

## Archival Objects in BHL - Correspondence

### Issue

As archival content such as field notes and correspondence continues to get ingested into BHL, there are no “best practices” for archival metadata within the BHL system.

### Background

A number of projects have introduced unpublished works into the BHL which sometimes do not fit into the traditional “book” or “journal/article” format. Additionally, these materials are often organized according to archival principles which can result in different hierarchical structures depending on the collection. A simple MARC record associated with a collection may fail to provide enough information for user access.

As items were ingested into BHL, field notebooks, journals and other “book-like” objects were treated as books with standard BHL metadata. However, correspondence can be much more varied. For example, an archive may have a collection from a single source (e.g.. Charles Darwin) that contains correspondence grouped into folders by person and/or year (e.g. Asa Gray, Louis Agassiz, 1897, etc.). Other folders could merely be groups of “miscellaneous” correspondence with hundreds of authors, recipients, and years, which may or may not be identified at the individual item level.. Because of the large diversity in archival arrangement and varying availability of page-level metadata, flexibility in BHL will be essential for individual library participation.

### Current Status

There have been multiple approaches to the metadata for correspondence in BHL.

1. [Engelman \(MOBOT\)](#)
  - a. Bibliographic – every letter or group of letters (author, recipient, year) has an individual bib. Titles all start with “Correspondence”.
  - b. Volumes – single volume
  - c. Pagination – date(s) included in pagination as a prefix. Transcripts also noted in pagination window.
2. [George Golding Kennedy Correspondence \(HUH\)](#)
  - a. Bibliographic – single bib record for correspondence collection. Includes names of major correspondents
  - b. Volumes – multiple alphabetically. Individual volumes can be over 200 pages long
  - c. Pagination – includes other party and date. Character limits (40) resulted in some text being included in the alpha/numeric page field. However, this interferes with harvesting of page number information.
3. [Mary Agnes Chase letters to Albert Spear Hitchcock, written in Brazil \(SI\)](#)
  - a. Bibliographic – single record for correspondence collection
  - b. Volumes – single
  - c. Pagination – page # of #. No dates

4. [Letter from George Engelmann to Frédéric Albert Weber, September 14, 1865 \(MOBOT\)](#)  
(MOBOT)
  - a. Bibliographic – done as a segment
  - b. Volume – part of a multi-volume set
  - c. Pagination – by date and page. Includes transcript

### Going Forward

NYBG has a 3 year grant to digitize and transcribe the papers of John Torrey. After reviewing their collection, NYBG will make individual bibliographic records for each of the pairs of individuals corresponding. Dates will be placed in the page number prefix field. See [“Correspondence: Wilkes and Torrey”](#) for an example.

Harvard Botany has thousands of Asa Gray correspondence digitized as part of the CLIR grant and ready to ingest via Macaw. While some materials are organized and cataloged with the name of both parties and the date, much of it is located in alphabetic files with hundreds of pages and individuals/organizations. It is not practical for each pair of correspondents to have an individual bibliographic record.

The suggested solution for these miscellaneous files is to input the folders as individual bibliographic records using the alphabetic division (e.g. [Asa Gray correspondence. Senders Be-Bo](#)). Individual letters will be identified as “letter” segments using BioStor to ingest the data. Segment titles will be constructed as “Sender to Recipient, Date”. Pagination will be via dates and page numbers in the prefix field, for example Aug. 15, 1923 [1], Aug. 15, 1923 [2]. For an example of the construction, see the first 12 letters in [Asa Gray correspondence. Senders Be-Bo](#)

### Evaluation

#### *Pros:*

- Page number field will remain intact, accepting numerical values only
- Searching for a known item will be easy
- Easy to navigate Table of Contents tab when viewing volume, or dates in the page number prefix field (40 character limit)
- Robust, meaningful citation data
- Avoids artificially assigning page numbers across the whole volume
- Can be bulk uploaded via BioStor for segments and page number spreadsheet in Macaw