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# CCQ INTERVIEW

*Carolynne Myall, Interview Editor*

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## An Interview with Sara Shatford Layne

Mary S. Woodley

**ABSTRACT.** Sara Shatford Layne discusses her career in cataloging and her work in several areas of cataloging theory. Topics covered include the intellectual attractions of cataloging, seriality and the serial “work,” development of revised Chapter 12 of AACR, subject access to visual images, OPAC design, and cataloging education. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

**KEYWORDS.** Sara Shatford Layne, cataloging theory, serials cataloging, visual image cataloging, subject access, AACR2 (Anglo-American Cataloging Rules), Index of Medieval Medical Images, Online Public Access Catalogs (OPACs)

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This interview was conducted on May 4, 2002.

Cataloging & Classification Quarterly, Vol. 36(2) 2003  
<http://www.haworthpress.com/store/product.asp?sku=J104>

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10.1300/J104v36n02\_02

**MW:** *In 1972 you received an MFA in Costume Design, and then worked for nine years as a costume designer at Cañada College in Redwood City, California. What sparked your change in careers?*

**SSL:** That is a question I have been frequently asked because it does not seem to be the kind of career change that a person would make, going from what people perceive as the more romantic, less practical, costume design to the more solid librarianship. It does not seem like a standard transition, and I give different answers at different times to that question. I was not finding costume design completely satisfactory to me as a career although it had many aspects that I really loved and enjoyed. But I was not really sure whether it was the particular job I was in or the career itself that I was dissatisfied with. So I took an organized approach and went into a career-counseling program to see whether they could help me figure out whether I should just find another job in costume design or whether I should change careers. I had always had a secret desire to be a librarian. This sounds odd, but it was true. I wanted to see if the counseling program could confirm this, although I did not tell the counselor that's what I thought I wanted to be. I went to counseling, and it was quite helpful. The counselor said one of the things I was particularly suited to was being a librarian, and more specifically, an academic librarian rather than a public librarian. So I went to library school at UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles] because it seemed to be a vibrant and interesting place to be at that point in 1980. It was somewhat difficult to leave the theater because people in the theater tend to view it quite as a vocation, something that you commit your life to, so it was like leaving the convent so to speak; I was falling away from a theatrical religion. But I kept many friends from that period. And I am still interested in seeing theater. And my husband is an actor. But I am much happier as a librarian than I was as a costume designer.

**MW:** *During your time at UCLA, what courses stood out for you as a student?*

**SSL:** Cataloging. I had no idea that I was going to be a cataloger when I started library school. I think I felt like most people who do not know much about it, that I would be a reference librarian because that was what I was familiar with as a user of libraries. But I found cataloging fascinating and unexpectedly intellectual. The problems of cataloging, which in some ways can never be solved, were fascinating to me; it was a surprise, a very pleasant surprise.

**MW: *How did your internship at the Bodleian Library influence your career?***

**SSL:** I don't know if it influenced it much. It was a lovely time I had there. I learned many things from it, but I do not think it determined the direction I went in afterwards. I am completely happy that I did it. Being there, in the whole history of librarianship practically, was fascinating. And I was fortunate enough to work on an interesting collection, a collection of ephemera from an archive of a job printer from a small town in Shropshire. The collection covered a period from the early 1800s to the late 1800s. Organizing the collection was very, very interesting. I also learned how your approach to classification can be culturally influenced without your being aware of it. I was organizing this collection into broad subject categories—the provenance arrangement had long since been lost, so I was not violating an archival arrangement. Among the subject categories I established were one for government activities and one for religion activities, because that was my American perspective that these two activities were separate—even though I was perfectly well aware from history classes that there was not a separation of church and state in England. But I did not think about the implications of this bit of information when trying to organize this collection. Of course, I found out that I could not create those two separate, mutually exclusive, categories in an English situation. So it was a lesson to me to be a little more humble or aware of how your own culture influences you.

