

A Case for Item-level Indexing: The Kenneth Burke Papers at The Pennsylvania State University

Jeannette Mercer Sabre
Susan Hamburger

ABSTRACT. In light of numerous discussions about whether to follow Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner's suggestions to process lightly and broadly, valid reasons remain for continuing traditional practices for many literary correspondence collections. In this case study, the authors use the Kenneth Burke Papers in the Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University Libraries, as an example of when it is desirable to provide item-level indexing. Recognizing that the majority of archival records may not require such detailed description, the authors discuss when it is appropriate to examine and index literary correspondents, a practice used with many other literary collections in which name access to literary correspondents is a legitimate, valued interest.

KEYWORDS. Archival description, literary correspondence, item-level indexing, manuscripts processing, archival finding aids

Jeannette Mercer Sabre, MA, MLIS, PhD, is Processor and Reference Staff, Special Collections Library, The Pennsylvania State University.

Susan Hamburger, MLS, MA, CA, PhD, is Manuscripts Cataloging Librarian, Cataloging and Metadata Services, The Pennsylvania State University.

Address correspondence to: Susan Hamburger, Cataloging and Metadata Services, 126 Paterno Library, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802 (E-mail: sxh36@psulias.psu.edu).

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Despite Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner's recent recommendations to process lightly, valid reasons remain for continuing traditional practices for many literary correspondence collections. In this case study, the authors use the Kenneth Burke Papers at The Pennsylvania State University Libraries as an example of when it is desirable to provide item-level indexing. In processing the Burke papers, Special Collections staff maintained Burke's original filing system: ordered chronologically, therein by correspondent, and within that chronologically. However, in practice, Burke's arrangement presented certain obstacles to access, barriers processors overcame through cross-references and item-level indexing. These strategies enabled reference staff to provide access for two of the three kinds of research queries received in Special Collections. A team approach to processing decisions garnered input from three professionals on the most useful approach for this particular collection—always keeping in mind the nature of the collection, researcher needs, reference staff workload, and repository priorities.

BACKGROUND

Early in his career, Kenneth Burke (1897–1993) was a member of an avant-garde group of writers living in New York City in the late 1910s. He became a prominent intellectual in New York City literary circles and later also was associated closely with Bennington College, Vermont, where he taught from 1943 to 1961. Afterward his influence continued to grow as he accepted teaching and lecturing opportunities in major universities across the United States.

Burke was a poet, essayist, reviewer, novelist, translator, social commentator, and writer of short stories. But he was more widely known in scholarly circles as a philosopher of language, and his writings have continued to influence contemporary thought, particularly in areas of rhetoric, philosophy, literary theory, cultural studies, and communication studies.

Burke's noted works include *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* (1935; 3rd rev. ed. 1984), *Attitudes Toward History* (2 volumes, 1937; 3rd. rev. ed. 1984), *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (1941; 3rd. ed. 1973), *A Grammar of Motives* (1945; 2nd ed. 1955; 1969), *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950; 2nd ed. 1955; 1969), *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (1961; 1970), *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (1966), and *Dramatism and Development* (1972). Many of Burke's essays also have been selected and published in different collections.

Although often controversial during his lifetime, Burke received wide recognition for his writings. In 1941 W. H. Auden called Burke “unquestionably the most brilliant and suggestive critic now writing in America.”¹ Burke received honorary doctorates and many other awards, among them the Gold Medal from the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1975) and the National Medal for Literature (1981).

The Kenneth Burke Papers

An avid correspondent, Burke filed the letters he received and, after the mid-1950s, copies of the letters he wrote. These correspondence files make up most of the Kenneth Burke Papers. Respecting the different periods of acquisition, the Kenneth Burke Papers consist of two accessions.

The Pennsylvania State University Libraries purchased the first Burke accession, Burke-1, dating from 1906 to 1961, from Kenneth Burke in 1974. Although it includes a few manuscripts, it is primarily a correspondence file of letters written to Burke. One researcher counted 1,500 different correspondents in Burke-1. It measures twelve linear feet. The Pennsylvania State University Libraries purchased the second Burke accession, Burke-2, from the Kenneth Burke Literary Estate in 2005. This accession dates from 1950 until Burke’s death in 1993, with the bulk of its correspondence written between 1960 and 1987. Burke-2 contains Burke’s later correspondence (including many carbon copies of Burke’s own letters), news clippings, article reprints, a few typescripts, many poems, and some photographs. Burke-2, more than double the size of Burke-1, measures twenty-five linear feet.

The Importance of the Kenneth Burke Papers to Researchers

As is characteristic of literary manuscripts, the Kenneth Burke Papers document the intellectual climate of a particular time, in this instance almost the whole span of the twentieth century. Specifically, these personal papers provide a valuable historical context for understanding the life and thought of Kenneth Burke and his many renowned correspondents.

