

Review Articles

Progress in Cataloging

U.S. Library of Congress. Processing Department. *Studies of Descriptive Cataloging. A Report to the Librarian of Congress by the Director of the Processing Department.* Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946. 48p.

U.S. Library of Congress. Advisory Committee on Descriptive Cataloging to the Librarian of Congress. *Report.* Washington, Library of Congress, 1946. 15p.

These two pamphlets are among the significant documents in the history of American cataloging. They record the events leading toward, the data supporting, and the decision of the Library of Congress to accept a new statement of the functions and principles of descriptive cataloging upon which a revised code of rules will be based. This decision not only brings to a head several controversies of long standing but also projects the theory of descriptive cataloging well beyond the horizons of present practice.

The studies which resulted in the publication of these pamphlets began early in 1942 following widespread criticism of the descriptive cataloging section of the preliminary second edition of the *A.L.A. Catalog Rules*, a code which reflects current Library of Congress practice. That this practice is no longer acceptable as a national standard is evinced by the fact that some of the major libraries of the country, one after the other, are abandoning the L.C. rules and developing more effective ones for their own purposes. From these and other libraries comes a persistent and growing demand for the simplification of cataloging rules and practice, a demand which cannot be ignored without endangering not only the position of leadership so long held by the Library of Congress but also the future of the cooperative enterprises which depend upon that leadership.

The first attempts to redefine the functions of descriptive cataloging and to evaluate current practice in the light of those functions occurred in the first half of 1943. Dur-

ing October and November of that year the chief of the Descriptive Cataloging Division and the director of the Processing Department held a series of conferences in fifteen cities throughout the nation in order to sound out opinion and gather data. Early in 1944 officials of the American Library Association suggested that if the Library of Congress were prepared to draft a new code of rules for its own use which would also be acceptable to other American libraries, the descriptive cataloging section of the preliminary second edition of the *A.L.A. Catalog Rules* would not be revised. The Library of Congress indicated its willingness to proceed with the development of such a code.

In December 1945 a two-day conference on descriptive cataloging was held at the Library of Congress, with nineteen members of the L.C. staff and seven consultants from the outside participating. The basis of the discussions at this conference was a newly formulated statement of the functions and principles of descriptive cataloging, supplemented by examples illustrating the application and effect of these principles. The statement and examples were then distributed to twenty-eight additional catalogers and administrators, and a detailed study was made of all the facts and opinions collected. The full report of this investigation, together with the original statement of principles and the list of examples, constitute the *Studies of Descriptive Cataloging*.

In transmitting this report to the Librarian of Congress, the director of the Processing Department, Herman H. Henkle, recommended not only the adoption of the new principles but also the appointment of an advisory committee representing the Library of Congress and the profession outside to advise the librarian on the disposition of the report and "on questions and conflicts of opinion to be resolved in the course of the development of the code." The committee was appointed, consisting of three members of the Library of Congress reference and acquisition staffs and

six members from the library profession at large. The committee held meetings at the Library of Congress, June 24-27, 1946, and later drafted its own *Report* to the Librarian of Congress. This report generally approves the recommendations of the director of the Processing Department, proposes solutions to problems involving conflicts of opinion, and points out areas in which further study is needed. The Librarian of Congress approved the committee's report and directed the Processing Department to proceed with the preparation of a code of descriptive cataloging rules in accordance with the committee's recommendations. The completed draft is to be submitted to the staff of the Library of Congress and the profession generally for criticism before its final adoption as a part of the cataloging policy of the library.

Toward Defining Objectives

That this elaborate procedure was aimed, not primarily at the discussion of specific cataloging rules, but at the clarification and formulation of general principles is in itself noteworthy. Rarely, perhaps never, in American library history has such a concerted effort been made to define the acceptable objectives of cataloging before a code of rules was written. The new Library of Congress descriptive cataloging code promises to be unique in that it will present first a statement of the functions which it will undertake to serve, then the principles which will be employed to serve those functions, and finally the rules themselves, the last being intended only to detail the application of the stated principles in typical cases. The sense of direction, purpose, and logical procedure which such a code would provide should be a welcome relief to many catalogers from the overelaboration of rules to fit specific cases.

