

TO: Joint Steering Committee

FROM: Jennifer Bowen, ALA representative

SUBJECT: ALA response to 5JSC/LC/6 (Family names)

General comments

ALA supports the inclusion of guidelines for family names in RDA, and appreciates the work that LC has done to present an initial proposal for consideration. Given that families can function as the creators, compilers, publishers, manufacturers, collectors, etc., of resources, it is appropriate for family names to serve as primary and secondary access points in resource descriptions and for RDA to provide guidance in the assignment and construction of those access points

Unfortunately, ALA is not generally in agreement with the approach taken in 5JSC/LC/6 because the proposal does not discuss the more controversial aspects of this question, and the specifics of the proposal gloss over many of the problematic issues associated with incorporating family names into RDA.

1. Reconciliation of current needs/practices

Within the U.S. cataloging community, there are two contradictory points of view regarding the nature and use of access points for families. General catalogers currently use access points for families in order to *collocate* records for works *about* a family, and the “rules” they follow are primarily those in the Library of Congress’s *Subject Cataloging Manual: Subject Headings*, H 1631, Genealogy, section 3, Names of individual families. The basic principle is that proposed for RDA 22.0B in 5JSC/LC/6: “Use the same heading for all families with the same surname.” This principle in essence means that a controlled access point is established for the **family name**, but that this same access point is used for any group of persons that use that name (or any variation thereof), whether they are in fact related or not.

On the other hand, there is a tendency among catalogers in the U.S. working with special collections of genealogy materials and archivists describing family papers to use access points for works about a particular family or for papers created by a particular family. This community is less interested in collocating works related to a given family than in *differentiating* the subject or creator of each individual work or collection from any other family group. They thus prefer to create distinct access points for very precise family groupings, which could be accomplished by adding qualifiers identifying the place, dates, or common ancestor. The result is a very specific heading that identifies a particular group of related persons, who may or may not be related to other families identified by other access points.

There are problems with both approaches. The generalist approach fails to differentiate groups that are in fact unrelated, and thus fails to support the FRAR definition of a family as “two or more persons related by birth, marriage, adoption, or similar legal status.” The specialist approach fails to bring together groups of persons who are in fact related, again failing to support the FRAR definition. Both traditions avoid the need to establish (through *see also* references) the relationships between family access points. RDA does not have that luxury.

2. Need for qualifiers

In order to include guidelines for establishing family names in RDA, the JSC will need to make a decision about the appropriate level of specificity to be required and/or allowed in access points for family names. ALA notes that the FRAR definition of family seems to require that RDA allow at least the option of qualifying a basic family name in order to differentiate unrelated family groups. Beyond that, it would certainly be welcome to specialist genealogy catalogers and archivists to have the option to add additional qualifiers that would allow differentiation of more specific family groups. A suite of options might be a reasonable compromise.

ALA notes, however, that allowing this sort of optionality within any given authority file could be extremely problematic. If access points can be established at any possible level of specificity, then the relationships among them would be (a) very difficult to establish, and (b) extremely complex to articulate in a common syndetic structure. Moreover, the fact that variant spellings might in some cases be treated as *see* references and in others as the basic family name would lead to the need to qualify almost all *see* references as well as most primary access points. Such a situation would also be difficult to present to users in an intelligible manner.

While the problem is indeed difficult to solve, ALA recommends that the JSC thoroughly discuss this issue before opting for a solution that would avoid dealing with the complexities of the problem.

3. Families as personal or corporate identities?

ALA notes the difficulties with grouping family names with either personal names or with corporate bodies. While some ALA members preferred the solution that LC has proposed (treating families with personal names), overall we are not convinced that this is the best solution. ALA urges the JSC to reconsider providing instructions for family names as a separate category apart from the personal name rules. (We note that the RDA Prospectus includes a separate chapter in part 3 for formulating access points for families).

4. Definition of “family”

The decision not to define “family” hinders interpretation of the proposed additions to the rules. The current AACR2 definition of “corporate body” could easily be seen to include

families; if RDA is to treat families as a distinct concept, then the definition of “corporate body” needs to be modified and a definition of “family” supplied. The word “family” could be applied to any or all of the following: all persons within an individual’s immediate family, all persons related to an individual within a certain number of generations, all persons that happen to bear the same surname, all persons that bear any variant version of a particular surname. Users of the catalog may have legitimate reasons for wanting to find resources relating to any of these notions of “family.” ALA recommends that “family” be defined, even if only to identify the range of possible interpretations and make explicit that the agency preparing the description will decide the boundaries of what constitutes a family within the context of the resource being cataloged. The definition could also clarify whether multiple specific persons who are in a family should be treated as multiple persons or as a family.

