DESCRIPTION OF PRIVATE PAPERS [1]

By T. R. Schellenberg.

In this article I wish to resume a discussion of the problem of managing private papers that I began in the last issue of Archives and Manuscripts where I devoted considerable attention to the basic principles that should be followed in arranging private papers. Here I wish to dwell upon (1) the broad character of a program for the description of private papers, (2) the units and elements that should be taken into account in describing them, (3) their description by units of various sizes - collections, series, and single pieces, (4) their description in relation to subjects, and (5) their comprehensive description.

Descriptive work may be considered as a professional discipline. While doing it an archivist obtains a knowledge of the provenance, content, arrangement, and significance of papers with which he deals. This knowledge he records in finding aids, and these serve a twofold purpose: to make the papers known to potential users and to facilitate searching in them for the archivist. Finding aids are thus a means of eliminating the personal element in servicing work and of placing it on a sound and methodical basis.

Descriptive work involves a degree of self-abnegation, for an archivist makes himself increasingly unnecessary in the use of his materials as he describes them. By means of the finding aids he produces, he imparts his knowledge of the papers in his charge to his colleagues and to the public generally. And this is as it should be. An archivist's function is to open up the research treasures entrusted to him, not to hoard them and keep them from others. A possessive and secretive attitude toward his holdings is inexcusable in an archivist. An archivist should put his knowledge on paper, not keep it in his head. He should describe his materials in such a way that others, using his descriptions of them, can understand their content, arrangement, and significance. And as his descriptive work progresses, the holdings of his repository gradually become more accessible to all who work with them or have need to use them.

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1. This article is a sequel to one on the "Arrangement of Private Papers," which appeared in the August 1957 issue of Archives and Manuscripts. It is also a chapter in the Spanish edition of Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques.

Some archivists are tempted to make themselves indispensable to their institution by keeping their personal knowledge about their holdings to themselves. The dependence of the institution on them in rendering service gives them a kind of job security, and they are loath to destroy this security by doing work that will make their personal mediation unnecessary.

An archivist need not fear that he will harm himself by making available to others in the form of finding aids the knowledge about his materials that he himself possesses. His personal knowledge obviously can never be completely supplanted by finding aids. No matter how well prepared, finding aids cannot impart all the knowledge that is in the head of a well-informed archivist. Nor are finding aids intended to supplant his help. They are "aids", in the true sense of the word, being simply designed to help him and the searcher in finding the materials needed. The archivist's knowledge is still needed to help find them more easily and more abundantly.

A. CHARACTER OF A DESCRIPTIVE PROGRAM.

A number of general considerations should be taken into account in developing a descriptive program for private papers, and to these I wish to devote a little attention in the following paragraphs.

1. Private papers should be described collectively as well as singly. In the United States the techniques employed in describing private papers have largely been developed by librarians, and these techniques, as is well known, relate largely to the treatment of single items. It is questionable if techniques based largely on those of the library profession provide the basis for a sound descriptive program in a manuscript repository. For too many years these techniques have gone unchallenged. Perhaps the time has come to inquire into the utility of producing various finding aids dealing with single items, to assess the appropriateness of such finding aids, and to seek alternative methods of description that will accomplish better the purpose of making known and available the materials in manuscript repositories.

If an archivist concentrates his attention on the description of single items, he is likely to fall far short of providing research workers with the quality of reference service that is possible under a well-considered program. His prepossession with single items, which he may painstakingly list, catalog, and calendar, may result in his repository becoming choked with masses of undigested materials to which he has been unable to give any attention. Most manuscript repositories have neither the time nor the resources to produce finding aids that relate to single items covering all their holdings.

A technique that should be employed in all manuscript repositories is the technique of collective description. It is peculiarly an archival technique that has been developed by archivists dealing with modern records. It means that records are described collectively by units of various sizes. Ordinarily the largest units in a manuscript repository are collections, and many archivists have learned to describe them in guides and other general finding aids. The unit to which little attention has been given, and to which particular attention should be given is the series. This is an intermediate unit between the collection and the individual item.

