

Title: Library of Congress Subject Headings Related to Indigenous Peoples: a Project Changing LCSH for use in a Canadian Archival Context.

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Abstract:

The Association for Manitoba Archives has created a database where members can deposit archival descriptions, to provide a central search for users. Library of Congress Subject Headings were also added, to provide a controlled subject vocabulary to use in the descriptions. Changes were made to LCSH to better describe material about or by Indigenous peoples, including: the word “Indian”; geographic place embedded in terms such as “Indians of North America”; changes related to Manitoba peoples specifically; and miscellaneous changes not part of a larger pattern. New terms were also added.

Keywords:

- Indigenous peoples
- Indians of North America

- Library of Congress Subject Headings
 - Archives
 - Canada
 - Manitoba
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This is a revised and expanded version of a paper presented at the IFLA Conference in 2016¹.

Project History

The Association for Manitoba Archives (AMA) was established in 1992 and was mandated with preserving “the documentary legacy of the people and institutions of the Province of Manitoba by improving the administration, effectiveness and efficiency of the Province’s archival system[s].” Among its stated goals and objectives is to “Promote a better understanding and increased public awareness among Manitobans of the role and uses of archives” and to “Enhance the quality of service provided by archives and archivists to the communities they serve in Manitoba by promoting standards, procedures and practices in the establishment and management of archives.”² To this end, the AMA implemented the Manitoba Archival Information Network (MAIN)³ – an online database of standardized descriptions detailing the documentary heritage found in archival repositories throughout Manitoba. Powered by AtoM⁴ and hosted by the software’s developer, Artefactual Systems⁵, MAIN improves the discoverability and accessibility of the province’s archival descriptions by providing centralized search and browse capability via simple keywords or through more advanced search parameters.

One access point within MAIN that was proving to be problematic for users and for MAIN’s administrators was subject headings. Scant resources prohibit the AMA from staffing a coordinator role for MAIN to ensure data is entered consistently by its thirty-seven participating repositories. Consequently, subject headings within MAIN were inconsistent in format and redundant in content, resulting in an unsatisfactory user experience when attempting to locate records of a similar subject or theme. To normalize data in the subject field, the AMA obtained grant funding to import into MAIN the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), which

are widely used in the archival community when assigning subject terms to descriptions. When the modifications to MAIN were completed in 2013, archivists inputting the data simply selected the most appropriate terms from the controlled vocabulary list when determining subject headings. Existing user-supplied subject headings in MAIN were mapped to LCSH. As a result, users could now more easily identify sets of records with related subject content within Manitoba.

The feedback the AMA received following the announcement of the completion of the project was generally favourable. However, one AMA member astutely noted the problematic history librarians and archivists in Canada have had with LCSH when attempting to describe resources created by or about Indigenous people. Librarians consulted at the University of Manitoba echoed that opinion.

As a response to this criticism, the AMA formulated a working group in late 2013 to explore this issue further within the context of MAIN. The terms of reference of the AMA MAIN-LCSH Working Group are threefold: devise and implement a strategy to replace LCSH in MAIN that are considered culturally insensitive to Manitoba's Indigenous people with terms that more accurately reflect their identity; ensure that the AMA does not perpetuate the culturally insensitive legacy of LCSH via the descriptions in MAIN; and ensure that the archival descriptions in MAIN remain highly accessible and discoverable by using standardized subject terminology.⁶ Composition of the Working Group included individuals knowledgeable about the classification of Indigenous cultural heritage as well as representation from Manitoba's First Nations and Métis communities. Current and past members of the Working Group are:

- Brett Loughheed, Chair – University Archivist/Digital Curator, University of Winnipeg Archives
- Christine Bone – Cataloguing and Metadata Librarian, University of Manitoba Libraries
- Camille Callison – Indigenous Services Librarian, University of Manitoba Libraries
- Janet La France – Généalogiste, Centre du patrimoine, Société historique de Saint-Boniface
- Randy Ranville – Former Genealogist, Métis Culture and Heritage Resource Centre
- Terry Reilly – Contract Archivist

