

Merrill's Code for Classifiers

Anita Coleman

Email: asc at u dot arizona dot edu

CODE
FOR CLASSIFIERS

PRINCIPLES
GOVERNING THE CONSISTENT PLACING
OF BOOKS IN A SYSTEM
OF CLASSIFICATION

BY
WILLIAM STETSON MERRILL



CHICAGO
AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
1928

COPYRIGHT, 1928, BY THE
AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
86 EAST RANDOLPH ST., CHICAGO

PUBLISHED NOVEMBER, 1928

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

A Code for Classifiers

- 1911 – Lectures at UIUC
 - 1912 – “A Code for Classifiers – Its Scope and Problems”, *LJ*
 - 1914 – *Code for Classifiers: Principles Governing the Systematic Placement...*
 - 1928 – published by ALA
 - 1929 – variant edition by ALA
 - 1939 – 2d edition, ALA
- 1969 – Paul Dunkin declares it “*out of date*” in *Cataloging USA*

In the Beginning...

“In American and English libraries and presumably in Continental libraries, the problems of classification are becoming more and more practical in their scope.”

*The Problems of Classification and an
A.L.A. Code*

*Paper by Wm. Stetson Merrill, at the 1911
ALA Pasadena Conference*

“The classification of human knowledge, the true or ideal arrangement of the sciences in orderly sequence is a problem that has occupied thinkers from the time of Aristotle to our own.”

Problems

- Adopting a classification of human knowledge for classifying resources/information materials
 - *Libraries must move with the times*
 - *Information is being demanded right away*
 - *Related subjects are looked for near one another*
 - *Plan of material classification is expected to reflect the literature it arranges and not break it into arbitrary divisions*

Usefulness - Criterion

- *Adaptable (past, present, future)*
- *Expansive (new topics, new points of view)*
- *Notation should not hinder growth*
 - *He calls these problems faced by the classifier (selection of a scheme).*
 - *But these are problems of the classificationist*
 - *SRR picked up on this and he distinguishes these from practice*

Problems of classifying

1. Determination of the primary content
2. Choice between two or more topics given weight or nearly equal weight
 - Influence of Italian upon French literature
3. Conflict of two classes facing two ways
4. Treatment of individuals
5. Form versus content
6. Indexing
 - Subject catalog planned to complement the classification

Side humor: Indexing is a task that is only fit for prison convicts but nevertheless demands brains - Poole

***“Whereas, there has hitherto been no general code of practice for the library classifier...
Whereas, such a code may be of service in connection with any scheme of classification”***

Semantic Rules

New Subjects

(a)

Make a new heading for a new subject, in preference to classing a book on such a subject along with others under an inclusive heading.

E.g. Pedagogical anthropology

Note: The reasons are: (1) a new subject usually persists, at least for some time, and the literature upon it grows; (2) classing under some subject that does not bring out the new feature buries the book and defeats the intent of the author.

Semantic Rules

(b) Do not force books on really new topics under some related topic merely because the system has no provision for them. Science and arts are both growing intensively and extensively and it is a mistake to make no place for new subjects. If this is not done, the new subject has no place in the classification although the books upon it are in the library.

E.g. Automobiles, Aviation, Psychology in Special aspects.

Semantic Rules

362 Indians of America

- (a) Works dealing in a general way with the Indians of North America since the discovery by Columbus: Class under history of America. ...
- (b) Works on the aboriginal languages of America: Class in language. ...
- (c) Works on pre-Columbian antiquities: Class in aboriginal antiquities of America. (Los Angeles)
- (d) Exception: LC classes all materials under Archeaology of the American Indians E61 history of America

1914 Code

- Mimeograph
- University of Illinois (P. Windsor) copying
- Newberry Library – cover
- 200 copies
- Sent with a letter from WSM to prominent librarians in the US
- Reviews/announcements

“The data seems to me exactly the kind of thing that most classifiers ought to have in hand all the time...”

“Promises to be a very helpful aid to classifiers. Covers many points about which there are liable to be dispute in a logical and sensible fashion.”

