**RDA phase 3: Handling of the authority 678 field**

Gary L. Strawn

September 1, 2014

**Background**

The preliminary edition of the MARC authorities format[[1]](#footnote-1) gives this definition for the 678 field:

678 Note – Epitome or Biographical Summary (Names)

This field is used to record biographical, historical, or other information about a name or uniform title heading. Such data could also appear as part of other fields, such as the note field for source data (tag 670). The Library of Congress does not expect to provide this field at the present time. The following subfield codes are used:

$w Control subfield[[2]](#footnote-2)

$a Epitome note

The indicators in this field are blank.

By the time of the publication of the first edition of the format,[[3]](#footnote-3) the definition had changed somewhat:

678 Epitome

This field is used to record biographical, historical, or other information about the heading. Such data could also appear as part of other fields, e.g., source data found (tag 670).

The indicators in this field are blank.

The following subfield code is used:

$a Epitome note

The field is not repeatable; subfield $a is repeatable.

EXAMPLE:

[100] 10$aKorman, Gerd

[678] ## $ab. 1928;$aPhD

Library of Congress practice: LC has used this field only for machine-readable authority records converted retrospectively from existing manual authority records. "Source data found" information in the manual records is summarized in field 678. Any new "source data found" information is recorded in field 670.

Early uses of the 678 field by LC appear to have been limited in the manner suggested by the LC practice note in the 1981 edition of the format: the 678 field contained bits of information picked off a manual authority card during the conversion of the authority card to machine-readable form. Here are examples of 678 fields that appear to be the result of this practice:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **LCCN** | **678 field** |
| n 79148147 | $a Est. 1946 |
| n 50059481 | $a B.A. |
| n 82010695 | $a 1927-1960 |
| n 50082265 | $a Dr. |
| n 50067927 | $a First, 1966 |

None of the three editions of the *NACO participants' manual* appears to mention the 678 field at all. This is hardly surprising if one assumes that the field was being viewed simply as a repository for information plucked from an authority card during retrospective conversion, and not as a field to be used as part of wholly new work.

The definition of the 678 field has shifted slightly over the years. The current definition[[4]](#footnote-4) of the field (contained in an appendix to this document), adds first indicator values and a few more subfields; the current definition also provides many examples. Perhaps the most important change in the definition of the field is reflected in the statement that the field is intended for *public display*.

Here are examples of recently-constructed 678 fields, which appear to be intended for public display:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **LCCN** | **Ind 1** | **678 field** |
| no2012161600 | 0 | $a aWende Wagner (1941-1997) was an American actress and stuntwoman |
| no2012160347 | 1 | $a aSaint Paul Island Tribal Government, organized as the existing corporation operating since 1959 |
| n 2014182110 |  | $a The Anatomical and Surgical Society was organized in Mar. 1878 as the Brooklyn Anatomical and Surgical Club, and incorporated in Sept. 1879 as the Brooklyn Anatomical and Surgical Society, but was known as Anatomical and Surgical Society, Brooklyn. |
| no2014022552 |  | $a aElizabeth Rice is an author and adjunct professor of biology at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania |
| n 88648790 | 0 | $a C. Riley Nelson (born 1956) is a biology professor in Utah. $b Charles Riley Nelson graduated from high school from Box Elder High School in Brigham City, Utah in 1974. He attended Utah State University, graduating in 1980 with his Bachelor's of Science in Biology and obtained his Master's of Science in Biology in 1984. He obtained his PhD in Zoology in 1986 from Brigham Young University and was worked as a Tilton Postdoctoral Fellow in Entomology from the California Academy of Sciences in 1989. He was a part of the biology faculty at the University of Texas at Austin from 1989 to 1999, before coming to Brigham Young University. His research and teaching focus on biology and entomology. |

**The problem**

The LC/NACO Authority File contains (by my count, in late March 2014) 56,053 instances of the 678 field. Some of these are constructed in a manner that lends itself to public display, but many are not so constructed. The indicator values available for assignment do not distinguish between fields that are intended for public display, and those that are not. (Any 678 field with a recently-defined non-blank first indicator can be assumed to have been intended for public display, but no assumption can be made about a 678 field with a blank first indicator.) This state of things means that when a program is building a public display from authority data, it cannot easily differentiate between those uses of the 678 field that are intended for public display, and those that were not intended for public display: the program must either display everything with a blank first indicator, or nothing.

