Editorial
This month, Geraldine Triffitt reports on a panel discussion on database indexing which was organised by the ACT Branch, and Kingsley Siebel raises issues concerning the professionalism of indexers. In addition, the AusSI membership list is included. Please let us know if your details need updating.

Victorian Branch General Meeting

Indexes to Genealogical Records on CD-ROM
Date: Wednesday, 10 August 1994.
Place: CSIRO Information Services, 314 Albert Street, East Melbourne.
Third Floor Conference Room.
Time: 6:00 pm for 6:30 pm

At the meeting, John Scarce, Genealogical Research Officer from the Victorian Registry, will speak on the creation of CD-ROM indexes to records of births, deaths and marriages in Victoria from the original manuscript registration data. There will also be a demonstration of the CD-ROM. There is no charge to attend.

Light refreshments will be served.

Victorian Branch Indexing Course
The Victorian Branch is planning to hold a three-day back-of-book indexing course in Melbourne on 26, 27 and 28 September, 1994.
Those people interested in attending the course are asked to contact Max McMaster on (03) 571 6341 or Mary Long on (03) 286 9125 as soon as possible. Since the number of places will be limited, bookings will be taken in order of receipt.

INDEXERS MEDAL
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. In addition to the presentation of a Medal to the winning indexer, a certificate is presented to the book's publisher.

To be eligible for the award, the index must be in print and must have been first published after 1991. It must have been compiled in Australia or New Zealand even though the text to which it refers may have originated elsewhere.

For the award, indexes are judged at the level of outstanding professional achievement, thus sufficient material is required, both in quality and quantity, for appraisal. The index should be substantial in size – as a guide, comprising a minimum of four pages, double columned. The subject matter should be complex, requiring generally more than one category of words/phrases as index entries.

All interested persons are invited to nominate up to three indexes which meet the above criteria, and which they regard as worthy of consideration. Don't be bashful, you can nominate your own index!

Please send recommendations with bibliographic details, together with a copy of the book, if possible (which will be returned), to:

The Secretary,
Australian Society of Indexers,
GPO Box 1251,
Melbourne, Victoria 3001

as soon as possible, but no later than Friday 16 September, 1994.
ACT Activities
On 21 June 1994, the ACT Region Branch considered the issues of database indexing by holding a discussion called 'Quality not Quantity: A Panel Discussion on Database Indexing'. Geraldine Triffitt, Branch President, summarises the issues which were raised.

Although only a small audience attended this discussion on methods of indexing to reduce irrelevance in database searching, an interesting debate ensued.

Susan MacDougall, from the University of Canberra, began the evening with an overview of database indexing. She examined indexing levels, the language and control of terms, degree of specificity, database and search software, skills required for searching, and the necessity of following a clear indexing policy.

Our second speaker was Sandra Henderson of the National Library of Australia, who contrasted the indexing policies for two of the National Library's databases: the Australian Medical Index and APAIS, the Australian social sciences and humanities index.

Although subject headings in the APAIS thesaurus are general, weighting occurs through assigning major and minor descriptors and identifiers. Consistency is maintained through the use of the thesaurus, a controlled list of name headings and an in-house manual. These are supplemented by staff training and supervision. The cost of printing and distributing the monthly APAIS updates limits output to 11,500 citations per year.

By contrast, the Australian Medical Index is only available online. This allows more items to be included and a greater depth of indexing. Descriptors from the MESH thesaurus and the nature of the subject matter, enable more specific searching.

The third speaker, Brenda Gerrie, whose company, INFOSCAN, manages the HERA and STREAMLINE databases, made the point that quality searching and information retrieval depends on a) knowing the scope and structure of the database, b) understanding the client's search needs, particularly if undertaken by an intermediary, and c) making use of all of the capabilities of the database. Brenda outlined the range of searchable fields for the HERA database. These fields allow the searcher to focus on a specific heritage site by name or map reference, or to specify a media type or treatment for a particular audience. Major and minor fields are identified, the major descriptors being the subject field used in the printed version. Constant revision, including re-indexing, allow for changes of focus in the database.

STREAMLINE, a database which contains information on natural resources and the environment, is run on a cost-recovery basis. Its existence is dependent on sales to the government and to research organisations. It is indexed in depth, with major, minor and place descriptors, including river basins and ground water regions.