Process

As recommended by Martin that “subject headings have to fit into a thesaurus and should be consistent with the practice used in other headings in that thesaurus”⁷, the Group decided that any changes would have to fit seamlessly back into LCSH as a whole, and that they would have to adhere to LCSH structure, including the rules of subject string construction. As MAIN does not contain references between terms, no attempt was made to change the See- and See Also-References in LCSH. Changes were made to the authorized headings only. However, all of the changes were made keeping in mind the relationships between these headings and others, as well as where the terms reside in LCSH’s hierarchical structure. Therefore, they are all internally consistent and, with some additional analysis, could be converted into a proper thesaurus, explicitly showing these relationships. The time and resources required to do so should not be underestimated, however, when working with this large a number of changes. If another organization were to take our modifications and implement them in a system which has references between terms, considerable expertise and labour would be necessary to accurately

reorganize those relationships. In future, should the MAIN database ever use software which accomodates references between terms, then another project creating a full thesaurus of our changes, with references, would need to be undertaken.

To begin the project, members of the Working Group familiarized themselves with the relevant scholarship*, along with similar Indigenous subject vocabulary projects being undertaken in Canada, primarily those of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) Resource Centre⁸ and the Xwi7xwa Library at the University of British Columbia.⁹ LCSH was also analyzed to find as many headings as possible that could be candidates for change. These were categorized into broad pattern decisions, affecting many headings, as well as a list of dozens of miscellaneous terms that would need to be addressed individually. As well as changing headings, the aim was also to add any relevant terms not extant in LCSH. Ideas for added headings came primarily from the two projects mentioned above, as well as from the Group members themselves. Over a period of two years, the Working Group discussed and debated and eventually composed a few broad recommendations that would guide the modification of the subject authority list for MAIN. However, the Working Group was cognizant of the necessity of consulting with Manitoba's Indigenous population to ensure that they were engaged in this process and that their opinions were respected and incorporated into the final recommendations of the Group. Consultation was intended to “garner views and preferences, to understand possible unintended consequences over terminology and categorization or to gather opinions on implementation.”¹⁰

* For a list of the resources reviewed, see the bibliography included in our spreadsheet of changes.¹¹

Separate consultation strategies were created for Manitoba's First Nations and Métis peoples. These strategies identified reasons for consultation; principles of consultation based on respect, inclusion, transparency, accountability, and privacy; when consultation should occur; methods of consultation; and contact information for the appropriate organizations. A survey was determined to be an appropriate method of consultation owing to its ability to reach individuals with accessibility issues and those in remote locations. The survey was intentionally brief and asked respondents to self-identify their community and language before asking for approval on patterns of terms identified by the Working Group. The survey concluded by providing an opportunity to submit freeform commentary on additional or alternative terminology that should be considered by the Group. Forty-five First Nations communities in Manitoba, as well as twenty-four First Nations and Métis organizations in the province, were contacted by email, telephone, or fax, and asked to complete the survey. Ten completed surveys were returned, giving us a response rate of 14%. Although the rate was low, the feedback received in the completed surveys was overwhelmingly positive and encouraging, and allowed the Group to feel comfortable continuing on, confident that it had support from the local Indigenous population. Further consultation occurred with Indigenous and non-Indigenous archivists and librarians at conferences[†], who again were overwhelmingly supportive of the work of the Group.

Once all the responses were received and analyzed, the Group made final decisions for implementation. A spreadsheet was then created reflecting these decisions, mapping, for every affected subject heading, what the new term would be. The final document contains 1093 changed or deleted headings and 120 new headings¹¹. It may be viewed or downloaded at

[†] Canadian Library Association (CLA) Conference, 2013; Manitoba Library Association (MLA) Conference, 2014; University of Manitoba Spring Symposium, 2015; Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) Conference, 2016; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Conference, 2016.

http://dx.doi.org/10.5203/ss_ama.main_bon.chr.2015.1. Once the spreadsheet was completed, it was made available to the AMA contributing organizations for input. As the response was very positive, no further changes were made.

