

7. CATALOGING BY PAUL EISLOEFFEL

In museums, libraries, and archives, description is the key to managing film collections. Description captures essential information about the film's physical characteristics and content and provides a textual link between the item and the user. In cultural repositories, a basic form of description is cataloging.

7.1 THE INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Institutions create and use the catalog record in different ways. The record may be produced manually on cards, through an in-house database, or via a networked system. It may provide only fundamental information necessary for access or great detail on an item's history and management.

All repositories practice cataloging in one way or another. In museums, it is the center around which all other collections management tasks revolve. In libraries, it is the essential public access tool. In archives, it is the first step in what may become a more detailed finding aid. Across these many types of organizations, a shared international framework for cataloging is provided by the MARC format, cataloging manuals, and controlled vocabularies.

THE MARC FORMAT. Over the last few decades, steps have been taken to bring greater standardization to cataloging practices in cultural and scientific institutions around the world. This has come about to some degree because of cataloging's critical role in collection management and access, but also to encourage information exchange among repositories. The best-known data structure standard is the MARC format developed by the library community. MARC, an acronym derived from Machine Readable Cataloging, is a system of recording bibliographic information to facilitate exchange between computer systems.¹ MARC offers a model for structuring and presenting data that is logical and inclusive yet flexible enough to accommodate the requirements of individual repositories.

As a tested framework for structuring and sharing data, MARC has been embraced by much of the archival community. Even the museum profession, which has been slow to develop cataloging standards, has begun to adopt some MARC features.²

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1. For background on the MARC format, see Betty Furrle, *Understanding MARC Bibliographic: Machine-Readable Cataloging*, 7th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Cataloging Distribution Service, Library of Congress, 2003), available at www.loc.gov/marc/umb/.

2. There is no universal cataloging standard for museums. Disciplines within the museum community have adopted their own guidelines to suit their subject specialties. History museums, for example, have been especially amenable to MARC.

MARC is now integrated into many collections management software packages for libraries, archives, and museums.

CATALOGING MANUALS. The MARC format is designed to be used in conjunction with cataloging rules. In English-speaking countries, most libraries and many archives describe their materials by following the second edition of the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2)*.³ AACR2 provides general rules for describing many types of materials, including books, periodicals, maps, music, and audiovisual media. However, catalogers of some special materials, such as films, artworks, or manuscripts, need more specific guidelines to describe their collections. In 1984, this problem was addressed for film and video with the publication of *Archival Moving Image Materials: A Cataloging Manual*. The 2000 version (AMIM2) updates the rules to incorporate current practices.⁴

AMIM2 provides a general framework. To document the full range of practice in the field, the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) compiled and analyzed examples of actual moving image cataloging records from a variety of repositories. The *AMIA Compendium of Moving Image Cataloging Practice* presents “real-life” models from which practitioners may find solutions appropriate for their own holdings.⁵

CONTROLLED VOCABULARIES. Cataloging experts have developed “controlled” or standardized vocabularies to foster consistent language across institutions. These guides generally take the form of thesauruses and present terms in a navigable hierarchy. Again, the library community took the lead with the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*. Specialized groups, such as art museums, have followed with their own vocabularies.⁶ For motion picture repositories, there are *Moving Image Materials: Genre Terms* and *Moving Image Genre-Form Guide*.⁷

7.2 PRACTICING FILM CATALOGING AT YOUR INSTITUTION

Published manuals, compendiums of practices, and lists of terms have helped build a broad national framework for local cataloging systems. Putting this framework into practice at your institution requires some thought about the access points and

3. *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: American Library Association, 2002).

4. Wendy White-Hensen, *Archival Moving Image Materials: A Cataloging Manual* (Washington, D.C.: Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress, 1984); AMIM Revision Committee and Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, *Archival Moving Image Materials: A Cataloging Manual*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Cataloging Distribution Service, Library of Congress, 2000).

5. AMIA Cataloging and Documentation Committee, *AMIA Compendium of Moving Image Cataloging Practice* ed. Abigail Leab Martin (Beverly Hills, CA: Association of Moving Image Archivists; Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2001).

6. See for example the Getty Research Institute's *Art & Architecture Thesaurus OnLine*, at www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabulary/aat.

7. Martha M. Yee, comp., *Moving Image Materials: Genre Terms* (Washington, D.C.: Cataloging Distribution Service, Library of Congress, 1988); Brian Taves, Judi Hoffman, and Karen Lund, comps., *Moving Image Genre-Form Guide* (Washington, D.C.: Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress, 1998) is available at www.loc.gov/rr/mopic/migintro.html.

level of detail helpful to your users. Often repositories document local practices by creating their own cataloging manuals and terms lists to supplement the published guidelines.