In many archival records, correspondence documents an organization’s functional activities, with the correspondents themselves appearing in roles of anonymous functionaries. By contrast, in literary correspondence the ideas and relationships between the often equally luminary sender and recipient take center stage. In the Kenneth Burke Papers, thousands of original letters of correspondents offer researchers unexplored opportunities for new scholarship, while Burke’s own letters potentially illuminate

themes in his published texts and offer the opportunity to learn how he formulated his thoughts and ideas for a poem, book, essay, or review.

The first Burke accession, Burke-1—compiled when Burke wrote most of his major works—reveals Burke's thought and influence during a critical time in his development. This accession, moreover, includes original letters from Burke's notable correspondents, among them, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, Ralph Ellison, Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Katherine Anne Porter, Theodore Roethke, Jean Toomer, Hart Crane, and Marianne Moore. Three of the most remarkable files in Burke-1 include those by the literary historian Malcolm Cowley, poet and novelist Howard Nemerov, and James Sibley Watson, cofounder of the well-known little magazine, *The Dial*.

The second Burke accession, Burke-2, continues the files of these prominent three correspondents. In addition, the accession provides a rare opportunity to appreciate the virtuosity of Burke's own letters and to reconstruct Burke's interchanges with his correspondents whose wide-ranging cultural interests included politics, sociology, psychology, music, art, literature, and language. Among his correspondents are Wayne Booth, Kay Boyle, Norman O. Brown, Louis Calabro, Robert Coates, Denis Donoghue, Stanley Edgar Hyman, Richard McKeon, Talcott Parsons, John Crowe Ransom, William Rueckert, Henry Sams, Harry Slochower, Susan Sontag, Carl Sprinchorn, and Rene Wellek. Together the two accessions afford a glimpse of a great mind in dialogue and reflect almost a century of personal, intellectual, and cultural history.

PROCESSING METHODOLOGIES—A TEAM APPROACH

Rare Books and Manuscripts takes a team approach to processing its literary collections. Currently, it holds twelve major literary manuscript collections (Arnold Bennett, Kenneth Burke, Jean Giraudoux, Christopher Logue, John O'Hara, Vance Packard, Conrad Richter, Theodore Roethke, François Sagan, John Updike, Ramón del Valle-Inclán, and Paul West) and thousands of smaller, though no less important, literary collections. To decide which literary collections to process, how to approach them, and with whom to match them (staff processor, volunteer, or undergraduate or graduate student intern), the Rare Books and Manuscripts curator consults on a regular basis with the manuscripts cataloger (an archivist, librarian, and historian with processing, reference, and cataloging experience). When planning a processing project, the curator and cataloger

meet with the designated processor to talk about the collection, brainstorm possible strategies, and develop a processing plan. All three meet together periodically during processing to answer questions and even to revise the plan as unforeseen challenges arise.

The general approach has been to describe each series at the folder level, as warranted, while recognizing that exceptions such as the Kenneth Burke Papers may need a finer granularity. Since 2006, the Special Collections Library (composed of Historical Collections and Labor Archives, Rare Books and Manuscripts, and the University Archives) determined that different levels of description would be applied at the collection and series level depending on the detail needed. To alleviate backlogs they abandoned the approach that believes a fully processed collection must include box and folder listings for each series. Literary manuscript collections will be evaluated using the same criteria, but the expectation is that more detail will continue to be necessary, especially for correspondence series because of the prominent correspondents.

Over the past several years the Rare Books and Manuscripts curator, manuscripts cataloger, and staff processor have met to discuss approaches to processing the Kenneth Burke Papers. Underlying our considerations was an assessment of the papers' value. Greene and Meissner point to the relation between value and processing approaches when they write, "The perceived importance and research value of the collection materials should dictate ultimate decisions about the intensity and level at which such tasks will be performed."² We defined *value* in terms of scholarly reputation, demonstrated user interest, and importance within our collections. The papers' perceived value would influence our decisions about how accessible for researchers we needed to make the papers through processing strategies. We defined accessibility in relation to how easily we might accommodate typical kinds of research questions.

Assessing Value

In assessing value, we felt assured of research interest in the Kenneth Burke Papers. Ultimately, the importance of the collection rests on the cultural reputation of Kenneth Burke, who received and wrote the letters and the reputations of his renowned correspondents. Since Burke's death in 1993, interest in Burke's works has increased. A Kenneth Burke Society exists as well as a major online bibliographic project. Previously unpublished writings are being collected, including essays, fiction, poetry, and even correspondence collections. During Burke's lifetime Paul

Jay edited and published the Burke-Cowley correspondence collection (*The Selected Correspondence of Kenneth Burke and Malcolm Cowley, 1915–1981*, edited by Paul Jay. New York: Viking, 1988), and more recently, literary editors published Burke's correspondence with William H. Rueckert (*Letters from Kenneth Burke to William H. Rueckert, 1959–1987*, edited by William H. Rueckert. West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press, 2003), and Burke's correspondence with William Carlos Williams (*The Humane Particulars: The Collected Letters of William Carlos Williams and Kenneth Burke*, edited by James East. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