Changing the word “Indian”

The first, and most sweeping, problem the Group addressed was what to do about the word “Indian.” This term is generally outdated in Canada, and, anecdotally, is the problem in LCSH most often mentioned by reference librarians and library users at the University of Manitoba; particularly Native Studies students and professors. The current LCSH structure for Indigenous peoples of Canada can be seen in Figure 1.¹²

Much of the debate, on how to reform LCSH “Indian” headings, has been focused on the terminology itself. In Canada, the term “First Nations” is a synonym of the term “Indians”, but much more current and accurate. First Nations are one of three categories of Canadian indigenous people, the other two being Inuit and Métis, and, aside from the term “Indians”, the current LCSH structure accurately reflects the relationships between these categories. Therefore, changing “Indians of North America” to “First Nations”, in our controlled subject vocabulary, would be a huge improvement and would bring our subject headings in line with more acceptable terminology. See Figure 2 for what that would look like.

However, there is also a barrier to access resulting from the three-tiered structure in the hierarchy, which cannot be resolved by merely changing the terminology. The term at the

topmost level (“Indigenous peoples”) and those that are, or could be, used at the intermediate level (“Indians of North America” or “First Nations”) are all used interchangeably by authors, information seekers, and Indigenous people themselves. While these words all have distinct definitions, the definitions are not strictly adhered to in popular language. This creates difficulties in assigning the current headings to records in a consistent way. For example, a book called “The Indigenous peoples of British Columbia” and another called “The First Nations of British Columbia” are likely about the same thing, because there are few Inuit or Métis indigenous to British Columbia. Both authors are using perfectly accurate, but different, terms. Cataloguers must choose between using the language of the author (risking different headings getting assigned to resources about the same thing); or ignoring the author’s language, examining the work to determine whether Inuit or Métis people are discussed therein, and applying the narrowest appropriate term, as directed by the LCSH rule of Specificity.¹³ In a perfect world, the second option would be applied every time. But, understandably, it is not; even by trained cataloguers. At the University of Manitoba, and perhaps elsewhere in Canada, this causes great confusion for patrons, and forces them to use multiple search terms in an unfocussed way[‡]. When a large number of contributors, with different backgrounds and training, are assigning subject headings (as is the case in MAIN), this exacerbates the problem. Thus merely changing the words, without addressing the structure, is not an adequate solution.

[‡] The Canadian Subject Headings thesaurus (CSH) (<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/csh-bin/search/1=0>) uses still different terms for these concepts, and is used by many Canadian libraries alongside LCSH, adding even more search terms and confusion for patrons. As the MAIN database does not use CSH, this paper does not address the details of its impact.

For our project, we adopted a flatter structure, which can be seen in Figure 3. There is one broad term, “Indigenous peoples,” leaving no room for cataloguers or archivists to use anything else, and leaving one broad search term for information seekers to use. The term “Indigenous peoples” was proposed because it is already in use in LCSH, and therefore fits seamlessly into the rest of the vocabulary. It is also current and widely-accepted language in Manitoba, as confirmed by our survey results. The terms for Inuit, Métis, and for the individual First Nations groups would obviously remain, but would all exist on the same level in the hierarchy, eliminating entirely the intermediate heading “Indians of North America”, and not replacing it with “First Nations” or anything else.

As mentioned earlier, the final document of changes only contains authorized headings; not the relationships between headings. Thus the adopted two-tiered structure would not be reflected there explicitly. Nonetheless, if the headings were to be changed in a consistent and meaningful way, the underlying hierarchical structure would have to be clear to us. In our final list of changes, then, all of the headings with the word “Indian(s)” would be changed to “Indigenous”, “Indigenous peoples”, etc. (“Indians” headings related to individual groups, e.g. “Cree Indians,” were not included in this pattern change, but are discussed later in the paper.) In order to maintain consistency, this pattern change would be made for all the peoples of the Americas, not just when describing people in Canada. For example:

Indian architecture → Indigenous architecture
 Indians of Mexico → Indigenous peoples—Mexico
 Federal aid to Indians → Federal aid to Indigenous peoples
 Autobiographies—Indian authors → Autobiographies—Indigenous authors