DATA ELEMENTS. Like other artifacts, film has its own conventions for classification and description. Generally data elements that are used for many types of research materials have been adapted to suit the special characteristics of film. Sources like *AMIM2* and the *AMIA Compendium* define how these data elements are applied. For example, in a film record, the field that libraries call “physical description” or museums call “dimensions” is often used to list the number of reels, length, type of film element, and color and sound characteristics. Similarly the field that museums use to note the name of the artist might cite, in a film record, the names of the filmmaker, producer, and screenwriter.

A key data element is the unique identification number that distinguishes an item from all other collection materials.

Methods for assigning identification numbers vary with the repository. Libraries, for example, often assign a call number based on the Library of Congress or the Dewey Decimal Classification. Museums typically use a catalog number derived from the item’s accession number.⁸ In an archive the film identification number is often tied to the collection in which a film belongs. Some film repositories also incorporate data on shelving location into the accession number.

LEVELS OF CONTROL. Although library and museum catalogs usually focus on individual items, some films are better described as part of a group. A family’s home movies, a series of educational films by a university department, or a film and its outtakes can be treated as a cohesive unit, a collection, to maintain the contextual relationships among the items. It is common to describe collections in a single

**CATALOGING FILM:
COMMON DATA ELEMENTS**

Identification/call number

Title

Alternate title(s)

Date(s) of production

Producer/photographer

Other credits

Gauge/format

Film stock

Element

Type of film element

Color characteristics
(color or black and white)

Sound characteristics

Length (in feet)

Running time (in minutes)

Physical condition

Summary

Genre

Accompanying material

8. One of the most common systems for accession numbers is a two-part code consisting of the year of acquisition and the order of acquisition within that year. For example, the number 2003.034 designates the 34th acquisition of 2003. Sometimes a third number is added to indicate specific items within an acquisition. Thus 2003.034.05 indicates the fifth item in the above-mentioned collection.

catalog record and sometimes supplement it with more detailed finding aids, described later in this section.

Films often come into a repository with accompanying documents and artifacts, such as production stills, scripts, advertisements, cameras, and projection equipment. Depending on the local cataloging system, these supplementary materials may be noted in the film record or described separately. Films acquired as part of a larger group, such as family papers or business records, are generally mentioned in the overall collection description, as shown in the record below.

CATALOG RECORD FOR A MULTIMEDIA COLLECTION THAT INCLUDES FILM

Collection Number:	RG3263
Collection Name:	Aldrich, Bess Streeter, 1881–1954
Date(s):	1892–1988; mostly 1925–1940
Size:	Approximately 12 cubic feet of papers; approximately 100 photographs; and 1 reel of 16mm motion picture film.
Abstract:	Bess Streeter Aldrich was an author of novels and short stories. This collection relates to her work as a writer and her personal life, and includes materials related to the motion picture based on her novel <i>Miss Bishop</i> (motion picture title: <i>Cheers for Miss Bishop</i>).
Access Restrictions:	Not all materials are available for immediate access. Consult with society staff for details.
Use Restrictions:	It is the responsibility of the researcher to pursue permission and copyright issues prior to publication of these materials.

ACCESS POINTS FOR CONTENT. An access point is a name, term, or other data element by which a description may be searched. Searchable fields for film include title, creator, gauge, credits, genre, and other elements listed in the catalog record.

An important access point for many film researchers is subject. Keep in mind that the subject matter of film—like most visual resources—can be rich and complex. Film not only contains a visual, and perhaps auditory, record of places, people, events, and objects but also presents information about larger yet less tangible concepts and themes. For example, a home movie reel may show images of babies, houses, parades, and automobiles, but the images may also be about childhood, domestic life and architecture, community celebrations, and auto touring. Repositories often use the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* and the *Thesaurus for Graphic Materials I: Subject Terms*⁹ as sources for subject terms and supplement these general controlled vocabularies with more specialized lists. In any case, when

9. *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, 26th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Cataloging Policy and Support Office, Library Services, Library of Congress, 2003); Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, comp., *Thesaurus for Graphic Materials I: Subject Terms (TGM I)*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1995), also available at lcweb.loc.gov/r/print/tgm1.

compiling access points to film content, always ask yourself: What are the film's images *of*? What are the images *about*?

MORE DETAILED DESCRIPTION. As mentioned previously, some films are more coherently described as part of a larger group. In a way, even a single film can be considered a “group” of scenes or shots. Film researchers, in fact, often look within films for short sections documenting particular subjects or points of view.

A single catalog record generally cannot provide this level of detail. To help researchers, repositories often create more detailed guides that serve as a table of contents to a film or collection. These guides vary in specificity and are similar to the finding aids developed by archives for family papers or business records.

The scenes that make up a single film can be individually described in a shot list. A shot list covers the content and sometimes the visual or technical qualities of each segment in the film. Ideally, the catalog record mentions the shot list and alerts the researcher to the availability of this tool.