As we have seen, increased interest in Burke has translated into demonstrated interest in the papers. In the summer of 2005, researchers explored the collections while participating in the conference "Kenneth Burke and His Circles," a rhetoric and composition conference held at Penn State. Our most frequent requests are via e-mail for photocopies of correspondents' letters, which is typical for research in literary manuscripts collections. In addition, the papers are used by visiting scholars and by graduate students in the Penn State rhetoric and poetic class, taught by Burkean scholar Professor Jack Selzer.

The scholarly reputations of Burke and his correspondents and research interest have assured the Kenneth Burke Papers an important place in our own collections. As our curator noted, the Kenneth Burke Papers are likely the most important manuscript collection in our Rare Books and Manuscript division. Because of their value, the papers warranted high priority on our list of processing projects.

Defining Accessibility

At the end of 2002, the curator, manuscripts cataloger, and staff processor met to determine an arrangement strategy for processing the Burke-2 accession. William L. Joyce recommends that archivists study their collections in relation to researchers' access needs and research questions.³ In light of our experience with the processed Burke-1 accession and the unprocessed, though open, second Burke accession, we understood researchers' questions to be of three kinds. Typically they asked:

1. *May I see all the correspondence written by and to Burke during a particular year?* This kind of question is asked by visiting researchers who want to browse and gain a contextual sense of a year in Burke's life. In addition, on-site students in Penn State's

rhetoric and poetic class often desire this type of access. In fact, their professor Jack Selzer used the original chronological order to write his book, *Kenneth Burke in Greenwich Village: Conversing with the Moderns, 1915–1931* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), and is now working on Burke during the 1940s. Other researchers studied the McCarthy period, as well as the years Burke taught at Chicago and Bennington by using the chronological files to great effect.

2. *May I see the letters written by a particular correspondent to Burke?* This kind of question is among our most frequent, typically asked by e-mail and requiring our reference staff to pull the letters for photocopying. For example, recently we have had requests to send copies of all the correspondence between Burke and Robert Heilman and between Burke and Wayne Booth. In another instance the Literary Trust of the Kenneth Burke Estate wanted to know whether the collection included a contract between Burke and Hermes Press.
3. *Do you have particular letters on a specific subject in the collection?* For example, a researcher wanted to know whether we had any letters written by Harold Rosenberg mentioning Hannah Arndt. Recently a researcher visited Penn State to determine what Shakespearean references occurred in the letters. Yet another researcher was interested in references to the Yaddo artists' colony.

In response, we wanted to enable access for at least the first two kinds of questions. To do so, we needed to process the collection so researchers can access the collection by year, by correspondent, and then by correspondents' letters chronologically arranged.

Our response to the third type of question marked a limit to our considered approach. Because of the collection's size and number of topics, to descriptively index the letters' subjects would be a prohibitive exercise. Nonetheless, if we addressed the first two types of questions, researchers knowledgeable about their subject from secondary sources would still be able to discover relevant materials by purposively browsing the chronological collection.

DISCUSSION

Access is not a rote repository affirmation for Special Collections but rather a real value, affirmed not only in mission statements of Special Collections and the University Libraries but also in the active leadership of the division heads. Accordingly, we considered our researchers' typical

questions and studied our two Burke accessions to determine what arrangement and descriptive approaches would facilitate research access.

Burke-1, arranged and described in the early 1970s, provided more than thirty years' experience to assess success, and we generally felt that its arrangement following Burke's original ordering schema was effective in providing on-site access. The second Burke accession, though, had certain obstacles to access that we needed to consider in our arrangement phase. We also hoped through our descriptive decisions to overcome arrangement limitations and to broaden access with both Burke-1 and Burke-2.

In respect to arrangement, we knew access to Burke-1 worked, so Burke-2 would continue with the same arrangement, minus the manually typed index cards. But, one overarching consideration was how to relate the two accessions. Though instances of overlap occur in the time period of the 1950s and in correspondence files of such writers as Malcolm Cowley, James Sibley Watson, and others, we decided not to physically integrate the two accessions. One reason was that researchers who had already seen Burke-1 would not know about the new letters interfiled later. But, we also realized we could effectively relate the two accessions with an integrated Encoded Archival Description (EAD) finding aid that would collocate Burke-1 and Burke-2 and include a <physloc> (physical location tag) for Burke-1 or Burke-2 for each letter. This approach would not only help researchers but also reference staff who had to pull letters from different containers. Reorganizing Burke-1—in effect, destroying original order—was neither ethically correct nor staff time efficient, and imposing a different order on Burke-2 would complicate reference retrieval.

