

Describing Games for Special Collections Libraries

Special collections libraries sometimes include games among their collections. However, games pose a challenge to catalogers, who are typically trained in printed formats. There is no single standard for cataloging games for special collections libraries. “Best Practices for Cataloging Objects Using RDA and MARC 21,” published by Online Audiovisual Catalogers, focuses on circulating collections. The Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials manuals provide guidance on describing resources as artifacts but do not provide instructions for cataloging three-dimensional objects. As a result, special collections catalogers describing games at the item level draw instructions from multiple standards. This article describes the process of cataloging a game collection. Using two items from the collection as illustrative examples, the article shows how instructions from RDA, the OLAC Best Practices, and the DCRM manuals were used together to provide users with information to identify resources and to improve discovery of games in the library’s catalog.

Special collections libraries sometimes include games among their collections. However, games pose a challenge to catalogers, who are typically trained in printed formats, leading catalogers to sometimes view games as “overly complex” bibliographic entities.¹ Further, there is no single standard for cataloging games for special collections libraries. *Resource Description and Access* (RDA) provides general guidance on cataloging library materials in all formats. For cataloging three-dimensional objects, the “Best Practices for Cataloging Objects Using RDA and MARC 21,” published by Online Audiovisual Catalogers, Inc. (OLAC) in 2020, is an excellent starting point but focuses on circulating collections.² Special collections libraries have different descriptive needs, summarized by the *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials* (DCRM) manuals as the “ready identification of copies of a resource,” and, “a

1. Diane Robson, Catherine Sassen, Jason Thomale, and Kevin Yanowski, “Enhancing the Discovery of Tabletop Games,” *Library Resources & Technical Services* 63.3 (July 2019): 199.

2. Objects Best Practices Task Force, Cataloging Policy Committee, “Best Practices for Cataloging Objects Using RDA and MARC 21,” Online Audiovisual Catalogers, Inc. (2020), available online at https://www.olacinc.org/sites/default/files/OLAC_Objects_BestPractices_22Jan2020.pdf [accessed October 25, 2021].

more exact description of the resource as an artifact.”³ However, while the DCRM manuals provide guidance on describing resources as artifacts, they do not provide instructions for cataloging three-dimensional objects. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (RDA Edition)* (DCRMR) currently contains instructions for books only. Of the six earlier, format-specific DCRM manuals (books, serials, graphics, cartographic, music, and manuscripts), *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)* (DCRM(G)) is the closest, but still only defines “graphic material” as, “generally, a two-dimensional pictorial representation.”⁴ As a result, special collections catalogers describing games at the item level often draw instructions from multiple standards.

This article describes the process of cataloging a game collection at Pennsylvania State University (Penn State). It highlights decisions made, including selecting standards and information included in the catalog records. Using two items from the Eberly Family Special Collections Library—a paper toy and a deck of cards—as illustrative examples, the article shows how instructions from RDA, the OLAC Best Practices, and the DCRM manuals were used together to provide users with information to identify resources in the collection and to improve discovery of games in the library’s catalog.

Toys and Games in Eberly Family Special Collections Library

The collection of toys and games in the Eberly Family Special Collections Library (the “game collection”) at Penn State consists of sixty-four cataloged items, chiefly from the nineteenth century, with a few from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The first games entered the library’s collections in the 1970s as part of a collection of German materials donated by Philip Allison Shelley, a professor of German and comparative literature. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the library expanded this collection with the purchase of additional German games. In the 2010s, due to curatorial interest in games, more were acquired, albeit with a broader collecting scope. The collection expanded to include dance history, education, women’s studies, and Pennsylvania Amish. The most common formats in the collection are toys (twenty items), card games (fourteen items), board games (twelve items), and puzzles (eight items). Additional formats include blocks, toy books, and construction games.

Choice of Descriptive Standards

First, a decision needed to be made as to whether to catalog the games at the item level, or to describe them archivally at the collection level. Margaret Nichols compared archival description and bibliographic cataloging as the difference between summariz-

3. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Books)* (Washington, D.C.: Cataloging Distribution Service, Library of Congress, 2007), 12.

4. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)* (Chicago: Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries, 2013), 8, 217.

ing and differentiating.⁵ Archival collections are described at the collection level and include information on context, custodial history, and structure of the collection—in other words, “hit[ting] the highlights,” without, “minute detail or with extensive transcription.” On the other hand, catalogers, “precisely identify a manifestation and *distinguish* it from other manifestations of the same work.”⁶ Some major game collections use archival description, including the game collection in the Browne Popular Culture Library at Bowling Green State University, and the Edwin and Terry Murray Collection of Role-Playing Games at Duke University.⁷ The finding aids begin with collection-level information, including scope and content, biographical and historical information, arrangement, and restrictions. From there, they narrow to series (such as card games or board games) and then to items, giving researchers a high-level overview and facilitating browsing. However, details are harder to capture. For example, Bowling Green’s scope and contents note states that some of the games are in their original packaging, while others are “incomplete and worn down,” but it is difficult to determine which games are in which condition.

Cataloging games at the item level provides greater detail. As an example of item level cataloging, Duke University’s Rubenstein Library catalogs games outside of the Murray Role-Playing Game collection. These records include transcription of title and publication information, descriptions of boxes and the game boards, detailed physical descriptions enumerating the games’ contents, and item-level notes to describe the games’ custodial history and provenance. By cataloging at the item level, the context of each game within the larger collection is less clear than it is for the Murray Role-Playing Games, but other aspects are described in much more detail. Item-level cataloging requires significant time, however. Copy cataloging (i.e., editing and reusing an existing catalog record, usually from a shared bibliographic database such as OCLC WorldCat) can save time, if records are available, but there is no guarantee there will be such records—especially for a highly specialized collection. Of the sixty-four games in Eberly Family Special Collections Library, only three had cataloging available. The remaining games all needed original records.

Additionally, appendix B of DCRM(G) provides instructions for creating group-level records, which allows catalogers to create, “collective bibliographic descriptions for groups of graphic materials that were not originally conceived of or published as a finite set,” including both previously-assembled collections, and those

5. Margaret F. Nichols, “The Cataloger and the Archivist Should Be Friends: Or, Herding vs. Milking Special Collections,” *RBM* 12.1 (Spring 2011): 27.

6. Nichols, “The Cataloger,” 26 (emphasis in original).

7. “SpColl 8: Games Collection,” Browne Popular Culture Library, Bowling Green State University, available online at (<https://www.bgsu.edu/library/pcl/Collections/games.html>) [accessed October 25, 2021]; “Edwin and Terry Murray Collection of Role-Playing Games, 1972–2017,” Duke University Library, available online at (<https://archives.lib.duke.edu/catalog/murrayrpg>) [accessed October 25, 2021].

assembled by the library.⁸ DCRM(G) suggests group-level records are appropriate for materials that can be “understood collectively,” such as items that share provenance or format, materials that share a collective set of access points, or materials that “are judged not to merit item-level cataloging.”⁹ In addition, collection-level description (either archival description or group-level cataloging) can be used in conjunction with item-level cataloging, with the collection record linking to the individual records.

In the case of the historic game collection in Eberly Family Special Collections Library, a decision was made to catalog at the item level using the MARC 21 format. Summation provided by archival description—or a high-level overview provided by group-level cataloging—would not benefit this collection, as the games have little in common: they do not have a shared provenance (like the Murray Role-Playing Games do), they cover a wide range of subjects, they were published in different countries at different times, and they represent a variety of genres. As a result, they do not fit the suggested criteria in DCRM(G): they are not understood collectively and do not share collective access points. Since the games in the collection showcase a variety of printers, techniques, materials, and formats, the greater detail provided by item-level cataloging was deemed to be essential, even though a single collection-level record would require less labor. In addition, contributing the original records to OCLC permits other libraries to use the records for copy cataloging.

Full-Record Examples

Bal d'enfants: travesti

Bal d'enfants: travesti (*Bal d'enfants*) is a paper toy of the mid-nineteenth century, published by the French firm of *Marchands de nouveautés*. The toy, housed in an octagonal box, includes a floor and a backdrop depicting a ballroom (figure 1). The toy includes free-standing pieces backed with wooden supports depicting furniture and dancers (figure 2). Also included are dancers with hinged limbs, which may be suspended from strings threaded through the backdrop (figure 3). Players arrange the furniture and dancers as they please, creating a ballroom scene.