5. Naming conventions

Naming conventions vary among different cultures and time periods. ALA recommends that the proposed rules be expanded to address how to construct family names in the following situations: places in which surnames are not used (e.g., Iceland and much of Southeast Asia) and places in which surnames are used but family members do not necessarily share the same surname (e.g., in ancient Scottish and modern American families, the wife may keep her family name after marriage rather than take her husband’s family name; in Sweden, when patronymics were in use, surnames changed from generation to generation).

6. Noble families, Royal houses, etc.,

The names of noble families, royal houses, etc., are frequently needed as name headings when tracing provenance for special collections materials. Some of the great private libraries of the past, many now dispersed, were the collective work of multiple generations of bibliophiles within a single noble or royal family. The mark of ownership might simply be an armorial bookplate engraved with the family name or the title of the head of the family (e.g., Earl of Dalhousie). ALA recommends incorporating these family groups into RDA as well, and notes that the “Family” entity in FRAR includes “royal families, dynasties, houses of nobility, etc.” and “the successive holders of a title in a house of nobility viewed collectively (e.g., Dukes of Norfolk)”.

Specific comments on proposed additions

21.4A2. Correction: The example should say “Main entry under the heading Bailey family” (rather than “main entries”)

21.6B2. ALA supports the option for limiting.

22.1B. It is not clear when one family is to be differentiated from another; the cataloger has to decide whether two names are the “same” family before establishing the name and

receives no guidance in the matter. Is the Smythe family a subset of the Smith family? Does source X refer to the “same” family as the source in hand? Suppose the Schmidt family moves from Northern Germany to Missouri in 1848 and keeps their name but changes it in 1917 because of anti-German hysteria during World War I. Is this a variant or a new family?

22.1B footnote. Archival finding-aids are often the only source of information about a family. ALA proposes including specific mention of finding-aids as an appropriate reference source in the footnote: “Reference sources, as used in this chapter, include books, articles, finding-aids, etc., written about a person or family.”

22.3D1. Without knowing which groups of people constitute a family, it is not clear how the cataloger would know which instances to examine for predominance.

22.5A2. The proposed rule is Anglo-centric, given that many languages form family names with the family designation first (e.g., Die Familie Hohenburg, La famiglia Rossini). The Draft International Cataloging Principles 5.3.1 recognizes this fact. With Native American clans, would the “Raven clan” become the “Raven family”? If catalogers are going to return to artificially constructed headings like these, the corporate body model is more flexible and more developed.

22.5C3. “Hyphenated surnames”: Family names can contain compound surnames even if they are not hyphenated (e.g., most Spanish names), therefore ALA recommends incorporating additional “family name” text and examples elsewhere in 22.5C “Compound surnames” (e.g. 22.5C2) not just in this particular rule.

22.5D. The assumption seems to be that when families change language or country of residence, they become different families. Are these variants or new families?

22.20B. “Use the same heading for all families with the same surname”: As we explained above in our general comments, we find this proposal to be very problematic. One can consider all people with similar last names to be one large family, but that view is not helpful to users interested in families with specific geographic and chronological boundaries. The best approach would seem to be the use of qualifiers, as is done with corporate names. The implication of differentiating families with the same name would probably be a separate name for almost each work or collection cataloged, which might be an honest admission that families are defined by the participants and observers. A major problem would be the question of whether to merge two family names that are substantially the same only because the qualifiers chosen for them differ. Finally, some in ALA have pointed out that although DACS uses undifferentiated family names, international practice is different, including the UK archival standards, the ISAAR(CPF) options, and (as we pointed out in our general comments above) FRAR.

26.2A2. Referring from variant forms of the family name to the established form often results in patron complaints about “typos” (the patron doesn’t understand why the cataloger has not chosen the spelling used by the family in question). Also, this rule for

providing a see reference seems to conflict with the 26.2C3 rule for providing a see also reference.

26.2A3. “Colthurst family” see reference seems to contradict 26.2C3 “Lloyd-Jones” see also reference.

26.2C3. The proposed rule is unclear and seems to contradict the proposed 22.20B.