The technique of collective description provides a shortcut to the objective of obtaining a control over the holdings of a repository. No archivist is fully trained in his profession until he understands it and knows how to apply it. And having learned the technique, he should first describe records collectively by groups and series, and thereafter, only if their character and value justify individual treatment, by single items. If he does not learn the technique he is likely to flounder among innumerable individual pieces that are found in every repository, however small.

2. Private papers should be described in the particular ways that will best facilitate their use. The emphasis here is on selectivity in the method of description.

Different collections of private papers have different values and, consequently, different uses. Some are useful mainly to the genealogist, some mainly to the antiquarian, and some have predominantly a scholarly interest and contain little information on either persons or places.

Different types of finding aids are needed by different classes of searchers. If a finding aid is to serve effectively the needs of a genealogist it should contain information on persons; if it is to serve the needs of an antiquarian it should contain information on places or things; and if it is to serve the needs of a scholar it should contain information that will make known the significance and content of various collections. The scholarly interest in private papers can best be served by a finding aid program that is comprehensive in its coverage and selective in its method of analyzing records. In coming to a repository a scholar initially wants to know something about its entire holdings. He should therefore be provided with a finding aid that will contain information, however provisional and superficial, about every collection of papers in the custody of the repository. After his initial review of the holdings, the scholar will decide if certain collections within it are pertinent to the subject of his inquiry. On such collections he will want more information than is provided in a comprehensive finding aid. On collections of private papers that are primarily of genealogical or antiquarian interest, the indexes to names of persons, places, and things will usually serve his needs, as they do those of the genealogist

and antiquarian. On collections that have a general research interest, the scholar will want to have information on their provenance (what persons or corporate bodies created them), their character (their physical classes and types), and their content (their relation to subjects or activities).

The archivist, then, should decide two things. First, he should determine what kinds of finding aids should be prepared for various collections of records. He should thus adapt his descriptive program to facilitate the particular uses to which particular collections of papers may be put. In regard to each collection he should use the method that is best suited to make known its content, arrangement, and significance. Secondly, he should determine what kinds of finding aids are particularly needed to serve his clientele. While a descriptive program should be designed to serve the needs of all kinds of users - scholars as well as genealogists and antiquarians - it should serve particularly well the needs of the main kinds of users.

An archivist should not develop a descriptive program that calls for completely uniform treatment of every collection in his custody. His program should be flexible. Unfortunately, for the sake of consistency, archivists have often produced certain kinds of finding aids - indexes, catalogs, and the like - regardless of whether or not they are needed or usable. Many of them, concerned chiefly with genealogical inquiries, have prepared indexes to personal names, often comprising case after case of index cards. Others, to serve the same need, have prepared extensive biographical sketches of persons important in the State or community. Some, concerned with inquiries about places, have prepared indexes to names of places. Others still having custody of correspondence or other early records important to the history of an area, have laboriously prepared calendars. And many, following library practices, have heaped catalogs on catalogs. And a few, not knowing what kind of finding aids to prepare, have prepared none at all.

One thing is certain, every manuscript repository, regardless of the degree to which it is intended to serve a specialized clientele, should make its holdings generally accessible for scholarly research. Because of the lack of a considered program for developing finding aids, archivists are often able to serve only the bare needs of genealogists and antiquarians; scholars are given short shrift. Thus, repositories established by religious groups, local historical societies, or genealogical organizations should serve not only their special interests; they should also serve the interests of scholarly research, for their holdings usually include materials that have a general research interest broader than that of the institutions that established them.

3. All records in a repository should be described immediately in provisional finding aids. An archivist should definitely forego the detailed description of individual series and items until he has provided immediate information on all holdings of his repository. This information should be provided in provisional, and perhaps rather general, finding aids.