For a number of reasons, our decision to flatten the three-tiered structure into two tiers is not without potential controversy. Firstly, the Canadian government categorizes Canadian Indigenous people into a three-tiered structure as well. Aside from differences in terminology, this officially-sanctioned structure is identical to the current LCSH structure, with “Indians” or “First Nations” existing as a broad category distinct from Inuit and Métis¹⁴. Secondly, “Indian” is a legal category in Canada, with members of that group having distinct rights and responsibilities, as prescribed by the Indian Act¹⁵. Thirdly, it was acknowledged by the Group that some First Nations people themselves value this distinction, despite how the terms are used in casual conversation. So we found ourselves in a position of having to choose between official, legal, and socially and politically meaningful categories; and efficient access to resources. We chose efficient access to resources, but this decision was not made lightly, and it may not be the right decision for everyone. For example, if a collection contains predominantly legal documents, the official three-tiered structure may be more appropriate. In that case, in order to avoid the problems outlined above, responsibility for assigning subject headings would ideally be limited to well-trained staff who strictly follow local subject analysis policy and adhere to whatever definitions are assigned to each term in the structure. Ideally, their patrons would also have access to these definitions, for more precise searching. In most cases, however, especially where the headings are applied by many different people, in multiple locations, with varying levels of training, we suggest that the flattened structure would be more effective for information access. Thankfully, none of the respondents from the surveyed communities were opposed to this decision for the MAIN database.

Converting "...of North America" etc. into a Geographic Subdivision

In terms such as "Indians of North America", "Indians of South America" etc., the word "Indians" is not the only problem. When these headings were created, geographic location was embedded right into the main heading, rather than relying on geographical subdivisions to indicate location, as is normally the case in LCSH. What this has done is grouped the peoples of the Americas into categories based entirely on European-defined geographic borders. Thus these categories seem arbitrary and meaningless. For example, the peoples of southern Texas are "Indians of North America," the implication being that they have more in common with the "Indians of North America" in Manitoba than they do with their close neighbours considered "Indians of Mexico."

Initially, there was some discussion in the Group of changing "Indians of North America" etc. to "Indigenous peoples of North America" etc., for purely pragmatic reasons. But for the reasons outlined above, we quickly decided that the extra work of converting these embedded geographical categories into geographical subdivisions was worth it. It could be argued that, even in geographical subdivisions, it may not be appropriate to use LC geographic headings in an Indigenous context, because they reflect boundaries drawn by Europeans. However, because we were not creating a separate thesaurus for Indigenous materials, but were rather making changes that would have to adhere to the broader LCSH structure, addressing this issue was not possible for this project. LCSH geographical subdivisions always uses LC geographical headings. Therefore so must we, if the headings in MAIN, as a whole, were to remain consistent.

Nonetheless, we were glad to be able to eliminate the Eurocentric geographical categories describing the people themselves.

There are a couple of variables it would be helpful to consider if implementing this change on a large scale; and if it were also desirable to maintain LCSH subject string construction. For example, if one were changing the access points in a library catalogue, and were hoping to use automated processes to complete the task, one may want to keep in mind the following:

1. The change will be different depending on whether a geographical subdivision already exists in the string. E.g.

Indians of North America → Indigenous peoples—North America
 (“North America” is converted into a geographical subdivision)

Indians of North America—Manitoba → Indigenous peoples—Manitoba
 (“North America” is removed)

2. The change will be different depending on whether existing topical subdivisions can be subdivided geographically. E.g.

Indians of North America—Languages →
 Indigenous peoples—North America—Languages
 (“—Languages” cannot be subdivided geographically)

Indians of North America—Kinship →
 Indigenous peoples—Kinship—North America
 (“—Kinship” can be subdivided geographically)

Changes made for Manitoba peoples only

As well as making broad changes to terms describing peoples of the Americas as a whole, some changes were made only to terms affecting Manitoba peoples specifically. Applying these changes to all the individual peoples in the Americas, or even just to those in North America, would have been far too labour intensive. Additionally, we did not want to make changes to headings related to specific groups who we were not consulting directly. The following changes were made for Manitoba peoples only:

1. The word “Indians” was removed from the group name, e.g.:

Cree Indians → Cree
Dakota Indians → Dakota

2. Group names not extant in LCSH were added, e.g.:

Sayisi Dene
Swampy Cree

3. Group names were changed to the name used by the people in Manitoba themselves. These changes relied heavily on the survey results, and were applied to every heading containing the term, e.g.:

Athapascan Indians → Dene
Athapascan women → Dene women

4. Headings with the word “mythology,” e.g. “Cree mythology,” were deleted outright, and not replaced with anything else. With the terms “Religion” and “Folklore” being available, and with the difference between religion and myth being fuzzy at best, and Eurocentric and inaccurate at

worst, we eliminated its use for Manitoba peoples entirely. The broad term “Indian mythology” was changed to “Spirituality—Indigenous” to be used on its own, or in combination with terms for individual groups.

