In April 1952

⁷ Philip M. Hamer, "Finding Mediums in the National Archives: An Appraisal of Six Years Experience," *American Archivist* 5 (April 1942): 82-92; Evans, "Modern Methods"; Mario D. Fenyo, "The Record Group Concept: A Critique," *American Archivist* 29 (April 1966): 229-39.

⁸ Solon J. Buck, letter to Librarian of Congress, 8 November 1949, records of the Library of Congress.

⁹ Katherine Brand, "The Place of the Register in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress," *American Archivist* 18 (January 1955): 59-67; and "Developments in the Handling of Recent Manuscripts in the Library of Congress," *American Archivist* 16 (April 1953): 99-104.

¹⁰ For a general commentary on catalogs and other finding aids, see Richard C. Berner, "Manuscript Catalogs and Other Finding Aids: What are Their Relationships?" *American Archivist* 34 (October 1971): 367-72. See Ruth Bordin and Robert M. Warner, *The Modern Manuscript Library* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1966), pp. 53-57, for example of general application of Library of Congress model.

a first draft was prepared. Richard S. Angell, chairman of the Manuscripts Cataloging Committee, stated in a covering memorandum, April 25, 1952, that the rules were based on certain assumptions and were designed (1) to control all manuscript materials in the Library of Congress; (2) to enable the making of entries that can be incorporated in the general catalog, mixing manuscript entries with those for publications; and (3) to be incorporated into the library's general rules for descriptive cataloging.¹¹

Following from these premises it is clear that intellectual control of manuscript collections would be based on techniques derived from librarianship, using the card catalog as the controlling descriptive format.

It is appropriate to ask why the Library of Congress rules were generally accepted by the NARS and SAA as well as by the library establishment. Why indeed were they accepted at the same time that an amalgam of practices was being developed, combining those of librarianship with those from the public archives field?

Probably the most critical factor was the decision to exclude public archives from the NUCMC. It had been the intention originally to include such records in a "national register." In the National Archives and Records Service (NARS) there had been serious criticism of the three drafts of the NUCMC description rules. Philip C. Brooks and Herman Kahn, in particular, expressed the fear that these rules would be used as a guide to practice at the repository level. In their opinion, the rules should be limited to description at the collection level for reporting to a national union catalog, and they should not be accepted as a practical guide for application at the repository level.¹² Once public archives were excluded from the rules, Brooks, Kahn, and others in the National Archives felt less concern and effective voices for the archival perspective were silenced.

In the National Archives staff discussions a new factor had been introduced, but only subliminally: the concept of different record levels and the establishment of intellectual controls by arrangement and description keyed to these levels. As noted above, at about the time the National Archives abolished its divisions of cataloging and classification, it established the record group concept as the basic level of control of records in the agency's custody. However, as Mario Fenyo stated in *The American Archivist* in 1966, there was little subsequent refinement of the record group concept.¹³ Although control at different record levels will be discussed later, it is important to note that the concept of relating to the record levels was not yet, in 1952 and 1953, fully integrated intellectually in the minds of those within NARS itself, where this archival concept originated and despite the existence of Schellenberg's *Staff Information Paper* 18, "Principles of Arrangement" (1951). If public archives had remained within the original

¹¹ From copy provided by Harriett Ostroff from Library of Congress records.

¹² For general background, see Robert H. Land, "The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections," *American Archivist* 17 (July 1954): 195-207. The concerns of Brooks and Kahn were expressed in the following documents provided the author by Frank G. Burke from the records of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission: Brooks, letter to Lucille M. Morsch, Chief, Descriptive Cataloging Division, Library of Congress, 6 November 1952; Brooks, file memorandum, "Conference on Manuscripts Register," June 1952; Kahn, memorandum, to "NAA," 13 January 1953. See also Richard C. Berner, "Observations on Archivists, Librarians, and the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections," *College and Research Libraries* 29 (July 1968): 277-78; and Terry Abraham, "NUCMC and the Local Repository," *American Archivist* 40 (January 1977): 31-42.

¹³ Fenyo, "The Record Group Concept."

scope of NUCMC, the intellectual refinement probably would have occurred earlier than it has.

Be that as it may, the NUCMC cataloging rules ignored record levels for all practical purposes, except specifically for the collection level and the item level.¹⁴ As Terry Abraham noted in his article in *The American Archivist* (January 1977), these rules were strongly to influence practice at the repository level.