4. Records should be described in progressively greater detail. Not only should an archivist develop a descriptive program that will meet the particular needs of his clientele, that will make known the content and significance of particular collections, and that will make known the content of all collections immediately; he should also plan a descriptive program that will provide constantly more information about his holdings as resources are available for their description. The purpose of more intensive description obviously is to improve the quality of reference service. The descriptive program for each manuscript repository, therefore, should be one that involves the production of a series of finding aids in which the sequence is from the general to the particular, the descriptions becoming progressively more detailed as the descriptive work proceeds. Such a descriptive program should be carefully planned, and the considerations that should be taken into account in establishing an order of priority for the preparation of finding aids to various collections are, first, the use that is made of them, and, second, their research significance. There should be selectivity in the program of description, as well as in the method of description.

5. Finding aids should be in a form that will (1) best make known the content, arrangement, and significance, and (2) best facilitate the use of private papers. The card form is obviously suited to library finding aids. Card systems of indexing and cataloging were developed by the Library Bureau, shortly after it was established, by Melvil Dewey in 1876. Library collections are growing collections; materials need constantly to be inserted in various places in the collection, and cards, which can be inserted at any point in a card file, are thus suited to the description of the discrete items in a library collection, each of which is inserted in its proper place as it is acquired.

Finding aids to private papers should be in card form whenever it is desirable (1) to identify specific subjects in the papers, such as names of persons, places, things, topics, and the like, and (2) to identify specific or single record items. For this reason cards are suited to the production of subject catalogs, name indexes, and topical indexes.

Finding aids to private papers should be in page form whenever it is desirable to describe such papers collectively. Thus descriptions

of collections as a whole, or series within collections, should normally appear on pages, instead of on cards. The page form is desirable for a number of reasons:

The first is the lack of space on cards. The provenance of a collection often cannot be indicated in a few words and more space than is normally available on cards may be needed. Similarly, the content, arrangement, and significance of particular series often cannot be indicated in a few words since such series may consist of many physical types and may relate to diverse subjects or activities. More space than is normally available on cards may be needed.

The second reason is the lack of continuity of information on cards. Each card usually contains information that is unrelated to that on other cards. The intricate relation of various series to each other cannot readily be made apparent on cards without resorting to elaborate cross-references. On pages, in contrast, the organic and subject relations of various series can be made apparent by the way the series entries are grouped and arranged.

A third reason is that the expansive factor of the card file is not needed in finding aids to manuscript collections. Collections of private papers are not expansive in the same way as are library collections. They are usually closed in the sense that no more additions will be made to them. If additions are made they are usually as addenda and not as insertions within the collections.

6. A system of notations (or symbols) has only a limited application in the description of private papers. Subject relations cannot be shown effectively by symbols. No classification system (with symbols for various subject classes) can be devised that is generally applicable to private papers, since their subject matter varies from collection to collection. Symbols used to denote subjects in library classification schemes (such as the Dewey-decimal and the library of Congress) are meaningless when applied to private papers. They cannot be applied in the same way to any two collections. Because of differences in the way they are applied from collection to collection, they are intelligible only to the particular archivists who assigned them.

No set of standard symbols can be devised to show organic relations because the relations of the components of a collection, just as is the case of archival groups, are different in each collection.

Symbols assigned to units of private papers are useful only for purposes of reference and citation, not for the purpose of description.

B. DESCRIPTIVE UNITS AND ELEMENTS

In the following paragraphs I wish to devote a little attention to two matters, (1) the units by which and (2) the elements in relation to which private papers should be described.

Units of Description:

Before an archivist can describe any documentary materials he must know what he is describing. He must know the physical bounds of each unit with which he deals.

Private papers, it seems to me, fall logically into three kinds of physical units. These are (1) collections as such, (2) the series within collections, and (3) the individual record items within series.

