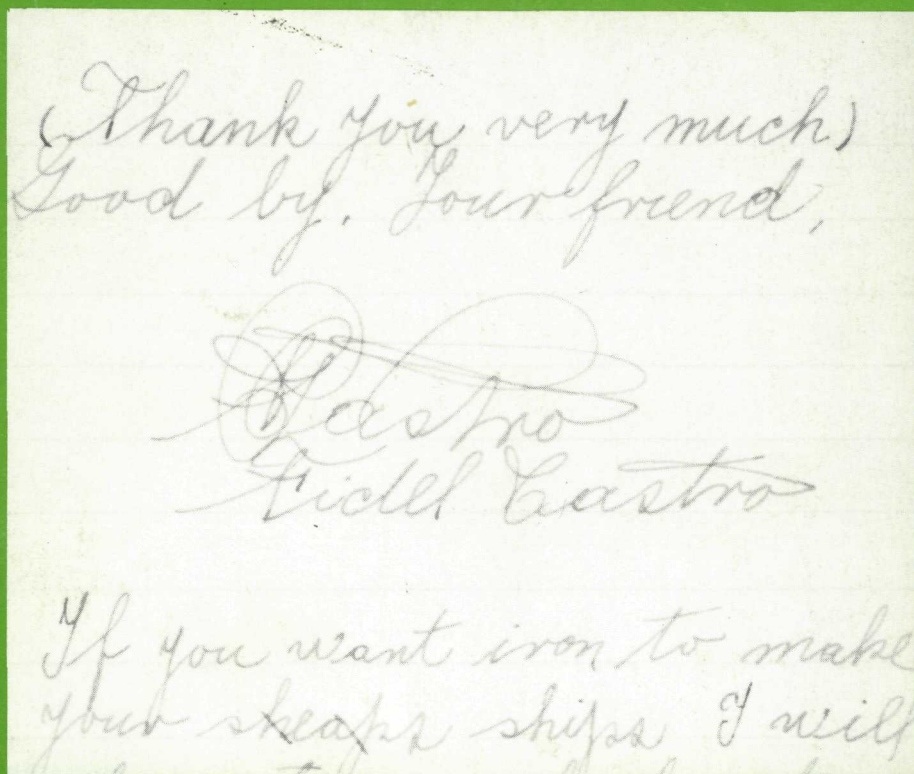


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Cover note: A detail from a letter appearing this issue is "From the Archives," a new department that will feature intriguing material from the archives of SAA members. See page 284.

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The Forum

TO THE EDITOR:

David Bearman's letter published in the Fall 1986 *American Archivist* commenting on an article by National Archives staff warrants a reply. The original article, which appeared in the Summer 1986 issue of the *American Archivist*, discussed the MARC AMC format among other matters. Because the undersigned was the principal author of the MARC AMC part of the article, I will reply for all authors.

Bearman cites what he believes are flaws at three points in our article. In the first instance, he labels our comment that MARC does not support "common information structures such as disposition schedules and inventories . . ." as "utterly meaningless and totally misleading." He argues that the fields can be recorded in any order and that ultimately the display is a "matter of design of output screens and reports."

In the report we are not concerned about the *intrarecord* order of fields. We are concerned about *interrecord* linkages that will support the display of related records on demand. Such links might include one relationship we mentioned in the article, i.e., the ability to display together a series description and descriptions of its indexes. In some cases, related series descriptions may be more easily understood if they are displayed together. This is not, however, simply a display is-

sue. It is a data storage and exchange issue that affects display possibilities. In the absence of a standard method in MARC AMC for capturing and transferring a variety of links useful for ordering the display, systems cannot be designed to generate the desired screens. The Committee on Archival Information Exchange has begun exploring several possibilities for increasing interrecord linkages in MARC AMC. We believe these links, if adopted, will strengthen the format.

Bearman's second point pertains to our critique of the shortcoming of the "generic action field." Recent changes in the MARC AMC format have significantly reduced our concern with the field. Before CAIE and MARBI authorized the augmentation of the action field with measurement subfields, an institution wanting to note what amount of a described unit was affected by an action would have used both the action field and the measurement field for each action. Each of the fields must be linked specifying the material in each field. If the action was an acquisition, an additional field, "immediate source of acquisition," might also be used, requiring another material specifier. Whether this information is keyed in separately or not, storing the same information two or three times is redundant. Additionally, the measurement fields are likely to be confusing to a user on the receiving system.

Bearman notes that local systems can provide specialized input screens for actions. Information entered in the local screens will then be stored with an action identifier in the MARC AMC format for exchange. We believe this is a cumbersome way to do business and that, over time, the profession will define separate action fields for major archival actions to enhance the MARC AMC format.

Bearman's third point concerns our discussion for the need for "specifically defined quantitative measures in relation to specific actions." As noted above, this change has already been made by CAIE and MARBI and has been incorporated in the MARC AMC format.

THOMAS E. WEIR, JR.
*National Archives and Records
Administration*

TO THE EDITOR:

Thank you for the opportunity to reply to Russell Castonguay's letter (*American Archivist* 50 [Winter 1987]: 3) commenting on my review of his book *A Guide to Classification Schemes for Local Government Documents Collections* (*American Archivist* 49 [Winter 1986]: 81-82). I regret that I wandered a little from local government documents to state government documents in my remarks. Castonguay is correct that his principal focus is on local government documents, though some of the classification schemes he discusses also include state government documents. I stand by the balance of my critique. The reader had the right to expect a well selected menu, not an "impartial banquet."

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and History*