Figure 1. Box for *Bal d'enfants*. (Source: Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.)

8. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)*, 145.

9. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)*, 147–148.



Figure 2. *Bal d'enfants* decorated with furniture and dancers. (Source: Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.)



Figure 3. Detail of *Bal d'enfants* with dancers suspended from string. (Source: Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.)

Below is the content of the catalog record for *Bal d'enfants*.

Title	Bal d'enfants : travesti.
Publication information	À Paris : Chez les Marchands de Nouveautés, [between 1860 and 1869?]
Manufacture information	[Paris] : Lemercier, Benard et Cie
Physical description	1 toy (1 floor, 1 backdrop, 18 pieces) : paper, wood, color ; in box 28 x 19 x 4 cm
Content type	three-dimensional form
Media type	unmediated
Carrier type	object
Material	paper wood
Color content	color
Form of work	Toys (recreational artifacts)
Source of title	Title from container.
Note	Lithographed by Lemercier, Benard et Cie.
Note	Date of publication from Whitton, cited below.
Citation	Whitton, B. Paper toys of the world, page 31
Summary	Housed in an octagonal box with label mounted to cover. Label includes a hand-colored lithograph illustration of a ballroom. Contents includes a floor, backed with wood, and paper backdrop painted in color. Backdrop is strung with a pair of strings attached to a weight behind the backdrop. Includes 4 hinged paper figures of dancers, which may be balanced on the string. When the weight is moved, the figures appear to dance. Also includes various paper pieces with wood backing to decorate the scene, including six decorative chairs, a sofa with a sleeping child, a trio of musicians, and a waiter serving drinks to children.
Local note	Rare Books copy: From the collection of Blair Whitton.
Subject	Paper toys -- Specimens.
Subject	Balls (Parties) -- France -- 19th century.
Genre	Paper toys.
Added entry	Whitton, Blair, former owner.
Added entry	Marchands de nouveautés, publisher.
Added entry	Lemercier, Benard et cie, printer.
Place name added entry	France -- Paris.

Musikalische Zauber-Karten

Musikalische Zauber-Karten is a set of playing cards printed and distributed in Germany during the mid-nineteenth century. Each card is printed with four bars of music: two from a gallop and two from a polka (figure 4). Players arrange eight cards by number to create unique musical compositions (figure 5).



Figure 4. Container for *Musikalische Zauber-Karten*. (Source: Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.)



Figure 5. Sample playing card for *Musikalische Zauber-Karten*. (Source: Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.)

Below is the content of the catalog record for *Musikalische Zauber-Karten*.

Title	Musikalische Zauber-Karten, oder, die Kunst, ohne alle musikalische Vorkenntnisse die verschiedensten Tänze, Galopp, Polka : zu componiren von einem Wohlbekannten.
Variant title	At head of title: 1001 Tanz
Variant title	Kunst, ohne alle musikalische Vorkenntnisse die verschiedensten Tänze, Galopp, Polka
Variant title	Musikalische Zauberkarten
Edition	Zweite Auflage.
Publication information	Berlin : Hasselberg'sche Verlagshandlung, [1856]
Manufacture information	[Berlin] : Lith. u. Druck v. C. Ullrich
Physical description	1 game (33 cards) : color, music ; box 8 x 11 x 2 cm
Content type	notated music
Content type	still image
Media type	unmediated
Carrier type	card
Form of work	Card games.
Source of title	Title from container.
Note	"Einzig rechtmässige Ausgabe"--Container.
Note	Date of publication from vendor's description.
Language	Instructions in German and French.
Summary	Cards to teach children music and dance. Each card contains four measures of music for piano: two bars of a galop at the top of the card, and two of a polka at the bottom. Players arrange cards according to rank to create a galop and a polka. Cards may be arranged in thousands of patterns to create unique compositions. Includes 32 playing cards and one instructional card. Playing cards are stenciled and colored. Instruction card is letterpress.
Subject	Galops.
Subject	Polkas.
Subject	Piano music -- Instruction and study.
Genre	Puzzles and games.
Genre	Card games.
Added entry	Ullrich, C. (Carl Wilhelm), 1815-1875, lithographer, printer.
Added entry	Hasselberg'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, printer.
Place name added entry	Germany -- Berlin.

