Indexing in Southern Africa

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Publishing and the production of books is in its infancy in the emerging states of Africa south of the Sahara. Most of the English books written by people in these countries are printed in Britain. Some subject books have workable indexes, which may have been made by the authors or editors, but their number is so few that it is impossible to assess the extent and quality of indexes to books in these states. The situation is different in the Republic of South Africa, where there is a flourishing publishing industry, although many writers in English, to obtain wider circulation, have their books published in England. This article, therefore, deals only with the state of indexing in South Africa.

South African books of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tended not to have indexes. Even the Van Riebeeck Society, the South African equivalent of the Hakluyt Society, with a librarian as secretary, issued its first nine volumes, 1918-1929, without indexes. Thereafter indexes were included, but up to the 'sixties authors were asked to supply a 'name index'. Some of the most recent volumes have had quite well-constructed subject and name indexes; it depended on the author or editor. In fact, the Society departed from the normal when it published Baines's *Journal of residence in Africa*. Volume one was issued in 1961 and the editor insisted on a full index to the first volume because it was being published and sold a few years before the second volume and it would be wellnigh useless without an index. When volume two was published in 1964, it included an index to the two volumes although volume one already carried its own index. The full work was indexed, introduction, text, footnotes, illustrations and all. That it should be necessary to mention this indicates that indexing is not yet very advanced in South Africa.

The country's great pioneer indexer was George McCall Theal, Colonial Historiographer at the Cape from 1891. Besides indexing his own major historical writings—and he was most voluminous—he edited and indexed G. W. Stow's *The native races of South Africa* (1905) and wrote in the Editor's Preface: '... I added an index, which is indispensable for a work of reference, and with this completed what was no more than the duty of one holding the appointment of colonial historiographer with respect to a work of such importance for both ethnological and historical study ...' It is a reasonably good subject and name index, with plenty of subdivisions under headings that need them. He indexed his own histories and his compilations from 1888 onwards and developed what he called a 'Synoptical Index', one that not only referred to the relevant pages but often gave enough information in the index entry to make reference to the passage in the text unnecessary. Sir George Cory, another great South African historian, did not index his own work. In the preface to Vol. 1 of *The rise of South Africa* (1921) he thanks two ladies by name for doing 'the necessary typewriting and indexing'. Did Cory consider subject indexing to be clerical work?

The searching for information in unindexed books on South African history and related topics became so time-consuming in the Africana Library of the Johannesburg Public Library that it was decided to make indexes for the most important of them. These indexes were made for the use of the Africana Library, but were issued in stencilled form, free of charge, to anybody who applied for them. Fifty or a hundred copies were usually made and they were very soon out of print. The books were not indexed only by members of the library staff, but by librarians in other institutions and by individual friends of the library. Two of these friends, each of whom gave the library five indexes, were well-known South African authors of historical works who made indexes to books that they used frequently in their
own researches; the indexes were made in self-defence, as it were. Incidentally, both of these authors provide full indexes in their own books.

Some of the indexes made for the library have since been included in facsimile reprints of the books. Among those later included with facsimile reprints was that to Godlonton and Irving's *Narrative of the Kaffir War*, indexed by Miss P. M. Speight, then Deputy City Librarian. This was an interesting index because it indexed two editions with different pagination, the London edition published in 1851 with 310 pages, and the Grahamstown edition of 1852, which had 471 pages and some material not in the London edition. In 1955 Miss C. D. Saul, then Librarian of the S.A. Institute of International Affairs, made an index to Collins's *Free statia* (1907). This was included with the facsimile reprint published in 1965. The index to Donald Moodie's *The Record* (1838-42) was compiled by Miss Anna H. Smith, now Johannesburg City Librarian, but was never issued as a separate publication; the index was published for the first time with the facsimile edition of 1960. Moodie is probably the most important source book of South African history; it is packed with information on a vast variety of subjects. If ever there was a book that cried out for an index it was Moodie. None was issued with the work because it was issued in parts and was never finished. Miss Smith's index is a formidable piece of work; very little has been missed and, in spite of its size, it is easy to use. It includes over seven thousand headings and subheadings. For instance, under the heading 'Horses' there are forty-seven subheadings with a total of 122 references. The compiler of this index is a compulsive indexer, brought up on M. T. Wheeler's *Indexing: principles, rules and examples* (New York State Library, 5th ed., 1957).