**MW: *You have been active in a wide range of areas: CONSER and serials cataloging, access to images with a focus on art images, and OPAC displays. How do you blend these interests together?***

**SSL:** They all have at their heart cataloging, organizing and access to information. I guess that is their unifying theme. I like to think about different things. I enjoy having ideas; it is a lot of fun to have an idea. If you think about different things, then you have a chance to have a lot of different ideas. I also think knowing the problems in one area of cataloging can help you in others. Solutions that work in one area may have an unexpected application in another. The wider your experience in cataloging, the more apt you are to have insights drawn from other areas. My interest in images does hark back to my costume background. As a costume designer I used images all the time as research materials. I needed images of costumes, of clothing of people in different times, different periods, and

different situations. As a designer you use not just pictures of costumes or people in clothing, but you might use all kinds of images for inspiration. The artwork from a particular period can help form a feeling for it, can show what colors epitomize a period. It was a wide range of images that I needed, so the problems of finding them interested me. I discovered when I arrived at library school that that was cataloging.

**MW: *What do you think are your most important contributions to librarianship?***

SSL: That's tough. I don't really know, and I suppose in some ways you never can know what your contributions may be. I know people have told me they were very influenced by my early articles on access to images. Recently, within a week, I received two requests for copies of my subject article from the 1980s. One request was from Europe, the other from Northern California. It is interesting to me who is interested in the topic. But I don't know. I have been fascinated by the work on revising Chapter 12 for AACR. It was a truly collaborative effort, with an exceptional group of people, and it is hard to know what part I specifically contributed. I have also influenced a couple of people to become librarians. Maybe that is an important contribution. These are people who are happy being librarians now that they have earned their degrees. I am happy about that. It is hard for someone to know what others will find important.

**MW: *In 1988 you and Martha Yee published a book on improving displays in WebPacs. What led you and Martha to tackle this issue?***

SSL: The book also deals with indexing and access in addition to the display issue, although the two are very closely intertwined. Martha is the primary author of the book and she had been approached to write an article in the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* [1996 v. 58, supplement 21]. After we had written the article, someone suggested that it should be a book. So we turned the article into a book. I guess my feeling is that as catalogers, we are in a good position to assess the potential of what an OPAC could do. We have knowledge of the data that already exists in the catalog record, data that we felt was not and is not being taken advantage of by systems. We felt that as catalogers, we perhaps could try to explain how this data could be used.

**MW: *Have you felt that your research on OPAC displays and indexing has impacted your participation in UCLA's migration from ORION to a new ILS [Integrated Library System]?***

SSL: Well, it certainly influenced it. But there is still a very big gap between what is being currently done and what Martha and I felt, perhaps idealistically, could be done. So choosing an ILS is necessarily an exercise in practicality as well as in what you ideally want. It is difficult to balance the two, because if you never ask for what is not there, you will never get it. But at the same time, if you ask for too much, you don't get anything. So it is tricky. We are now on our second search in ten years for an ILS.

***MW: The first migration by most accounts could not be considered successful. Do you feel that you learned from it?***

SSL: I think we all learned a great deal. Not just me, but everyone at UCLA learned a lot from it. Probably the vendor learned things too. Sometimes we learned things we might prefer not to have learned. Harkening back to the balance between practicality and idealism, there are dangers for both the vendor and the customer when you try to do too many new things all at once, when you try to design a perfect system.

***MW: It is difficult to be on the cutting edge.***

SSL: If you take big risks, you risk big failures. I am hoping that the perceived failure at UCLA does not lead people to be too cautious in the future in trying to design really good systems. I think that systems are getting better. I think that things are improving and vendors are trying interesting things when it comes to the OPAC, for example, using the information in authority records in innovative ways.

***MW: If you were to write your book again about OPAC indexing and displays, based on your recent experience, what changes do you think that you might make?***

SSL: I do not know. Martha is keeping a folder labeled "Second Edition," where we file ideas. We had to stop on the first edition. I remember Martha saying, "We have to stop here, we can't keep revising this forever before publication." I do not know exactly what we would revise; there have certainly been developments in OPACs since the first edition. I do not know if we would be any more practical and less idealistic. Hard to say.

***MW: What are your current projects?***

SSL: I have just finished a chapter for a book Murtha Baca is editing for the Getty. It is a book on subject access to art images. It was very inter-

esting to read the other authors' contributions. It caused me to think about some of my ideas in more depth, ideas that I had not thought about as thoroughly before. And that was useful. For example, when I was invited to give a paper at the ARLIS [Art Libraries Societies] conference this last March I turned one of the controversies that came up during the editing of the book into the paper I presented.