Details in the Catalog Record

In accordance with recommendations from the OLAC Best Practices, all games were cataloged using the visual materials workform in OCLC. The MARC leader/006 (Type of record) was set to “r” for “three-dimensional artifact or naturally occurring object,” and the MARC field 008/33 (type of visual material) was coded as either “g” for “game” or “w” for “toy,” as appropriate.¹⁰ These codes were applied to all games in the collection, including card games. Since cards themselves are two-dimensional, institutions sometimes catalog these materials using MARC leader/006 (Type of record) “k” for “two-dimensional nonprojectable graphic.”¹¹ Guidance here was again drawn from the Best Practices, which treats card games as objects rather than as two-dimensional images. This consistent coding enables faceting of search results. In 2019, with the implementation of a Blacklight discovery layer, facets were added to the catalog to limit search results to library and format. A facet for “Games/Toys” was added to collocate all records with the type of visual material coded “g” (game) or “w” (toy). Examining catalogs for twenty-eight other libraries with games holdings revealed a wide variety of terms, including “three-dimensional object,” “image,” “two-dimensional object,” “other,” “realia,” and “unknown,” with “game” used by only four libraries¹² (table 1). At Penn State, the clearer terminology, “Games/Toys,” was employed to better convey meaning to users, improving discovery for this collection.

In accordance with Penn State’s policy, catalog records were created in the MARC 21 format using RDA as the

TABLE 1
Format for Games in Public Catalogs

Category	Number of libraries
3D object	11
Image/2D graphic	8
Other	5
Game/Board game	4
Kit	4
Realia	3
Visual material	3
Object	2
Manuscript/Archive	1
Non-print	1
Unknown	1

10. “Leader,” MARC 21 Format for Bibliographic Data, Library of Congress Network Development and MARC Standards Office, available online at (<https://www.loc.gov/marc/bibliographic/bdleader.html>) [accessed February 13, 2024]; “008 – Visual Materials,” MARC 21 Format for Bibliographic Data, Library of Congress Network Development and MARC Standards Office, available online at (<https://www.loc.gov/marc/bibliographic/bd008v.html>) [accessed February 13, 2024].

11. “Leader,” MARC 21 Format for Bibliographic Data.

12. Catalogs examined include: The Bodleian Library, Brown University, Bryn Mawr, Brigham Young University, Case Western Reserve University, Cornell University, DePaul University, Duke University, University of Kansas, Kent State, the Library of Congress, University of Liverpool, Louisiana State University, Miami University, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Oberlin College, Oregon State University, Princeton University, San Diego State University, Stanford University, University of Connecticut, UCLA, University of Miami, University of North Texas, University of Southern Mississippi, Vanderbilt University, and Wayne State University.

descriptive standard. RDA provides general cataloging instructions, “covering all types of content and media.”¹³ Its predecessor, *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (Second Edition)* (AACR2), provided general rules in an introductory chapter with format-specific chapters following, whereas RDA provides a single set of instructions for all formats, with format-specific guidance added only when needed. As a result of RDA’s new approach, instructions pertaining to cataloging three-dimensional objects are integrated throughout the text.¹⁴ Although RDA is intended to be used with all formats, the editors of the OLAC Best Practices found that the instructions in RDA were, “mainly intended for textual materials,” and note that cataloging of three-dimensional objects is, “not particularly well represented in RDA.”¹⁵ The Best Practices are intended to, “work in tandem with RDA to provide best practices in cataloging objects.”¹⁶ Additionally, instructions from the DCRM manuals, particularly DCRM(G), were used for capturing copy-specific information. While the DCRM manuals were consulted, these records are not full DCRM cataloging. Instead, they represent “special collections cataloging,” defined by *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Books)* (DCRM(B)) as “follow[ing] the spirit” of DCRM, including added notes and details, without meeting the full requirements.¹⁷ As a result, the records are coded as RDA, but not as DCRM.

