Australian Society of Indexers
NEWSLETTER

Editorial

The Australian Society of Indexers has a new editor. Rebecca Smale joins the Society as the new editor. She brings with her, skills and experience acquired whilst working in the Librarianship and Publishing fields. Welcome Rebecca !

I have enjoyed my time as editor. The job was challenging and not without its moments of panic! It was 12 months of exploring the world of indexing, getting to know interesting people, expanding my knowledge and expertise. I thank the Society for giving me the opportunity to make a contribution to the Newsletter, and for the correspondence from members. I hope members enjoyed reading the Newlsetter as much as I did putting it together.

In the June issue, we include excerpts of a stimulating article by Robin Derricourt from Cambridge University Press discussing what makes a good index. Also, we have more details on local and International Indexing events. Paul Michell writes more about exciting indexing projects currently being undertaken by the Northcote City Library.

NSW Meeting

The next meeting of the NSW Branch will be a panel discussion, held jointly with the Society of Editors (NSW). Speakers will open by talking briefly about:
> the publisher's expectations of indexers
> what indexers need from publishers
> negotiations between the author, editor and indexer
> how indexes are made

Theme: _'Indexers & publishers: what they need from each other'_
Date & Time: Tuesday 5 July, 6.15pm
Venue: Level 4, Australia Museum
(William St entrance)
Cost: Members $10; non-members $12
(including light meal & wine)
Contact: Robin (02) 560 1017 before 1 July
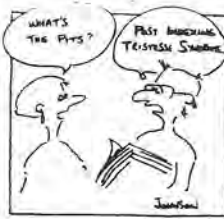(bookings essential)

Canberra Abstracting Workshop

On Saturday 30 April 1994, the ACT Region Branch of the Australian Society of Indexers mounted its first Abstracting workshop. The Workshop was jointly presented by University of Canberra lecturer Susan MacDougall and the Director of the information consultancy firm, Datascape Information, Lynn Farkas. Twelve attendees enjoyed a day of theory, practical work and discussion which covered all aspects of making a good abstract. The emphasis of the day was on abstracting for document indexing services, and participants were encouraged to bring work from their fields of interest for the practical sessions. These examples indicated the range of abstracting being undertaken in a variety of work situations in and around the Canberra area.

The Worshop provided an introduction to abstracting theory; abstracting examples; discussion of the issues of bias, selectiveness, depth and use of author abstracts; two workshop sessions covering scanning techniques, abstracting styles and tips for better abstracting; and three practice sessions where individual advice and assistance was provided by the Workshop presenters.
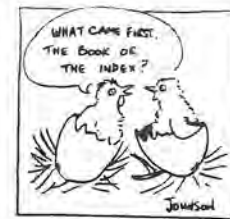
The informal nature of the day and the varied backgrounds of the participants ensured that as much was learned from swapping experiences as from lectures and paractice sessions. Interesting company, new skills and an outdoor lunch amid the glorious perfect Canberra autumn day - what better way to spend a Saturday?

Lynn   Farkas

Index the readers' key

by Robin Derricourt
Cambridge University Press

A good index plays an essential role in determining a reader's enjoyment and satisfaction of a book. Robin Derricourt gives a publisher's view, primarily for academic authors, on what makes a good index. Following are the key excerpts of Robin's article.

The user group

A good index is one which starts from diverse needs of the readers, not from an analysis of the manuscript. The length, structure, complexity, selectivity need, always, to start from the question: who will use the index, what kind of entries (words) will they look up?

There is little value in an index which lists every proper name, obscure theme, specific item if these are not words which the inquirer will want to look up. Similarly, the index must open up the text from a wide range of inquiries - subject, place, person, theme, concept - wherever these are, realistically, the starting point of an inquiry.

It is futile to plan an index by trying to index words only. A word which has not substantive position in the narrative in one context ("to hell and back") becomes a meaningful entry in another place ("Dante's description of hell"). An unimportant personal reference ("Raffles' *entrepot* of Singapore) becomes substantive a few pages later ("when Raffles returned from London").

Readers want to be guided to something which leads on from their inquiry word; they are not entering a "spot the word" competition. So an entry with five references to discussions of "adaptation" is more use than a list of 20 places where the word "adaptation" is used. This means there is no short cut to a good index. A computer may help sort, list and alphabetise index entries but for a scholarly book it does not create an index of the quality and form that readers need.

