

## **Session # 39 - Everything But Encoding: Costs and Benefits of EAD Consortia**

### Introduction

#### **1<sup>st</sup> overhead-project title, duration, funding agency.**

My name is Caroline Moseley and I'm chairing this session from the perspective of both an insider and onlooker. I was there at the conception of the project and was co-director, with Joe Anderson, at the beginning of the grant funded effort. Six months ago I left the American Institute of Physics to take another position at Bowdoin College but I've naturally been following the progress of this considerable effort ever since.

From my perspective as insider, I'd like to take a few minutes and provide a little context for the upcoming papers by explaining the evolution and intent of this consortial project.

We consider the Physics History EAD Consortium - the database of finding aids that will be the end result of this project - to be a natural progression in the work of the American Institute of Physics' Center for History of Physics and an initiative that supports the History Center's mission "To preserve and make known the history of physics and allied fields"

The History Center grew out of a decision made by the American Institute of Physics in the 1960s to provide a leadership role in efforts to preserve the historical source materials of 20<sup>th</sup> Century physics, astronomy, and other allied fields. The call to action had come from concerned scientists and historians alarmed at the poor record of preservation of documentary evidence of many of the critical events and achievements of modern science. So the AIP, and it's History Center, took action, not by acquiring collections at risk, but by working with archivists at academic, governmental, & corporate archives to encourage the preservation of these materials in the most appropriate repositories, and by spreading the word about the location and content of these collections. And also by conducting and supporting documentation projects, such as microfilming and oral history interviews, and through working to develop a national documentation strategy.

The EAD finding aids database that we're discussing today, builds on the History Center's International Catalog of Sources for History of Physics and Allied Sciences. This database catalog, also known as the ICOS, includes several thousand summary descriptions of primary source collections and materials located in repositories worldwide. The ICOS has been a great central resource for researchers in the history of science over many years, and through several renditions - from a card file, through various (sometimes painful) database migrations, to it's current form as a MARC based OPAC which is publically available via the Web. The ICOS is essentially an effort, which is ongoing, towards a subject based union catalog for primary sources in the history of physical sciences. We also share ICOS records with RLIN .

It was actually one of our regular researchers who asked about the possibility of searching finding aids from different repositories in much the same way that he was able to search the collection level descriptions in the ICOS. I don't think he knew about EAD, but he knew that many Special Collections & Archives, including AIP, were posting finding aids in HTML & that this was very helpful for the researcher.

This was in 1997, and we had already been mulling over the idea of implementing EAD for AIP's own finding aids. However, the prospect of developing an encoding project that would build on our International Catalog immediately seemed more relevant to us than restricting the effort to our own finding aids. Successful development of the International Catalog of Sources had always depended on, and promoted, cooperation with other repositories. A consortial approach to building an EAD finding aids database seemed like the most effective way to go - a natural progression of our reciprocal work with Archivists in building the ICOS over the years. The rich potential of such a finding aids database was clear to us from the start. We had always collected paper copies of many finding aids from other repositories, such as MIT and Harvard, to supplement the ICOS, and were confident of the quality and significance of the collections that these finding aids described.

By implementing EAD to create a searchable union database of finding aids in the physical sciences, we would be expanding the content of the existing International Catalog of Sources and significantly improving the level of access to collections. Finding aids and catalog records could be interlinked creating, in theory, a more-or-less seamless, and much improved resource for researchers.

A consortium made sense not only in terms of the research value of the final product. Working with other institutions made for a broader experiment and one with lessons for others as well as ourselves. The collaborative EAD projects already underway, such as the Online Archive of California, seemed to provide the best opportunity to test and stretch both the implementation and effectiveness of the new standard and technology. A consortial approach would definitely be a good test of one of the most touted possibilities of EAD implementation - the potential of sophisticated searching across multiple finding aids and we were particularly interested in the merits of this for subject based, rather than geographical based, consortia.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> overhead-list participants**

And so we submitted a proposal to the NEH for a one-year pilot project to create a database of finding aids, collaborating with the nine repositories shown here. The intention always being to look critically at the process from an administrative & planning point of view, and to try to come to some conclusions about the feasibility of this approach when working with legacy finding aids from other institutions. I would like to say clearly here, before you hear about the challenges we faced, that we're very happy to report on the success of this grant-funded project. I think the papers will show that we not have the beginnings of a fine research tool and that we met our goals in the grant proposal, but that we also came away with a useful, and well-documented analysis of the process, and much food for thought.

In designing the EAD project, there were four questions that we had in mind:

1. Is SGML EAD an effective way of making finding aids, particularly legacy finding aids, available for this kind of consortial project?
2. Is SGML-EAD a cost-effective way to go?
3. How much work does such a project mean for the participating institutions & are the participants able to respond to the demands of the project?
4. And finally, what level of technical expertise is needed to successfully complete an EAD project?

Our three speakers today will address these questions and share insights gained from working on the collaboration. Then at the end of the papers we will take questions and discuss the next major issues that face the Physics History EAD Consortium.

Introduction for speakers:

Katy Hayes joined the staff at the History Center's Niels Bohr Library in College Park, MD in January of 1998 after five years at the Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. In 1996-97 she spent a year at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History as an NHPRC Fellow.

Clay Redding began at AIP one year ago to the day. He graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in August 1999 with an MLS in archival administration. Clay has research and publication interests in digital initiatives and electronic records. As a graduate student, he worked for the HELIOS project at Carnegie Mellon and the Digital Research Library at Pitt.

Megan Sniffin-Marinoff has been Head of the Institute Archives and Special Collections at MIT since the Spring of 1999. Prior to MIT, Megan was at Simmons College for 19 years, where she was first College Archivist and eventually Asst. Professor and Director of Archives Programs at the Graduate School for Library and Information Science and at Simmons College. She also worked for several years in the University Archives at New York University. Megan holds a BS degree in journalism from Boston University and an

MA in history and certificate in archives management from New York University. She is currently a doctoral student in history at Boston University.