

“Everything about this person”: Name-based access to multiple resources using EAC

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Abstract: People are the most logical access point for certain types of archival holdings. An access tool that is based on personal names instead of on the arrangement of records can be both a research tool in itself and a way to bring together resources from different collections, different repositories, or different formats.

The membership files of the American Institute of Architects are a rich source of information used by preservationists and architectural historians. Online access is newly available through the AIA Historical Directory of American Architects. The past approach to access was to create a card catalog of what was known to exist as membership files were processed. The new approach starts with a list of the 50,324 members from 1857-1978, on whom documentation is likely to exist. The Historical Directory is the primary finding aid, not just an index, to multiple series within the membership files record group.

Initially the entries have just enough data to disambiguate similar names. Even at this level, the list is a research tool, since users can see that William S. Beckett of Georgia and William Beckett of California are two different people. As material is requested, that member's file is processed, digitized, and linked to the Directory entry. The Directory is also a resource guide, with links to collections of architects' papers in repositories around the country, and citations/links to published sources. It follows the Encoded Archival Context (EAC) data structure, which allows each record to be fleshed out with a wide variety of biographical, archival, and bibliographical information. A name-based access strategy is applicable wherever there's a group of people with a known relationship to the organization and its records, such as a university archives or a membership organization. The EAC structure enables creation of true finding aids based on names, not just indexes; and allows the option to interconnect with traditional finding aids in EAD.

About the author:

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