Under rules for reporting to NUCMC, a repository could choose to do original cataloging in card format according to NUCMC rules, or it could submit its report on data sheets provided by NUCMC offices. This data sheet is merely a page for reporting information from which the catalogers at NUCMC can do their own cataloging. This form of reporting permits a repository to avoid being locked into a card cataloging descriptive format. It had been the intention of the promoters of the NUCMC to achieve nationwide conformity to its descriptive cataloging rules. They seem to have succeeded in large measure, and in doing so have helped perpetuate the librarianship mode of description, inducing manuscript repositories to adopt those rules as a guide to internal practices. This concept of practice is that of Nute and Fitzpatrick and, as such, may be viewed as a regression from the LC's own internal practices, which have been characterized above as a new departure.

There is, however, a more positive view of the NUCMC procedure relating to its cumulative indexes for proper names, place names, and topical subjects. These indexes are simple book-like indexes referring the user by entry numbers, only, to the description appearing in the text. In these indexes there is no narrative such as that which appears on typical catalog cards. If one realizes that the catalog card really functions as an index, it follows that the card catalog itself might be superseded by a simpler description such as simple index entries.

Attention should be directed to yet another unrecognized attribute of the NUCMC indexes. Implicit is the idea that a single descriptive system might be operable at the repository level, as the basic system from which special lists and the like can be derived. The NUCMC itself represents such a descriptive system.¹⁵

The direct consequence of adopting the NUCMC rules as a model for practices at the repository level is that a system consisting of two independent sets of finding aids having only accidental relationships—the card catalog and the page form of descriptions—has been perpetuated. The accidental feature is that the catalog cards only happen to serve as a partial index to the page form of descriptions; but they do not do so conceptually as part of a single system. The card catalog remains self-contained; typically, the user is referred from it to other independent aids. It is ironic that instead of the development of a wholly new descriptive system modeled on the NUCMC product, only the descriptive rules used in compiling entries have been the model. The fears of Philip Brooks and Herman Kahn that the NUCMC rules would be used at the repository level were indeed justified.

¹⁴ *Rules for Descriptive Cataloging in the Library of Congress; Manuscripts; Preprint of the Rules for Collections of Manuscripts* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1954) and supplemental "Information Circulars," numbers 2–5 (August 1966).

¹⁵ The University Archives and Manuscripts Division of the University of Washington Libraries is the only repository known to the author to have established a single descriptive system resembling the NUCMC system. See Richard C. Berner and M. Gary Bettis, "Description of Manuscript Collections: A Single Network System," *College and Research Libraries* 30 (September 1969): 405–16.

Various writers have tried to cope with the problems relating to the documentary mass of modern manuscript collections. Most notable in the 1960s were the following: Lucile Kane, *A Guide to the Care and Administration of Manuscripts* (1960 and 1966); Ruth Bordin and Robert Warner, *The Modern Manuscript Library* (1966); and Theodore R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives* (1965).¹⁶ Each is clearly influenced by practices in NARS, recognizing the importance of collective control through arrangement of modern manuscripts into record series. Each is trying to amalgamate library and archival practices. Each recognizes the central importance of series-level control, but each stops short of incorporating these elements into a coherent theory and set of practices of the kind that were being developed in NARS, and which were not fully expressed until Oliver W. Holmes did so in *The American Archivist* in 1964.¹⁷

Kane, for example, writes that "whenever the processor has serious doubts about whether sections of a group should be cataloged as units within a collection or as separate collections, it is preferable to have them together." This is the germ of a subgroup concept in which subgroups would be established on the basis of provenance prior to the arrangement of papers and records into series. Kane provides examples from the Gilman Papers, subgrouped into the separate corporate activities of Mrs. Gilman and into Family Papers. Kane continues that "the organization chosen for the collection is by no means the only one that would have worked. The two units could have been cataloged as two collections instead of two sections of one collection"¹⁸ Further on she tends to intermingle series and subgroups, not distinguishing them intellectually. However, she clearly recommends that subgroups be established; and she implicitly recognizes the relevance of provenance to subgrouping on the basis of the record-creating activity.