Who does the indexing?

There are a number of author's guides on indexing; indeed there are whole books on indexing to guide those for whom this is a full time activity. And if you are really nervous, you can hire a professional indexer to do the job for you, or ask your publisher to hire an indexer - probably at your expense.

This works better in general publishing than in scientific and scholarly publishing. As the author, you understand what themes are important, what terms are synonyms, which apparent synonyms are in technical use quite different, how abstract concepts are related to each other, A professional indexer is unlikely to be a professional in your subject area; he or she is likely to make mistakes in judgement.

Indexing tips

Here are some practical suggestions - but if colleagues or experience or other author guides seem to you more applicable, feel free to follow those.

One index or two?

Firstly, decide whether you want one index or several. Depending on the kind of book, and therefore user, more than one kind of index may be appropriate. If you are studying fossil flora, readers will be inquiring either under a species or genus name, or another topic. It is unappealing to have an index which alternates incessantly between the flora and themes, and perhaps therefore between italic and roman type. And indeed, a single alphabetical list of the flora may have other uses beyond the index purpose; if a species does not occur in the index, it does not occur in the book. So you would do two separate indexes. Many scientific works create separate indexes of this kind. It may be appropriate in other topics, where a particular class of items belongs together.

This should not be taken too far. The conventional index mixes people, places, specific topics, general themes. These

usually belong in a single index. The reader may want to move around several headings, and it may be appropriate to include cross references within the index between people and places and themes. More than one index may be a nuisance; think carefully before you decide to divide your index.

What terms to index

You also need to decide what kinds of things you will include. If there are a lot of places mentioned, will they all be in, or just key places? If there are a great many philosophical themes, where do you make the break between "index" and "don't index"? Will all people in the narrative of your book be indexed or only those with historical importance? Best to list a few extras in case you decide later they should be in.

Most difficult is the inclusion of academic authors. Most publishers would urge you to omit from the index those authors' names which are merely a bibliographical citation. But where you actually discuss an author's work ("Jones' views on the gradualism of this process have met with a critical response") then it is a topic in the book and merits inclusion. Where the literature becomes in general a subject in the book, not just a formal reference, include it. This would apply in literary works but also, of course, in discussions of the development of a scientific idea or argument.

Preparing the index

When you are at the initial stage of preparing an index, it is best to over index. It is much easier to decide to exclude Kelvin from an index, because he occurs once in an unimportant reference, than it is to decide halfway through indexing that Kelvin is really important, and to read back to find previously ignored references in pages already indexed. You should nevertheless start with some idea of what the overall length will be in the final index.

Before the actual indexing is started, I suggest you consider what are major abstract words you wish to index - themes, arguments, propositions, theories, analytical modes. These you should list before you find entries for them. And if the book has a major theme

plan ahead of time what subdivisions will be useful entries. Think ahead of the abstractions which will be useful headings and subheadings.

Now you are ready to go. Work through the pages of the book in succession, noting down the index word and printed page reference. Distinguish carefully between references continued across two or more pages (145-47) and those which are separate references but on subsequent pages (145, 146, 147).

The list of names of people, places, specific subjects will be reasonably easy, though you will realise the need to trim and edit as you progress. The list of themes will be more difficult. As you index, some abstractions and themes will clearly seem to be subdivisions or synonyms of others. Do not try to change the heading at this stage, but make a marginal note ("? merge with racism and cross-refer").

Other single topics will seem to be too large. If you catch this early, go back and establish better subdivisions. If you decide this too late, make a marginal note to return to each of the entries and find some satisfactory subdivision.

In editing and organising the index, the main task is structuring references. Look through each entry. Do some entries need merging?, Synonyms for instance. Add cross references where needed.

See if some entries are too long and create subdivisions. People will look up "nationalism" but be helped to use your book by having topics more narrowly defined: "nationalism and race", "Balkan nationalism" and so on.

Add cross references; after entries on "Russia" add "*see also* Soviet Union". Think of what headwords people will look up, and what other parts of the book they really need to find, beyond those listed immediately under that headword.