The largest and the smallest of these units are easily identifiable, and are usually established for the archivist in the course of their creation. Thus an archivist normally has no difficulty in defining the bounds of a collection. It simply consists of all documentary materials received from a particular source, usually in one accession but occasionally in more than one. Thus, also, the archivist normally has no difficulty in identifying individual record items. Usually they consist of separate physical entities, such as (1) bound volumes, (2) binders or folders, or (3) single documents or pieces.

The descriptive methods devised in the United States relate largely to the large and small units of private papers, i.e. to collections and single items. Less attention has been given to the descriptive techniques that apply to collections than to those that apply to single record items. In their literature on the management of private papers American librarians have concerned themselves almost exclusively with the latter. A number of their articles relate to calendaring and indexing techniques that can be applied mainly to such single items. And only the librarians that have had archival experience have concerned themselves with units of treatment other than discrete physical entities.

There are, however, intermediate units between collections and single items to which the archivist must give attention if he wishes to carry out a well-considered descriptive program. These units he must define carefully. Such units, or series, are established, as I noted in a previous article, on the basis of the arrangement of the papers, their physical type, or their relation to subject or activity.

Arrangement and description are thus not separable functions; one merges into the other. While describing records the archivist simply does so in relation to the units that were established during

their arrangement. By dividing a collection into a number of series he is enabled to describe the papers collectively, that is to describe a number of individual pieces under a single entry.

Descriptive Elements:

Private papers, just as public records, can be described in relation to two distinct matters, (1) their substantive content, and (2) their unitary form and arrangement.

They can be described substantively in relation to their provenance, their subject matter, and their dates. The substantive elements are clearly shown if the following questions are answered:

(1) Who?
The person or corporate body that produced or collected the papers.
The persons or corporate bodies to whom the papers relate.

(2) Where?
The place or places at which the papers were produced.
The places to which the papers relate.

(3) What?
The organic activity, if any is involved, that resulted in the production of the papers.
The phenomena involving either persons or things that are recorded in the papers.

(4) When?
The dates between which the collection was produced.
The dates of the phenomena to which the collection relates.

They can be described structurally in relation to their physical type and form, and their volume. The physical or structural elements are clearly shown if the following questions are answered:

(1) If a single document, what kind?
Letter?
Memorandum?
Directive?
Form? etc.

(2) If an aggregation of documents, what kind?
Folder?
Binder?

(3) If a bound volume, what kind?
Register?
Letter book?
Press-copy book? etc.

(4) How many papers are there?
Linear feet?
Number of volumes?
Number of folders, binders?
Number of single documents or pieces?

C. DESCRIPTIONS OF LARGE GROUPS

Large groups of private papers should normally be described in the following kinds of documents, which serve as a means of providing an immediate and current control over all papers in custody:

Accession Registers:

An accession register should be designed to serve administrative purposes and not as a finding aid. An entry should be made in the register as each new accession is received on the source from and the conditions under which it was acquired. Information for the entry should be obtained from the donor or seller and during a cursory examination of the accession just before or after it is acquired.

An entry should normally be made on a one-page document, maintained with similar documents in a looseleaf system, or on a card. It should contain the following in regard to each accession: (1) Its provenance, which should be indicated by giving the name of the person or corporate body that produced, collected, or gave or sold the papers to the manuscript repository, or all three; (2) its character, which should be indicated by providing information on the main physical types and forms found in it, its subject matter as reflected by the nature of the activity that resulted in its production, the character of its producer, and the dates of its production; and (3) the conditions under which it was acquired, including, if pertinent, information on its purchase price, restrictions on its use, and literary property rights applying to it.

Initial Description Sheets:

An initial description sheet should be prepared for each collection shortly after it is received, or shortly after an addition to it is made by means of a new accession. Such a sheet is called a Registration Sheet in the National Archives and a Register in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. The description sheet should be designed to serve as an initial finding aid, and should contain all the information about the collection that can be obtained readily during a cursory examination of it, and before it is arranged. The provisional character of a description sheet should be recognized, and no attempt should be made to provide full or absolutely accurate information in it.

