

## *Introduction*

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THEODORE SCHELLENBERG, ONE OF THE most influential American archival theorists, wrote of "basic methodological differences between the archival and library professions," stating that

the materials received by a librarian are referred to as acquisitions, denoting purchases, gifts, and exchanges, while those of an archivist are called accessions, which are received by transfer or deposit; the librarian selects his materials, while the archivist appraises his; the librarian classifies his materials in accordance with established classification schemes, while the archivist arranges his in relation to organic structure and function; the librarian catalogs his materials, while the archivist describes his in guides, inventories, and lists.<sup>1</sup>

Schellenberg further defines archival materials (books, papers, maps, photographs, and other documentary media) as being of an administrative nature and housed by an institution because of their legal, functional, and informational value.<sup>2</sup> These differences between the methodologies of the archivist and the librarian, the administrative and unique nature of most archival collections, and the practice of collection *v.* discrete item level description, have often been emphasized by both archivists and librarians as reasons why archivists have been unable to develop automated bibliographic or descriptive systems similar to, or compatible with, those of libraries. Archivists as a profession, have traditionally strived to retain their own identity distinct from that

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of the much larger, better financed, and more cohesive library profession, and nowhere is this more evident than in the history of the development of automation.

The development of automated systems independent of library and other information systems and the ability to use the processing capabilities of computers to improve intellectual access to the contents of archival collections, began in the 1960s. Progress was hindered, however, not only by the conceptual difficulties arising out of archival theory and practice, and the very diverse and specific subject areas, media, and formats which archival holdings encompass, but also by the relatively small size and low profile of many archival operations when compared to libraries. Another serious impediment has been the continuing absence of a sustained level of funding. Many pioneering applications in automation have relied heavily upon grant support, but in an environment where operating budgets for many basic manual functions rarely achieve high institutional priority, the costs of even the most inexpensive and standardized automation may well prove prohibitive.

Recent developments, the cumulation of two decades of debate and experience, indicate that it is now time to reevaluate the state of archival automation and its relationship to other information systems. These include the availability of inexpensive, powerful microcomputers and commercial and custom-designed archival software. The most notable and influential development, however, is the USMARC format for Archival and Manuscripts Control (AMC), which has become the professional standard for recording in machine-readable form descriptive data on archival collections.

It is increasingly apparent that even if an archive chooses not to adopt the MARC AMC format, nonetheless, it will still have to respond to the way in which the format will affect the profession's and the users' information storage and delivery expectations. The MARC AMC format has made national databases of information about institutional holdings, which previously were not available, accessible in a centralized form to researchers and other archives and collectors. Those archives that have chosen not to include data concerning their collections in the bibliographic utilities such as RLIN or in the local online public access catalogs which may be in place in their institutions, will not be able to reach potential users and resources as effectively as those archives that have chosen to participate. They might, in fact, lose ground since such vast bibliographic systems often are mistakenly assumed to be comprehensive by a user, who may then neglect to search further. Because the format raises the minimum descriptive levels of

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materials far above the current practices of many archives, and because the archival profession is placing an increased emphasis on assisting the user, use of the AMC format will gradually, but inevitably, increase researchers' expectations; regardless of archives' traditional descriptive standards, users will expect standardized access to materials at each archive where they conduct research.

This *Library Trends* issue looks at some of these new developments and their implications, and attempts to establish the role of archival automation in the wider context of library and information systems, since, as Schellenberg pointed out:

To emphasize the basic differences between the two professions is not, of course, to ignore those areas where they have much to contribute to each other. With respect to their holdings, archivists and librarians share the common objective of making them available as effectively and economically as possible. For this purpose both should know, in general terms at least, what information the other can provide for inquirers.<sup>3</sup>

Looking at the implications of the AMC format for automation and greater integration in the 1980s, Steven L. Hensen, as a contemporary commentator, reinforces the same approach.

The AMC format has given the archival community the opportunity to become a full partner in the broader information community of which it was always an obvious and natural (albeit unwitting) part. For the first time, archivists have a real stake in matters that were previously the sole province of librarians; cataloging rules, name authorities, and subject headings are now firmly a part of the archival lexicon. Archivists will make their voices heard on the councils that decide on such things or they will almost certainly regret it.<sup>4</sup>

Given the diverse nature of archival collections, this issue cannot claim to be either comprehensive or definitive in its coverage. It concentrates, therefore, less on archival or technical theories, and more on the practical aspects of developing and providing automated systems that will facilitate machine-readable description of archival materials as well as increased access by the researcher. In order to take full advantage of emerging trends and standards, archivists, regardless of background or affiliation, will have to consider solutions to an array of issues—funding, education, data formats, retrospective conversion, links with wider bibliographic systems, staff and user needs, acceptance and expectations, hardware and software configurations, and continuing technological change—when coping with the design, implementation, and maintenance of an automated access system. Automation of administrative functions such as inventory control and records management is not

specifically addressed in this issue, but that process is, of course, closely related.

The topics of the articles in this issue are intended to address these considerations in a broad, thought-provoking manner. The articles highlight common ground between diverse applications, rather than dwelling on specific types of archives such as academic, government, or religious archives, or museum-type institutions. The papers by Weber and Gilliland deal with many basic questions of how archivists actually get to the stage of automation, and the educational and managerial issues that they face. Although technical standards are increasingly in place, it is these issues that are emerging as the major stumbling blocks to successful implementation of automated systems and they have yet to be substantially discussed in the professional literature. Hensen, Hickerson, and Cloud have contributed articles regarding different aspects of using the MARC AMC format: as an evolving descriptive format that requires specific cataloging skills; as a tool for bibliographic interchange, particularly through the Research Libraries Information Network archival segment; and as a new format, the adoption of which carries with it considerable retrospective conversion implications and costs. Articles by Gilmore, Honhart, and Dürr examine the development and marketing of microcomputer-based systems that have been purpose-designed for archival applications. Honhart discusses Micro-MARC:amc, which is the first commercially available microcomputer system to support the AMC format on a local basis while at the same time facilitating data interchange with other systems. It is, therefore, a development that many archivists, particularly those responsible for smaller archives, are watching very closely. Dürr and Gilmore both discuss non-AMC applications and other possibilities for integrating local archival data into wider information systems. Their papers are significant in that they focus attention on viable alternatives to AMC-based systems—some of which have been operating successfully in an integrated environment for several years.

Many of the articles reflect the authors' considerable experience—their practical knowledge, their research with specific applications, and their consistent involvement in the considerable professional debate that has raged over the last twenty years. Other articles inject fresh points of view into the discussion. I hope that this *Library Trends* issue will lead archivists and librarians alike to speculate further on the implications of current developments in automated archival access systems as they relate to the archival profession as a whole, and in their relation to other information systems.

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### **References**

1. Schellenberg, Theodore R. *Modern Archives Principles and Techniques*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956, pp. 23-24.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
4. Hensen, Steven L. "The Use of Standards in the Application of the AMC Format." *American Archivist* 49(Winter 1986):40.

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