

**“Stepchild” Publications:  
Working with State Government Documents**

by

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*Author's note:* references to series statements in this article are applicable for libraries that intend, despite LC's recent decision on discontinuing series authority work, to continue providing controlled series access in their catalogs.

**Conference Program Abstract:** State government documents present unique challenges (housing, classification, cataloging). Share questions, problems, and solutions from your library.

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## Introduction

State government publications are unusual in a number of ways. The characteristics they share with other types of library materials suggest that they should be handled like those materials, but when all the similarities are added up, contradictions result. Do we treat them like government documents, or, because of their local-interest aspect, should they be housed in special collections? Wherever we house them, should they circulate? State documents are frequently serial in nature, with monographic series and subseries not uncommon. Should those items be handled as serials, monographs, or as analyzed series? State documents do not fit neatly into any one category and they are likely to require original cataloging. In this era of reduced staff and budgets, how much time can libraries afford to spend cataloging these materials? Are they worth the trouble? The intent of this paper is to outline options rather than to provide definitive answers, since decisions will vary depending on the individual library's circumstances and priorities.

## Housing and Processing

Should state publications be housed in the general collection? This option is simple and convenient, but it ignores state publications' special characteristics—their “document-ness” and their local-interest aspect. If the library houses them with federal publications, this would benefit researchers who are specifically interested in government documents, but it separates state publications from other materials of local interest. Because of that state-specific aspect, they can be shelved in special collections, so that they stand with other publications related to the state, but they may not fit the “profile” of other special collections material in that they are neither rare nor expensive.

The fact that they are neither rare nor expensive raises questions about how they should be processed. If they're not rare, they may not need the restrictions sometimes applied to special collections material. For example, we may want to apply barcodes, call number labels, and property stamps to them, whereas other special collections materials may receive more limited physical processing. We may also want state publications to circulate, while other types of special collections material do not circulate at all.

## Classification

This topic can, of course, be closely tied to the housing decision. An initial question may be whether to classify state publications at all, or to simply shelve them by agency name. A problem with the latter method is that state agency names tend to change—sometimes more than once. The library may choose to classify state documents with a locally-created numbering scheme analogous to the federal Superintendent of Documents classification. Whether such a scheme is used to shelve the state publications in the stacks, in a government documents area, or in special collections, it separates them from other materials related to the state and/or their general subject matter (e.g. agriculture). If they are classed with the “regular” materials, in either LC or Dewey, they stand next to related materials that are not state documents, and they may be more accessible to library users who are familiar with the predominant classification scheme.

## Cataloging

Before the library automation era, it was not unusual for government documents to remain uncataloged, with shelvest entries and printed indexes providing access. Even after the advent of online catalogs, the idea that government documents do not require the same type of access as other library materials tended to linger ([McKay and Carmack](#) 1994, 59). But as more and more information appears in electronic format, today's library users expect that all of a library's collections will be accessible electronically—indeed, that the full text of the item will be available online. Even when state documents *are* available online in full text, however, they may still need cataloging to provide controlled-vocabulary subject access and authority control, as well as title/keyword indexing that might not be included in the full text retrieval software. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *level* of cataloging, rather than whether to catalog at all, is more likely to be a decision that cataloging managers make with regard to state publications.

When trying to catalog more materials with fewer staff, libraries may regard state documents as good candidates for minimal-level cataloging. If the documents are shelved in a tightly controlled area with staff providing guidance on use of the materials, a detailed catalog record may be considered less important. However, a brief record has fewer access points, which may mean that users won't find what they need. Yet we may never know that they didn't find it, if they don't ask for help.

Extensive use of local brief records can also raise some ethical issues. The availability of our catalogs on the Web means that our “local” records are not quite as local as they used to be, since other libraries can use them for cataloging purposes. However, the cooperative cataloging value of a brief record is not a match for a full record input to a bibliographic utility, especially if the library's OPAC doesn't allow for a tagged MARC display. There is also the matter of obligation to bibliographic utilities. The library may be contractually obligated to perform all of its original cataloging through OCLC or RLIN, an obligation that is not met by the creation of in-house catalog records.

## How Much Detail?

If a library opts to provide full-level records for its state publications, it will be faced with the question of how much time can be devoted to these materials. Our online catalogs allow us to provide more and more information in catalog records at a time when many technical services departments have fewer and fewer people to do the providing. This means that a manager may have to make decisions not only on broad categories of minimal or full-level cataloging, but also on how much record revision will be done.