Bordin and Warner do not move as far as Kane in developing a concept of subgrouping as a general basis for arrangement; but they recognize its potential application, at least to corporate records. They write that "institutional or business records are more likely to be filed by the groups and divisions (i.e., committees, officers, departments) which created them."¹⁹ This is as near as they come, for manuscript collections, to contributing to a more systematic system based on archival theory and practices. Following the practice in the Library of Congress, they recommend production of inventories or registers to supplement the card catalog, stopping short of developing a single, integrated system as the basis from which supplemental aids can be produced as needed.

T. R. Schellenberg makes a more sustained application of archival theory to the management of modern manuscripts. In *The Management of Archives*, he sought primarily to convince librarians that they ought to apply archival principles of arrangement and description in their management of manuscript collections. He was convinced that modern manuscript collections had the same basic characteristics as corporate and public archives, and because such collections were managed by librarians, librarians ought to be taught archival principles. In

¹⁶ Lucile Kane, *A Guide to the Care and Administration of Manuscripts*, 2d ed. (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1966), issued in the first edition in 1960 as Bulletin Vol. II, No. 11 of the AASLH. Bordin and Warner, *The Modern Manuscript Library*; and Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives*.

¹⁷ Oliver W. Holmes, Jr., "Archival Arrangement—Five Different Operations at Five Different Levels," *American Archivist* 27 (January 1964): 21–41.

¹⁸ Kane, *A Guide to the Care and Administration of Manuscripts*, pp. 18 and 23.

¹⁹ Bordin and Warner, *The Modern Manuscript Library*, p. 44.

dealing with modern manuscripts, curators recognized that most were already arranged in series. This would suggest to them that unorganized papers and records would themselves be susceptible to arrangement into record series. Furthermore, given the mass of documentation requiring intellectual control, some form of "collective," as distinct from item, description became the focus. Schellenberg sought to structure these trends into a more general system on the basis of commonality. Viewed historically, he was trying to get librarians to do what the National Archives did in 1941 by abolishing its divisions of classification and cataloging. Schellenberg was convinced that modern manuscripts resembled public archives and, consequently, that librarians should abandon the principles of librarianship in the management of modern manuscript collections. His book might have been more appropriately titled "The Management of Modern Manuscript Collections," for this was its thrust.

In his chapter on arranging manuscript collections, Schellenberg wrote that "series should be the concern of curators of recent papers. . . . Unless series are established, it is necessary to deal with such collections on an item-by-item basis." He continues that "a collection of personal papers . . . is usually divisible into at least two groups: one relating to the purely personal or family papers, and the other to the activity for which the person became noteworthy. These groups may be regarded as series." Schellenberg reflected the conventional, contemporary (1965) view by confusing series with subgroups in this statement. In his subsequent discussion he fails to distinguish series from subgroup, treating all categories of records as series, not distinguishing record-creating activity from filing arrangement.²⁰ However, in his discussion of these record levels in relation to public records, they are clearly distinguished.²¹ In general, Schellenberg is hesitant about extending the concept of archival record levels, as conceived in the National Archives, to the arrangement of modern manuscripts in a holistic manner. In addition, he insists that the basic finding aids should be tailored to the anticipated needs of different kinds of researchers. By urging this practice he would: (1) fragment the basic finding aid system from which separate lists could be produced as occasion permits; and (2) encourage subjectiveness in the descriptive process before basic controls have been established. The idea of the subgroup as a potentially useful concept is absent in his discussion of manuscripts. However, no one in the National Archives apparently had yet recognized that the basis of subgrouping was, in fact, that of record-creating activity, thereby distinguishing it from series, file folder, and item levels, each of which relates to filing only.

With the publication in 1975 of Kenneth Duckett's *Modern Manuscripts*,²² a descriptive practice derived from librarianship is the recommended mode, a return in effect, to librarianship. It deserves attention because of its recent publication and of its potential influence. Duckett's recommendations are the most recent expression of ideas and tendencies reflected in earlier writings of others.²³

²⁰ Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives*, pp. 182–88.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 161–71.

²² Kenneth W. Duckett, *Modern Manuscripts: A Practical Manual for Their Management, Care and Use* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1975).