***MW: What was the controversy?***

*SSL:* I wonder if I can explain it quickly. It had to do with which of two approaches to subject access is better. One approach is to lump a lot of things under subject access, and call them all "subjects." The assumption is that the user wants to retrieve everything that could remotely be called "subject" and is not concerned about fine distinctions. The other approach is to do more differentiation on behalf of the user. Different kinds of subjects are differentiated in the record by coding, so that it is possible to give the user a display that says there are the different kinds of subjects, different ways in which this term might be used. An example would be if you have two artworks that were commissioned by Louis the 14th. One commissioned artwork is a tapestry that has symbols of the Louis the 14th in it; the other is a portrait of the King. You could argue that the tapestry with the symbols is in some sense about Louis the 14th and therefore he is the subject of the tapestry as well as of the portrait. What I argued is that once you get large databases, putting all those subject aspects together in an undifferentiated retrieval could be quite annoying to someone who is looking specifically for pictures of Louis the 14th, because that search needs to sift through all the results that include symbols of Louis the 14th as well as images of him. This is not saying that some people would not be interested in the symbols as well as in the images. You might want to provide access to both kinds of subjects, but somehow in the resulting display indicate what the searcher has retrieved; for example, this many images contain symbols of Louis the 14th, this many images depict him. This started a small controversy about which way would be best.

***MW: What are your current activities?***

*SSL:* I am chairing a subcommittee of the American Library Association's ALCTS CCS [Association for Library Collections and Technical Services, Cataloging and Classification Section] Subject Analysis Committee, the

Subcommittee on the Display of Subject Reference Structures in Automated Systems (<http://www.ala.org/alcts/organization/ccs/sac/subjecta.html>). I am in the process of writing up what this group has been working on. The CONSER revision of [AACR] Chapter 12 has been completed, and I will be presenting a paper on the changes at The Special Libraries Association Annual Conference this June. I am heavily involved in UCLA's search for a new ILS.

***MW: In the revision of Chapter 12, what do you think was the most difficult issue to resolve or the most discussed issue?***

*SSL:* I think it was perhaps opening our minds to thinking about what really were the essential aspects of serials, or seriality, and how did they effect how serials should be cataloged. It was interesting and fun to think about all of that. We did a lot of thinking about serial works, how the work manifests itself or expresses itself, if you want to use FRBR [Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records, <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s13/frbr/frbr.pdf>] terminology in serials. Although we did not come to any definite resolutions, I think thinking about "serial work" in the back of our minds, may have helped to form the rules that we wrote.

***MW: Do you think the issues surrounding electronic versions and integrating resources meant that traditional definitions needed to be reviewed?***

*SSL:* That certainly was a reason to go back to the basics and try to analyze what were the essential elements of seriality. Clearly an electronic resource no longer has physically separate pieces, therefore physically separate pieces could no longer be part of the definition of a serial if you believe that electronic resources could be serials or have seriality. I think the idea that things that had not been traditionally serials have seriality was a new idea, or at least a new way of looking at these materials. It was also important to see how these new electronic materials were not totally different from anything that had gone before. Once you got down to what the basics were of seriality, what defines seriality, you could see that at least some of these new resources had the essential elements of seriality that the more traditional paper serials also have. I need to point out that Crystal Graham had the ideas that started the whole discussion, and that Jean Hiron is really the person most responsible for developing Crystal's ideas and turning them into actual rules, although many, many people contributed to the effort along the way.

***MW: I remember early on during the whole discussion on what is a serial, you had brought up a solution to how this should display to the public, in other words, is it by latest title or is it a title change. What do you still feel that the public needs to know for resource discovery and identification?***

*SSL:* They need to have access to the work; and when they get a result, they need to know whether they have found what they are looking for. That is about as much as you can say about it without getting into trouble and that is one of the problems—that there is no perfect answer. Some pieces of information in the record will be meaningful to some of the users of the record; other pieces of information will be useful to other users of the record. The whole record may, without the users being conscious of it, give them information that they did not know they needed before they got here but once they are there they need it. Asking users if they need a particular bit of information is dangerous, partly because that requires them to understand library terminology, which they should not have to do. Also, you get pieces of information in your everyday life that you don't even know that you are receiving but that are important to you for making decisions. I think that this is also true for users of a catalog making decisions about records. So asking, "Do you need to know the publisher?" or "Do you need to know the date?" is dangerous. Users have no way of answering those questions accurately.