Normally a description sheet should consist of a brief (one or two-page) narrative and descriptive document that is organized as follows: (1) A short identification of the collection as a whole giving the name of the person or corporate body that produced it, or the name of the collector. If the name of the producer is given, the profession or professions of the person (ex.: lawyer, clergyman, playwright, inventor) or the activity or activities of the corporate body (ex.: automobile manufacturing, coal mining). (2) A descriptive paragraph on the collection as a whole, in which information is provided on the main physical types and forms found in it; the subject content, listing the important persons, places, things, or phenomena to which the collection relates to the extent that these can be ascertained during a cursory examination; and the dates between which the collection was produced or brought together. (3) A statement on the conditions of access, indicating, if such exist, restrictions on its use and literary property rights that apply. (4) The number (or symbol) assigned to the collection.

D. SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

Manuscript series, just as archival series, are established by the archivist during his arrangement of records. They are, as has been noted, the intermediate units between collections and individual record items. As early in the program of analyzing collections as possible, the series should be described, and there are two types of finding aids in which this is normally done, (1) inventories, and (2) series catalogs.

Inventories.

An inventory of private papers is very similar in its organization and content to an inventory of public archives. It should normally have two parts, the first consisting of an introduction and the second, of series entries.

The introduction of an inventory should contain information on the provenance and the character of the collection, and the conditions of access.

In the paragraphs on provenance information should be provided that is similar to that relating to administrative history provided in an inventory of the archives of a government agency. If a private person produced the collection, the paragraphs on its provenance should contain his biographical sketch. The information provided in this sketch is suggestive of content of the collection in the same way as an administrative history of a government agency is suggestive of the content of a record group. The sketch of the person will indicate his main activities (in relation to which papers probably exist in his

collection). It will indicate other persons with whom he dealt, and the years of his life. It will thus refer to most of the elements pertinent to an analysis of the substance of a collection - its dates, the subjects or activities to which it pertains, and the persons mentioned in it.

The biographical sketch should be similar in its content to that provided in biographical dictionaries. It should, for example, show the following:

(1) Dates (day of month and year) and places of the birth and death of the subject;

(2) Names of his (her) father, mother (maiden name), wife, (husband), and children; names of brothers and sisters and grandparents, if significant; changes in family name or in name of subject;

(3) Occupation and economic status of parents;

(4) Schools, colleges, universities attended and degrees received (in course and honorary);

(5) Career of subject, occupation or profession; notable events or episodes with which associated; positions held; organizations or institutions with which associated; productions (writings, inventions, etc.); places of residence.

If the collection was produced by a corporate body, the paragraphs on its provenance should contain a historical sketch of the corporate body. In this sketch information should be given on the dates (day of month and year) of its establishment and dissolution (if dissolved); the places in which it operated; the names of persons associated with it, including names of founders and officers; the kind of activity, business, profession, institution, organization, and so forth; and the significance of its products or activities.

The introduction should also contain information on the character of the collection as a whole, indicating its arrangement and organization and its relation to other documentary materials, and on conditions of access, including information on restrictions and literary property rights that apply.

Each series should be described separately, and the typical entry for a series should show its physical type or types, the inclusive dates between which it was produced, its substance, its quantity, and the number assigned to it. An inventory is, as its name implies, a stock taking or listing of items. In the case of an inventory of private

papers stock should be taken of the series that exist, and of the subjects (using this word in the broad sense of itsmeaning) to which the series pertain. The names of persons and places and the topics mentioned in the series should be noted. If this is done the series entries provide the basis for producing other finding aids, for the information on names and topics can be used in preparing subject catalogs and indexes.

If a collection of private papers is quite small and is not divisible into separate series, the whole collection should be regarded as one series, and information should be provided on its main physical types, the inclusive dates between which it was produced, its substance, and its quantity.