As a first step, catalogers select the source of information for transcribed information, including title, edition, and publication. RDA 2.2.2.4.1 provides several possible sources in order of preference, including, “a container or accompanying material issued with the manifestation.”¹⁸ The OLAC Best Practices instruct catalogers to, “choose a source of information that identifies the resource as a whole.”¹⁹ Both *Bal d’enfants* and *Musikalische Zauber-Karten* include a title on the label affixed to the container, which was selected as the preferred source of information. *Musikalische*

13. “About RDA,” *RDA Toolkit*, available online at <https://original.rdatoolkit.org> [accessed October 11, 2021].

14. A new version of the RDA Toolkit was released subsequent to the cataloging project described in this article. As of this writing, this new version, referred to as the official RDA Toolkit, has not been adopted by the Library of Congress of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC). PCC will implement the official RDA Toolkit on a rolling basis, beginning in May 2024. (see “Update on the PCC’s implementation of the Official RDA Toolkit,” *Program for Cooperative Cataloging*, available online <https://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/rda/update-on-PCC-implementation-of-Official-RDA.pdf> [accessed February 13, 2024]). In addition, the OLAC Best Practices are aligned with the original Toolkit. As a result, the original Toolkit will be referenced throughout. Likewise, references to the *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials* manuals will be to the original format-specific DCRM suite rather than DCRM, which is aligned to the official RDA Toolkit.

15. Objects Best Practices Task Force, “Best Practices for Cataloging Objects Using RDA and MARC 21,” 10, 12.

16. Objects Best Practices Task Force, 12.

17. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Books)*, 152.

18. “Identifying Manifestations and Items,” *RDA Toolkit*, available online at <https://original.rdatoolkit.org> [accessed October 11, 2021].

19. Objects Best Practices Task Force, “Best Practices for Cataloging Objects Using RDA and MARC 21,” 29.

Zauber-Karten requires catalogers to decide whether “1001 Tanz” at the head of the label is part of the title. When multiple forms of the title appear in the same language, RDA 2.3.2.5 and the Best Practices instruct catalogers to select the title based on sequence, layout, or typography.²⁰ Because *Musikalische Zauber-Karten* is typographically larger and more prominent, this was selected as the title proper, with “1001 Tanz” added as a variant title. In addition, transcription guidelines in DCRM(G) instruct catalogers to convert early forms of symbols to the modern form, in this case, changing the symbol following “Zauber” to a hyphen.²¹

The labels also contain both publication and manufacture information. However, for both games, key pieces of information were missing, including place of manufacture and date of publication. Supplying place of manufacture was straightforward, as the location for both printers was easily ascertainable in reference sources. Supplying the date of publication was trickier but necessary, as the OLAC Best Practices instructed catalogers to supply a date of either publication, distribution, or manufacture, when a date is not present on the resource. For *Bal d'enfants*, Blair Whitton's *Paper Toys of the World* states that the publication “possibly dates in the 1860s.”²² No other sources supplied a more precise date, so date of publication was recorded as “between 1860 and 1869?” No reference sources were identified for *Musikalische Zauber-Karten*, so date of publication was supplied from the dealer's description. Place of manufacture and date of publication were both enclosed in square brackets to show that the information came from an external source.

Since these games were cataloged for special collections, the records contain a full inventory of the games' contents, including an enumeration of all playing pieces. RDA 3.4.6, “Extent of Three-Dimensional Form,” instructs catalogers to record extent for objects using the number and types of units, taking a term for type of unit from a list of carrier types, which included “game,” “jigsaw puzzle,” “flash card,” and “toy.”²³ RDA and the Best Practices further instructed catalogers to record number of subunits, such as game pieces, in parentheses “when appropriate.”²⁴ A decision was made to record all subunits, as a full record of the game's contents serves as an inventory, in case of loss. Unlike type of unit, however, RDA does not provide a list of terms to be used for subunits, allowing catalogers to apply more descriptive terminology as appropriate. For example, the subunit for *Musikalische Zauber-Karten* is “cards.” For *Bal d'enfants*, subunits include the floor, backdrop, and a count of the other pieces.

20. “Title,” *RDA Toolkit*, available online at <https://original.rdatoolkit.org> [accessed October 11, 2021]; Objects Best Practices Task Force, “Best Practices for Cataloging Objects Using RDA and MARC 21,” 32.

21. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)*, 191–192.

