



Australian Society of Indexers NEWSLETTER

Volume 16, Number 6, July 1992

ISSN 0314-3767

EDITORIAL

This month's issue includes a full membership list. Feel free to proof-read your own entry and let us know if the details need updating.

Our feature article this month is about tracking down our early settlers. Identifying colonials is not always a straightforward matter. There are plenty of traps for the unwary. Of course, a good index can help! John Scarce describes how early registry data has been transformed into a computerised database format: The Victorian Pioneers Index.

Steve Sunter



An indexer researching whether to put a *See* reference under "Seaside" or "Seaview".

NSW News

Sydney indexers have recently completed the running of an indexing course at the University of NSW. Alan Walker and Michael Wyatt have been invited to organise similar courses for the ACT and New Zealand.

International Conferences

The Society of Indexers (UK) conference is being held in Chester this month. Three members from our society are representing Australia at the Chester conference: Kingsley Siebel, John Simkin and Josephine McGovern. We wish them well.

Plotting is continuing for our own conference to be held in 1995. A Conference Steering Committee has been appointed, i.e. Max McMaster, John Simkin, Josephine McGovern and Joyce Korn.

INDEXERS MEDAL

A reminder that nominations for the Australian Society of Indexers Medal close on Friday, 28 August, 1992. The Australian Society of Indexers Medal is again being offered for an "outstanding" index to a book or periodical compiled and first published in Australia or New Zealand.

Details were published in the June issue of the *Newsletter*. Further information can be obtained from the Secretary.

THE VICTORIAN PIONEERS INDEX 1837-1888¹

In December 1985, microfiche sets of the indexes of Victorian births, deaths and marriages were released for sale to the public. As a project to celebrate Australia's Bicentenary, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints conceived the idea of transferring the information to a computer database, using the year 1888 as a cut-off point.

Work began in July 1989 to transfer 1.74 million index entries into a computerised format using some 300 volunteers. In November 1990, the Registry became involved in the project with a view to enhancing the quality of the data before its release to the public. The main objectives were to eliminate duplicate entries and to re-insert missing data. The Project Manager was responsible for coordinating a team of 12 volunteers to deal with approximately 72,000 records.

The skills of the volunteers in interpreting old and sometimes poor handwriting were very important. Great care had to be taken, especially with names beginning with such letters as: I and J; L and S; or H and K, as these letters can easily be confused causing changes of name to occur.

Care also had to be taken not to confuse surnames and occupations: e.g., putting John Williams BAKER into a death index when the registration entry really meant John WILLIAMS, occupation baker.

Variations in the spelling of either the surname or the given name of an index entry may have caused many entries to be recorded twice. For example the surname might have been entered as both BROWN and FROWN due to the difficulty in deciphering either the original registration entry or the

microfiche of the handwritten index entry.

Several computer programs devised by Bruce Fullarton from the Genealogical Society of Victoria, have been run on the data to do such things as: remove commas and slashes; to remove leading zeros from registration numbers, and to change those names containing non-alphabetical characters.

Another task was to correct some of the more obvious typing errors in the surname field. For example, the index entry which reads "MMMLER" actually represents the surname "BOWLER" !

The index is sorted by alphabetical order of surname in the same manner as telephone directories. Hyphens are disregarded, "MC" is treated as if spelt "MAC", and "ST" is treated as though spelt "SAINT".

Unfortunately, because of a computer sorting problem, surnames beginning with "ST.", e.g. "ST LEDGER" will be found in both the S.A.I.N.T. section, and the section "ST. LEDGER" (full stop). Remember to look in both sections if you are researching such surnames.

The listing of those events where the surname is recorded as "UNKNOWN" has been split into two sections. The first group appear out of their correct sequence because they were originally in the index under "U" which was expanded by the computer into "UNKNOWN". Unfortunately after the expansion the data was not re-sorted to integrate both groups.

Abbreviations are used throughout the Victorian Pioneers Index. There was no standardised system in use when abbreviations were made last century. Where abbreviations occur in given names the names are sorted letter by letter so always remember to be aware of possible abbreviations to the given name when you are searching a list of surnames.