The general functions of descriptive cataloging are stated in these pamphlets with almost deceptive simplicity. These functions are:

1. To describe the significant features of the book which will serve (a) to distinguish it from other books and other editions of this book and (b) characterize its contents, scope, and bibliographical relations
2. To present the data in an entry which will (a) fit well with the entries of other books

and other editions of this book in the catalog and (b) respond best to the interests of the majority of readers.

In arriving at this statement and the principles which follow, several important decisions were made. It is in the effect of these decisions on cataloging practice that the real significance of the new L.C. code will rest.

First, the decision is unequivocally rendered that the Library of Congress will not undertake so-called "bibliographical cataloging," the reasons being that such cataloging would be too costly, could not be justified for more than a very small fraction of the library's acquisitions, and would result in cards too cumbersome and inefficient to meet the constant needs of the majority of readers. To the question, is there any reason why the Library of Congress should undertake this extra bibliographical service, Mr. Henkle answers, "Emphatically no."

Simplify the Entry

The second decision, complementary to the first, is to simplify the catalog entry. While "simple cataloging" as an objective is perhaps no more defensible than "bibliographical cataloging," it has become apparent that greater simplicity is essential to intelligibility. Thus "the book is to be described as fully as necessary for the accepted functions, but with an economy of data, words, and expression." Information is not to be duplicated on the catalog card, publishers' names are to be abbreviated, only one place of publication is to be given, pagination is to be limited to the last numbered page of each section that is separately numbered, the illustration statement in the collation is to be generally limited to the term "illus.," and ellipses are to be used only to indicate the omission of parts of statements and not the omission of entire statements. These and other simplifications have, of course, long been practiced by a number of libraries, both large and small, as well as by many bibliographers, apparently with more benefit than injury to library service.

In abandoning "bibliographical cataloging" and adopting a more simple catalog entry, the Library of Congress is only catching up with recent developments in the profession. In another area, however, it is moving distinctly ahead of the profession. With respect to the

organization of the elements of description, the following principle, as revised by the advisory committee, is set forth:

The bibliographical elements of the book are to be given in the entry in the order that will best respond to the normal approach of the reader and that will enable the entry to be readily interfiled in the catalog with cards for other editions and books. For these purposes the following order is in general prescribed: title, subtitle, author statement, edition statement, and imprint; followed by the collation, series note, and supplementary notes.

These bibliographical elements are to be given in the prescribed order regardless of the order in which they appear on the title page or of the source, other than the title page, from which the information is obtained. In other words, the entry will describe the book, not the title page as such. This is the third major decision which the Library of Congress has made, and in the long run it may prove to be the most significant.

In the application of this principle, however, it appears that important concessions may still be made to the more traditional practice of title page transcription in the "body of the entry." The "body of the entry," which represents the title page, at least historically, is to be preserved as a matter of form; and there is a fair chance that transpositions in the order of information, as given on the title page, may be indicated by symbols of one kind or another. In the opinion of this reviewer, the use of symbols to identify transposed statements would be unfortunate, since it would make the entry more complex and less intelligible to the reader while serving only to preserve a principle the validity of which has been denied—the principle that the entry should describe the title page. This is not to minimize the importance of the information on the title page as a description of the book or to deny its identification value but only to point out that, if the objective is really to describe and identify the book, the *order* in which the information is given on the title page is of little consequence for the great majority of modern books. It should also be recognized that the continued use of the body-of-the-entry form will have only a vestigial meaning in relation to the new code, although it will facilitate the interfiling of the new cards with the old. In the interests of clarity

and understanding, however, the advisability of distinguishing the new cards from the old by adopting some modification of this form might be considered.

The principle of giving the descriptive elements in a prescribed order, regardless of their order on the title page, is supplemented by the further principle that "all information relating to a given bibliographical item should be integrated, except where the length or construction of a given statement make its integration with the other data undesirable." This principle is so closely related to the former one that it might have been combined with it. If the information from all sources is to be brought together in the prescribed places on the card, the impracticability of trying still to keep the title page inviolate by using symbols to indicate interpolations, as well as transpositions, is further apparent. The complexities and confusions which might result are manifest in the fact that the two terms, transposition and interpolation, are in themselves inconsistent with the cataloging principles here professed, since they are meaningful only in relation to the transcription of title pages. In describing a book, as contrasted with its title page, in the prescribed manner, the questions of transposition and interpolation seem irrelevant.