Series Catalogs:

Cataloging, which is a technique borrowed from library practice, is not a procedure that is recommended for a description of private papers. Since such papers are often administered by librarians, the technique of cataloging has often been applied to them. The units of cataloging in a library are usually precise and definable - discrete items. The only precise and easily definable units in a manuscript collection are either collections or single record items. These units are either too large or too small to be appropriate units for cataloging. A catalog entry for a collection is hardly meaningful, while entries for various of its individual pieces are often too numerous to be meaningful.

Catalogs of intermediate units, i.e. series, have seldom been made for the simple reason that the concept of series is not understood by most custodians of private papers. And the cataloging technique is of questionable utility when applied to series, which are quite variable in their physical makeup and subject content. The diversity of their content and physical type makes it difficult to describe them properly in card form.

Series catalogs simply contain the same information provided in series inventories, the only difference being that one type of finding aid appears on cards and the other on pages. In a series catalog information should be provided as follows: General entry cards should provide information on the provenance of the collection as a whole, similar to that provided in the introduction of an inventory, while series entry cards should provide information on each series, similar to that provided in series entries in an inventory.

The cards on each of the collections in a repository (both general entry and series entry cards) should be placed in the catalog in either of the following orders: alphabetically in the order of the titles of the collections, or numerically in the order of the numbers assigned to the collection.

E. ITEM DESCRIPTIONS

Individual record items are normally described in three kinds of documents, (1) lists , (2) item catalogs, and (3) calendars. In the following paragraphs I wish to give a little attention to each of these three types of documents.

Lists:

Lists of individual record items (volumes, binders, folders, single documents) contain a brief description of each such item in a collection or in a series within a collection. Lists usually appear in page form. In lists record items are identified and described mainly in physical terms. The physical characteristics of each item are indicated by answering the questions that were discussed under "descriptive elements" above. If information relating to an item's substance is given at all, it is usually very sketchy and is confined to its provenance (authorship) and its dates.

An archivist is seldom justified in preparing lists of individual record items for purposes other than one of accounting for the items. Unless the descriptive data in them is rather full, lists are not particularly helpful as finding aids. Usually the information on each item is too sketchy to be meaningful to the searcher. If they are prepared at all, they should be prepared only for the most valuable record items in particular series or collections.

Item Catalogs:

Item catalogs are similar to series catalogs, except that the records being described are smaller than series, i.e. binders, folders, or single documents. The information provided on each item is similar to that provided in lists. The item entry cards should be embodied in a series catalog and placed after the entry cards for the particular series to which they belong.

Individual record items, as was noted before, are too small for cataloging. They do not deserve the attention that is required in the cataloging process, which is, on the whole, a rather slow process. To give each individual item the standard and full cataloging treatment results in a waste of energy and effort and is likely to divert the staff of the manuscript repository from more constructive work. If item catalogs are prepared at all, they should be prepared only for series that contain unusually significant items.

Calendars:

Calendars of individual record items contain substantially more information about records than lists and always relate to individual pieces, not to aggregations of pieces such as binders, folders, or volumes. A calendar is normally organized into three parts, (1) an introductory section, (2) item entries, and (3) an index.

The introductory section should contain a collective description of the record items that are being calendared, including information on their source and significance.

The item entries should have three parts. The first is a title line for each record item, indicating its date, since items in a calendar are always listed in chronological order, and the names of the writer and the recipient. The second part is a paragraph entry in which the substance of each record item is indicated in either of two ways: One way is in the form of a running digest of its main facts and ideas. In this form the calendar is essentially a finding aid in which the contents of the individual items are indicated in condensed form. The other way is in the form of a reproduction of its language on essential matters in the exact phraseology of the writer, and a condensation of its substance on nonessential matters. The condensation is effected by omitting words and paraphrasing. In this form a calendar is a product that is intermediate between a finding aid and a documentary publication. Historians, who are the chief users of calendars, have on occasion expressed a preference for this type of calendar. The third part of the item entry contains a reference to the physical character of the documents by means of letter symbols, which are used as follows:

L	-	A letter or a writing in the form of a communication.
L.S.	-	A letter signed.
A.L.S.	-	An autograph letter signed.
D.	-	A document other than a letter.
D.S.	-	A document signed.
A.D.S.	-	An autograph document signed.
A.N.	-	An autograph note.