²³ For example: Robert S. Gordon, "Suggestions for Organization and Description of Archival Holdings of Local Historical Societies," *American Archivist* 26 (January 1963): 19–36; Dorothy V. Martin, "Use of Cataloging Techniques in Work with Records and Manuscripts," *American Archivist*

In these there is first a search for the "catalogable unit" whether or not that term is actually used. Furthermore, the search is without reference to a particular record level; indeed, there is an absence of any consciousness of different record levels unless it be the item level. Turning to Duckett, the "curator" at the stage of arranging papers takes "content notes" and "sorting notes." "Content notes should be taken on uniform sheets so that they are easily sorted and arranged to write the inventory and catalog cards. . . . The process of taking content notes is an attempt by the curator to abstract what he thinks is the important information in the collection so that he can synthesize it for the researchers. If the curator is in doubt, he should take a note."²⁴

Duckett's purpose in taking content notes is to make catalog entries; it is done while arranging papers and is independent of the actual arrangement of the papers; it is cataloging from the item level and is done before an attempt has been made to establish intellectual controls at the series or file folder levels. There is no clear reference by him to different record levels and only casual reference to series. Although he states that "the inventory is the best tool yet devised for maintaining bibliographical control over huge twentieth-century collections," his discussion places it at the periphery of the process in establishing bibliographic control.²⁵ In following Duckett, one is tempted to describe or catalog while arranging the papers, and that is cataloging from the individual manuscripts themselves, not from the inventory. Instead of the description being a mirror image of arrangement it will resemble a kaleidoscope. The kind of content notes he recommends lead in the direction of item description and away from the kind of collective description represented by the inventory. All can agree with his recommendation that "sorting notes" need to be made; that is, that notes should be made relating to characteristics of filing order and other elements that will not appear in catalog cards nor in the body of an inventory but are useful to the staff and to readers of the inventory or register. Content notes which, according to Duckett, also should be made, are another matter, leading as they do to item description before preliminary intellectual controls have been established at other record levels.

A common thread through the writings in this genre is the random selection for a catalog entry of particular items and name and subject references within them. Duckett, for example, recommends noting individual letters that seem sufficiently important to merit a catalog entry.²⁶ The "catalogable unit" becomes an imprecise creature of the cataloger's mind. When cataloging is not keyed clearly to different record levels, description veers as a consequence toward item description. Whatever receives a catalog entry becomes a "catalogable unit."

As noted earlier, the alternative scheme to that recommended by Duckett for description of modern manuscripts began for all practical purposes with Margaret Cross Norton and the Historical Record Survey. The HRS had been forced to develop methods of collective description by the nature of its problems:

18 (October 1955): 317-36; Paul S. Dunkin, "Arrangement and Cataloging of Manuscripts," *Library Trends* 5 (January 1957): 352-60; Library of Congress, *Preprint of the Rules for Collections of Manuscripts* (September 1954); and American Library Association, *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*, chapter 10.

²⁴ Duckett, *Modern Manuscripts*, pp. 121-24.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

(1) recording concise information about massive quantities of personal papers and corporate and public records mainly having no kind of prior intellectual control; (2) doing it within a tight time frame; and (3) doing it, often, with staff that had little training.

We have noted the reorganization of the descriptive program of the National Archives in 1941. Subsequently, through its own internal practices and manuals, collective description became the rule at NARS. Oliver W. Holmes's article, "Archival Arrangement—five Different Operations at Five Different Levels," reflects this practice. Based on the National Archives *Staff Information Paper* No. 18, "Principles of Arrangement," Holmes's article describes the depository level, record group level, and subgroup level, series level, file unit level, and document level.²⁷ He summarizes practices at the National Archives, practices that had already influenced many manuscript and archival institutions. In this scheme, each level represents a successively refined level of intellectual control. As time and budget permit, the National Archives tries to achieve this control in a disciplined way, not at random.

Reference has been made to Schellenberg's attempt to apply these archival techniques to the arrangement and description of manuscript collections. In my own case, strongly influenced by Schellenberg, I have systematically applied these principles to modern manuscripts in two recent articles, one in the *Drexel Library Quarterly* (January 1975) and the other in a theoretical context in the article which appeared as "Perspectives on the Record Group Concept," in *Georgia Archive* (Winter 1976). These articles extend the concept of record levels to arrangement and description of manuscript collections. Lydia Lucas, of the Minnesota Historical Society, in the same issue of *Georgia Archive*, applies archival techniques of arrangement and collective description in her article "Massive Collections from Warehouse to Reading Room."²⁸ Lucas stresses the need for establishing preliminary intellectual controls at the time of accessioning. In effect, she would achieve control at the record group or accession level in association with a container list that would provide the basis for catalog entries to the accession at the time it is shelved. This practice now seems generally applied in public archives and manuscript collections dealing with modern manuscripts.