Lynn Farkas, from Datascape, contributed to the question time. She described her experiences managing the multicultural (MAIS) and health promotional (HEAPS) databases.

Other issues raised in the question time, included: the increasing costs of producing and managing databases; the possibility of fees for services; the expense of training and employing indexers for specialised databases; the availability of free, un-referenced information of dubious quality through electronic networks; and the dilemma of providing high quality databases for people unable to use the search capabilities to find specific information. Only those who can afford it will get the information.

Geraldine Triffitt
Kingsley Siebel raises the issue of professional accreditation for indexers and hopes to promote debate on the matter.

"...it is as individuals that we...lack conviction and enterprise. How often do we say proudly that we are indexers?" wrote Ian Crane, the 1994 Chairperson of the Society of Indexers, in his guest editorial in The Indexer (April 1994). Statements like this go to the core of professionalism. Whilst authors and editors are recognised as essential to a publishing team, some publishers still consider indexers to be peripheral to publishing. Hans Weilisch, the author of A-Z of Indexing, wrote, 1 "Why should American indexers not be certified or accredited?"

About three years ago, there was an attempt in Australia to formulate a scheme in co-operation with the universities for advanced education of indexers. But that seems a long time coming, if it has not been shelved. In the meantime, it is good to know that one or two institutions are taking the initiative.2

AusSI’s Constitution provides for a Register of Indexers. This heading alone gives some the perception that this is no more than a register of members of the Society. It does not enhance our members’ standing. If you say to some people that you are an indexer, you are likely to get that quizzical look and a question – in a high-pitched voice – 'What's that?' If we are to succeed in projecting a competent professional image of indexing, let's start talking earnestly about it between ourselves.

Many professional organisations provide for a Register of Qualified Members (in addition to the usual register of members that any organised body must have for its administration). Qualified Membership is usually graded as Associates, (Senior Associates) and Fellows. Some organisations require an academic qualification, together with professional experience, before admission to the register is allowed.

Because Australian indexers have no form of grading, we lack professional credibility. The world does not even know that we have a form of accreditation because we call this process 'registration', following the practice of the Society of Indexers, (which has since reformed its scheme of accreditation). Three steps may be required to improve the situation.

Firstly, let the National Executive prescribe and publish criteria for registration3 and for grading, as has been done for accreditation in the UK and for the HW Wilson Award in the USA.

Secondly, let's amend the Constitution so that it provides for Qualified membership, leading ultimately (if necessary), to Certified Practising Indexers (CPIAusSI). As we have no academic scheme at present, registration may be supplemented by a number of years of practical experience and perhaps by the number and quality of documents indexed. These two requirements must also be considered in addition to any future academic qualifications.

Thirdly, let's hear your views. I might add that I brought this matter up informally with the National Executive, and was invited to write an article which might encourage debate. About 250 indexers read this Newsletter each month. If half of them are motivated to express themselves, we will have an ongoing debate.

For a start, I suggest the following draft amendment of the Constitution:

4A. Register of Qualified Membership
   (a) a Board of Assessors (the Board) shall prescribe and publish the criteria for admission to the Register of Qualified Membership;
   (b) the Register shall comprise
      (i) Associates of the Australian Society of Indexers (AAusSI)
I suggest that provision may be made, at the discretion of the Board, for current registered indexers who remain financial, to be admitted as Associates. Provision may also be made to admit as Fellows those members who have registered, (if this is to continue as a first step), and who have a specified minimum number of years of practical experience. The Board may give special recognition to some who have led courses of study or who have been awarded the Society Medal. They may be admitted as FAusSI (Snr), or as Certified Practising Indexers (SPIAusSI).

Other ideas or suggestions are certain to move this debate along.

2. RMIT has recently announced a course, I think there is one in Ku-ringai, and some librarians include indexing in their syllabi.
3. A scheme of accreditation may take its place.
4. See note 3.
5. For all purposes, reference to the Australian Society of Indexers may be shortened to AusSI (like the AUD).