As previously mentioned, many state documents are serials. They change titles; sometimes the titles flip back and forth as if the agency can't decide what to call the publication. An issuing agency may go through a series of name changes—and serial titles entered under an agency's name need to have new records created each time the name changes. When working with state publications, it is not unusual to find that there were earlier name or title changes that should have been reflected in the catalog records but weren't. These errors add retrospective changes to the workload, including shifting holdings from one record to another, revising title change notes, or putting in entirely new records. Fortunately, the rules defining a serial title change are not quite as stringent as they used to be, but the manager may need to set priorities and limit corrections to upgrading records that are actually incorrect (as opposed to those not quite in sync with the latest rule interpretations). State agricultural extension publications can be a particularly rich source of headaches. For example, Mississippi State University Cooperative Extension Service's *Publication* has undergone changes of title as well as issuing body, resulting in the following title history:

**1916:** Bulletin (Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College. Agricultural Extension Dept.)

**1917-1931:** Extension bulletin (Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College. Extension Dept.)

**1931-1939:** Extension bulletin (Mississippi State College. Extension Dept.)

**1939-1950:** Extension bulletin (Mississippi State College. Extension Service)

**1950-1962:** Publication (Mississippi Agricultural Extension Service)

**1962-:** Publication (Mississippi State University. Cooperative Extension Service)

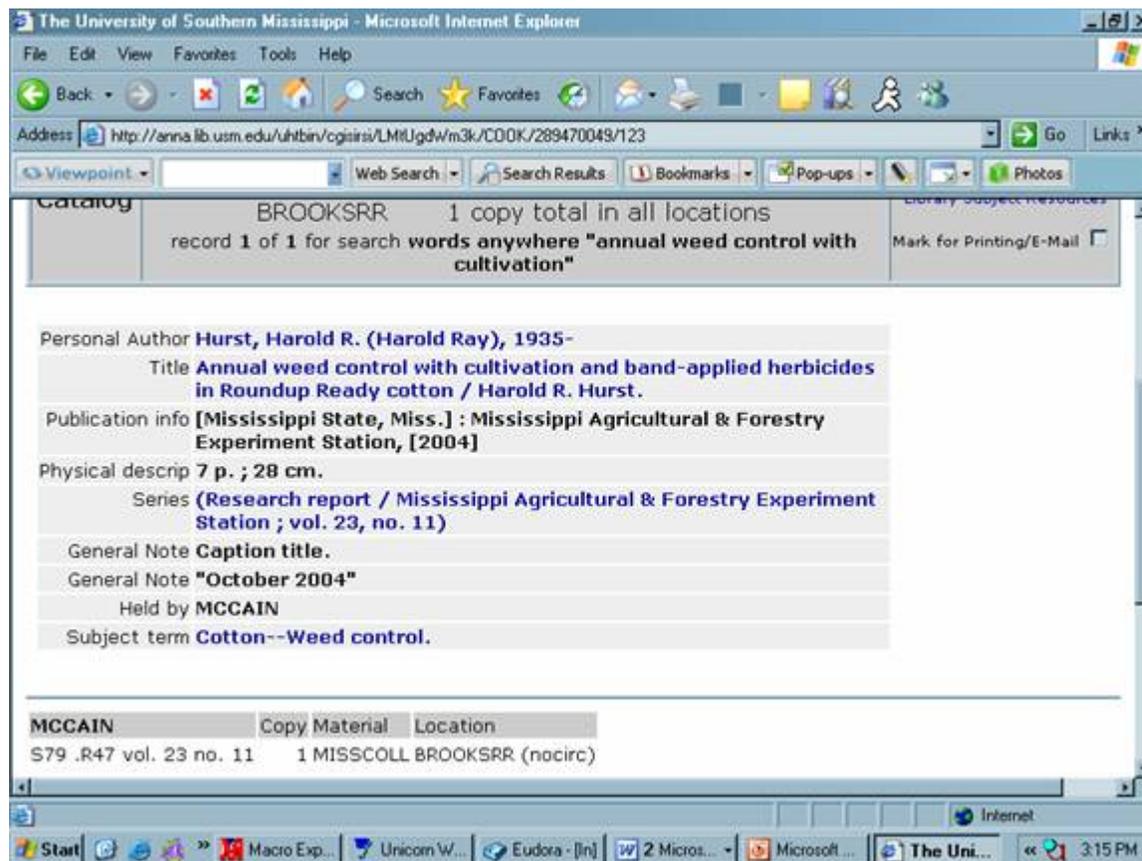
This sequence actually leaves out a few twists and turns. The *Publication* beginning in 1950 is really a continuation of more than one serial title. Some earlier issues of the *Bulletin* had minor title fluctuations which had to be shown in the records with notes. It was not unusual for issues to be published out of numerical sequence, and sometimes there were reissues of volumes that first appeared under earlier forms of the title. These variations don't even take into account the fact that this is a monographic series, with each issue having its own distinctive title.