***MW: What do you see as the future of cataloging?***

*SSL:* I think cataloging is increasing in importance because of the vast quantity of information that is out there. The basic principles of cataloging are just as important, if not more important than they have ever been. So I would hope people could learn that and make use of those basic principles.

***MW: Who do you think has had the most significant impact on your career?***

*SSL:* On me as a librarian it is clearly Betty Baughman who was my cataloging teacher in library school. She was a remarkable woman and very unusual. One of the things she taught me, which is a funny thing not to have learned earlier in my life, is that when you have an idea or an answer that is different from everybody else's, that does not necessarily mean that it is the wrong answer or an invalid idea. I did not learn that until I



was thirty or so, which seems kind of late. Betty also taught her students, if they were able to learn this from her, that there were no perfect answers to cataloging problems. It used to frustrate a lot of her cataloging students who wanted to have one right answer to everything. She would not put up with that way of thinking and it was a very valuable lesson.

***MW: As a corollary question: many of the library schools are no longer requiring cataloging; what is your personal opinion of that?***

***SSL:*** My personal opinion is that it is extremely unfortunate. I know that some library schools have not eliminated cataloging but are instead teaching a more general class called something like "Information organization." The problem I have with that is I think that it is very hard to learn principles without seeing practical applications of those principles. How those things have worked themselves out in the past. How solutions do or do not work. How rules, when applied, solve some problems but may create others. Unless you see the details, you cannot fully understand the principles. To me it would be like teaching chemistry without a lab, without talking about specific chemicals. If cataloging is taught in a vacuum, without reference to reality, it does not work. There is no anchor; there is no showing when things do not work and when they do. I know in the past cataloging has sometimes been very badly taught because it is a very difficult subject to teach. If a cataloging teacher just teaches a particular set of rules without any reference to principles, without trying to make the students think about when these rules do not work, that is not good either; it is the opposite of principles only. I think that you need a mix. I know cataloging is hard to teach, but that does not mean it should not be taught.

***MW: What would you like to do as your next project?***

***SSL:*** It is almost becoming too late. I finished my dissertation five years ago; and because of other commitments, I did not turn my dissertation into a published article. I think there are things in that dissertation that people would be interested in, and I would like to make it more widely accessible. And you never know what else may come up that will be interesting to work on. Almost everything about cataloging interests me.

***MW: Any last thoughts on the future of cataloging?***

*SSL:* It is really important that we do not lose sight of what we are here to do. The basics have not changed—the technology has changed, but what we are trying to do has not. There seems to me to be such a tendency to throw the baby out with the bath water, to be trite—to believe that because things are electronic, nothing that used to be taught in librarianship applies any longer. I do not find that to be true. People are still people; they still need information, and they still want to acquire knowledge. The way you deliver that to them, the technology, has changed; but the principles on how to do that have not.

*MW: Cutter's principles and Elaine Svenonius' reworking of those are still valid?*

*SSL:* Yes, just because resources are electronic does not mean that we can forget these principles.

*MW: Have you ever worked on any digital projects, besides the theoretical? Would you like to work on any digital projects in the future?*

*SSL:* I have worked on some small ones. The Index of Medieval Medical Images, which is a small project, started in the late 1980s when digitizing images was not yet practicable. We started making machine-readable records for them, anticipating that some day the technology would catch up so that the images themselves could be digitized. Some of the images have now been digitized, and we have a pilot project of about 500 images almost ready for release through UCLA. I have also consulted on a couple of other projects. Currently, I am consulting with the image cataloger at the Japanese-American National Museum; the image cataloger is cataloging the fine arts collection there. So although I am not doing the actual cataloging, I am serving as a consultant on a real project.

*MW: Do you think that the Functional Requirements for a digital object differ significantly from traditional materials?*

*SSL:* No. Why should they? There may be additional technical and administrative data that you may need. But as far as the intellectual access to a digital object, I do not see that as any different.