The excellent index to Moodie, which incidentally, was made at great speed when the compiler was isolated with chickenpox, should be contrasted with the miserable travesty of an index provided for the tercentenary edition of the *Journal of Van Riebeeck*. This work, well produced in three volumes, was a prestige publication issued by the Van Riebeeck Society in collaboration with a commercial publisher from 1952 to 1958. Apart from its index it is a book of which the country may well be proud. Being the day-book of the first Commander at the Cape, it is full of information on innumerable subjects, and yet it has only a name index—and a very poor one at that. It need only be said that under the heading 'Van Riebeeck, Jan' there are four hundred and five references and no subheadings. The heading 'Eva' in the index to Moodie has twenty-three references divided under four subheadings; in the Van Riebeeck under this heading there are sixty-five references and no subheadings.

The Johannesburg Public Library has issued twenty-eight indexes to books originally published without an index, but this is only a small part of its indexing activities. It has a staff of six librarians in its Indexing Office, which compiles the *Index to S.A. Periodicals*, an annual which has been running since 1940, with ten-yearly cumulations, and the Office is now working on an index to S.A. periodicals published between 1900 and 1939. The library makes the half-yearly indexes to the City Council Minutes, and compiles ten-yearly cumulations; it compiled an index to *Afrikaans poetry in books*, published by J. L. van Schaik in 1957; it published in stencilled form over its own imprint an index to pictures of South African interest in *The Illustrated London News*, 1842-1949, and an index to the names of African native tribes met with in books—a total of 13,000 names—the latter entailed a lot of reading. Two of the library's biggest indexes will never be published. These are the index to all the portraits in books in the Africana Library, an index numbering to date some 80,000 entries; and a personal name index to the *Cape of Good Hope Votes and Proceedings and Annexures, 1854-1910*. These have become too big for publication.
There is no end to the variety of indexing. The Africana Museum in Johannesburg has published Africana Notes and News since 1943 and with each volume issues the usual, rather perfunctory, index to the authors, titles and subjects of articles. At the end of every ten years a very detailed index to the articles and contents of articles is published as a separate publication. The first, to volumes 1 to 10, 1943-53, ran to 327 closely printed pages, and was so detailed that it was almost a concordance. It is an excellent example of over-indexing, and yet the user is often grateful that it is so detailed. On the other hand, in spite of intelligent and ingenious arrangement, its very size makes it difficult to use. For instance, under the heading 'Baines, J. T.', there are ninety subheadings, not tabulated but running-on. There are, of course, indexers in South Africa who would have given the hundred-odd references under Baines without a single subheading. On the grounds that over-indexing is better than under-indexing, the second ten-year index was as detailed as the first, and—on the grounds that the proof of the pudding is in the eating—the third is to follow the same pattern. Africana Notes and News has been a strong advocate for more and better indexing of South African books. It has had two leading articles on Indexes and indexing in 'Learned drudges' in v. 10, no. 3, pp. 73-5 (June 1953). 'What! No index!' in v. 13, no. 3, pp. 85-6 (September 1958).

The South African Library Association has interested itself in indexing to the extent of urging the government to provide a usable index to the Government Gazette and to government publications, and has urged a newspaper to publish an index. Some individual librarians in places other than Johannesburg have compiled indexes to books; several exhort publishers on the iniquity of omitting an index from a subject book. But, on the whole, South African librarians, although aware of the value of indexes, do not realize the difficulty of compiling them, particularly indexes of subjects and ideas. They tend to know little of the basic principles of book indexing; they think of indexing as being as easy as subject cataloguing; and, in recent years, they have become enamoured of the computer, which they think will do their indexing for them.

