Indexing in Canada: Local Indexing and Commercial Services

PETER GREIG and JOYCE A. TRACY

Traditional indexing, whether on a local or a commercial level, has not achieved the status in Canada which it appears to have gained in Great Britain or the United States. On the commercial side this lack of interest may be attributed to the pre-eminence of British and American periodicals and periodical indexing services. Libraries and similar institutions have acquired, and probably will continue to collect, nationally produced periodical materials despite the inadequate coverage provided by these same foreign indexing services. The emphasis throughout this article will be on periodical indexing, although other materials will be discussed in connection with local indexing.

In the 1882 edition of Poole's index to periodical literature access was provided to two Canadian periodicals; however, these represented American holdings and had been indexed by American librarians. The first recorded Canadian contributor to a multi-periodical index appears to have been James Bain, Librarian of the Toronto Public Library. Through his labour the Canadian magazine was included in the supplements of Poole's index which appeared between 1897 and 1908.

Invariably, libraries and similar institutions maintain some form of information file scaled to the subject interests and requirements of their clientele. At the most primitive level such a source might be only a clippings file or a drawer of cards labelled 'facts on file'. Occasionally the service may proceed to a further stage and through systematic development become an index.

This level of information service may be seen in Poole's original index of 1848; as such, it represents one of the earliest examples of local indexing for local needs. By 1876 a great deal of duplication of effort had taken place at the level of local indexing. Poole's solution was a gradual expansion of his multi-periodical index by means of co-operative institutional labour. The centralized periodical indexing services of the present day have reversed this process in order to maintain the solution on a feasible basis.

This experience of the close relationship which may occur between local indexing and its subsequent development into a commercial service seems remarkably predominant in this country. As a demonstration of this relationship the object of this article is to provide an overview of the representative local indexing and commercial services in Canada. The examples which will be quoted in the course of discussion are largely drawn from a survey on local indexing conducted in 1970 by the Index Committee of the Bibliographical Society of Canada.

Local indexing essentially represents an added feature of institutional service. While
it demonstrates certain broad characteristics, it remains governed by the type of institution providing the service—whether a public, academic, special or government library. Frequently such productions represent the work of either a well established institution or one with an especially strong subject interest. Only on rare occasions do the files go beyond the card production stage and reach final publication. The reasons for this may usually be traced to the lack of trained staff, time and money to complete and edit the materials produced.

Historically, the public library has played an important role in local indexing by supplementing those services already available. Newly established institutions tend to display a greater reliance on the commercially available tools than do the older, better established ones. In the majority of public libraries selective indexing is a by-product of an interest in local history. While activity of this nature is common, it is rarely pursued in a systematic fashion. Too often the result is merely a sketchy information file rather than a comprehensive bibliographic index. As an example of this type of indexing, the Ottawa Public Library has indexed both books and periodicals dealing with the Ottawa area in addition to other materials of a more general nature. Similar files have been developed on the basis of their respective regional interests by the Halifax City Regional Library and by the Public Libraries in Westmount, London, Saskatoon, Calgary and New Westminster.

Other than local history, public libraries usually do not index in special subject areas when these are served by any of the commercial periodical indexing services. Occasional indexes are provided for specific subject fields of major interest in the region. The Calgary Public Library, for instance, maintains an index on the oil industry. On a broader level, the Business Section of the Toronto Public Library prepared and published an index to the contents of Canadian business periodicals during the 1950’s. When this service was discontinued, the Canadian periodical index provided a continued coverage for certain of the more commonly received of these periodicals.

Among the academic libraries, there appears to be significantly less interest in indexing. The more specialized requirements of universities and colleges seem better met by the standard periodical indexing tools. Accordingly, a great deal of reliance is placed in the commercial services, especially in the scientific fields. As in the case of public libraries, some indexing service is provided for local history materials by the academic institutions. Commonly, as at the Memorial University of Newfoundland and at Mount Allison University, this takes the form of indexing runs of local periodicals.

Occasionally these services expand to the broader level of provincial coverage. The Memorial University of Newfoundland again provides an illustration of an institution which has begun to do systematic indexing on this basis. In addition they also index some books of provincial interest. The University of Saskatchewan at Saskatoon has indexed both periodicals and newspapers of provincial and special subject interest. Where subject indexing is being done, it is usually provided by a subject branch library or for the use of a specific faculty. The work of the Law and Medical Sciences Libraries of the University of Alberta is an instance of the creation of these special subject tools.

At a national level the McLennan Library of McGill University has done work in the past to complete the five-year gap in coverage of the Canadian periodical index. The Centre de Documentation de la Bibliothèque at Laval University has also done pioneer periodical indexing work on an international basis. Their particular field has been the indexing of French and French Canadian periodicals, employing computerized techniques.

Special libraries filling the needs of business, industry and research do only a minimum of indexing. Their special subject interests are served in a more comprehensive
fashion by the commercial indexing services in that field. Further, the small staff size prevalent in special libraries is a determining factor in the production of indexes. Often the individual institution will try to provide some form of SDI service rather than attempting a full subject index. Where a certain subject interest is common to a number of special libraries a joint indexing service may be created to provide the needed information resource tool. To date, such co-operative activity has not been discovered among the Canadian special libraries.