¹ Based on a more comprehensive article published in: *The Genealogist*, March 1992, 7(1).

There are also subtle variations in the spelling of surnames. The surname for which you are looking might actually be under a totally different letter of the alphabet for example the names EARLY and HURLEY.

Slight variations however can still appear on the same microfiche, if not on the same microfiche page. An interesting example concerns the births and deaths of the children of William and Elizabeth Louisa ALNER of Richmond during the period 1855 - 1858 where the mother's maiden surname has been registered in 5 different ways. These variations are not errors in the index; they represent how the maiden surname was recorded for each registration entry. The informant for three of the entries was the mother, while the father was the informant for the two death entries.

The Victorian Pioneers Index is also being released in a CD-ROM version. It is important to realise that the CD-ROM will contain the same data as that which appears on the microfiche. However, the information retrieval will be computer generated. It allows searching of many more fields and/or combinations of fields.

The CD-ROM is published and distributed by the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, by agreement with the Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages. Enquiries should be directed to: INFORMIT, RMIT Libraries, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne Vic. 3001.

The Victorian Pioneers Index is a vast improvement on the earlier microfiche indexes released by the Registry. Instead of having to search data on a year-by-year basis, the indexes up to 1888 are now consolidated and integrated into one alphabetical sequence for easier searching.

However, we must bear in mind that it is an index derived from original source documents. Each time an index is re-worked, the information becomes one

generation further removed and therefore new errors can creep in.

The volunteers who participated in the various aspects of the Victorian Pioneers Index have done a tremendous job. When you consider that there were 1.74 million entries involved, the percentage rate of errors is small.

John Scarce, Project Officer, Victorian Pioneers Index; Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Melbourne.

JULY MEETING: Vic Branch

Topic: "Indexing the Argus"
Geraldine Suter, 1991 AusSI medallist has been invited to speak about her award-winning index. The meeting will be held on Wednesday, July 22 at 5.30 for 6pm. Venue is CPA House, 170 Queen St, Melbourne.

RSVP: Please book with Joyce Korn (606 9610) by Mon, July 20. Light refreshments supplied; no charge.

TRAINING & COURSES

1. The AusSI (Vic) introductory book indexing course will be held in Melbourne in the spring-time. It will start on August 17 and end on Sept. 28. Sessions will be held on Monday evenings from 6pm to 8.30pm (no session Sept 14). The venue will be: CPA House, 170 Queen St., Melbourne. Cost is \$250 for the six sessions (\$225 for AusSI members). **Contact:** Max McMaster (03)418 7269

2. Melbourne University Press is sponsoring a seminar on *The History of Publishing in Australia*. It will be held on October 30-31 at the Sir John Monash Business Centre, 253 Flinders Lane, Melbourne. The seminar is being jointly organised with the Australia Centre, University of Melbourne. Further details from: Tony Delves (03) 344 7235.

NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes the following
new members:

Mrs C. Tuch
2/4 Gale Road
Maroubra NSW 2035

Dr M. Crane, 15 Lynwood Avenue
Maori Hill, Dunedin, N.Z.

MEMBERSHIP LIST

(As at July 1, 1992)

Privacy Respected

AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY
OF INDEXERS:
GPO BOX 1251L
MELBOURNE, VIC 3001

President: Isabelle Mentha
(03) 418 7222
Vice Pres.: George Levick
(03) 418 7344
Secretary: Ian Odgers
(03) 418 7275
Treasurer: Joyce Korn
(03) 606 9610
Editor: Steve Sunter
(03) 418 7253
Fax: (03) 419 0459

Committee Members:
Max McMaster: (03) 418 7269
Cherryl Schauder: (03) 660 3059
Mary Long: (03) 846 0225
John Simkin: (03) 429 8817
Josephine McGovern: (03) 596 1555

NSW BRANCH
PO BOX R598
ROYAL EXCHANGE
SYDNEY, NSW 2000

President: Garry Cousins
(02) 955 1525
Secretary: Christine Winning
(02) 793 0793
Asst. Secretary: Alan Walker
(02) 380 5875



We are all free to choose our own set of filing rules.