

Automation of record descriptions at the genealogical society of Utah

by

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INTRODUCTION

I wish to express thanks to my colleague, Jean Pieyns, for the invitation to present a paper to the Congrès International Informatique et Sciences humaines. I have chosen for my subject The Automation of Record Descriptions at the Genealogical Society of Utah. The system which provides record descriptions is the International Genealogical Library Catalog (IGLC) system.

In order to fully understand the work in automating record descriptions at the Genealogical Society of Utah a brief background is helpful. A portion of this material was summarized from a paper presented by Charles Clement at the 1979 Congress of the International Federation of Library Associations held in Copenhagen.

BACKGROUND

The first records were obtained in 1894 when the Genealogical Society of Utah was organized. In 1938, the Society began an extensive microfilming program. Since that time many manuscript collections have been microfilmed. The Society now holds over one million reels of microfilm containing old manuscript records from archives all over the world. The book equivalent is over four million volumes of three hundred pages each.

In addition to the microfilm collection there are over one hundred thirty five thousands volumes of genealogical and geographic works in book form. This collection of films and books is used by the public to identify their ancestry. The main record types that are included within the collection are

- 1) Civil registration,
- 2) Parish registers,
- 3) Land records,
- 4) Census registers,
- 5) Wills and probates, and
- 6) Other records that contain genealogical type information.

When microfilming the records in an archive, care is taken to preserve rights of privacy by observing appropriate cut-off dates. The holding archive receives a copy of the film. In some cases filming is already done by others and the Society purchases copies.

From the beginning of The Genealogical Society of Utah, the describing of records has been of prime importance. The record descriptions in the Society's catalog are a product of a special library environment. The Catalog contains several eras of cataloging, most of which has been done according to general established cataloging procedures.

Up until the 1960's there were no tracings in the catalog and there was no subject authority control. This condition is probably not unlike the condition and development of cataloging in many special libraries and archives in the world. In the 1960's Library Science was introduced into the Society's cataloging. Subject headings began to be used as well as other tracings. This development was some

what uneven and a limited set of subject elements evolved which were used with localities to form locality subject headings. The form was, (Countries), (County), (Town or Parish), - (Record type or subject).

Example : DENMARK, HJORRING, SKALLERUP - FOLKLORE or DENMARK, HJORRING, SKALLERUP - MILITARY RECORDS.

Gradually as subject authority concepts began to take effect more control over subject headings began to take place. Some card subject authority files were set up. Maintenance of these files was very difficult and was done by inexperienced staff. These files became somewhat untrustworthy. Gradually as qualified staff increased, solutions were worked out to some of these problems. During this period of time new acquisitions had increased to a rate of 50,000 microfilms per year plus several thousand books. This material was coming from forty different countries covering many different languages.

By the 1970's the Society had a very large and fast growing card catalog of a unique segment of the world's information store. It was recognized that scholars wanting to use our collection for research other than genealogy couldn't be served very well by the card catalog. Long range cost effectiveness in the cataloging process was not evident as the future was considered. The question was, how could we solve the problems of accuracy of entries, subject authority control, service capacity, and cost effectiveness based on the services the catalog would be expected to perform? To answer these kinds of questions, managers, librarians, and system analysts created a team to look at the creation of a computer catalog that would have effective authority control. Naturally this was easier said than done, but the task was undertaken with vigor.

THE CURRENT COMPUTER SYSTEM

By the end of December 1977 functional requirements were completed for a catalog system, which would provide record description of the Society's vast collection. This document produced an overview of the system that the Society desires to create. In that document it was stated that the catalog system was to provide computerized description of records held by the Genealogical Society of Utah and other repositories of the world, and that these descriptions would be used by patrons of the Society to identify records that contain information on their ancestors.

These descriptions are now provided to patrons in the format of a book type catalog, produced on computer output microfiche. The catalog is distributed to each of the over 350 Branch Genealogical Libraries and to several locations within the main library of the Society. Patrons then use the catalog to select records listed by locality and record type, family name, author, title, topical subject or record number. This allows patrons several different approaches to the Society's collection. The descriptions are also being used for many different internal activities of the Society such as, acquisition lists, inventory lists, etc. These can easily be prepared to aid in the completion of the Society's responsibility.