**Approach**

One solution to this problem is to modify in some manner those 678 fields that appear not to have been intended for public display, so that the remainder, suitable for public display, can be identified unambiguously. Several small-scale projects have in the past taken the course of re-tagging 678 fields as 670 fields, with explanatory text identifying the source of the data. This removes the data from the 678 field altogether, so it cannot be the source of difficulty in a public display. Here are some examples:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **LCCN** | **670 field** |
| n 00063515 | $a Info. from 678 field, 2014-02-10 $b (Died 1958) |
| n 50046701 | $a Info. from 678 field, 2014-02-11 $b (b. 1903) |
| n 50019564 | $a Info. from 678 field, Oct. 20, 2012 $b (born 1924; docteur ès letters) |

This approach (with slight changes to the wording of the standard text) continues to be acceptable to the Policy Standards Division at the Library of Congress. The remaining part of the problem is identifying *by program* those 678 fields that are and are not suitable for public display. Substantial exploration into this matter by the RDA Phase 3 Work Group indicates that most 678 fields can be sorted by program into two categories: those that should be reformulated as 670 fields, and those that may remain as 678 fields.

Here are the criteria we have devised to achieve the major part of this work. The tests are to be applied in the order given here.

* If the first indicator is not blank, retain the 678 field
* If the 005 field in the copy of the authority record residing at the Library of Congress is dated earlier than 2011, re-formulate the 678 field as a 670 field.[[5]](#footnote-5) Similarly, if the date in the 005 field is later than April 15, 2014, retain the 678 field.[[6]](#footnote-6)
* If the 678 field contains subfield $b, retain the 678 field (all existing 678 fields containing subfield $b have now been reviewed, and the old-style fields re-coded as 670)
* If the text in 678 subfield $a is longer than 110 characters, retain the 678 field
* If the 678 field contains more than one occurrence of subfield $a, reformulate the field as 670
* If 678 $a contains "is" or "was", retain the 678 field
* If 678 $a begins "The", retain the 678 field
* If 678 $a contains only numerals and punctuation (allowing for accompanying texts such as "B.C.", "organized" and "held"), reformulate the 678 field as 670
* If 678 $a contains only abbreviations, reformulate the 678 field as 670
* If 678 $a begins "approved by BGN", "cannot identify", "full", "name, "AACR", "Linked in" or "PhD" (normalized comparisons), reformulate the 678 field as 670
* If 678 $a contains only a roman numeral, reformulate the 678 field as 670
* If all of the alphabetic characters in 678 $a are upper-case letters, reformulate the 678 field as 670
* If the entire 678 $a consists of "DR", "D R", D R MED", or begins "DR " (normalized comparisons) , reformulate the 678 field as 670

At the time these tests were devised, they accounted for all but about 6,700 of the existing 678 fields. These remaining fields were subjected to careful review by members of the work group, which resulted in their being placed into one of four categories:

* Retain as 678
* Reformulate as 670
* Reformulate as 667
* Delete[[7]](#footnote-7)

The 678 fields in this last group that need to be reformulated or deleted have now been appropriately handled. This means that all remaining 678 fields can be recognized well enough by the tests devised by the work group to declare them either valid for continued use as 678 fields, or suitable for reformulation as 670 fields. When time comes to perform the Phase 3 work, the remaining 678 fields can all be handled correctly by program (left alone, or reformulated as 670).

**Appendix: Current definition of the 678 field**

# 678 - Biographical or Historical Data (R)

**MARC 21 Authority - Full**

**October 2001**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **First Indicator** Type of data # - No information provided  0 - Biographical sketch  1 - Administrative history | **Second Indicator** Undefined # - Undefined |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
| **Subfield Codes** | |
| $a - Biographical or historical data (R)  $b - Expansion (NR)  $u - Uniform Resource Identifier (R) | $6 - Linkage (NR)  $8 - Field link and sequence number (R) |

### FIELD DEFINITION AND SCOPE

Summary of the essential biographical, historical, or other information about the 1XX heading in an established heading record, an established heading and subdivision record, or a subdivision record.