The Wonderful World of Indexing

Conferences

27 July–31 July 1994
Sixth International Feminist Book Fair

21 July–23 July 1994
Second Language Expo (Australia) (conference and exhibition)
VENUE: Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour, NSW. COST: per day, exhibition only — Adults $12, Students $6, Unemployed/Pensioners $8. CONTACT: Clare MacAdam, Manager, Language Expo '94, Fauth Royale Associates Pty Ltd, 22/6 Avondale Rd, Armadale Vic 3143, Tel (03) 509 4160, Fax (03) 509 9115.

11 Oct–16 Oct 1994
Melbourne Writers' Festival
VENUE: Melbourne, Vic. CONTACT: Julie Morgan, Tel (03) 696 5060, Fax (03) 696 5866.

If you would like to notify AusSI members of any events, send information (including dates, venue, cost, theme and contact) to the Editor.

INDEX-L Procedures

If you’d like to contact others from around the globe who are interested in indexing, the Internet provides access to Index-L. There are three addresses you need to use for interaction with index-L:

To take part in a discussion or send a message to the list (aka group or subscribers), address your e-mail to Index-l@bingvmb.bitnet or index-l@bingvmb.cc.binghamton.edu

To send a message directly to the moderator (aka Charlotte), address your e-mail to Skuster@bingvmb.bitnet or Skuster@bingvmb.cc.binghamton.edu.

To send a command to the listserv, address your e-mail to listserv@bingvmb.bitnet or listserv@bingvmb.cc.binghamton.edu. As subscribers, you are able to send commands to the listserv to see the archives, see a list of subscribers, stop your mail for a while, or a number of other options. To get a list of listserv commands and what they do, send the following message to the listserv:

INFO REFCCARD

Do not sign your name or put anything else in the message.
AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF INDEXERS

LIST OF MEMBERS

as at 1 July 1994

Mr. J.D. Adams, Unit 17, 115 Torbay Street, Macleod, Vic 3085

Australian Taxation Office Library, Level 8, 100 Market St, Sydney, NSW 2000

Mrs. J. Baker, RMB 992, Creswick, Vic., 3363

Ms T Baker, PO Box 67, Gordon, Vic 3345

Mrs. A. Batt, 30 Colombo Street, Victoria Park, W.A. 6100

Mrs. R. M. Bennett, 26 Beatty Street, Balgowlah, N.S.W. 2093

Mr. B. Bingley, 57 Seymour Terrace, Ascot Park, S.A. 5043

Mrs. E. Binkowski, G.P.O. Box 1724, Canberra, A.C.T. 2601

Ms R. Bird, 24 Methven Street, Brunswick East, Vic. 3057

Ms. K. Borchardt, 3 Sundew Court, Tarroona, Tas. 7053

Ms G Brie, PO Box 288, Kempsey, NSW 2440

Mr R Brooks, 19 Cowper Street, Brighton, Vic 3186

Mrs. Susan Brookes, 15 Maritime Terrace, Birkenhead, Auckland, New Zealand AIRMAIL

Ms. G. Browne, 32A Ross Cres., Blaxland, N.S.W. 2774

Mrs M. Bryant, 79 Chelford Street, Alderley, Qld 4051

Mrs. M. Buchanan, 3 Simon Court, Rosanna, Vic. 3084

Ms. R. Bunnage, 59 Alhany Crescent, Aspendale Vic. 3195

Miss A. Burgin, 274 Douglas Parade, Newport, Vic. 3015

Manager, Acquisitions, CSIRO, 314 Albert Street, East Melbourne, Vic. 3002

Ms S. Campbell, Senior Librarian, Radford College, College Street, Bruce, ACT 2617

Dr S J Cauchi, 1/73A Michaels Ave, Ellerslie, Auckland, New Zealand AIRMAIL

Ms. J. Caunt, 5 Walba Place, Coogee, WA 6166

Ms. D. Chai, 9/25 Illawarra Road, Hawthorn, Vic. 3122

Ms P. Clarke, 14 Chirnside Street, Deakin, ACT 2600

Ms P. Clarke, Winston Road, Palmwoods, Qld 4555

Mrs J. Cole, PO Box 38, Murrumbateman, NSW 2582

Ms. C. Colton, 441 Darling Street, Balmain, NSW. 2041

Ms L. Conder, 1/6 Cameron Ave, Manly, NSW 2095

Mr P. Cotton, 2 Megalong Street, Katoomba, NSW 2780

Mrs. B. Cooper, 1 Halifax Court, Alamein, Vic. 3147

Dr. W.G. Coppell, 22 Strezelecki Crescent, Narrabundah, ACT. 2064

Ms. R. Cotter, 147 Ford Street, Ivanhoe. Vic. 3079

Mr. G. Cousins, 2/27 Whatmore Street, Waverton, N.S.W. 2060
Mrs. B. Crighton, 29 Turner Avenue, Baulkham Hills, N.S.W. 2153