EXCERPT FROM SHOT LIST FOR *BEEF RINGS THE BELL*

Title:	Beef Rings the Bell
Year:	ca. 1960s
Color:	Color
Shot List:	00:00:41:18–00:05:18:05 Title credit, cartoon w/ cow ringing bell for mealtime. WS PAN cattle herd w/ snow-capped mountains in BG. VS cattle (steers) grazing on ranch. VS of cattle ranch in winter, w/ rancher feeding cows hay. VS of bull cow among herd. Cowboys (men on horses) herding cattle. Cattle in holding pens, fences. Men spraying cattle w/ insect repellent, dipping them, inoculating them against disease. Branding irons. 00:05:18:06–00:08:47:20 Color, sound, ca. 1960s. Cowboys on horses round up cattle in the fall. WS ZO of cows (steers) walking across plain, herding. Cattle in holding pens, grazing. Cowboys leading herd, cattle drives . . .

INTEGRATING FILM INTO YOUR INSTITUTION’S CATALOG. As discussed throughout this guide, a number of preservation and curatorial issues set film apart from other media at cultural repositories. For cataloging, however, film is handled like most other materials. To be sure, the film catalog record includes descriptions of the unique physical and informational qualities of film, but these basics can be incorporated into your existing system.

7.3 STARTING FROM SCRATCH

For organizations new to film cataloging, sources like *AMIM2* and the *AMIA Compendium* give guidance and abound in practical examples. Other resources include two important collaborative projects now in development.

The Moving Image Collections (MIC) Web site, gondolin.rutgers.edu/MIC, sponsored by AMIA and the Library of Congress and funded by the National Science Foundation, will provide a universal search mechanism for moving image collections and incorporate a union catalog,¹⁰ a directory of organizations, and cataloging tools. As a part of the project, MIC's developers are creating a "flexible but standardized metadata architecture" for the film description based on MARC, Dublin Core, and MPEG-7 metadata standards.¹¹ They plan to produce a template for general use.

A cataloging template is already available from Independent Media Arts Preservation (IMAP), a consortium dedicated to the preservation of independent electronic media. IMAP has developed a MARC-based cataloging template for film, video, and audio that can be used with FileMaker Pro software. The template, and other useful information, is found at the organization's Web site, www.imappreserve.org.

7.4 SHARING RECORDS

The union catalog planned by MIC's developers will be a boon to film preservationists and researchers alike. Until its full implementation, repositories can use systems already in place. For decades libraries and archives have pooled catalog records through two major bibliographic databases, the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) and the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN). With the advent of Internet search engines, researchers can also find records directly on institutional Web sites. All these approaches share an important purpose: By making descriptive records of film holdings widely available, repositories not only encourage use and appreciation of film but build the collective record of our cinematic history.

10. A union catalog brings together in a unified sequence information on the contents of more than one repository.

11. The Dublin Core Metadata Element Set and the MPEG-7 Multimedia Content Description Interface are standardized sets of data elements for describing physical and digital materials. For more information see the the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative Web site, dublincore.org.

CASE STUDY: NORTHEAST HISTORIC FILM

Maine Marine Worm Industry (1941, 1,300 ft., 16mm, color, silent), preserved by Northeast Historic Film.

Cataloging is the link between preservation and access. *Maine Marine Worm Industry*, preserved by Northeast Historic Film, shows how the catalog can open materials to the public and, as the archive puts it, become a way to “get more eyes, ears, and brains engaged with the moving image history of the century.”

Maine Marine Worm Industry is an amateur documentary, with intertitles, about harvesting and selling sea worms for fishing bait. It was made by Ivan Flye, a professional photographer who built his Newcastle worm business into a multistate enterprise. Flye donated his film to the archive in 1991. In 2002, with grant support, Northeast Historic Film preserved the film and made videotape reference copies for the public. *Maine Marine Worm Industry* is described in the archive’s catalogs.

Northeast Historic Film has two catalogs—one for the public and the other for staff—accessible through complementary databases. The in-house records are more detailed. For each collection, the record describes the physical artifact and gives confidential information on the acquisition history, rights, status of preservation, location of copies, and other vital housekeeping data.

The public records in Northeast Historic’s Online Collections Guide, available on the archive’s Web site (www.oldfilm.org), have a different purpose. They are the path into the film collection for users across Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. Users can check the catalog by collection name, date, or subject or do a more elaborate full-text search. A search for “Boothbay,” “rockweed,” or “low tide” brings up the description of Ivan Flye’s documentary, along with a streaming video showing worm harvesters at work and information on loan and purchase copies.

While the catalogs were built for the archive’s immediate audience, Northeast Historic Film designed its records to comply with international standards. The records employ a stripped-down version of the MARC format and, with some fine-tuning, could be exported to a union database. With this goal in mind, Northeast Historic Film is participating as a MIC test site.



Northeast Historic Film's online catalog record for the Ivan Flye Collection.