The preparation of the descriptions is done by using an interactive on-line computer system. Descriptions from the current catalog are accurately converted. Description of newly acquired or located records are created. This process creates a comprehensive catalog file of record descriptions. This file is used to produce all catalog lists etc, previously mentioned. The interactive computer system also aids in the training of personnel. The system is designed to allow easy addition and adaptation. On-line description searching, etc. can be made when needed. The catalog system interfaces with four other systems within the Society, they are :

- 1) Information Collection
- 2) Records Gathering
- 3) Patrons Assistance and Instruction
- 4) Indexing.

INFORMATION COLLECTION

Information collection consists of gathering information about records that contain genealogical information. There are two basic kinds of information :

- 1) From genealogical type records held by record holders in the world.
- 2) From genealogical type records described in bibliographies held by the Society and other libraries or archives.

This information is put into the catalog system and used to determine other records that may not be in our holdings.

RECORDS GATHERING

Record gathering currently is done by microfilming records that have been identified through the information collection process. The record gathering interfaces in basically two ways :

- 1) When genealogical information is to be gathered the comprehensive catalog file is searched and a list of the items to be gathered is generated.
- 2) When the records have been gathered a report to the catalog system is made giving what has been gathered and how it is identified.

PATRON ASSISTANCE AND INSTRUCTION

Patron assistance and instruction provides patron access to genealogical research sources and information. The catalog system interfaces in two ways :

- 1) It provides a comprehensive catalog for patrons.
- 2) Patrons provide catalog updating information.

INDEXING

Indexing provides indexes to genealogical information. The catalog system interfaces in four ways with indexing :

- 1) It provides list of unindexed items.
- 2) It receives catalog updates of items indexed.
- 3) It provides list of indexing in progress.
- 4) It provides subject authority files for some types of indexing.

The catalog will ultimately produce an "International Guide to Genealogical indexes".

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

As the catalog system was developed some general basic requirements were necessary to be successful in creating a catalog system that would provide good record descriptions. It was determined that the catalog system should meet some basic requirements. The following list gives the requirements that have been met by the system :

A. Catalog record preparation requirements :

- 1) Previously cataloged items are reviewed as new items are input to :
 - a. Give consistency in the cataloging work.
 - b. Tie similar items together.
 - c. Give consistency in subject authority assignment.
- 2) There is real-time book and film call number assignment and control.
- 3) Cataloging is reviewed by qualified personnel before it is finalized in the catalog.
- 4) The cataloging is automated as fully as possible.

B. Authority Requirements :

- 1) Standard authorities are created and placed in a Comprehensive Authority File. Previously cataloged items are reviewed while cataloging a new item to maintain consistency of authority assigned.
- 2) Records covering the same subject or by the same author are tied together using authority assigned.
- 3) Need for authority change is determined because of new information.

C. Update Requirements :

The ability to change, add data to the comprehensive authority file or the comprehensive catalog file is provided. All comprehensive authority file and comprehensive catalog file updates are made by authorized personnel only.

D. Output Requirements :

Output for users (department and patron) is provided. It is in a variety of forms for different purposes and usage. There are currently some very basic outputs in the system. The output documents that are produced are :

- 1) The patron catalog in four divisions :
 - a. Locality
 - b. Surname
 - c. Author/Title
 - d. Topical subject
- 2) Inventory Lists.
- 3) Comprehensive catalog file print of given records.
- 4) Acquisition output to indicate what records we ought to be acquiring based on information that we have gathered.
- 5) Index status list to tell what the progress is on records indexing.
- 6) Comprehensive authority file record print which shows us what is in a particular record that is an authority.
- 7) Management information, such as statistic, catalog production, things of that nature.
- 8) Repository output which gives us an indication of what we have gathered from a given archive.

SUMMARY

It is very difficult in a short paper to give a complete description of our cataloging system.

In summary, the International Genealogical Library Cataloging System provides automated record descriptions of our holdings. It has proved to be an invaluable automated tool. It makes it possible to do easy correction to the subject access points or the authorities that are used. It has made it possible for the Society to easily produce multiple copies of our catalogs. It is possible to look at the holdings in various ways (such as, what has the Society filmed in a given archive). It also provides inventory lists for the Society's holdings. It allows the Society to access its collection in many different approaches.

The Catalog system has been invaluable and without it the Society could not have proceeded to handle the large volume of records it has gathered. The system also provided a means to increase the capacity of each cataloger to do more work than they were previously doing.

I appreciate the opportunity to present this paper at this Congress. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions concerning the work we are doing.