22. Blair Whitton, *Paper Toys of the World* (Cumberland, MD: Hobby House Press, 1986), 31.

23. “RDA Carrier Extent Unit,” *RDA Registry*, available online at <http://www.rdaregistry.info/termList/RDACarrierEU/> [accessed October 25, 2021].

24. Objects Best Practices Task Force, 58.

For a board game, subunits might include “game board,” “pieces,” “dice,” or other components.

Content type, media type, and carrier type were then recorded, using terminology drawn from the RDA value vocabularies.²⁵ The OLAC Best Practices noted that content type is “usually three-dimensional form,” for objects, but this can vary.²⁶ Since *Musikalische Zauber-Karten* consists of cards—and therefore is not three-dimensional—other appropriate content terminology (“still image” and “notated music”) were supplied, instead. “Media type” refers to “a categorization that reflects the general type of intermediation device required.”²⁷ For realia, media type will almost always be “unmediated.” More specific details, such as information on printing techniques, may be recorded as notes. For three-dimensional objects such as games, carrier type will most often be “object.” Cards games are again an exception, using carrier type “cards” instead.

The records were then enhanced with notes. Both the Best Practices and DCRM(G) emphasize the importance of notes as, “an important way of conveying to the user information that would otherwise be difficult to distill into discrete RDA elements.”²⁸ Summary notes were especially useful for adding details not apparent from the rest of the description. Neither the Best Practices nor DCRM(G) require summaries, but DCRM(G) does instruct catalogers to include a summary of the content, “if not apparent from the body of the description,” and to include notes on the, “nature, scope, or artistic form when useful to amplify or explain,” information recorded in the title.²⁹ For *Bal d’enfants*, a summary was added to provide additional details about materials, printing technique, and how players might engage with the toy. The summary for *Musikalische Zauber-Karten* describes the physical layout of the cards, printing techniques, and summarizes gameplay.

In addition, bibliographic citations were added when applicable. The Best Practices include citations as an option, but do not address them deeply, directing catalogers only to format references as instructed in *Standard Citation Forms for Rare Materials Cataloging*. By contrast, all of the DCRM manuals recommend including citations. DCRM(G) requires citations any time information is supplied from an outside source and gives an option to include additional citations when considered impor-

25. “RDA Value Vocabularies,” *RDA Registry*, available online at <https://www.rdaregistry.info/termList/> [accessed April 27, 2022].

26. Objects Best Practices Task Force, 64.

27. “RDA Media Type,” *RDA Registry*, available online at <https://www.rdaregistry.info/termList/RDAMediaType/> [accessed April 27, 2022].

28. Objects Best Practices Task Force, 65.

29. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)*, 126.

tant.³⁰ Adding citations amplifies the information in the catalog record and directs library patrons to additional resources. For *Bal d'enfants*, since the date of publication was supplied from a reference source, a citation was added to the record.

Special collections cataloging relies on local notes to provide copy-specific information, such as imperfections, provenance, custodial history, and other distinctive details.³¹ Local notes allow catalogers to differentiate the copy in hand from other existing copies. The OLAC Best Practices do not give guidance on local notes, and DCRM(G) includes instructions only for provenance, source of acquisition, and exhibition history. DCRM(B) provides more complete instructions for creation of local notes, although DCRM(B) states that the instructions are not prescriptive, giving leeway to catalogers to decide which details are most important.³² At Penn State, imperfections—such as missing pieces or damage—were always noted. When known, provenance details were also added. For instance, a local note was added to the record for *Bal d'enfants* to indicate that it was from the collection of the author of *Paper Toys of the World*.

Next, subject and genre terms were added. DCRM(G) encourages a “full complement” of subject headings and use of genre/form headings for full-level records.³³ The OLAC Best Practices provided some guidance on subject access but noted that they keep their advice “on a very practical level.”³⁴ They recommended using the subdivision “Specimens” to indicate that the object described *was* a game or toy rather than being *about* games or toys. For *Bal d'enfants*, the subject heading “Paper toys—Specimens” was added, as well as the Library of Congress Subject Heading “Balls (parties),” since the work was about balls. For *Musikalische Zauber-Karten*, since the game contained both galops and polkas, headings were added for both. In addition, since the object of the game was to teach piano music, a heading was added for “Piano music—Instruction and study.”