“I hope you will not become at all discouraged over the slowness of the progress on the Code nor the lack of appreciation shown it by many librarians.”

Phineas L. Windsor, May 3, 1915

Code, 1928

- First edition
- Published by ALA
- Ida Farrar, Jennie Dorcas Fellows, Julia Pettee, Grace Kelley
- Variant Edition issued in 1929
 - Without Dewey Decimal class numbers
 - Carrying the ALA endorsement

“So many students think that classification is merely Dewey numbers, and your text will show them how much reasoning has to be done before the correct subject matter can be detected and before the classification scheme is understood. Please accept my congratulations for an excellent piece of work.”

Margaret Mann, UMich

1914	1928	1939
<p>Members of the committee</p> <p>1) J.C. Bay, John Crerar Library</p> <p>2) Walter C. Biscoe, NY State Library, Albany</p> <p>3) W.P. Cutter, Library of the Engineering Societies, NY</p> <p>4) J.C.M. Hanson, University of Chicago Library</p> <p>5) Charles Martel, LC, Washington</p> <p>6) Wm. Stetson Merrill, Chairman, Newberry, Chicago</p> <p>7) P.L. Windsor, Urbana</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Annotater</i>, Pettee, Julia (Librarian, Union Theological Seminary) ❖ <i>Practice</i>, Fellows, Dorcas ❖ <i>Critic</i>, Farrar, Ida F. ❖ <i>Science & Technology Rulings</i>, Kelley, Grace O. ❖ <i>Sponsor of Code</i>, Windsor, P. ❖ <i>Sponsor of Code</i>, Bay, J.C. ❖ <i>Counsel</i>, Utley, G. B. 	<p>Participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Pettee, Julia ❖ Fellows, J. Dorkas ❖ Farrar, Ida F. Kelley, Grace Osgood ❖ Windsor, P. L ❖ Bay, J. C. ❖ Utley, G. B ❖ Fontaine, O. ❖ Akers, Susan Grey ❖ Ansell, Esther ❖ Hansen, Camellia ❖ Hastings, Charles H. (Card Division, LC) ❖ Pitt, Laud R. (Card Division, LC) ❖ Perley, Clarence W. ❖ Getchell, Myron W. ❖ Haykin, David Judson ❖ Pressey, Julia C. ❖ Penfield, Harriet E. ❖ Foote, Frances F. ❖ Radtke, Elizabeth S. ❖ Conway, James H. ❖ Wife

“Classification of books differs from classification of knowledge.

The latter is the science of drawing up a scheme or system in which the various subjects of human inquiry, or human life in its varied aspects, are grouped according to their likenesses or relations to one another.

Classification of books, on the other hand, while making use of a scheme of knowledge, may be considered as the art of assigning books to their proper places in a system of classification.”

Wm. Stetson Merrill

Model of Collaboration

- Merrill's relationship with the women in developing the Code
 - Farrar, Fellows, Kelley, Pettee
- Merrill's relationship with leaders
 - Cutter, Poole, Lane, Hanson, Martel, Evans, Windsor
- Merrill's relationship with professional societies, libraries, and library schools
 - ALA, BSA, Chicago Library Club, "ALA Survey" ; Mann, Akers, etc.

A Federation Model

- Integration of information resources organization for knowledge organization and representation – Indexing, Bibliography, Cataloging, Classification, Archives, Museums, Libraries
- National consensus – an attempt to codify, an attempt to standardize & systematize offers a new federated model for classifying that respects the “Other” and privileges none

William Stetson Merrill



- 1866-1969
- B. Newton, Mass.
- D. Oconomowoc, Wisc.
- 1884-1888, Harvard
- 1889-1930, Newberry Library, Chicago

Acknowledgements

- Newberry Library
- ALA Archives
- Brooke Sheldon, Prof. Krummel,
Prof. Williamson, Prof. Malone
- Wenshang Wang and Youfen Su

The End

Questions?
Thank you!