Facilitating Access through Arranging

We felt it was especially important to maintain the original order that Burke's filing system represented, for in many respects, the letters are purposefully and consciously arranged. Burke's attention to dating letters and the relatively ordered condition of his files suggests his attentiveness. The most salient evidence of Burke's intent, however, is found in the spidery handwritten names he often wrote in the margins of letters to indicate how he was filing letters. Such a system reinforces the wisdom of adhering to "original order," as recommended in *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* "to preserve existing relationships between the documents and the evidential value inherent in their order."⁴

As noted, Burke originally arranged his correspondence first chronologically, therein alphabetically by correspondent, and within each

correspondent's file, chronologically. In studying Burke-1, we saw that Burke's original order accommodated researchers' needs to read chronologically and also to look for particular correspondents' letters, the first two of our typical researchers' questions. In studying Burke-2 we anticipated that a similar processing approach would also make this larger accretion accessible. However, in practice, Burke's arrangement of Burke-2 was sometimes counterintuitive for researchers.

Although the correspondence was reasonably well-ordered, the practical exigencies Burke confronted with his filing system potentially caused some dislocations. For example, Burke kept his files in several boxes that didn't necessarily neatly correspond to a year-by-year chronological arrangement. The initial box inventory suggests that Burke typically started a new correspondence file with a new alphabet when a correspondence box or boxes (if he used two boxes for one file) were full. This practice sometimes meant that as many as three years' of correspondence were compacted together. Another kind of disruption occurred when Burke started a new file during an extended visit, for example at Bennington, Florida, or Kingston, New Jersey, while keeping another file with letters encompassing those same years. Nonetheless, the files revealed a forward chronology that paralleled Burke's ongoing life.

Until her death in 1969, Burke's wife Libby kept some order in the files and appeared to have dated a few items. After her death the filing arrangement no longer had the benefit of her attention. Furthermore in addition to occasional misfiling or approximate filings by Burke, some ordering by the family had occurred before we received the boxes for Burke-2.

Our aim has been to preserve Burke's intellectual order while arranging and describing Burke-2 to facilitate access for researchers. Accordingly, we made four arrangement adjustments that, while still keeping Burke's intellectual order, created greater access for researchers and reference staff.

Year-by-Year Arrangement

First, we clarified the chronological arrangement by separating the correspondence into distinct chronological years. This order would enable access by particular year and help address the first of our researcher queries, to browse through a year of Burke's correspondence.

General and Family Correspondence

Second, we separated immediate family correspondence from the general correspondence. This action followed our processing of Burke-1 and

appeared to follow Burke's general practice, as instanced in the separately boxed file for his sons' correspondence. The separation would allow researchers interested in Burke's professional correspondence to find it in the general correspondence.

Correspondent Files

Third, we also maintained Burke's filing by correspondent, an arrangement allowing access to the collected letters of particular correspondents. In arranging Burke-1 in the 1970s, the processor separately foldered certain important authors whose letters were especially valuable or likely to be heavily used, for example, those of Malcolm Cowley, E. E. Cummings, Hugh Duncan, Thomas Mann, Hart Crane (photocopies), Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, Theodore Roethke, Robert Penn Warren, Katherine Anne Porter, Allen Tate, Jean Toomer, and William Carlos Williams. We followed the same practice in arranging Burke-2, separately foldering, for example, the letters of Malcolm Cowley, Ralph Ellison, Stanley Hyman, Howard Nemerov, and James Sibley Watson. Sometimes, too, voluminous correspondence, such as that for Mildred Ligda, publisher of Hermes Press, would also result in separate foldering.

In other cases, as in Burke-1, we grouped correspondents' letters alphabetically. Researchers looking for a particular author would need to locate it within an appropriate alphabetical range. For example, a letter from Arthur Schlesinger Jr. is placed in an "S" folder labeled "Sams to Stanford University." These arrangement practices allowed us to accommodate, with limited searching, our second type of researcher query to see the letters of a particular author within certain years.

Internal File Arrangement

Finally, to arrange Burke-2 on the item level we followed Burke-1 by reversing last-to-first filing within correspondents' files, placing earliest letters first and following letters afterward to anticipate researchers' expectations.

Split Files

Thus far all of our adjustments not only facilitated access for researchers but worked within Burke's intellectual order, keeping the threefold

order of first chronological, next alphabetically by correspondent, and then chronologically therein. Yet we also noticed a feature of Burke's intellectual order itself likely to create a barrier to access, namely the presence of "split files." These types of files were created when Burke filed correspondents' letters in different places, typically under a corporate heading and a personal name heading.