The Best Practices note that the Library of Congress Genre/Form Thesaurus (LC-GFT) is of “limited use” for objects, although it listed a few specific terms that may be used, including “Board games,” and “Puzzles and games.”³⁵ It recommended several other possible sources of genre terms, including the *Art and Architecture Thesaurus* (AAT) from the Getty Research Institute, *Genre Terms for Tabletop Games*, and *Thesaurus for Graphic Materials* (TGM) from the Library of Congress. Some additional guidance is given in DCRM(G), appendix B, which provided instructions on

30. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)*, 136.

31. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Books)*, 145.

32. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Books)*, 145.

33. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)*, 20.

34. Objects Best Practices Task Force, 13.

35. Objects Best Practices Task Force, 162.

creating group-level records, encouraging catalogers to prefer terminology in TGM, and noting that other controlled vocabularies—such as AAT or the RBMS controlled vocabularies—may also be used.³⁶ Locally, terminology from LCGFT was preferred, when available, but was also enhanced with terms from other vocabularies as needed. The record for *Musikalische Zauber-Karten* includes the broad genre term, “Puzzles and games,” and the narrower, “Card games,” from LCGFT. TGM provides more specific terminology for toys than LCGFT, so, for *Bal d’enfants*, the genre term, “Paper toys” was selected from TGM.

Finally, records were enhanced with access points for publisher or printer using authorized name forms from the Library of Congress Name Authority File, when available. Supplying names from the Name Authority File ensured that name forms were consistent across records, which assisted collocation. Although these access points are optional, DCRM(G) stated that full-level records, “may contain headings for printers, publishers, former owners, etc.,” in addition to headings included in catalog records for circulating items.³⁷ Since special collections researchers will sometimes search for items from a particular publisher or printer, adding these details potentially benefits patrons without significantly increasing catalogers’ work. In addition, for *Bal d’enfants*, an added entry was made for Blair Whitton—using the RDA relationship designator “former owner”—to denote their relationship to the item.

Conclusion

As of February 2024, sixty-four games were cataloged for the Eberly Family Special Collections Library, and the collection continues to grow. Establishing descriptive practices, pulling instructions from RDA, the OLAC Best Practices, and the DCRM manuals as appropriate, ensured that the records captured detailed information about both the publication as a whole, and copy-specific details. Information important to special collections researchers—including printing techniques, names of publishers, and item-level information—all appeared in the records, when known and available. However, this project also highlights the need for “out-of-the-box” solutions for non-print formats, especially for special collections libraries. While RDA provides instructions for cataloging three-dimensional objects and realia, the instructions are dispersed throughout the text. The OLAC Best Practices conveniently pull these instructions together in a clear, workflow-based manual, but special collections catalogers still need further guidance from the DCRM manuals. In addition, discovery of these resources—many unique to Penn State—required local changes to the library’s discovery layer.

An additional challenge was frequent lack of bibliographic information relating to games. All library cataloging is based on the item, in hand, and examination of a

36. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)*, 164.

37. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)*, 20.

single item cannot capture the full bibliographic history of the manifestation. When describing rare books, catalogers consult descriptive bibliographies or other reference sources to learn about the printing history. However, it is unusual to find this sort of detailed reference source for games. Furthermore, bibliographic description of books has a long history, with important works by authors, such as G. Thomas Tanselle and Fredson Bowers. Similar works for bibliographic description of games do not yet exist. Cataloging is a necessary step to making games available to future researchers. When based on a single specimen with no additional information, cataloging will necessarily flatten and simplify the description of the resource. Catalogers can describe the items in their collections in detail to try to capture any potential variants, but, with only one specimen in hand, details will inevitably be missed.

The research conducted by Robson, et al., suggests that games are frequently under-cataloged, noting that, “simply getting items into the catalog is a great place to start,” and that enhancing the records, “further increases the likelihood that users will find those items.”³⁸ Those enhancements, however, require understanding which information will be useful to users. Penn State’s approach—combining general cataloging guidelines with rare materials guidelines—ensures that games are discoverable, with the added description and access points necessary for special collections. While other libraries will need to adapt these approaches to their local context, the practices employed at Penn State may help others develop their own local policies and guidelines for cataloging these materials.

38. Robson et al., “Enhancing the Discovery of Tabletop Games,” 211–212.