



Development of Cataloging Rules

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THE GROWTH OF THE rules which shape library catalogs and determine their character and usefulness is susceptible of much more extended treatment than is possible here. What is attempted in the following pages is to point out present trends and to indicate their significance.

Evidently the year 1941 marked the beginning of a new phase in the evolution of cataloging rules. The publication then of the preliminary American second edition of the *A.L.A. Catalog Rules*¹ appears as the culmination of a movement inspired exactly one hundred years earlier by the issue of Panizzi's rules.² The latter followed a very long period in which rudimentary methods of cataloging slowly evolved and the need of rules to systematize the work gradually came to be recognized.³ As long as libraries were small and few books were published, the contents of a library could be recorded in any fashion that struck the fancy of the one in charge. Catalogs were made by librarians largely for their own use and had one simple function, that of an inventory or a collection of lists showing the holdings. The form and arrangement of the entries were arbitrary.

As the holdings increased and the production of books rose, new functions were imposed and the old improvised methods became inadequate. When Sir Thomas Bodley set out to buy for the Oxford University Library, and sought to find from its catalog whether certain books were already on the shelves, he soon discovered that the entries were often vague in their descriptions and sometimes could not be found at all.⁴ It was well for inventory purposes, for example, to list a book bound with another book under the title of its companion; but when Bodley failed to find it under its own author's name he could escape buying another copy only by recollecting that it was already on hand. His letters to the librarian on the failings of the Ox-

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ford catalog of that time were probably among the earliest practical lessons in cataloging from the viewpoint of the user other than the librarian. They demonstrated also the need of well-considered methods for the preparation of a library catalog.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the time was ripe for formulation of rules prescribing how the books of a library should be systematically cataloged, and Panizzi's effort came as an answer to that need. Although some of his colleagues⁵ and many of the users of the British Museum⁶ clung to the idea that the catalog was for the librarian not the reader, and objected vehemently to Panizzi's ideas, his rules were widely applauded by the library profession and inspired the development of cataloging codes in various countries.

As the growth of libraries and of the production of books continued, new types of publications and novel problems of cataloging were encountered, and fresh regulations had to be designed. Every successive edition of Cutter's *Rules* was more extensive than the preceding one, and the *Catalog Rules* of 1908 was larger than the preceding editions of the American Library Association code.^{7, 8} The expansion of the rules for a while after 1908 aroused little notice, although some were published separately from time to time.⁹⁻¹¹ It was not until the appearance of the preliminary American second edition in 1941 that the result was fully realized. Then the multiplicity and variety seemed bewildering. What happened was analogous to that which took place when libraries were confronted with rising collections of books. While the number of cataloging rules was small there was no problem in application; but when their number and variety increased greatly, the need arose for general principles to guide the catalogers.

Of course, recognition of the need for cataloging principles did not spring forth any more suddenly after 1941 than that of the necessity for cataloging rules came before 1841. The hearings held by a Royal Commission on Panizzi's proposals revealed that he had contemplated essentially the same objectives which have been pursued in later codes. But these were not set down as the basis of his rules and would not readily be inferred from them. In fact, some of Panizzi's rules appear to be inconsistent with the aims which he advanced in defense of other rules.

The first edition of Cutter's *Rules*, published in 1876, presents the first conscious effort "to set forth the rules in a systematic way" and "to investigate what might be called the first principles of cata-

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loguing.”¹² These *Rules* are systematically organized, and appropriately begin with a statement of the objectives which presumably they were designed to serve. But the attempt to consider “first principles” produced only a number of miscellaneous explanatory notes, stating the reasons for some of the rules or exceptions to them. It never brought formulation of general governing principles, to be detailed in the rules.