### **Monographic Series**

Catalogers have several options in providing access to monographic series. We can create a bibliographic record for each individually titled volume of the set, with its own call number and subject headings. In the case of voluminous series, this process can take up enormous amounts of staff time. On the other hand, we could choose to create a single record for the serial title. However, that would give no access to individually titled volumes at all, except call number and barcode number.

If there are just a few volumes, title entries added to the serial record in 740 fields are a possibility, but this is impractical for series that have many issues. Providing less-than-full-level cataloging for the individual issues may be considered, though the cautions on minimal-level cataloging mentioned above would also apply here; it all depends on how much access the library wants to or can afford to provide. One way to speed up the processing of these materials is to classify them as a set, even if there are individual records for the volumes of the series (see Figure 1). Having a single base call number for what may turn out to be hundreds of volumes can save considerable staff time over the life of a series title.

**Figure 1.** Individual volume of monographic series classed as a set.

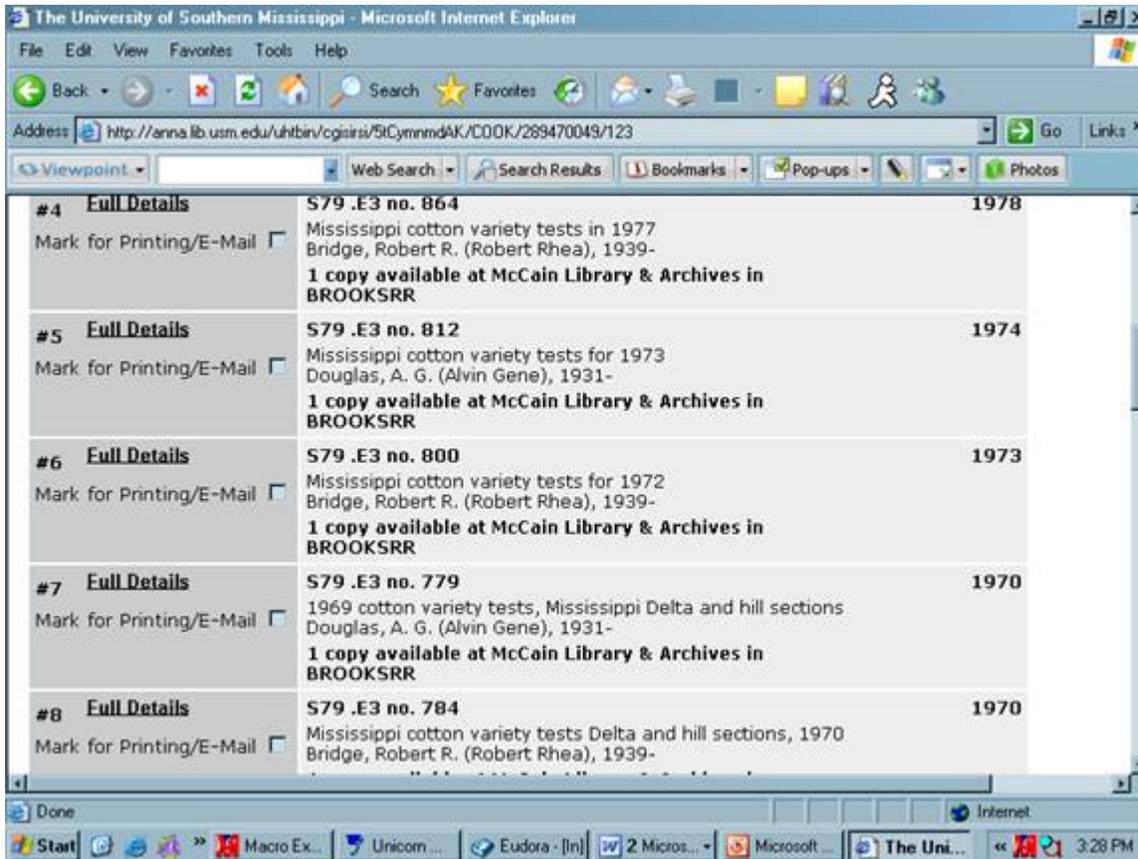


## What about Subseries?

Should they be classified as numbers of the "main" series, or given a series call number of their own? If an annual report is also part of a numbered monographic series, that report has two conflicting numbering sequences: the year of the report, and its unique number within the larger series. If the library shelves the reports according to one set of sequences, they are out of order with regard to the other set. For example, do the reports for 1979-2004 stand together, or are they shelved by their numbering in the main series? Which form of access is more important? We can express these complicated bibliographic relationships with notes, linking entry fields and MARC holdings records, but the results may still be confusing to the user. Once again, agricultural publications offer examples of this particular dilemma. Figure 2 shows a University of Southern Mississippi Libraries

OPAC index display for a subseries within the *Bulletin* of the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station.