Indexes should include the names of persons and places mentioned in the documents that are calendared.

Calendaring is a time-consuming and expensive procedure. It may be justified with regard to highly significant documents. Such documents should, obviously, have great research value to warrant the time-consuming treatment given them in calendars. This is doubtless the reason why calendars were prepared by the Bureau of Rolls and Library of the Department of State, between 1893 and 1903, to the papers of Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe. If the calendar entries are in the form of a reproduction of the exact phraseology of the original on essential

matters, they can often be used instead of the original document; but if the purpose of calendaring is to be obviate the use of the originals a cheaper and more accurate way of doing this is to microfilm them. Microfilming is a modern substitute for calendaring whenever calendaring has the objective of reducing the use of original documents by providing abstracts of them. It is a cheaper technique than calendaring. And it is better, from the point of view of research, for it provides a full text, not merely an abstract.

If calendaring is done in the form of paraphrasing the language on the main facts and ideas of the documents, perhaps a better and more efficient way of providing information in regard to the documents is by compiling lists that contain full descriptions of them. In such lists individual documents may be described in such a way that the information most essential to the scholar is made known in them. This information relates to the physical type, the provenance, the dates, and the content of the documents. Lists obviously do not provide the window-dressing that is provided in calendars, but it matters little to the scholar whether a particular document is identified as a letter signed or an autographed letter signed, for the scholar wants to know simply if the document is pertinent to his subject of inquiry. The symbols, for that matter, have specificity only with respect to a few kinds of documents, such as letters and notes, and all other physical types are encompassed in the general term "document". The elaborate investigations, then, that must often be made in regard to the authors and recipients of letters to produce a calendar entry are not only very time-consuming but their results are somewhat meaningless.

A second reason for calendaring is to make records accessible that are otherwise inaccessible because of their physical character. A perfect example of calendars that accomplish this purpose are those prepared to the medieval rolls by the British Public Record Office. These rolls, or registers, which contain the copies of documents either in abridged or complete form, consist of pieces of parchment fastened end on end and often quite long. As a result of the neglect accorded many public records before the 19th century, many of the rolls are in a poor physical condition and are difficult to use. The writing in them is often almost indecipherable and in languages difficult to interpret for many present-day scholars. Calendars of the rolls, therefore, are highly useful documents.

A third reason for calendaring is to protect records of great intrinsic value. Calendars provide a means of precisely identifying the documents not only by author and date but also by substance. This precise identification reduces handling. This purpose can be accomplished, though, as well and perhaps more cheaply by microfilming the documents, and, for that matter, by properly arranging and numbering them.

F. SUBJECT DESCRIPTIONS

Private papers are described in relation to subjects in the following three kinds of documents, (1) subject catalogs, (2) name indexes, and (3) topical indexes, to each of which I wish to give a little attention in the following paragraphs.

Subject Catalogs:

Before private papers are analyzed in relation to subjects, they should be analyzed in relation to their components, that is the constituent elements of the collection should first be ascertained. The unit being cataloged should always be carefully established. Subject catalogs may pertain either to series or to items within series. In such catalogs cards containing descriptive data on series or items are grouped under subject headings.

The problem of subject headings in relation to which the units are to be cataloged must, therefore, be resolved. Should the units be cataloged in relation to subject headings derived from standard lists of subject headings devised for library materials? Or, should a separate list of subject headings be developed for the holdings of a particular manuscript repository? Or, should separate lists of subject headings be developed that will fit each of the collections within a manuscript repository?