In my two articles, Lucas's techniques were carried successively to other record levels. Holmes's "five levels" are adapted to the arrangement and description of manuscript collections by eliminating the "depository level" (subdivision of a depository's holdings into a few major subdivisions on the basis of geography, subject, or the like) as being irrelevant to most manuscript collections, and by establishing the subgroup as an independent record level. In this view, the subgroup, representing the separate corporate activity(ies) of a person or corporate body, should be considered as the basis of establishing preliminary intellectual controls. By subgrouping records prior to establishing recognizable record series within them, the manuscript repository can also set processing priorities for the entire manuscript collection. The record group and subgroup

²⁷ Theodore R. Schellenberg, *Staff Information Paper* No. 18, "Principles of Arrangement," National Archives and Records Service; and Holmes, "Archival Arrangement."

²⁸ *Drexel Library Quarterly* 11 (January 1975). This issue is entitled "Management of Archives and Manuscript Collections for Librarians." The author's chapter is "Arrangement and Description of Manuscripts," pp. 34–54. See also his article, "Perspectives on the Record Group Concept," *Georgia Archive* 4 (Winter 1976): 48–53; and Lydia Lucas, "Massive Collections from Warehouse to Reading Room," *Georgia Archive* 4 (Winter 1976): 56–63.

levels are also distinguished from series, file unit, and item levels. They are record-creating agencies, whereas the series and its sub-units reflect merely the way the materials are filed. As such, the record group and subgroup each relate to provenance whereas the series and its sub-units relate to file order.

More recently, David B. Gracy II, in his SAA manual on *Arrangement and Description*, also adapts the archival concept of record levels to arrangement and description of manuscript collections. However, in his treatment of series and subgroups he confuses series with subgroups, failing to relate subgroups to record-creating activity and series to filing order. He would also arrange series before subgrouping, thereby dispersing subgroups among series.²⁹ Gracy's procedure runs counter to Holmes's recommendation. Holmes urges that "once all series are assigned to record groups and subgroups . . . the archivist looks within the group or subgroups and works out a logical arrangement sequence for the series so assigned."³⁰

Without discussing current trends in automated indexing, computer programs, and where they are taking us,³¹ it is worthwhile to cast a historical perspective on where we have been.

It would be ironic indeed if the basic nature of the descriptive problem is overlooked in the preoccupation, as if in a vacuum, with developing automated indexing techniques. When we recall that the creators of NUCMC had rejected its cumulative indexes as though they were unwanted offspring, it is doubly important that the nature of the problem at this time be more clearly assessed.

With respect to the NUCMC experience, two major elements are clear:

- (1) The descriptive system was intended by its sponsors to be subordinated to the general cataloging system and the general card catalog of each library with a manuscript collection. It was to be essentially independent of any supplemental finding aids; in fact, only a casual reference is made in NUCMC rule 7 to any need to refer to any other finding aid. Although the Library of Congress itself maintains separate catalogs for its manuscript collections and its holdings of publications, its preoccupation with promulgating the card catalog as the primary mode of description for the NUCMC blurred its view of the kind of product created.
- (2) Two separate descriptive programs, the self-contained card catalog and independent finding aids, having only accidental relationships would be perpetuated uncritically within each manuscript repository.

Bearing in mind the NUCMC experience, worth delineating now is the problem facing manuscript curators and archivists in the area of arrangement and description. The central problem is one of providing subject access to sources. The sources themselves typically represent twentieth-century materials that are being acquired at a rate and in such volume as to make largely irrelevant the adaptations of classical library practices. These practices are as outmoded now

²⁹ David B. Gracy II, *Archives and Manuscripts: Arrangement and Description* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977). See pp. 9 and 10.

³⁰ Holmes, "Archival Arrangement," p. 32.

³¹ See H. Thomas Hickerson, Joan Winters, and Venetia Beale, *Spindex II at Cornell University and a Review of Archival Automation in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976); Marion M. Torchia, "Two Experiments in Automated Indexing: The Presidential Papers and the Papers of the Continental Congress," *American Archivist* 39 (October 1976): 437-45; and Frank G. Burke, "Spindex II: An Aspect of Archival Information Retrieval," *Records Management Journal* 8 (Summer 1970): 19-23.

as they were to the National Archives before 1941. Twentieth-century manuscript collections and public archives have so much in common in terms of the kind of materials that constitute them that archival theory and practice are clearly more applicable.