In all other respects, however, the suggested applications of the new principles and the derivation of those principles from the accepted functions of descriptive cataloging are developed in these pamphlets with admirable insight, logic, and inner consistency. The work of Mr. Henkle and his associates in this project exhibits a quality of intellectual integrity, a sincerity of purpose, and a validity of method which cannot help advancing in a substantial way the theory and practice of library cataloging. Among these advances several may be anticipated.

For the reader, the new L.C. code should result in more simple, direct, and intelligible descriptions of books, with greater consistency of form and integration of data, and with less irrelevant and comparatively useless information added.

For the cataloger, it should be a challenge to lift his work above the mechanical application of specific rules in specific instances to the considered and purposeful application of general principles to the construction of a

catalog designed to perform definite functions. There will still be rules, but they will be fewer, let us hope, and less inviolate, the attention of the cataloger being focused primarily on the objectives to be achieved.

For the administrator, the new code may mean some reduction in the cost of cataloging, although this is doubtful. It will certainly check for a time, however, additional increases in costs that might have otherwise accrued from the further elaboration of "bibliographical" techniques.

For the cataloging profession as a whole, it should mean unification again on the basis of an acceptable standard of descriptive cataloging, with an immediate revival of cooperative enterprise. There is every reason to believe

that all or most of the libraries which have recently departed from Library of Congress practice will find it possible and desirable to adopt the new code, not only because it will do what they have already been trying to do, but also because the new code will enable them to do it better.

In preparing this new code, the Processing Department of the Library of Congress has assumed a great responsibility. If the work is finished with the same display of imagination, reason, and courage which has distinguished it thus far, the responsibility will have been nobly discharged. We now have the principles; we eagerly await the code.

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Resources for Research

The First Century of the John Carter Brown Library, a History with a Guide to the Collections. By Lawrence C. Wroth. Providence, R.I., The Associates of the John Carter Brown Library, 1946. vi, 88p.
William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, Report of the First Decade, 1934-1944. [Edited by Lawrence Clark Powell.] Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif., University of California Press, 1946. vii, 78p.

The psychology of custodianship of rare books has undergone certain rather profound but inevitable changes in recent decades. Administrators of special collections for literary and historical research have become increasingly active in carrying out a responsibility which is at least twofold, and "preservation" and "availability for scholarly use" are companion requirements in today's scheme of service for the library that finds itself possessed of valuable books and manuscripts. This is not to infer that librarians of the past have not understood the nature of their responsibility but only that the means of meeting it have not always been at hand. It has been necessary for administrators to devise standards—often complicated and always costly to apply—whereby the two objectives could be brought into accord. And before that could be done, it had to be realized that the objectives are not irrevocably at opposite poles from each other. Curators of the watchdog type had to be persuaded

that books are, for the most part, quite sturdy objects and not fragile things with which no scholar, no matter how righteous his need, is to be trusted. They had to be shown that their cause would be strengthened and their function made more comprehensible if the sterner rules were applied only to those books that are truly fragile—illuminated manuscripts, books printed on brittle paper, historic bindings, and the like. On the other hand, the scholar has had to submit to reading under supervision. No longer may he stuff a rare colonial tract in his pocket, to be mulled over in the comfort of a private office or cubicle. That is the prerogative of ownership, and the books and manuscripts contained in a research library are not the property of any one scholar but of all scholars. There is simply no choice in the matter.

The two progress reports under consideration here relate to the John Carter Brown and William Andrews Clark libraries, and furnish excellent examples of the modern approach to the problems of administering large and important collections of rarities, near rarities, and basic resources. In addition, a third facet of the responsibility of custodianship is brought forcibly to the forefront of attention—that of assuring constant and intelligent growth. Both discussions begin by tracing the origins of the respective collections which were founded and fostered as the personal hobbies of the men whose names