Since collections of private papers vary greatly in their subject matter from collection to collection and from repository to repository, a standard list of subject headings cannot be developed that is generally applicable to the holdings of all manuscript repositories. Nor are library lists of standard subject headings satisfactory. In my opinion, a list of subject headings should be developed on an ad hoc basis for each manuscript repository. If its collections have been inventoried, the inventories will provide information on the basis of which such a list can be developed. The list should contain a limited number of broad subjects, which are mutually exclusive, in relation to which catalog cards can be grouped. It should not contain highly specific subjects (limited in coverage), and once adopted it should not be expanded constantly to include new subjects.

While symbols can be used effectively to designate collections and series within collections, they should not be used in the cataloging process to show either the organic or the subject relations of series or items.

Since scholars are accustomed to using subject catalogs in regard to books, they often expect to find them also for historical manuscripts. It is questionable though if subject catalogs are the best means of making known subjective information in regard to research materials in manuscript form. The intricate and involved information on organic and subject relations that exists in regard to most manuscript collections, and particularly those that are organic in nature, can be presented more understandably and more fully in page form than on cards. And the existence of information on subjects can be made known more easily in topical or name indexes. Indexes, admittedly, merely indicate that information on particular subjects exists in particular series; they do not, as do subject catalogs, describe the series in which the information is found. But these descriptive data can be obtained by reference to inventories of the series, if such have been made.

Name Indexes:

Name indexes to persons, as I have indicated before, are primarily useful to genealogists; those to places are primarily useful to antiquarians. But generally name indexes are also useful to students of local history, and to students of history generally, as their research becomes localized. Name indexes to both places and persons should cover all holdings of a manuscript repository and should be prepared after collective descriptions have been made of the holdings in inventories and guides. In view of the large number of names represented in the holdings of any manuscript repository, even a small one, name indexes should contain a bare minimum of information on persons and places and on the records in which they are mentioned.

Indexes, it should be noted, serve as a means of locating record items (within series or groups) that relate to particular matters; they are not means of describing such record items. They should, therefore, be distinguished from catalogs, which refer to specific physical entities such as series or items; indexes simply refer to subjects in such entities. Indexes are, thus, locating media; catalogs are descriptive media.

A name index should have the following characteristics:

(1) Each card or slip entry in it should give the name of the person or place mentioned in a series, and identify by symbol the series in which the name is mentioned. The entry should not be encumbered by additional descriptive information, since its sole purpose is to indicate the series that contains information on a particular name. It should be noted that this procedure can be followed only if all series within a collection have been properly established, arranged, and identified by symbols.

(2) A name index should progressively cover all collections or series within a manuscript repository.

(3) A name index should be organized alphabetically.

Topical or Subject Headings:

Topical headings relate either to "things" (including buildings, ships, or other physical objects) or to "phenomena" (what happens to either persons or things, such as conditions, problems, activities, programs, events, episodes, and the like). Inquirers interested in "phenomena" or "things" generally need to use an entire collection for their research. Their inquiries are not so specific as those of inquirers interested in the names of persons or places. They do not need to know the specific series in which information on "phenomena" or "things" is found. Topical indexes, therefore, should not normally be prepared until after name indexes have been completed, for the collective descriptions of private papers in the form of guides and inventories will initially suffice to meet the needs of inquirers interested in "phenomena" or "things".

G. COMPREHENSIVE DESCRIPTIONS

All records in the custody of a manuscript repository should be described in a guide. The organisation of the entries in a guide depends to a certain extent on the organisation given manuscript collections in the repository. If the manuscript collections have been grouped into subject classes, the guide should describe them in relation to such classes. If the manuscript collections have been simply placed in the repository in the order of their receipt, they should be described in the alphabetical order of their titles or in the numerical order of their accessioning.

Collections should be described in the guide on the basis of information developed in the production of other finding aids. On each collection succinct information should be given on its provenance, including brief biographical or historical data on the person or corporate body that produced it; and on its series, if such exist, including data on their type, chronological span, subject content, and quantity.

An index should be provided that will show the relation of series and items to various subjects.

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