

What Is the Encoded Archival Description Standard?

Archivists, librarians, and museum curators use EAD (Encoded Archival Description), a data structure standard for:

- creating archival finding aids (such as guides, inventories, registers, catalogs, and container lists) for records and personal papers, in a standard and clear fashion; and
- coding archival finding aids for use online in order to clarify their contents and provide hierarchical access to the collection description in a way that mimics the way a researcher uses a collection.

Most simply, EAD is a sequence of fields or elements into which bits of information from or for an archival finding aid are placed.

Archival finding aids to be encoded with EAD are typically more detailed than summary-cataloging records found in a library cataloging system. Finding aids may include:

- contextual information about how and why the materials were generated (creator sketch)
- the formats of materials included, topics and persons represented, and a general description of the contents (scope and contents note)
- more detailed descriptions of groups of materials within the collection (series descriptions)

- container or folder lists and administrative information that the repository uses for intellectual and physical control of the materials.

The hierarchical listing of the EAD elements shown below outlines some of the basic structural elements, which are repeated at various levels of description. Archival collections are by their nature hierarchical—the meaning of an individual item is clarified and enhanced by the materials surrounding it—and EAD represents that hierarchy in a series of unfolding layers of information using the same basic elements for each layer. It should be noted that not all EAD elements would be used at every level of description, and that very few of the elements are required.

EAD encodes the logical components of a finding aid, i.e., a paragraph is not just a paragraph, rather, it is a paragraph within a scope and contents note or a creator sketch. This kind of markup, called descriptive markup, permits the reuse of the data for other purposes, such as guides to holdings or machine readable cataloging format (MARC), library records, and facilitates indexing and information retrieval.

EAD is being used by many repositories to encode collection-level descriptions of hundreds of linear feet of material with a common history of creation (provenance), while Durham University

Sample of Encoded Archival Description SGML Tag Use

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<ead>
  <eadheader> (describes the encoded finding aid document)
  <frontmatter> (material for formal publication of the finding aid)
  <archdesc> (description of the archival unit (the text of the finding aid))
    <did> (descriptive identification of the unit)
      <repository> (name of the archives providing access)
      <origination> (unit creator(s) or individual(s) who assembled it)
      <unittitle> (unit title)
      <unitdate> (date(s) of unit creation)
      <physdesc> (physical description including extent, dimensions, genre,
        form, and physical characteristics)
      <abstract> (abstract of the unit contents)
      <unitid> (the unit accession or catalog number)
      <container> (the storage device, such as box)
      <physloc> (the physical storage location of the unit)
      <note> (explanatory text, such as a footnote)
      <dao> (a URL type link to an actual digitized archival object)
      <daogrp> (URLs of linked groups of digitized archival objects)
    <admininfo> (administrative information)
    <accruals> (information about expected unit additions)
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(UK) is using EAD for the very detailed item-level descriptions provided in their hand lists.

EAD is flexible enough to support many different types of screen or page formatting. EAD is ISAD(G) compliant (International Standard Archival Description General), and is based on SGML (Standard Generalized Markup Language), ISO 8879. SGML is platform independent and nonproprietary, supporting much more sophisticated navigation and retrieval in a World Wide Web environment than does the more commonly known HTML (hyper text mark-up language). SGML documents are stored as ASCII text, a stable data storage mechanism.

The intellectual component of the community-based EAD standard is owned by the Society of American Archivists; the standard is maintained by SAA's Technical Subcommittee on Descriptive Standards Encoded Archival Description Working Group (EADWG). The Working Group has representatives from Canada and the United Kingdom, as well as from a variety of repositories within the U.S. In partnership with SAA, the Library of Congress Network Development/MARC Standards

Office makes available the EAD files at its FTP site, and maintains the EAD web site.

For more information on EAD, visit the EAD web site at <www.loc.gov/ead/>. There is also an EAD listserv <ead@loc.gov>, where everything from institutional tagging practice to the pros and cons of various pieces of software is discussed (instructions for subscribing to the listserv are available at the web site).

Two recent issues of *The American Archivist* are dedicated to EAD: the first (vol. 60, #3, Summer 1997) contains articles that cover context and theory, and the second (vol. 60, #4, Fall 1997) includes six case studies from repositories that have implemented EAD. For those who are interested in putting EAD into practice, the *EAD Tag Library* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1998) is an essential tool. For more information on SGML and XML, visit Robin Cover's home page <www.oasis-open.org/cover>.

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Archival Reorganization at Little Bighorn Battlefield

Original ledger drawings made by Richard Woodenleg, a Cheyenne who participated in the Battle of the Little Bighorn June 25-27, 1876; letters from General Philip Sheridan to Brevet Brigadier General George Armstrong Custer during the Civil War; a full halfplate tintype of Brevet Major General George Armstrong Custer in civilian clothes taken by the photographer Eastabrooke in New York's Union Square; Custer's military commissions signed by presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson; all these items represent just a small portion of the archival holdings being treated at Little Bighorn Battlefield during the next four years.

At the request of Matthew Wilson, curator at the National Park Service Intermountain Region's Support Office in Denver, this author completed the first official archival assessment of Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in May 1996. The author evaluated archival holdings, including the photographic collection, rare books, and archival materials and provided suggestions

for their preservation, arrangement, description, and use for reference. The park's archival collections, described below, rank with the finest in the National Park Service.

The Elizabeth Bacon Custer Collection (Accession #19), donated to the park in 1943. After Custer's widow Elizabeth died in 1932, his personal papers were stored in trunks and kept intact by a trust administered by a New York City bank, until such time that a museum could be constructed to display the collection according to her wishes. This collection includes George Armstrong Custer's personal effects and clothing, as well as extensive photographic and documentary items. A large portion of the archival materials include Custer's military records and correspondence beginning with the West Point years and continuing through the Civil War. The final portion concerns the Indian Campaigns, from the Battle of the Washita through to the end at Little Bighorn.

The Walter Mason Camp Collection (Accession #312), contains primary source materi-