Miscellaneous changes, Additions, and Guidelines

As well as the pattern changes discussed so far, we made a considerable number of changes to individual headings falling into no pattern. Each of these had to be discussed individually by the Group. Some decisions were obvious and quick, while others required lengthier discussion or help from others. Usually, the change was meant to convert an LCSH term to the term most commonly used by Indigenous people in Canada generally or Manitoba specifically. A few terms affecting the people of Nunavut were also changed, as many Manitoba archives contain resources related to the North. The spreadsheet itself is obviously the best source to view an exhaustive list of these changes, but here is a sample:

Off-reservation boarding schools → Residential schools
 Eskimo dogs → Qimmiq
 Sweatbaths → Sweat lodges
 Tribal government → Band government

We not only made changes to existing LCSH headings, but also added 120 terms for concepts not reflected in LCSH at all. Many other subject-specific heading lists and thesauri were consulted. The vocabulary created by the UBCIC Resource Centre was especially helpful for us, and saved us a lot of time. Our own list of possible additions was created from these, as well as from new terms we came up with on our own. Then, for each possible candidate, LCSH was

searched to make sure some term for that concept didn't already exist. We also determined if the concept exists as part of the culture of peoples in Manitoba or Nunavut. If not, it was discarded from consideration. If we determined that a new concept should be included, then the appropriate local term for the concept was determined, and added. Some examples of added terms are:

Smudging
Métis scrip
Fishing rights
Sentencing circles
Voyageurs

“Voyageurs” is an example of a term extant as a See Reference in LCSH, in this case pointing to the term “Fur traders.” This is one of a few cases where the authorized LCSH term was not found to be problematic in itself, but where we did not believe that the two terms are actually synonyms. In this case, we considered the term “Voyageurs” to be a narrower term from “Fur traders.” So “Fur traders” was not changed, but “Voyageurs” was added.

Along with changes and additions to LCSH, we also composed a short list of guidelines to help archivists make decisions about how to use terms we thought might be confusing. For example, Métis identity is controversial in Manitoba. Some Métis leaders posit that only those belonging to the distinct Métis cultural group should be considered Métis, while others argue that anyone with both Indigenous and European ancestry should be included. Our guidelines recommend that archivists stay out of the controversy by letting the resource speak for itself. If the resource mentions Métis or Michif, then use “Métis,” otherwise use “Indigenous peoples—Mixed descent.”

Next Steps

As of Spring 2017, the AMA is preparing for the implementation of the Working Group's suggested additions/revisions to the subject headings in MAIN. The Working Group provided the AMA with two options for implementation. The first involves the AMA having developers import the revised LCSH headings into MAIN via the spreadsheet, mapping the existing headings to the revised ones, while ensuring that all existing linkages between headings and descriptions are retained, but using the revised terminology.

The second option involves replacing the LCSH data file in MAIN with a revised version of the FAST vocabulary. Following the original import of LCSH into MAIN, the system's performance slowed, owing to the considerable size of the LCSH data file. In an effort to improve the system's performance, the Working Group suggested to the AMA that it import an edited version of the FAST (Faceted Application of Subject Terminology) derivation of LCSH into MAIN, rather than edit the LCSH data file currently used by MAIN. The stated benefits of FAST are that it is "simple to learn and apply, faceted-navigation-friendly, and modern in its design."¹⁶ FAST retains "the very rich vocabulary of LCSH while making the schema easier to understand, control, apply, and use."¹⁷ Implementing FAST could increase system efficiency within a framework that still retains the familiar terminology of LCSH. This, in turn, could encourage archivists to increasingly use subject headings in the creation of their descriptions, and improve the discoverability of those descriptions by users.