Ms. J. Dartnall, 17 Kepler St, Wulguru, Qld. 4068

Ms. P. Davies, PO Box 490 Artarmon, NSW 2064

Mrs D. Davis, 29 Lansell Crescent, Camberwell, Vic, 3124

Ms B. Dickens, 23/47 Eyre St, Kingston, ACT 2604

Ms. H. Dittebrandt, 115 Kunyung Road, Mount Eliza, Vic. 3930

Miss M. Doolan, P.O. Box 482, Woden, A.C.T. 2606

Ms. L. Doyle, 15 Nirimba Ave, North Epping, N.S.W. 2121

Dr. A. Dunbar-Nobes, 64 Kambalda Crescent, Fisher, ACT. 2611
(Overseas from 31/5/94 to July 1995, at:16 High Green, Great Shelford, Cambridge, CB2 5EG, UK)

Ms Christine Durbridge, 38 Alister St, Nth. Fitzroy, Vic. 3068

Mr. A. Eddy, 24 Normanby Terrace, Mt. Martha, Vic. 3934

Ms D. Ehrlich, P.O. Box 568, Randwick, NSW 2031

Mrs E Ellis, 40 Seaview Avenue, Taroona, Tas 7053

Ms E. Estbergs, 4 Griffith Place, Kambah, ACT 2902

Ms L. Farkas, GPO Box 1870, Canberra, ACT 2601

Ms A-M Gaudry, 24 Banfield St., Downer, ACT 0200

Miss E. Gavin, 43 Mulheron Ave, Baulkham Hills, NSW 2153

Mrs J. Gillespie, 'Black Cameron', Smith Gully, Vic. 3760

Ms G. Giopoulou, 67 Finnis Crescent, Narrabundah, ACT 2604

Ms R. Gipps, GPO Box 1762Q, Melbourne, Vic. 3001

Ms K. Gladwish, Lionel Murphy Library, Attorney General's Department, Barton, ACT 2600

Dr. J. Goodell, 6/44 Brisbane Street, Toowong, Qld. 4066

Mrs. K.M. Gray, "Old Oak", Franklings Road, Harcourt, Vic. 3453

Mrs A. Grant, 137 Shackleton Circuit, Mawson, ACT 2607

Ms. E. Greig, 18 Therry Street, Drummoyne, N.S.W. 2047

Miss J. Hagger, 31 Maylands Avenue, North Balwyn, Vic. 3104

Ms P. Handyside, GPO Box 155, Canberra, ACT 2601

Ms. D.C. Harriman, 39 Carawa Road, Cromer, N.S.W. 2099

Mrs W. Haszler, 15 Wombat Drive, Eltham, Vic. 3095

Mrs N Heine, 4/28 Fulton Street, East St. Kilda, Vic. 3183

Mrs. M. Hempel, 82 Murray Road, Croydon, Vic. 3136

Mrs. K.A. Herbstreit, P.O. Box 299, Mooroolbark, Vic. 3138

Mrs H Hillman, 2 Manuka Drive, Warrnambool, Vic 3280

Miss J D Hine 31 Fairfax Road, Mosman, NSW 2088

Mrs J. Hoggan, PO Box 359, Penrith, NSW 2751

Ms. P. Holt, 141 Ramsden Street, Clifton Hill, Vic. 3068

Mr. W. Hood, SILAS, University of NSW, PO Box 1, Kensington, NSW 2033.
Ms J Matthews, Hitech Editing, 70 Piper Street, Lilyfield, N.S.W. 2040