In providing subject access, archival practice leads in the direction of keying control to specific record levels, and doing it in a disciplined manner. By this approach the random method of providing subject access, advocated by Kenneth Duckett, needs to be abandoned except under certain conditions: (1) where there are no significant backlogs, (2) where there are budgets large enough to permit item description, (3) where there is a low volume of annual intake, and (4) where collecting is done more for reason of having select items or accessions and less for their value as part of filling a need for comprehensive documentation. Even repositories with modest accessions should consider keying controls to specific record levels and move in the direction of achieving progressively refined controls after having gained some initial controls.

In providing subject access in a disciplined way, several modes of subject access ought to be recognized. There is now an awareness that much subject information is provided by the association of proper names with activity. In other words, subject matter is inferred by being associated with activities of persons and organizations. Where proper name control exists, this frequently carries control to the file folder level in those instances where there is a folder of correspondence with, or a subject file about, a particular person or corporate body. Similarly, but less precisely, geographic/place names, if controlled, provide subject information inferentially.

The most subjective, and most expensive to obtain, is the subject information derived from forms of content analysis such as SPINDEX II and traditional analytic cataloging. Some caution must be asserted in any form of content analysis, particularly as the describer/cataloger moves beyond the subgroup level to the series and more refined levels. Some record groups and some accessions are more important than others, and so are some subgroups. Not all can be arranged and described uniformly to the same level because of the sheer size of the task. Therefore, the most important ones need the most attention, but only in a program that establishes essential preliminary controls for all accessions as they are received. Bearing this caution in mind, one should proceed with content analysis with a full knowledge of where prior analysis has been taken, i.e., to what record level. In each case, except probably for the item level, it will be only the primary subject attributes that need to be revealed, but keyed to specific record levels, not wandering among them in an undisciplined manner. Content analysis, noting proper names, subject matter, and key words in a series, for example, will be less precise than the analysis for the individual file folders that make up that series. One provides intellectual access to the series which must be searched in its entirety, while the other provides it to the individual file folders that make up the series. One of the results following from the interest in automated indexing and computer programs is the development of single descriptive systems each element of which is part of an integrated whole. To the extent that this embryo grows from pilot programs, the card catalog will become outmoded and with it the disappearance of unintegrated descriptive programs wherein card entries partially describe the same material as the inventory, but not as part of a structured system that leads through successive steps to the material itself. There is

overlap, but overlap is not integration; and referring to the inventory for more detail is no substitute for integration.

In closing I offer two observations that might provide some added perspective on the historical origins of some of the problems treated in this paper.

The library card catalog and library forms of cataloging are what tended to shape our thinking not only about description but about processing and arrangement as well. In such cataloging, manuscript librarians tend to ignore provenance, the cardinal principle of archival theory and practice. Only in the past generation has provenance become an accepted principle of manuscript processing. Yet the card catalog remains vestigially to govern thinking about description. It is the cause of perpetuating two descriptive systems having only accidental relationship. Its indexing function is, however, being caught up by automated indexing techniques, unfortunately without a conscious recognition of the displacement that is occurring.

When the National Archives abolished its divisions of cataloging and classification, in effect it turned its back on librarianship. Manuscript curators were left thereafter to handle historical manuscripts in the traditional way, until the impact of collecting modern manuscripts after World War II forced an accommodation to archival theory. The stage has now been reached whereat most manuscript curators recognize that modern manuscripts have essentially the same qualities as archives. Consequently, curators are dealing with manuscripts more and more as if they were archives, a product of extended activity.

Just as automated indexing and networking are beginning to render the card catalog obsolete for librarians, so too are these techniques bringing manuscript curators and archivists together for a single purpose.

The concern, however, should be to treat automated techniques as mere instruments to implement a single descriptive or analytic system, and not to allow them to inhibit our overall concept of the problem at hand. From our historical experience with the card catalog, we have seen how a mere instrument overwhelmed the system of which it was but a part.

It is now time to cast a historical view upon what has been happening. This paper has attempted to do just that.