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Refining Metadata for Travel Archives

Lee Arnold
Historian Librarian And Archivist

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by Lee Arnold, DLitt et Phil

Travel Archives
Travel archives are perhaps one of the more unappreciated archival collections accumulated and kept, often coming only to a repository when the originator dies or is no longer able to enjoy its existence. These archives may be the notes and journals of travel writers, leisure world travellers, scientists on expedition or average people making momentous life relocations. These archives are not something usually passed down from one generation to the next. However, these travel archives could prove a rich trove for researchers if publically accessible.

Statement of the Problem
Due to inadequate subject description, it is often difficult for researchers to access travel archives.

Purpose
The purpose of this research is to examine, describe, and identify gaps in the description of travel archives with the goal of better describing travel archives, in order to provide more efficient access. Research conducted on travel archives (and the recommendations stemming from this research) will serve as a case study and be applicable to other forms of genre archives. The same measures recommended to improve access to travel archives should also be beneficial, for example, to genealogical archives (another genre archive).

Objectives
There are four overarching objectives to this research project: 1) To assess the current state of metadata relating to travel archives; 2) To ascertain how (or why) researchers use travel archives; 3) To suggest how travel archives can be better described; and 4) To propose these remedies to other genre collections.

Research Questions
The following research questions are answered in the course of this project: 1) How are travel archives currently described (as exploration, expedition, travel accounts, cartographic, etc.) and what is the quality (based on standard criteria) of the finding aids to these collections?; 2) How are these collections used by researchers?; 3) How can travel archives be better described?; 4) How can the remedies for accessing travel archives be expanded to other genre collections?

Initial Literature Review
While there were lots of studies about access to archival collections, over the past 30 years, they were mostly general and did not address travel archives (and rarely addressed genre archival collections). Prior to 2003 these types of studies provided a concise overview of the history of archival description and how each new development would solve the problems or deficiencies of the previous "new thing": Creating a finding aid was better than typing out subject cards;

Machine-Readable Cataloguing Archival and Manuscripts Control [MARC AMC] would make collections more accessible; Dublin Core and Encoded Archival Description [EAD] would render MARC AMC and paper finding aids (respectively) irrelevant. None of these studies have a direct impact on the thesis at hand, but they do provide a litany of the ongoing problem of archival access. Czeck (1998), Feeney (1999), Dooley (1992) and Greenberg (1998) are good examples. Within the last ten years, new solutions are described which would address the old deficiencies -- for example, the belief that search-engines would solve the problem. Some of the concepts from these types of articles, like MacNeil (MacNeil 2005), have an indirect impact on this proposal.

There were a handful of studies which looked at similar issues but through the lens of other genre archival collections (genealogy, presidential papers, regional history, etc.). Perrone's (2006), Southwell's (2002), and Strong's (2000) studies are good. However, none of these articles directly (or indirectly) address the issue of access to travel archives.

Archival Description and Representation
Bradsher (1991) states that "The goal of descriptive activity is to assist researchers in locating pertinent documents" (Bradsher 1991:70). Description can be either at the provenance level (or archival *fonds*) and pertinence (MacNeil 1996). Provenance level description focuses on the intent of the creator. Pertinence level description focuses on how the materials could be accessed (and used) by potential researchers (Lytle 1980). Bradsher (1991) lists five categories of information crucial for minimum archival description: 1) title phrase, 2) series dates, 3) series quantity, 4) physical arrangement and 5) informational content (Bradsher 1991:70). The last category, informational content, includes subject access. In a finding aid these are subject terms which denote people or entities, geography, and topics related to the collection. In a machine readable record, these would be 600-tags (personal names), 610-tags (corporate names), 650-tags (subjects) and 651-tags (geographical).

Archival representation (an often tangible outcome of archival description) may take a variety of forms: guides, inventories, finding aids, bibliographic records, card catalogs, bibliographic databases or EAD databases. Irrespective of the form, they are the initial surrogate to the collection. They allow the researcher to determine not only if the collection is pertinent to their research, but what in the collection (and often where in the collection if there is an inventory) that relevant material is located.

Research Approach
A combination of quantitative and qualitative measures is used in gathering data. This mixed methods research methodology is a solid approach to this research topic. Cresswell (2003) outlines four criteria for choosing a mixed methods research strategy: implementation, priority, integration, and theoretical perspective. This study is intended to be applied research, in that it is "… intended to address issues that have immediate relevance to current practices, procedures and policies" (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:43). While institutional policies may not be gravely affected,

the recommendations for better accessing travel archives will be practical and doable and should have a positive effect on archival practices and procedures. But Gilliland-Swetland (2000) encourages archival doctoral students " … to learn how to apply research skills not only with a view to *improving* the professional environment (applied research), but also to *proving* the premises upon which it has developed (theoretical research)[italics hers]" (Gilliland-Swetland 2000:260).

Research Method/Design
Using travel archives as a case study, this thesis focuses in particular on travel archives located at four institutions in the American city of Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology Archives, Presbyterian Historical Society and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.   Gilliland-Swetland (2000) defines a case study as: "In-depth study of an individual situation, institution, or process in order to understand it in complex detail, and sometimes, to compare against other cases" (Gilliland-Swetland 2000:267). The study of travel archives (and their issues with access) produces results that are applicable to other genre archives.

Conclusion
The researcher concluded that based on the study of databases, repositories, archivists and users, there were two main criteria which needed to be addressed in any set of recommendations for effective travel subject access: A) there needed to be some version of the word "travel" in a MARC record and/or the archival finding aid and B) there needed to be some indication of a genre/format, of the item, in a MARC record and/or the archival finding aid. The researcher provided six recommendations to improve access to travel archives: 1) archivists and manuscript librarians should use *Description and travel* liberally as a geographic subfield, 2) archivists and manuscript librarians should concentrate on the second grouping of travel terms, *Voyages and travels*, in selecting subject terms for their finding aids or subject tracings for an archival MARC record, 3) archivists and manuscript librarians should use genre/form terms (655), 4) archivists and manuscript librarians should use genre/form subject subfields, 5) archivists and manuscript librarians should use topical subjects (650 terms) and subfields ($x terms), personal subject subfields ($v and $x terms), and genre/form terms (655 terms) which are also natural keywords for travel-related collections and 6) archivists and manuscript librarians should not ignore or dismiss their analogue subject access resources. The researcher modified and applied these travel recommendations to another type of genre archives, namely: 1) concentrate on a set of standard subject terms, 2) use genre/form primary terms, 3) use genre/form subfields and 4) use topical subfield terms. For an example of another genre archive, the researcher used genealogical papers. However, this remedy could be applied to other types of genre archives as well.

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