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Letters to the Editor

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LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Letters to the Editors which include pertinent and constructive comments or criticism of articles or reviews recently published in GEORGIA ARCHIVE are welcome. Ordinarily, such letters should not exceed three hundred words.

To the Editors:

I enjoyed reading Karen Benedict's article on "Archives, Automation and National Networking" and Benjamin Shearer's review of the Guide to the ALA Archives in the fall 1980 issue of Georgia Archive. The interest in archival automation demonstrates a timely concern for using contemporary technology to improve access to archival resources.

Mrs. Benedict states that the University of Illinois PARADIGM system was created for administrative control of records at the collection level and that Illinois "rejected subject indexing." The latter statement is incorrect. The PARADIGM system developed in 1970 to obtain administrative control over archival holdings included subject indexing. The first subject indexes were produced in 1974. The system went online in 1976. Since the development of COM programs in the 1978-80 period, comprehensive subject indexes (11,211 entries of 3,483 subject descriptors) have been provided in low cost format. While box level indexing is possible, staffing limitations preclude the detailed control of 3,400 record series (26.3 million documents) in a repository with only one full-time professional archivist.

In Benjamin Shearer's review of the Guide to the ALA Archives, it is stated that "the microfiche appear to have been produced by filming computer print-outs." Actually, the negative fiche was produced by COM printer from a computer tape. No paper printout was used. I concede that a decimal point may be difficult to see on a microfiche reader, but the difference between .3 and 3.0 cubic feet is also indicated by the use of two digits for the latter figure. The lack of personal papers in the ALA Archives is due to the policy of not collecting them. Personal papers will appear in the National Catalog of Sources for the History of Librarianship, a companion guide that will cover archives and manuscripts in other repositories.

Each archival subject index must represent the unique content of the source documentation. We have analyzed indexing terms used in the ALA Guide as follows:

Persons	31.9%	Publications	6.2%
Offices & committees	22.1	Professional assns.	2.7
Functional subjects	17.9	Locations	2.4
Programs & projects	8.1	Institutions,	
Institutions	6.7	types of	1.9

We have not used hierarchically structured indexes familiar to librarians because we prefer description-derivative subject descriptors that allow users to make their own determinations of "like subjects" without the limitations of preconceived structured systems.

While the PARADIGM system has not resolved the problems of subject indexing that Mr. Shearer raises, it is an effective low cost system for a small repository. It is also the only completely automated comprehensive university archival control system.

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