

Connecting the Dots: Using EAC-CPF to Reunite Samuel Johnson and His Circle

**Harvard Library Lab
Fall 2011 – Fall 2012
Final Report**

Project Summary

This project was designed to demonstrate the benefits of using the new archival standard, Encoded Archival Context – Corporate Bodies, Persons, and Families (EAC-CPF), to describe creators of manuscript collections and encode meaningful semantic links between creators and the primary sources that document their lives and work.

The project focused on lexicographer Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) and his circle of fellow writers, artists, political thinkers and friends, as well as collectors thereof. EAC-CPF records created describe Johnson and members of his circle; document and make navigable their relationships; and provide links to the rich Johnsonian archival resources held by the Beinecke and Houghton Libraries.

The project attempted to answer the following questions:

- 1) How can two separate institutions (Beinecke/Yale and Houghton/Harvard) collaborate to create, share, maintain EAC-CPF records and develop a set of metadata best practices for this new archival standard?
- 2) What is a content-rich EAC-CPF record? What contextual information and linking will be most beneficial to our users?

Accomplishments

- Gained crucial experience creating, editing, and maintaining EAC-CPF records
- Hired two interns, Brooke McManus (at Houghton) and Mary Yearl (at Beinecke), who together created 78 content-rich EAC-CPF records for Johnson and his circle, 28 more than estimated in our proposal
- Met with Kathy Wisser, Co-chair, Technical Subcommittee on EAC-CPF
- Collaborated as a cross-institutional team on the development of a set of local Best Practices for EAC-CPF records, accessible on a public wiki:

<https://wiki.harvard.edu/confluence/display/connectingdots/Connecting+the+Dots%3A+Using+EAC-CPF+to+Reunite+Samuel+Johnson+and+His+Circle>

- Installed a test instance of the SNAC prototype software and loaded our EAC-CPF records, making them publicly accessible:

<http://snac.dev.berkmancenter.org/xtf/search>

Challenges

Challenges faced were largely due to the newness of the metadata standard and the lack of existing tools for creating, manipulating, and displaying EAC-CPF records. We wrote our EAC-CPF records using the XML editor, oXygen; such an editor is not optimal since the relationships/links between the records aren't visually apparent. We also lacked a collaborative editing environment and so ended up with separate Beinecke- and Houghton-created records, though they were all built on agreed-upon best practices and brought together.

We found the relations section of EAC-CPF – where you can create semantic links between the entity being described and other CPF entities, resources, or functions – to be the most compelling aspect of the new standard. Unfortunately we struggled with and ultimately abandoned an attempt to adopt or create a vocabulary to characterize the nature of the relationships being documented. Developing that ontology is a possible next phase of the project.

Our local instance of SNAC was installed later than we hoped, and we had correspondingly less time for further configuration of the software; a few small issues and inconsistencies arose in our records that we would have addressed if time had permitted.

We are still not at the point where we can say what kind of contextual information and linking will be most useful for researchers. This will only be known as EAC-CPF is more widely adopted and records become broadly available to researchers.

Next Steps

We finished all goals as outlined in our proposal. We have ideas for continuing the collaboration, building on the success we had with this project and exploring further developmental aspects of the standard as a contribution to the national/international development of EAC.

Publicity and Presentations

Due to the newness of this metadata standard, there is a lot of interest in our project. We plan to announce the completion of our project to relevant listservs and expect our Best Practices to be very useful for anyone considering implementing EAC-CPF.

Our presentations to date and planned:

- May 2012 at Harvard: Joint Library Lab presentation with the University Archives focusing on the use of EAC-CPF in our projects
- August 2012 at Society of American Archivists annual meeting, San Diego CA: SAA Research Forum presentation on Harvard/Yale project
- November 2012 at Yale: Standing Committee on Professional Awareness forum on Harvard/Yale project
- November 2012 at Harvard: Library Lab Showcase on Harvard/Yale project
- March 2013 (approved) at New England Archivists' Spring 2013 meeting, Worcester, MA: report on Harvard/Yale project
- August 2013 (proposed) at Society of American Archivists' annual meeting, New Orleans, LA: session proposal submitted, jointly Harvard/Yale with Tufts University

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