A number of possible reasons exist for split files. Accident and lapse of memory could account for some diverse filings. But, we also can imagine other reasons. As the collection grew in size, Burke may simply have found it more convenient and memorable to associate some letters with organizations rather than with a personal name, as he did in Burke-1 when the collection was smaller. Or, Burke's relationship to a correspondent may have changed over time, and as a correspondent grew—or diminished—in importance to Burke, he might later have filed correspondence under a personal rather than an organizational name, or vice versa. Another kind of split file, of course, might occur if over time Burke knew a woman by both her maiden and married name.

Even accounting for natural inconsistencies in determining where to file a correspondent's letters, Burke's filing nonetheless appears to suggest how he was thinking about the correspondent at a particular point in time. Accordingly, we decided to maintain Burke's use of corporate names and personal names for filing letters. In other words, correspondents' letters may be discovered in more than one location. Keeping Burke's split file arrangement was an important decision, for as we will note in our descriptive decisions, we would need to cross-reference filing locations.

Access

With the arrangement phase completed shortly before the 2005 "Kenneth Burke and His Circles" conference, we discovered our new arrangement greatly assisted our reference service for Burke-2. Our year-by-year division assisted those researchers interested in browsing correspondence from particular years. In addition, we quite easily located relevant folders for researchers interested in particular correspondents. As our Burke-1 model forecasted, we had provided graduated access to the collection for at least two of our research needs.

However, unlike Burke-1 with its item-level card index, Burke-2 was still limited in enabling access to letters on an item level. We addressed these issues in our descriptive decisions.

Facilitating Access through Description

When the Burke-2 accession became the legal property of Penn State with our final payment to the Burke Literary Estate in 2005, the curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts, staff processor, and manuscripts cataloger met to discuss descriptive strategies for making the Kenneth Burke Papers even more easily accessible for researchers. Through continuing discussions as well as trial processing, we developed descriptive access strategies as follows, adapted to the nature of this accession.

Series

Conceptually we organized Burke-2 into three series: correspondence, works, and photographs. In arranging the letters we had already separated family and general correspondence for the convenience of researchers, and for the same reasons we would describe them separately in two distinct subseries. Though the two correspondence subseries would note the presence of accompanying works and photographs, we also created for works and photographs two separate series to accommodate researchers' interests. We will address topical access in the EAD finding aid with series scope notes that narratively identify topical content, personal or literary, and tie in to Burke's biographical note highlighting the events and places of his life.

Notation: Indicating Identity

To individually describe items we adopted notation consistent with the traditional notation used for Burke-1. When correspondents are known by different names, cross-references for alternate names are given in the authorized (Library of Congress Name Authority File) version of the name. For example, in Burke-1, Elspeth Burke's letters are filed under Elspeth Chapin. In Burke-2, we also indicated nicknames parenthetically, as for example, in

Slochow, Harry ["Decator"]

To identify items, we used the common literary abbreviations listed in Table 1 followed by date and addressee, adding specific information if Burke added a note on a letter or included a poem.

This notation was modest; it did not include the length of the letters. Nor, because of the wide variety of topics and disciplines reflected in

TABLE 1. Manuscript Abbreviations

AL	autograph letter
ALS	autograph letter signed
ACS	autograph card signed
AN	autograph note
ANS	autograph note signed
APS	autograph postcard signed
CCS	Christmas card signed
TC	typed card
TCS	typed card signed
TL	typed letter
TLS	typed letter signed

the letters, did it include an abstract of the letters' contents. We also used encompassing general notation whenever possible, for example, explaining that the recipient is Kenneth Burke when a recipient is not noted and that personal name entries, unless otherwise noted, indicate authors of letters.

The following notation, for example, indicates that Conrad Aiken wrote a typed signed letter to Burke on March 15, 1960.

Aiken, Conrad

TLS, 15 March 1960

Notation: Indicating Location under New Headings

In the previous Conrad Aiken illustration, the placement of the item description under a personal name heading indicates that researchers will find Aiken's letter under his name in the physical files. Typically, the personal, corporate, or subject name headings function as indicators of the items' location in the files. These files are located either in separate folders (e.g., Watson, James Sibley) or within folders labeled with alphabetical ranges (e.g., Cox to Curley).

However, some differences in the correlation occur because we wanted to facilitate access to letters from Burke, married women, and families. In these instances we created headings that don't exist in Burke's physical files.

Burke's Letters. In the physical files Burke interfiled his letters with those of his correspondents. In the finding aid, however, because of Burke's importance to researchers, we created a personal name entry for him, just

as we did for his correspondents, to compile a list of all the letters he wrote. To assist researchers in finding a Burke letter, our general notation indicates that the name of the letter's recipient points to the file locus of the letter. Accordingly, for each item, in addition to basic descriptive information, we also included the salutation and supplied missing portions of the recipient's name. In the following instance, the notes locate Burke's letter in the physical files under "Fowlie, Wallace."