Dr. T. Matthews, 164 Windsor St., Paddington, NSW 2021

Mrs L. Mentha, 22 Wandsworth Road, Surrey Hills, Vic. 3127

Mr. D. Mercer, Shop 6, Byron Street, Byron Bay, N.S.W. 2481

Mrs J. Merrell, 17 Brookman St, Torrens, ACT 2607

Dr J. Merrick, 19 Gollan Ave, Oatlands, NSW 2151

Ms P. Millist, 1/33 Gourlay St, St Kilda, Vic. 3182

Mrs W. Mills, Unit 2, 57 Gloucester Avenue, Berwick. 3806

Ms R. Missingham, 7 Samson Place, Kambah, ACT 2902

Ms H. Moorcroft, NT University Library, PO Box 41246, Casuarina, NT 0811

National Library of Australia, (Preliminary Processing) Canberra, A.C.T. 2600

Mr C. Nelson, [10/82 Patterson Street, Middle Park, Vic 3206] Moved—address unknown

M.I. Odgers, 9 Finch Street, Altona, Vic 3018

Mr. R. K. Olding, 12 Woorabinda Drive, Stirling, S.A. 5152

Ms A. Parry, 4 Godfrey Road, Artarmon, NSW 2064

Mrs. B. Parsons, 11 Bayview Parade, Hamlyn Heights, Geelong, Vic. 3215

Mrs J. Pelosi, 44 Willarong Road North, Caringbah, NSW 2229

Ms. Helen Penridge, P.O. Box 6069, Mooloolah, Qld 4553

Ms. C. Pillar, 10/1 Francis Street, Bondi, N.S.W. 2026

Meryl Potter, P.O. Box 399, Coogee, N.S.W. 2034

Mr J. Poulos, 16 Rochdale Drive, Burwood East, Vic. 3151

Mrs. D. Prescott, 44 Lucas Street, East Brighton, Vic. 3187

Ms. Margery E. Price, 10 Maleela Avenue, Balwyn, Vic. 3103

Mr. R. Price, PO Box 555, Brighton, SA 5048

Ms J. Pritchard, 111 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn, Vic. 3122

Ms. S. Quinn, Online Information Resources Pty Ltd, P.O. Box 476, Doncaster, Vic 3108

Mr. G. Ralph, 15 Brian Street, Lockleys, S.A. 5032

Mr. M. Ramsden, 104 Lakeview Drive, Lilydale, Vic. 3140

Ms. H. Ranger, 7/26 Scott Street, Elwood, Vic. 3184

Mrs. P. Ray, 67 Hopetoun Circuit, Yarralumla, A.C.T. 2600

Mrs. J. Restarick, 208 Kooyong Road, North Caulfield, Vic. 3161

Ms E. Riley, 3 Tangmere Street, Chapel Hill, Qld 4069

Ms S. Rintoul, Professional Editing Services, PO Box 234, Henley Beach, SA 5022

Ms C Roberts, 2/80 Cremorne Road, Cremorne Point, NSW 2090

Ms J. Rudd, 6/109 Wyuna Avenue, Harbord, NSW 2096

Mrs. C. Schauder, 1 Geel Street, Bentleigh, Vic., 3204

Ms C. Schmidt, c/- Law Book Co., 44-50 Waterloo Road, North Ryde, NSW 2113

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Miss M. Shand, 52 Rio Vista Boulevard, Florida Gardens, Broadbeach Waters, Queensland. 4218