Finally you have a list of your topics and themes, names and other entries, with subdivisions for the large entries. If they are not yet in a single list, combine them and check the alphabetical order is correct.

Editing

Now comes the difficult question of length. You have probably created a list of entries greater than actually needed by users. Edit out those which seem superfluous, entries which, given the overall nature of the book and the index, people are unlikely to use.

Finally the index is ready but must be formatted for delivery. Like the main manuscript, it should be delivered not looking like an index when typeset, but as a double spaced print-out ready for copyediting and design mark-up, together with a word processing disk if you have created one. Check that you have a consistent approach to alphabetical order using a style guide when in doubt. Check that you are consistent in abbreviations and capitalisation. See that the presentation of numbers is consistent. Deliver a clean careful index to your publisher and the book can move to its final stage.

This article appeared in the La Trobe University 'Campus Review', Publishers' Post Column, May 5-11, 1994, p 11. It is reproduced with the permission of the author. All cartoons appear with the approval of the artist.

The Wonderful World of Indexing

September 30 1994
Workshop: 'History of Print Culture in New Zealand' Sponsor: **New Zealand Academy for the Humanitites, in conjunction with the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand**
Location : Wellington, *Contact:* Kathleen Coleridge, Library, Victoria University of Wellington, P.O. Box 38, Wellington, New Zealand, *Tel:* 64-4-4721000,
Fax: 64-4-4712070,
email: Kathleen. Coleridge@vuw.ac.nz

November 11-12 1994
Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand (BSANZ) Annual Conference, *Venue::* University of Melbourne . Those interested in presenting a paper at the conference should indicate their intention to Dr Brian McMullin before 30 June 1994.
Contact: Dr McMullin at the Department of Librarianship, Archives and Records, Monash University, Clayton, Vic 3168, Australia: *Tel:* 61-3-905-2956
Fax: 61-3-905-2952

Local History Indexing: The Northcote Experience

by Paul Michell
Local Studies Librarian - Northcote City Library

In the past two articles I have described two projects 'Street Names' and 'Local History Database'. In this article I will be mainly discussing another project. Namely the indexing to a past publication on Northcote's history.

An indexing project I have recently completed is that of providing an index to *The Hstory of Northcote* written by W.G. Swift and published by Northcote Council in 1928. As was common to may publications of that period the book was published sans index, but with chapter subheadings. This book is a mine of information about Northcote, particularly in the 19th century. In the 1960s a surname index was compiled by Ian A. Hughes and this is very good for locating people. Unfortunately as Local Studies Librarian the requests I get and the information needed is based around things, like 'when was the bridge across the Merri Creek built?'; all queries requiring specific entries.

In indexing this book I came across difficulties which related to the book's purpose. The book was written by the

Town Clerk and thus had a lot of first hand statistical data about the city's growth. However it is very specific and it is here that difficulties can occur. An example is the listing of churches. For a reader not familiar with the community the general index under a specific name could be difficult to use, as there is an assumption made upon the reader that they would know all the churches in the area, and thus know to look under each specific name. Of course a number of churches have changed their names. I felt that most readers would be using the book as a form of tracing their roots, where they grew up, or where their relatives, work mates, etc. had lived. The churches are now listed under one main 'Church' index, with an alphabetical listing under all the churches mentioned in the book. This way the reader does not have to go through the entire index but will find them all listed under the general heading of Churches. Other entries that have been treated the same way include parks and schools. Under 'Rates' there is a chronological index of dates. This indicates to the reader that in a particular year there are specific statistics.

The index is currently being checked by two people. After this I will be attempting to merge the prior surnames with the items index - thus producing a complete index to the book. The book will be examined for release in a limited second edition complete with the index.

New Members
The Society welcomes the following new members:
Ms J Caunt, Coogee, WA
Ms L Conder, Manly, NSW
Ms L Farkas, Canberra, ACT
Ms E Lee, Norwood, SA

On The Lighter Side...
A man and his wife were upset by their daughter's limited vocabulary. Everything was either "awsome" or "gross" 50 times a day depending on whether she liked or disliked something. Finally, the father said, *"Mandy, there are two words I don't want to hear any more. One is gross and the other is awsome"*

"OK Dad," Mandy answered, *"What are they?"*