Burke, Kenneth Duva

TL, 15 March 1958, to Dear Wallace [Fowlie]

However, Burke did not always interfile his letters under his recipients' names. For these exceptions, we pointed to the location of the individual letter with the notation "Filed under." In the following example, the researchers will find the letter not under "Rago, Henry," but rather under *Poetry*.

Burke, Kenneth Duva

TL, 25 Sept. 1962, to Dear Henry [Rago]. Filed under *Poetry*

Occasionally, Burke put a carbon copy of a letter he wrote on the back of another letter, with the result that the two letters are out of chronological filing order, sometimes falling into another year. In this situation, we used "on verso" to help readers locate letters Burke copied onto the verso of another letter, as in the following example.

Burke, Kenneth Duva

TC, 19 May 1960, [to William C. Fels]. On verso of TCS, 13 May 1960, from William C. Fels

Fels, William C. [of Bennington College]

TCS, 13 May 1960

In this instance, the description of Burke's typed card tells researchers they can find the correspondence on the verso of William C. Fels' signed typed card of May 13, 1960.

Married Women's Letters. In addition to creating a separate list for Burke's letters we also created separate listings for married women whose letters were interfiled with their husbands. For example, although Hannah

Josephson's letters are filed with those of her husband Matthew Josephson, we created separate personal name headings for both.

Josephson, Hannah Geffen

Josephson, Matthew

In the event correspondence was sent by both husband and wife, we linked the two personal name headings with a *see also* notation, as follows:

Cowley, Malcolm

See also Cowley, Muriel

TLS, 19 April 1958

Cowley, Muriel

See also Cowley, Malcolm

AP, 27 Nov. 1957, to Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Burke, from M & M

The *see also* reference under "Cowley, Malcolm" tells researchers they should look for additional correspondence by Malcolm Cowley under the heading of "Cowley, Muriel." The *see also* reference under Cowley, Muriel anticipates additional correspondence by Muriel Cowley under "Cowley, Malcolm."

Family Correspondence. A related issue occurred when an item was sent by several members of a family. In these instances we created a family entry. If we discovered that a family member also individually sent a letter to Burke, then we set up an internal reference using *see also*. The following example illustrates.

Cunliffe Family

See also Cunliffe, Mitzi

TC, [1960?], from Marcus, Mitzi, Antonia, Shawn, & Jason

Cunliffe, Mitzi

See also Cunliffe Family

AL, [1958]

The *see also* under "Cunliffe, Mitzi" tells researchers to look under "Cunliffe Family" for additional correspondence by her, and *see also* under "Cunliffe Family," tells researchers to look under "Cunliffe, Mitzi," for additional correspondence by her.

Notation: Indicating Location under Split Files

In addition to accommodating researchers' queries for letters by certain correspondents, we also needed to overcome obstacles occasioned by Burke's own filing system that resulted in split files or subject files.

Split Files: Personal Name/Corporate Name Entries. As we noted in discussing arrangement, sometimes Burke did not file a letter under the author's name. This situation often occurs when an author is writing on behalf of an organization. In these instances, we recorded the letter under the name of the organization where it was filed, using *see also* to link personal authors and corporate authors.

For example, in 1965, a researcher will find letters by Robert Zachary filed under "University of California Press" and under "Zachary, Robert." The need for a "from" under an organizational name is a cue that a *see also* will need to be set up under the personal name and corporate name entry.

University of California Press**See also Zachary, Robert**

TLS January 21, 1965, from Robert Zachary

Zachary, Robert**See also University of California Press**

TLS, 18 May 1965

In this example, we can see that "split files" sometimes occur when Burke filed correspondents' letters in two different places. The internal referencing enables us to point the researcher to the other file.

Although the reasons for Burke's split filing vary, in the previous instance, we can hypothesize that after spending time with Zachary and his wife Joan, at the beginning of May 1965, Burke's relationship with Zachary grew in importance to Burke, enough to warrant an individual personal filing entry. Indeed, the Zachary file, rather than the University of California Press file, becomes the expected location of Zachary's letters thereafter. Without the cross reference, letters written by Zachary as a representative of the University of California Press would be hidden, and we do not anticipate that a researcher would know automatically to look under the press name for additional letters by Zachary. And, certainly, the reference staff, unfamiliar with the employment histories of Burke's correspondents, would not know there were additional letters filed under a corporate name.

Subject Name Entries. Another situation requiring internal referencing occurs when a personal name entry takes on the characteristics of a subject entry. For example, after Burke's father died, letters relating to the elder Burke were filed under his name, James Leslie Burke. As seen in the following notation, we set up referencing between the Burke, James Leslie entry and that of the author of the letter, the Social Security Administration.

Burke, James Leslie

See also Social Security Administration

TN, 15 June 1959, to Mr. [Kenneth] Burke, from Social Security Administration, with envelope

Social Security Administration [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare]

See also Burke, James Leslie

Most of the letters Elizabeth Burke wrote are discovered as they are filed within other correspondents' files. In those instances, the correspondents are not only authors but also recipients and as such subjects.