SARA SHATFORD LAYNE: VITA

EDUCATION

- 1997: PhD, Library and Information Science, University of California at Los Angeles. Dissertation title: *Modelling Relevance in Art History: Identifying Attributes That Determine the Relevance of Art Works, Images, and Primary Text to Art History Research.*
- 1982: MLS, Library and Information Science (Specialization: Cataloging and Reference), University of California at Los Angeles.
- 1972: MFA, Costume Design (Drama), Stanford University.
- 1968: BA, English Literature, Stanford University.

AWARDS

Librarians Association of the University of California, Los Angeles Distinguished Librarian of the Year, 1999.

TEACHING AND CONSULTING

- Cataloging Consultant, Japanese American National Museum, 2001-date.
- Introduction to Subject Access, Dept. of Library and Information Science, UCLA, Spring Quarter, 1999 (Adjunct Professor).
- Cataloging Consultant, Center for the Study of Political Graphics, 1998.
- Consultant, Getty Art History Information Program, 1993.
- Consultant, Getty Art Information Task Force, 1993.
- Cataloging Consultant, Index of Medieval Medical Images, 1988-1993.
- Designed and taught workshop on AACR2 for Rand Corporation, Sept. 1991.
- Workshop instructor for OCLC, Introduction to the Books Format, Oct. and Nov. 1989.
- Seminar instructor for AJ Seminars:  
Introduction to Basic Cataloging, Feb. 1987 and 1989.  
Advanced Descriptive Cataloging, Feb. 1988 and 1990.

## ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPATION

- American Library Association (ALA) member, 1981-date.
- Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Science & Technology Section Ad Hoc Committee on Designing A Conference Proceedings Style Sheet, member, 1984-1986.
- ACRL Science & Technology Section Task Force on Subject Access To Science Materials, chair, 1985-1987.
- ACRL Science & Technology Section Committee on Subject and Bibliographic Access To Science Materials, chair, 1987-1991.
- ACRL Rare Books & Manuscripts Section (RBMS) Standards Committee, member, 1986-1989.
- ALCTS/CCS/CC:DA-ACRL/STS Planning Committee for a Preconference on the Bibliographic Control of Conference Proceedings, held in Miami, June 1994, co-chair.
- ALCTS/CCS/CC:DA Task Force on the Cataloging of Conference Proceedings, member, 1995-1997.
- ALCTS/CCS Subject Analysis Committee, member, 1997-2001.
- ALCTS/CCS/SAC Subcommittee on Metadata and Subject Analysis, member, 1997-2001.
- ALCTS/CCS/SAC Subcommittee on Display of Subject Reference Structures, chair, 2001-date.
- California Cataloging Colloquium (invitational): Participated 1984, 1986, 1988, 1989, and 1992.
- CONSER (Cooperative Online Serials) Program.  
Task Force on Conference Publications, member, 1995-1997.  
Task Force on AACR Review, member 1995-1996; chair, 1996-2000.
- Special Libraries Association, 1985-date.  
SLA Liaison to the CIP Advisory Group, 1993-date.
- Other organization memberships: Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS) member, 1985-date; California Academic and Research Librarians Association, 1985-date; Science and Engineering Academic Librarians, 1985-date.

## PRESENTED PAPERS

- Presented paper as part of program "Options for the 80's: Computer Access to Special Collections of Children's Books," 1984 ALA Annual Conference.
- Presented "Cataloguing Medieval Images" at annual meeting of the Medieval Association of the Pacific, March 31, 1989.

- Presented papers on "MARC Format for Medieval Medical Images" and "The Index of Medieval Medical Images" at RBMS preconferences in 1990 and 1992.
- Presented paper on "Intellectual Aspects of Integrating Images into the OPAC" as part of a panel at the ASIS (American Society of Information Science) midyear meeting, May 1993.
- Presented paper as part of a panel on Cataloging Research at the Seymour Lubetzky Symposium, UCLA, April 1998.
- Presented paper on "Research Needs of Costume Designers" as part of a workshop at the ARLIS/NA annual conference, Los Angeles, California, March 2001.
- Presented paper on Seriality, American Association of Law Librarians annual conference, Minneapolis, Minnesota, July 2001.

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