Usually written in a form adequate for public display.

### GUIDELINES FOR APPLYING CONTENT DESIGNATORS

#### ■ INDICATORS

**First Indicator - Type of data**

Type of data contained in the field.

**# - No information provided**

**0 - Biographical sketch**

**1 - Administrative history**

Administrative history of an organization.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **678** | **1#$a**The Office of Geography provides research and other staff services for the interdepartmental Board on Geographic Names and the Secretary of the Interior on foreign geographic nomenclature.**$b**The Office inherited functions and records of earlier boards and committees engaged in similar work. The earliest of these, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, was created by an Executive order of September 4, 1890, to ensure uniform usage throughout the executive departments of the Government ... | | | | | | | | |

**Second Indicator - Undefined**

Undefined and contains a blank (#).

#### ■ SUBFIELD CODES

**$a - Biographical or historical data**

Brief statement providing biographical information about an individual. It may also contain historical and adminstrative information relating to an organization.

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|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 100 | 1#$aJordan, Joseph A. | | | | | | | | |
| **678** | **##$a**M.D., M.R.C.O.G.;**$a**Dept. of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Birmingham Maternity Hosp., Queen Elizabeth Medical Center, Edgbaston. | | | | | | | | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 100 | 1#$aHaupt, Georges | | | | | | | | |
| **678** | **##$a**b. 1928 | | | | | | | | |
| 670 | ##$aHis aspects of international socialism, 1871-1914:$bCIP pref. (b. Szatmar; wrote in Rumanian, Hungarian, Russian; moved to Paris 1958; d. 1978) | | | | | | | | |

**$b - Expansion**

Expansion of the biographical or historical data given in subfield $a.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **678** | **1#$a**The Office of Geography provides research and other staff services for the interdepartmental Board on Geographic Names and the Secretary of the Interior on foreign geographic nomenclature.**$b**The Office inherited functions and records of earlier boards and committees engaged in similar work. The earliest of these, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, was created by an Executive order of September 4, 1890, to ensure uniform usage throughout the executive departments of the Government ... | | | | | | | | |

**$u - Uniform Resource Identifier**

Uniform Resource Identifier (URI), for example a URL or URN, which provides electronic access data in a standard syntax. This data can be used for automated access to an electronic item using one of the Internet protocols.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **678** | **##$a**The Faribault State School and Hospital provided care, treatment, training, and a variety of other services to mentally retarded individuals and their families. It was operated by the State of Minnesota from 1879 to 1998 under different administrative structures and with different names. A more detailed history of the Hospital may be found at**$u**http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/80881.html | | | | | | | | |

**$6 - Linkage**

See description of this subfield in Appendix A: [*Control Subfields*](http://www.loc.gov/marc/authority/ecadcntf.html).

**$8 - Field link and sequence number**

See description of this subfield in Appendix A: [*Control Subfields*](http://www.loc.gov/marc/authority/ecadcntf.html).

1. *Authorities, a MARC format : specifications for magnetic tapes containing authority records / MARC Development Office. Preliminary edition. Washington : Library of Congress, 1976.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Under the preliminary edition of the MARC authorities format, most variable data fields contained a 24-byte control subfield, most of which was never coded. This was later boiled down to the control subfield $w still used in 4XX and 5XX fields, and was eliminated from other fields. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Authorities, a MARC format.* First edition. Washington : Processing Services, Library of Congress, 1981. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Available at: <http://www.loc.gov/marc/authority/ad678.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. If the record has not been updated since the definition of the field was adjusted to permit public display, it may be assumed *not* to be suitable for public display. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Starting on this date, all 678 fields in new and updated authority records were made part of a consistent program of review. Any 678 fields in records created or updated since the institution of that review may be assumed to be suitable for public display. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The 678 fields marked for deletion contained information fully redundant with information elsewhere in the 670 fields. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)