Dr B. Shaw, PO Box 24, Bridgewater, SA 5155

Mr. K. Siebel, 11/22 Frederick Street, Hornsby, NSW 2077

Mr. J. Simkin, 148 Stawell Street, Richmond, Vic. 3121

Ms. J. Sorby, 12 Paul Street, Balmain East, NSW 2041

Mrs. H. Stafford, 12 Keith Road, Blackwood, S.A. 5051

Mrs. L. Stead, P.O. Box 1370, Griffith, N.S.W. 2680

Mrs. A. Stephens, 23 Lukin Street, Clayfield, Qld 4011

Ms. M.B. Stevenson, 5/6 Mackie Court, Kew, Vic. 3101

Miss V. Stevenson, 6/54 Sackville Street, Kew, Vic. 3101

Mr S Sunter, 14 Coolabah Drive, Eltham, Vic 3095

Mrs. G. Suter, 41 Lothian Street, North Melbourne, Vic. 3051

Ms D. Talent, 16 Waraga Place, Giralang, ACT 2617

Ms. Ann Taylor, P.O. Box 51, Beaconsfield, Vic. 3807

Mr. P. Taylor, 3 New Street, Dimboola, Vic. 3414

Ms. J. Thompson, P.O. Box 478, South Yarra, Vic. 3141

Ms R Tonk, PO Box 21-085 Edgeware, Christchurch,1, New Zealand

Mr. N. Towart, Bardeen, Back Trundle Road, Parkes, N.S.W. 2870

Mrs. G. Triffitt, P.O. Box 537, Mawson, A.C.T. 2607

Mr A. Trumble, 20 Denham Place, Toorak, Vic., 3142

Ms S Tuckwell, 61 Stewart Street, Paddington, NSW 2021

Mr S. Tulip, 32 Turnbull Way, Trigg, WA 6029

Mrs. L. Tunks, 11 Philips Place, Latham, ACT 2615

Ms. Mary Turner, 5/3 Trafalgar Place, Mansfield, NSW 2122

Mr. A. Walker, 56 Fitzroy Street, Surry Hills, N.S.W. 2010

Mr D. Walker, 2/1 Nelson Street, Randwick, NSW 2031

Mrs D. Ward, 47 Wakeford Rd, Strathfield, NSW 2135

Ms S. White, 11 Courtice Close, Fadden, ACT 2904

Ms M. Whitford, 2 Murrabibbi St, Leanyer, NT 0812

Mr. E. Whiting, 6 Cypress Street, Leeton, NSW., 2705

Mrs. E. Whitten, 24 Somerville Street, Spence, ACT 2615

Mrs. V. Wicks, 3/43 Robinson Road, Hawthorn, Vic. 3122

Ms J. Wilson, 34 Araba St, Aranda, ACT 2614

Ms. C. Winning, 197 Prince Alfred Place, Newport Beach, NSW 2106

Mrs R Winspear, 8 Disraeli St, Kew, Vic. 3101

Ms C Wood, 3/150 Helen Street, Morwell, Vic 3840

Mrs. J. Wood, 5 York Court, Heathmont, Vic. 3135

Mr. M. Wood, 154 Minerva Road, Manifold Heights, Vic. 3218

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New Members
The Society welcomes the following new members:

Mrs C Durbridge, Fitzroy North, Vic
Ms Ann Marie Gaudry, Downer, ACT

The Society of Indexers
GPO Box 1251
Melbourne VIC 3001

President: George Levick
              (03) 418 7344
Vice Pres: Mary Long
             (03) 286 9125
Secretary: Ian Ogiers
             (03) 418 7275
Treasurer: Joyce Gillespie
             (03) 654 8527
or
             (03) 710 1270
Editor: c/- Rebecca Smale
               (03) 600 1422
Fax: c/- (03) 670 0138

Committee Members:
Max McMaster: (03) 571 6341
Heather Hillman: (055) 62 5084
Rosemary Bunnage: (03) 565 2605
John Simkin: (03) 429 8817
Josephine McGovern: (03) 596 1555

NSW BRANCH
PO Box R598
Royal Exchange SYDNEY, 2000

President: Alan Walker
           (02) 380 5875
Fax: (02) 361 0651
Secretary: Michael Wyatt
           (02) 281 0460
Treasurer: Kingsley Siebel
           (02) 477 3149
Committee: Garry Cousins, Mary Turner,
Lorraine Doyle, Christine Winning
Dwight Walker

ACT REGION BRANCH
GPO Box 2069
Canberra ACT 2601

President: Geraldine Triffitt
           (06) 246 1177
Fax: (06) 249 7310
Secretary: Jenni Cole
           (06) 243 4211
Treasurer: Susan MacDougall
           (06) 201 2645
Committee: Olga Howell
Laurel Tunks
Robert Hyslop
Barbara Dickens

Next Deadline - Friday 5 August 1994

News, views and reviews are always welcome.
Floppy disks will be appreciated where articles
are longer than one A4 page (preferably 3.5"
Macintosh disks; Microsoft Word software; IBM
is also OK).

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