Burke, Elizabeth Batterham

See also Nemerov, Margaret

Nemerov, Margaret

See also Burke, Elizabeth Batterham

TL, 19 June 1958, to Dear Peggy [Nemerov], from [Elizabeth Burke]

The notation placement follows the filing: Elizabeth Burke's typed letter of June 19, 1958, is located in the Nemerov file.

In addition to using a personal name as a subject file, Burke also created topical subject files for fan letters, autographs, and permission requests. Again, our cue for setting up the *see also* pairing occurs when we needed to identify a letter's author with a "from" note, a situation that occurs when a letter's author differs from the heading under which the letter is listed.

Processing

In the process of creating an inventory an archivist will not know until describing all items in the collection whether a *see* or *see also* reference is required. Our *see also* pairing was our way of anticipating letters to

be listed under both related headings. However, after the initial collection description is completed, we will be in a position to refine the cross referencing, as follows.

If a correspondent with the notation *see also* has letters under his or her name, no change is needed. In the following example, Ligda, who has letters under her name, will keep the *see also* references to indicate that her correspondence is also found under **Hermes Publications**.

Hermes Publications

See also Ligda, Mildred

TL/AN, [1955], from Ligda

Ligda, Mildred

See also Hermes Publications

ALS, 13 July [1950?]

However, if at the end of the listing process, the personal name entry has no letters indicated, we need to modify the referencing. For example, during the process of listing, we wrote:

Perspectives USA

See also Simmons, Lynda

TLS, 27 Jan. 1958, from Lynda Simmons

Simmons, Lynda

See also *Perspectives USA*

If after the listing is complete no letters were filed under “Simmons, Lynda,” we will do the following:

- Change the *See also* to *See*
- Move *See* and the organizational heading to a parenthetical phrase
- Go to the organizational name (e.g., “*Perspectives USA*”)
- Eliminate the personal listed name and the *See also*.

Following this procedure the entries become:

Perspectives USA

TLS, 27 Jan. 1958, from Lynda Simmons

The notation then tells the researcher that the letters from Lynda Simmons are listed not under her own heading name but under Perspectives USA.

Parameters. The main name entries and internal referencing system as described will assist researchers in discovering correspondents' letters researchers might otherwise miss because of Burke's filing system. However, we did not intend our internal referencing system to exhaustively cross-reference all items described. Drawing parameters was important because they render the system in use less complex. Following, we illustrate five kinds of items that do not have main entries and that while identifiable in print will be even more accessible in an EAD finding aid through a keyword search.

Recipients of Letters Who Do Not Write Letters. The correspondence series has an authorial focus. Thus, even though correspondents may have received a letter, if they did not author a letter, we did not give them a personal name entry. For example, in the following instance, even though the physical files will have a location for "Fowlie," if Wallace Fowlie did not write any letters, he will not have a personal name heading in the finding aid.

Burke, Kenneth Duva

TL, 15 March 1958, to Dear Wallace [Fowlie]

Enclosures with Letters. Excepting enclosed photographs and manuscripts, described in their own series, we did not reference enclosures to a second listing under an authorial name heading. Rather we considered these documents primarily as accompaniments to a letter, using the notation "with" or "and." In the following illustration we see the one record of the letter Marie Borroff sent to Marianne Moore. We noted it here as accompanying Ms. Moore's letter to Kenneth Burke, without further referencing.

Moore, Marianne

TLS/AN, 12 July 1959, with TLS, 8 July 2005, to Dear Miss Moore, from Marie Borroff

Continuations of the Original Letter. As noted previously, we used "on verso" to locate letters written by Burke and copied on the reverse side of other letters. This distinct *verso* correspondence differed from other uses of a letter's reverse side as a continuation of the original letter. In these latter

instances we identified such content with the notations “verso includes,” “with,” or “and,” without linking the content to a personal, corporate, or subject heading. The following notation provides the single identification of the letter Connie Sutton included on the Christmas card she and her husband Samuel Sutton sent to Kenneth and Libby Burke.

Sutton, Connie

See also Sutton, Samuel

CCS, 25 Dec. 1957, from Connie and Sam, and ALS, to Dear Libby & K.B., from Connie, with envelope

Notes after the Letter was Written. Another kind of addendum to letters includes the short notes written on letters, not by the letter’s author, but by the recipient, typically Burke, after he received the letter. As previously mentioned, Burke often wrote notes about where to file his letters. But, sometimes he also wrote other notes, and we indicated these notes, when significant, as part of the original item entry with no further item entry under “Burke.” In the following notation we see that Burke added a note to the card he received from Karl Shapiro.

Shapiro, Karl

ACS [1951?], with AN [by K. Burke]

Poetry. We also included poetry in descriptions as the following line indicates.