**Figure 2.** Index display for titles that could constitute a subseries.



There are more of these cotton variety test publications than are illustrated by this single screen shot. Since they come out annually, they could be treated as a serial in their own right. Instead, they have been cataloged as individual volumes of the *Bulletin* and classified according to their numbering within that series. In this case, it was decided that the individual volume titles varied so often (*Mississippi Cotton Variety Tests FOR [Year]*; *Mississippi Cotton Variety Tests IN [Year]*; titles that switch between statewide results and results for certain sections, etc.) that cataloging them as serials might result in nearly as many separate records as treating them as individual titles. To maximize access and minimize confusion, the cataloger chose to add a record for each individual volume and to classify the subseries according to the *Bulletin* numbering, not the years of the cotton test reports.

## Corporate Entries

For publications that are not monographic series, the cataloger may still have to deal with the question of “when to do corporate main entry, and what form the government main or added entry should take” ([Elrod 2002](#)). While AACR2 gives us the principle of “emanation” for deciding on corporate entries ( *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* 2002 revision, 21-7), deciding whether some state publications meet the criteria—i.e., whether the publication contains enough information about the agency itself to justify a corporate main entry—can be a matter of individual judgment. For forms of entry, if the agency's name is not found in the Library of Congress authority file, the condensation of AACR2's formulation of corporate entries to the formula

110/710 1\_ \$aJurisdiction. \$b Smallest Unique Dept. \$b Smallest Office

is a good guideline ([Elrod 2002](#)). However, if the library's catalog contains pre-AACR2 records that have not been updated, the cataloger may find conflicting forms of state agency names when establishing a heading for the work in hand.

## Who Will Catalog Them?

Once a manager has decided how to catalog and classify state documents, s/he is left with the question of, “Who will do the work?” It may be tempting to outsource, letting someone else deal with the pleasures of name and title changes and subseries, not to mention the authority work that goes with establishing headings of local interest. However, due to the high percentage of original cataloging, working with state publications can be costly no matter who does it. There is also the matter of how much information to give the outsourcing vendor. Unless the library sends the entire piece, which would add to shipping costs, it is possible that the vendor could lack some information needed to catalog the title. Some state documents have vital information scattered throughout the work instead of being concentrated on the title page. For example, a title change notice could appear in a preface, while a volume number might show up only in small print on the back cover. Also, a cataloger sometimes needs more information than appears on the piece in hand. A library may have people on the scene who are familiar with the history of a publication and its issuing agencies. In addition, local catalogers can easily refer to the earlier

volumes of a serial or any other related works necessary to establish, for example, that a name change has occurred, or that one particular state agency is subordinate to another. However, despite the wish to provide the fullest possible access to state publications using local staff, outsourcing may be the only way to get state documents cataloged. Staff may have to be allocated to other types of materials when the complexity of the materials and the time required to catalog them are not proportionate to their anticipated usage.

## Conclusion

Finally, we return to a question asked at the beginning of this paper: “Are state publications worth all this trouble?” The subject matter is not usually exciting; it's easy to ask ourselves if anyone really cares about these materials. But they may.

We do not know when, or in what context, researchers will need the information they contain. For example, some of the extension publications of the '50s and '60s that were directed at homemakers could be of interest in women's studies programs. Publications on nutrition might be used to demonstrate changing perceptions of what's healthy and what's not. Works on pesticide use could be valuable to environmental studies programs. Also, if libraries in the documents' state of origin do not catalog these items, it is unlikely that anyone else will. While the Library of Congress and the National Agricultural Library cataloged some state publications in the '60s and '70s, such records are less common in these straitened financial times.

Besides, state documents are not always dull, especially not with such titles as *New Egg Reporter*, *Having Fun with Bugs*, and *Let's Learn to Cook: 10 Year Olds* (or is that *Let's Learn to Cook 10 Year Olds?*). That last one should be exciting enough to hold the attention of any cataloger.

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## References

McKay, Beatrice N., and Norma Carmack. 1994. "Sharing Expertise to Mainstream Government Documents Cataloging." *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 18:3/4, 57-74.

Elrod, J. McRee. 2002. "Government Document Cataloguing Cheat Sheet." <http://www.slc.bc.ca/cheats/govdoc.htm> (accessed March 29, 2006).

*Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*. 2nd ed. 2002. Chicago : American Library Association.