The *Catalog Rules* of 1908, which superseded Cutter’s fourth and last edition of the *Rules*, appeared without a declaration of objectives, and without explanation of reasons, except for a few prefatory remarks implying that the rules were designed to provide for the entry of books in the way readers were expected to look for them. It elucidated very little, and the rules were bound to drift. In the absence of general guiding principles there was a mounting need and demand for more and more rules and detailed specifications, to provide for variant cases not covered specifically by the compilation. The cumulative result was embodied in the preliminary American second edition of the *A.L.A. Catalog Rules*, published in 1941.

The widespread discussion precipitated by the issue of this tentative edition indicated that a considerable segment of the profession was earnestly perturbed when confronted with the trend, and thought that the time had come to re-evaluate the rules in the light of objectives and principles. The defenders of the code pointed out that what the profession wanted was an expanded and more complete statement, not a revised code, and that the new edition gave them what they needed most.¹³ The critics thought that the exigencies of cataloging might better be served by a re-examination of purposes and methods.¹⁴ The result was a Solomonic division. The critics were awarded the rules of description for revision, and the defenders of the code retained custody of the rules of entry.

The revision of the descriptive cataloging rules was started in the Library of Congress in the spring of 1943. It began with an examination of the printed catalog cards, the product of the rules. These presented two questions: (1) What information or data should be given on the card? (2) How should the information be organized? It was assumed as axiomatic that everything appearing on the card must be necessary or useful for some purpose of the catalog, and that the arrangement of the data must be related to some desired pattern. But what were those purposes, and what was that pattern? In the absence of any stated objectives it was assumed that the information must be essential for the

identification of a specific work and its particular edition, or for its characterization, and that the pattern of arrangement desired would display under the author's name his various writings, and under each the several editions, so that the reader would be helped to find the item he wanted and to select the edition most suitable.

In the light of these assumptions, which none have challenged so far, the cards appeared to be inadequate in both respects. In content they were found to be weighted with repetitions—for instance, giving the author's name before and after the title, the issuing body in the headings and imprint and sometimes also in the series note, the illustrations in the title and then in the collation. It was suggested, therefore, that avoidance of such repetitions would not reduce the informational value of the card and would make it clearer and more intelligible.

In organization of the data, it was noted that while some elements of the entry always were in accordance with a certain pattern (e.g., author heading, title . . . place, publisher, date, collation, series note), others did not always appear in the same order. For example, the author or edition statement on the title page was transcribed on the card after the title of the book if it was so found on the title page; but if found at the head of the title page or elsewhere in the book, it was cited in a note. It was suggested, therefore, that such basic elements should always occupy the same relative position, between the title and the imprint of the work, regardless of where derived. It was pointed out that this would improve the integrability of the entry in the catalog, and would show more clearly the relation of the entry to the other works or editions in the catalog. There were some other suggestions of lesser importance designed to simplify the entry and make it more intelligible, including the proposal that omissions in transcribing the title page should not be indicated on the entry by ellipses.

This was a radical approach, and the suggestions were equally radical. When the suggestions were circulated in a statement setting forth the objectives and principles for a revision of the descriptive cataloging rules, they met with considerable opposition. This rested on the traditional "principle of transcription," maintaining that the transcription of the title page is the easiest and safest method to describe and identify a book, and that the new proposals would complicate matters for catalogers and impair identification of the book.

The proponents of the new principles pointed out that the principle of transcription was not being followed, since the title, place, publisher,

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date, and series commonly were given in a certain order even if found otherwise on the title page; they could see no logical reason, therefore, for assuming that if the author and edition statements were similarly treated the dire predictions of the opponents would come to pass. They decided, however, to test the claim that the proposals would impair identification. Accordingly they selected a considerable number of entries from the Library of Congress catalog, for a variety of works issued in several editions, and edited the entries in accordance with the proposals. No evidence appeared that the proposals would impair the identification of the book or of its edition.

These studies, which had been carried out with the inspiring support and encouragement of Herman H. Henkle, then Director of the Processing Department, were later incorporated by him in a report¹⁵ to the Librarian of Congress recommending adoption of the proposed principles as the basis for a revision of the descriptive cataloging rules. An advisory committee¹⁶ appointed by the Librarian of Congress warmly supported the report, and the objectives and principles advocated in it were incorporated eventually in the amended descriptive cataloging rules and approved by the profession.

