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September 29, 1980

TO: W. L. Kurtz

FROM: F. T. Graybeal

Microfiche of files

Regarding our conversation which we couldn't continue the other day concerning microfiche of the files I'd like to offer some additional thoughts based on a number of discussions I've had with various geologists and others in the SWED. I had plans to mf (microfiche) all drill records, claim notices, and similar seldom-used records to cut down on space until the building expansion was approved. Although nebulous plans continued to mf this type of data the need evaporated because of the major increase in space available to the SWED. Discussions with geologists led to the conclusion that mf of the geologic files would make access to this information substantially more difficult and time-consuming than by standard file format now in use. I have previously used mf for extended periods of time (NTIS, etc.) and found them very tiring, due to harder to read copy than the actual paper copy. Projection from the mf to the screen loses substantial resolution, a fact not appreciated to the casual observer who may take a 30-second glance of a typical mf. Anybody who thinks mf is a good idea should spend 1-2 hours of steady use and then be asked to comment. Particularly tiresome are the Xerox maps such as produced by GJS to accompany his ERS, which are of marginal quality even before they go into the files. Another time-consuming step common to mf is the process of scanning a large amount of material to get at something of specific importance -- a step far more quickly done with standard file format than with mf which requires playing with the little knobs. Then having found something on mf you lose it totally if you continue your search and have to go back to the tiresome search for the significant points previously located. My opinion based on experience is that anyone who thinks mf is neat has never used it. The idea of miniaturization is appealing and the mf cards look neat and easy to use. If you think mf is faster try a search of a thick file -- one search using standard format, the other using mf. The reason I decided against mf for the standard file data is because it's hard to use, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding.

I guess it is generally realized that large maps, larger than can fit on the screen of a mf machine using the blow-up lens, have to be retained separately so one is faced with retaining a substantial amount of standard filing cabinets and the gains in space-saving become marginal. In addition, separation of maps and texts accomplishes nothing other than making the file work slower and more tiresome to say nothing of the questionable logic involved with storage of text in one place and maps in another.

The files, particularly the hall files, are really there for everybody to use. People say the files aren't really used that much because, they say, they don't see geologists constantly in the halls. But they miss the point. Geologists don't read in the halls; they spend 1-2 minutes gathering the information which they then take to their offices where they spend hours with the material. In addition, it would be awkward to have an mf reader in every truck to accommodate the geologist who wants to take a 1-2 ft. thick pile of material with him to read at his leisure.

I think that ease of access to and use of file material is important. That was one reason for the revision now in progress. My feeling is that the easier the files are to use the more they will be used and that is the important point. It's true you can lock up the standard file format material to force use of mf and after exposure to mf I'm certain you would have to use that sort of tactic. But the mere fact that such an approach would be necessary is, to me, a clear statement that conversion to mf for use of scientific material is illogical. Particularly if you want the information easily accessible to the geologists. You can't force actual use of the files or mf, but Rod's work I think goes a long way to encourage file use and I would hate to see those advantages lost by converting to mf. Remember that the majority of what you will read will be initial typed copy which then goes to mf -- think of the poor guy who reads it 6 months later when it's only available on mf. He is the one who should be in on a decision to convert to mf and he should acquire extensive (several continuous hours) experience before making a conclusion.

Turning to need, we don't need the space-saving features offered by mf. Don Melhado and I measured the volume available in the new file room for standard files (less library, a desk, and a drafting table for laying out maps) and I estimated enough space for another 20-50 years assuming roughly current accumulation rates. In other words, we don't need to save the space. Even after Fleet Koutz is added, you will have an empty 3-window office west of Bob Crist, and I'm assuming a full 3-window office is used for the microscopes. I've talked to computer people about data storage and there is general agreement that mf is an interim phenomenon re space-saving. In the future mf will be used to store duplicate, reproducible material in case of loss of the originals and computer tapes which can be tapped on a world-wide basis will be the ultimate storage technique. Why spend the money when it isn't necessary?

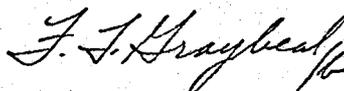
Which brings up the last point. The cost to mf SWED and Latin Amer. hall files would be about \$27,000, maybe \$20-25 grand with a discount for bulk, but still something which should be subject to an authorization. That doesn't include my SWED files, your WEx files, Bob Crist's files, or Harold Courtright's files, which were all included in the space estimate by Melhado and me.

I know the BLM uses mf, but they are on a standard format with all material in the same place. In addition they have space problems, and ease of use is not a major factor. The Geol. Society of America, USGS open file, and NTIS went to mf because it was cheaper and faster than printing. Those reasons simply don't apply to Asarco. The New York Office doesn't use it, SW Mining Dept. doesn't, none of our other exploration offices do (Cadwell was a faddist and he never really carried out the plan). It seems to me that if SWED is to do it it should be a uniform program, assuming the need is there. I'll bet Cadwell never used mf, but those little cards certainly looked interesting and I'm sure Bryan Bailey pushed the idea.

The conclusion is that we will have considerable excess space so how can we justify the expense, particularly at a loss of efficient use of the file data. If you are adamant I suggest mf of your SWED and WEx files only

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and then sit back and over a period of time review whether further such work is justified. I am wary of moves which involve a finality from which there is no retreat until actual need or demonstrated experience can justify such a move. I know you would agree with that last comment. I'm sorry we couldn't get into this discussion more deeply while I was still here because I have done a great deal of thinking about the subject which I see I should have shared with you earlier. But I would like to have that opportunity before any further mf of the SWED general files is started and I would think that approval through TCO should be sought before any permanent disposal or lock-up of file material is planned.



F. T. Graybeal

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