When institutional indexing has been performed by a special library, it is usually of a stop-gap nature. The library of the Bank of Montreal, for instance, discards its listings as soon as coverage is ensured by the commercial service. Occasionally indexing has been begun to cover areas of interest not covered by the commercial service. As an illustration of this aspect the Public Relations Department Library of the Canadian National Railways maintains an index to periodical and newspaper literature dealing with transportation in general and the CNR in particular. However, a fuller instance of comprehensive subject coverage is the card index on the tobacco industry maintained by the Reference Library of Imperial Tobacco Products Ltd.

Government libraries in the legislative sphere would appear to do very little indexing of governmental material. The information files which are created are intended for staff use generally and not meant for either publication or public consumption. Debates and journals are usually indexed by other government services dissociated from the library itself. The Library of Parliament in Ottawa is the major exception. Since 1967 a steadily growing Index Section has provided access to the reports of both the House of Commons and the Senate Committees by means of a published index.

Some indexing has been done on a regional basis by the various provincial legislative libraries. The Nova Scotia Legislative Library has indexed both periodicals and books of historical interest to the province. The Provincial Libraries of Saskatchewan and British Columbia, again illustrating regional interest, provide index access to provincial newspapers and other materials of interest to their respective governments.

In addition to matters of regional interest and provincial history some indexing is done on a specific subject basis. The Provincial Museum and Archive of Alberta has indexed materials which essentially relate to the natural history of the province. In some departmental libraries a certain amount of subject indexing related to in-house activities has been done as well. The National Science Library, for example, has provided indexes to National Research Council publications and the Quebec Department of Lands and Forests maintains an index on forestry and related subjects. The library of the Research Council of Alberta, as will be shown, also provides special subject services on a commercial basis.

Since 1968 the National Library of Canada and various groups at the federal government level have expressed interest in the provision and co-ordination of information retrieval services, particularly in the areas of science and technology. In the brief submitted to the Special Senate Committee on Science Policy the National Librarian recommended

That the National Library investigate the possibility of establishing, in co-operation with other libraries, indexing and abstracting services in fields in which such services are not now available, or are grossly inadequate.¹

Such interest, however, has been limited to the more recent indexing techniques. In the report on Scientific and technical information in Canada prepared for the Science Council of Canada, traditional indexing methods are denigrated as being 'unable to provide adequate service' and as 'growing obsolete'.²
Newspaper indexing has been mentioned briefly in the context of the above remarks. The complexity of providing access to information in newspapers has posed an acute problem only reflected by the very nature of the material. A further recommendation of the National Librarian was

That a central newspaper indexing office for all government departments and agencies be established in the National Library, where news items would be kept permanently and coded for instantaneous retrieval and communication.

An earlier abortive attempt to create a Canadian newspaper index was begun at the Regina campus of the University of Saskatchewan in 1966. The proposed service was to provide access to twenty newspapers representing each of the provinces as well as the two official languages, by computerized means. Although the pilot project of the Canada news index successfully produced a sample listing, the plan has not been able to reach fruition despite immediate library response. The selective services provided on a regional basis by various institutions are too limited in scope to meet national requirements. It is hoped that the National Library will inaugurate its proposed service in the near future in order that public access may be had to the information of past events. At the present time only two newspapers are indexed in a readily available form: the Financial post is indexed in the Canadian periodical index and a machine-produced index has been provided for Le devoir since 1966.

The Canadian periodical indexes commercially available to the public represent projects of individual associations or library institutions rather than products of private firms. Such indexing services have found it difficult to cover their expenses profitably, with the result that long term efforts are a rarity. The first commercial indexing service appeared in Canada in 1928. Prior to that, as has been mentioned, the only recorded indexing had been the contributions of James Bain to the supplements of Poole's index.

As well, two French Canadian periodical indexes appeared during the first half of the twentieth century. Both of these were individual efforts which were never continued. In the Catalogue d'articles parus dans diverses revues canadiennes (1912), A. Saint-Pierre indexed the contents of fifteen French Canadian periodicals which had appeared during 1912 on the basis of eight broad subject fields. Within the subject field the articles were arranged alphabetically by title followed by the journal mnemonic, volume number and the author's name.

The Répertoire de nos revues prepared by René Girard around 1939 was a more comprehensive work. From thirty-two French language periodicals, of which fourteen were Canadian in origin, Girard prepared over 6,000 entries. In all cases an attempt was made to provide access to the complete run of the journal. The plan of the index was based on the traditional order of the cours classiques, for whose students it was meant. In essence it provided a classed listing by title followed by the author’s name, the journal mnemonic, the year, the volume or issue number and the pagination. It is curious that by producing classed indexes, the works of Saint-Pierre and Girard provide a foretaste of the structural approach which would be taken in the computerized Index analytique.