The AMA accepted the proposal to use FAST headings in MAIN, and a revised version of the spreadsheet will be created, to include the equivalent changes to FAST as were mapped for LCSH. It will also include some small changes suggested by MAIN contributors since the first draft was completed. LCSH currently used in MAIN descriptions will be mapped to the equivalent FAST headings. The conceptual work done by the Working Group will not require revisiting, as FAST and LCSH use the same terminology. The only modification that will be significantly different in FAST, is converting “of North America”, etc. into geographical subdivisions. The subject string construction problems outlined above will be significantly reduced in FAST, because it uses far fewer and far shorter strings. The revised subject headings should become available for archivists and users by 2018.

Considerations for Cooperative Environments

The AMA and the AMA-MAIN Working Group encourage anyone to use the list of changes in any way they see fit, and to modify it for their own purposes. There are a number of things to consider, however, if changes like this are to be implemented in an environment where records are shared between organizations, such as in a large library system.

Because archives all have unique collections, they also all have unique descriptions of their collections, which cannot be used by other archives in the composition of their own descriptions. This makes MAIN an ideal environment for testing changes of this magnitude, and deviating from the standard to this large a degree. However, if the subject headings in MAIN were to be contributed to an even larger consortial archival database, or otherwise integrated with any other

information system, it could be argued that this large a departure from the standard could have some effect on access. We believe, however, that for archives, the rewards of making these changes far outweigh the risks. Until recently, owing to the hierarchical structure of archival description and the diverse inter-disciplinarity of their content, archives have not had a history of facilitating subject access to records, let alone strictly using controlled subject vocabulary standards. The terms they use have sometimes been internally consistent, but they have not generally worried about subject term consistency with other archives. The reasons for this are obvious: all of their descriptions are unique, and are not used by others in the composition of descriptions. Since the advent of searchable metadata online and the resultant change in user behaviours, archives have realized the potential of subject-based access to records and have necessarily become more interested in controlled vocabularies, as evidenced by the MAIN database itself. Nonetheless any consortial database that MAIN may contribute to is not likely to be at all consistent, with respect to the subject terms used in the myriad descriptions contributed. These archival descriptions are more likely to reflect the legacy of the insular systems from which they came. If a system such as LCSH is already not consistently used in a given environment, then the concerns of deviating from that system should not outweigh the great benefits we believe come with the changes we have made.

Libraries, on the other hand, have a long history of using controlled subject vocabularies, and of sharing records between institutions. Therefore, in libraries, deviations from the standard must be made much more cautiously. One factor to consider is how to maintain the local changes in incoming shared metadata. A large library system, for example, may batch load hundreds or

thousands of catalogue records at a time. If that library has elected to change thousands of headings for local use, the manpower and/or technology needed to regularly seek out the affected headings, and to make all of those changes in an efficient manner, would be significant. Even if an organization currently does have the required resources to find and change all relevant incoming metadata, serious thought would also have to be given to the future. For the sake of consistency over time, one would not only be committing one's current resources to this maintenance, but would also be committing future resources, as well. Sophisticated library system software could conceivably help to catch affected headings and make some of the changes automatically. For less complex changes, this is possible now in some systems. However, more complex changes would still need to be recognized by the system and reviewed by human eyes. For example, the idiosyncratic nature of LCSH subject string order provides complexity not easily managed by a machine. This is illustrated in the section above about changing "of North America" into a geographical subdivision.

As well as managing the metadata coming in, a library would also need to consider the metadata going out. If library records are being contributed to an external database such as Worldcat, then any local subject headings need to be clearly indicated. A library would have to decide whether to retain the original LCSH alongside the local equivalents; or whether to replace the original LCSH outright. Including both the original LCSH and the local terms in the same catalogue would undoubtedly increase confusion among one's own users, as it introduces the very synonymy that controlled subject vocabularies are meant to avoid. However, replacing the standard outright, with the local heading, makes the record less valuable to a cooperative such as OCLC and to other institutions who may import it from Worldcat or elsewhere. Some sort of

workflow could be designed where the LCSH heading is included in the contributed record, but then replaced with the local heading later on. The efficiency of such a workflow would need to be considered.

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