Burke, Kenneth Duva

TLS, 15 Sept. 1969, to Dear Bobbert [Zachary], with integral poem, “Modernism so far is but peanuts”

While the poetry in the letters was too prevalent to record in a series, we did identify it in the description, and with an EAD search feature readers will be able to search for keywords of known poem titles or simply for “poem” to retrieve each instance within the collection.

Access

Our item-level lists are part of a graduated plan for enabling access. The first step simply had been to open the unprocessed second accession of the Kenneth Burke Papers to researchers. We also have given both

Burke accessions a Web presence (<http://www.libraries.psu.edu/speccolls/rbm/collections/Kenneth%20Burke/index.html>) to alert researchers to the correspondents and nature of the papers.

A traditional finding aid will provide a context for the item lists by including administrative, biographical, scope and content, and series notes. In addition, because Burke used nicknames for family members we wrote a relationships section identifying family members, their nicknames, and their relationships to Kenneth Burke.

When our item-level processing is complete, we will be able to more easily accommodate by e-mail and on-site two of the three types of researchers' requests (subject queries excluded as previously indicated). Furthermore these item-level lists set the stage for creating an item-level EAD finding aid, a last step in our graduated approach to accessibility, and one that will allow off-site researchers both to identify particular letters and, as noted, to overcome cross-referencing parameters by using the browser edit-find feature in a keyword search.

CONSIDERATIONS

Many homogenous collections can benefit from Greene and Meissner's recommendation to process on a series rather than item level. Indeed, when we process series that contain repetitious or unorganized materials (for example, research notes, newspaper clippings, family photographs, and clippings for a book), we process on a series level. But, in instances of collections with many disparate items, a series description often can provide little concise information to assist reference staff in service and researchers in discovery.

Arguments against item-level processing rightly point to large collection backlogs made inaccessible to researchers through long, costly processing time. As indicated by the strategies needed to modestly yet adequately index the Kenneth Burke Papers at the item level, this type of description is not necessarily simple or quick. However, certain benefits to item-level indexing of a nonhomogeneous correspondence collection can counterweigh processing time and cost.

For example, time spent on processing collections translates into time saved during reference activities associated with these collections. When a collection such as the Kenneth Burke Papers remains in original order, and that order makes sense to the creator but erects barriers to identification of needed items by researchers and easy retrieval by reference staff, then

detailed description aids the staff in performing their duties. With an item-level index we are able to save time for our reference staff who also have processing responsibilities. Working from a detailed finding aid, staff can select the individual letters requested electronically by a remote researcher who needs a photocopy or scanned image.

Conversely, without the item-level index, flipping through the drawers and/or digging through files to retrieve all of the letters of one correspondent not only takes considerable time, but takes this time away from other processing projects. The Special Collections Library is not allowed to charge a service fee for time spent searching through an unindexed, chronologically arranged collection to identify and retrieve all letters written by one person. Here in remote central Pennsylvania we do not have a cadre of independent, freelance researchers for an off-site patron to hire. Penn State also does not have a library school or archives program from which to draw graduate students willing to do the legwork for distant researchers.

Item-level indexing benefits also include cost-effective preservation measures for fragile, irreplaceable papers. Our Kenneth Burke Papers are kept in cabinets in a climate-controlled vault, with the most important of the files housed in a fireproof cabinet. Yet, the papers are vulnerable, with some of them torn and many deteriorated from the acidic paper on which the letters were written. However, while arranging by item the staff processor took the opportunity to flatten pages, enclose torn pages in Melinex™, and remove only rusting staples and paper clips. In addition, our detailed inventories will make extensive searches unnecessary and thereby prevent damaging disturbances of the letters.

CONCLUSIONS

Best practices for collections like the Kenneth Burke Papers containing correspondence from many different authors suggested an item-level index approach to enable meaningful access. Other illustrations of materials requiring this in-depth approach include compiled collections of autographs, for example, our Autographs Collection, 1682–1972, or collected, unrelated letters by authors, for example, our Mortlake Collection of English Life and Letters, 1591–1963.

Item-level indexing, anathema to the prevailing opinions of archivists struggling to deal with voluminous twentieth and twenty-first century records, remains a viable option for literary collections. Balancing the needs of researchers and reference staff, the time spent on a middle-ground

approach to identifying correspondence—without providing abstracts of the contents—can be justified by time saved during the reference query and by preservation concerns with repeated handling of the collection to answer the inevitable question, “Do you have correspondence between X and Y?”

NOTES

1. W. H. Auden, “A Grammar of Assent,” *New Republic* 105 (July 14, 1941): 59.
2. Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, “More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing,” *American Archivist* 68 (Fall/Winter 2005): 243.
3. William L. Joyce, “Archivists and Research Use,” *American Archivist* 47 (Spring 1984): 124.
4. *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 2005), xii.