Adoption of the recommended principles was an important victory for progressive cataloging, for it marked a change in the philosophy of cataloging from a degenerating *formalism* to a vitalizing *functionalism*. The old rules represented a growing collection of bibliographical forms which the cataloger had to fit to the books in hand; the selection of the forms appeared as the end of cataloging. The new rules began with a statement of the functions which they were to serve; the bibliographical forms were no longer an end in themselves, but a means to specified ends. In the light of the specified aims the accumulated forms could be re-evaluated, obsolete or unnecessary ones discarded, imperfect ones redesigned, and the revised rules themselves constantly improved, since no sanctity would attach to the forms except as they might best serve the ends of cataloging.

The significance of the studies of descriptive cataloging was noted by students of cataloging at home and abroad. In a report to the International Library Committee on cataloging developments in the United States Andrew D. Osborn,¹⁷ who had himself called for such a change in dealing with the problems of cataloging, characterized Henkle's report as one which "represented a new and original approach to cataloging theory" and which "had put new life and meaning into descriptive cataloging," and expressed regret that the "vexed prob-

lems of author entry" had not received such attention.¹⁸ Three years later, after the second edition of the *A.L.A. Cataloging Rules for Author and Title Entries* was published, Leonard Jolley¹⁹ described it as "a great pity" that the rules for entry had not been subjected to "a thorough reassessment of the function and principles of cataloguing," as had been the rules for description in the Library of Congress. He observed strikingly that "The two new codes are the abiding results of the ten years' discussion amongst American librarians, though it is possible to suggest that the *A.L.A. Rules* do not so much reflect as ignore the greater part of that discussion." He recognized, however, that they did represent the demands of the profession at that time.

In 1951 the Board on Cataloging Policy and Research of the A.L.A. Division of Cataloging and Classification asked the Library of Congress to have an intensive study made of the rules for entry which would provide a foundation for their revision. Thoroughly in sympathy with the need, the Library of Congress readily responded to the request and assigned the present writer to carry out the project requested. The first phase was analytical examination of the rules, which sought to determine whether they were all necessary, whether they were properly related to one another, and whether they were consistent in purpose and principle. It showed defects in all these regards. The second aspect was an etiological study of the rules for corporate entry, which demonstrated that the foundation for the complex of corporate rules was unsound. The third phase was an attempt to identify and discuss the objectives at which the rules of entry should be aimed and the basic principles on which they should rest.

The report of this undertaking, entitled *Cataloging Rules and Principles* and published in May 1953, was put on the program for discussion at one of the meetings of the Division of Cataloging and Classification at the A.L.A. conference in Los Angeles. Judging from the comments on the report after circulation to a considerable number of catalogers throughout the country, the profession may be ready to complete the change from formalism to functionalism which began with the revision of the descriptive cataloging rules. It may be anticipated that the future code will be designed to achieve specific and well-considered objectives, and evolve from basic and well-considered principles. Such a code would be consistent in aim and method, and would be better suited to meet the modern needs of catalogers than numerous detailed and specific rules unrelated to unifying principles. It also would make

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the work of catalogers more interesting and satisfying, because it would be rational in application and purposeful in function.

There is a school of thought which maintains that economy in cataloging requires a code of rules which could be applied without the exercise of judgment by the cataloger. Judgment, they say, is expensive because it requires highly paid people and takes much time. It is questionable whether this theory was ever valid in large and scholarly libraries. It certainly cannot be so where catalogers are confronted with a vast and mounting variety of publications on the one hand and a growing maze of rules on the other. It also is detrimental to the future of a profession which will require a generation of catalogers able to cope with greater cataloging problems than their predecessors have faced. Such a generation could not be brought up on a cataloging diet rich in rules and poor in principles, and on a preparation in cataloging which involved the use of rules without the exercise of discretion and reason.

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