South African publishers are not yet very index conscious. There is a smaller proportion of books published without an index than was the case a few years ago, but there are still too many. Only last year one of South Africa's principal publishers issued a book on stage-coaches and coaching without an index. Certainly, it was a book intended primarily for continuous reading; it would also have been a useful book of reference had it had an index. Two or three years ago a fairly large town published its official history—without an index. In 1960 a Natal publisher published without an index the letters of an 1820 settler, a book of 371 pages packed with information. A research worker who needed to use it immediately set to and made an index for it. Fortunately, reviewers are acquiring the habit of drawing attention to the lack of an index in a book that should have one and of referring to the omission as a serious defect. It is also becoming more common for reviewers, in journals and on the radio, to refer to the usefulness of a new book's index.

There is no society of indexers in South Africa and no Wheatley Medal; in fact, I know of nobody in this country who would rank as a professional indexer. Indexes are usually made by authors, whose skill varies from satisfactory to bad. The main faults are a tendency to use comprehensive rather than specific headings, the inclusion of numerous references under a single heading without subdivision, and restricting indexing to names only. Many indexes are made by librarians, who tend to think in terms of a dictionary catalogue and to make cross-references that are necessary in an open catalogue but not in the index to a specific single book. One of the friends who made indexes for the Johannesburg Library, a barrister by profession, once said that he knew his indexes

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PERSONALIA

MEMBERS HONOUR THE PRESIDENT

Nearly forty members of the Society met at Schmidt's Restaurant on 7th December to entertain our President, Mr. Norman Knight, to lunch, and so honour him on reaching his eightieth birthday.

After a very enjoyable meal, our President acknowledged the toast to his health (which was proposed by our Chairman, Mr. Richard Bancroft) in a most pleasant and witty speech. He said that to him, it was a wholly memorable and joyous occasion. Asking if there is anything so remarkable about becoming an octogenarian, he instanced several well-known national figures, politicians, musicians and authors who were active in their chosen spheres until well over eighty and, in some cases, over ninety.

He said that quite recently, for a business purpose, his doctor wrote a certificate to the effect that normally he could expect a lease of life of at least ten years. 'So that, unless some Act of God or other diabolical contrivance intervened', he would be found still around (with his name cluttering up the list of members) for quite some time. But, he said, 'I do hereby undertake, that long before bodily infirmity has put a stop to further attendance at meetings of the Society, I shall hand over the Presidency (which I value more than I can say) to some younger and abler colleague'.

He mentioned that he had attended almost all the seventy-four meetings of the Council, and all the Society's numerous other meetings except two and on those occasions he had been in hospital.

He reviewed the work of the Society since it was founded fourteen years ago, and paid tributes to past and present officials of the Society.

Norman Knight, our Founder and President, has received such a flood mail of charmingly-worded letters of congratulation upon his eightieth birthday that he finds himself unable to reply to them individually, as he would have infinitely preferred to do.

He therefore asks his numerous correspondents to accept his heartfelt thanks through this note in The Indexer, in whose columns many members probably received their first intimation of his reaching that age.

Mr. Ivan Butler, a long-standing member of the Society, is an expert on matters of the stage and the screen. Of his fourth book within a year The Daily Telegraph (27.1.72) says: 'Ivan Butler's well-arranged history, devoted yet detached, tells its detailed story in To encourage the art of film (Hale, £2.30) . . . It is, however, as a record of struggling faith in the cinema that this careful book deserves acknowledgment'. A fifth book, The hundred best plays for amateurs, selected by Ivan Butler, was published by the Pelham Press in February this year.

As we go to press we learn with regret of the death of Mrs. E. M. Hatt, who frequently attended the discussion-meetings in the early years of the Society.

James Negus, who occasionally contributes to The Indexer, has had published by the American Philatelic Research Library a 60-page booklet entitled Good bibliographic practice. We hope to refer to it more extensively in our next issue.

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were not very good; they were, he said, too subjective; he indexed what interested him—he didn’t know what might interest other people. Here the librarian has an advantage, for he is taught to consider and understand the requirements of readers with different interests and needs.