The two major indexes to periodicals, the Index analytique and the Canadian periodical index, represent the linguistic duality of Canada. Although both cover a broad subject range their individual approach to the indexing process differs radically.

The Canadian periodical index represents the earliest attempt in this country to provide a commercial service. Modestly making a début in 1928, it was issued in mimeographed form by the Windsor Public Library. The work had been originated by the Librarian, Miss Agnes Lancefield; after 1931 it was carried on by Mr. Angus Mowat. Shortly after
his departure the following year, the Canadian periodical index was discontinued. For seven years the project languished, undoubtedly due to the financial conditions of the times as much as to the lack of sustaining leadership. However, in 1938 the reference staff of the University of Toronto Library recommenced the index under the editorial direction of Dr. W. S. Wallace. The indexes were published in the Ontario library review through the assistance of Mr. Mowat, who had recently assumed the post of Inspector of Public Libraries for the province. This situation endured for eight years until the influx of students after the second World War forced the University to withdraw its support. By 1946, however, the Canadian Library Association had been formed and it rapidly became convinced that that index represented a worthy object for its assistance.

The Canadian periodical index represents the traditional subject approach to the indexing of periodicals. At present it provides access to eighty-seven Canadian periodicals and a single newspaper, the Financial post; seventeen of the periodicals are wholly or in part in the French language. Selection of the journals to be indexed is determined on the basis of surveys conducted among the subscribing libraries. Occasional resurveys are made to ensure the continuing usefulness of these serials to the institutions concerned. The subject range of the periodicals includes business, economics, fine arts, librarianship, literature, popular culture and the social sciences. A broad comprehensive index is provided for the magazines and the entries are alphabetically arranged by author and subject. Book reviews and reproductions of Canadian art are accorded special treatment. The indexing level of the material is suitable for all types of libraries. Under various editors and over a period of forty-four years the Canadian periodical index has ensured access to the most widely read of Canadian serials.

Index analytique represents the second major periodical index available to the public on a commercial basis. Begun in 1966 to satisfy the needs of Laval University, it is still a production by that institution's Centre de Documentation de la Bibliothèque. In the past there has been an emphasis on university level materials; however, the scope of Index analytique has been modified and broadened in recent years for use at other levels. At the present time access is provided by means of a computerized index employing a controlled vocabulary of natural language terms to 120 French language periodicals produced in Canada and France. The index has been divided into sections to provide access by alphabetically arranged descriptors, classed headings, authors and article titles. The range of the materials abstracted and indexed includes coverage of economic, political, religious and social affairs in Quebec, as well as articles dealing with geography, history, philosophy and sociology.

Specialized indexes have been created to fill in the subject gaps left in the coverage of the two main indexing services. The Index to Canadian legal periodical literature produced by the Canadian Association of Law Libraries is an annual index in traditional format intended to provide access to Canadian legal periodicals and collections of legal essays.

The Canadian Council for Research in Education sponsors a quarterly index to French and English language books, pamphlets, periodicals and reports published in Canada on the subject of education. The Canadian education index, unlike the majority of indexing services, represents a co-operative venture. Indexers in each province send their work to a central office where the entries are edited prior to publication.

Two organizations specializing in the medical sciences also provide indexes to materials in their field. The Canadian Medical Association Library provides an annual index to the Association's own journal, as well as to the Canadian journal of surgery. Both indexes are published in their respective journals while a cumulated file is maintained at the Library. The Canadian Nurses'
Association provides an author and broad subject index to the bibliographies produced in their Canadian nursing studies series. The scope of this last index includes such varied materials as periodical articles, projects, reports and theses related to the health sciences and nursing in Canada or written by a Canadian nurse.

The interest in film materials and the need for information in this field led to the provision of an indexing service by the Canadian Film Institute. Essentially representing materials in their collection, Film Canadiana provides access to information in film catalogues and to articles in Canadian and foreign periodicals.

Only a single library in a specialized subject field appears to rival Index analytique in its technological approach to the indexing process. The library of the Alberta Research Council indexes materials relating to bituminous sands, and the Athabasca oil sands in particular. Computer print-outs serve as a form of index publication, ensuring subscribing institutions quick and efficient service.

A further step in the development of indexing progress in Canada should be mentioned. Two years ago the Bibliographical Society of Canada formed an Index Committee with the object of promoting indexing activity and to provide information on indexing methodology. Essentially the Committee has been concerned with traditional indexing rather than the technologically involved post-war information retrieval systems. Its major effort to date has been a survey on local indexing projects carried on by Canadian institutions. From the information gathered and other sources, the Committee proposes to establish a union list of indexes which should prevent duplication of effort and provide a valuable reference tool.

Where indexing has not been provided initially it is difficult and expensive to create and maintain on a systematic basis. The representative examples which have been given in the foregoing survey demonstrate the amount of unknown work which has been produced at an institutional level. If these services can be technically improved and systematically developed in conjunction with national guidelines and the available commercial services, a major step in information retrieval will have been achieved in Canada. Complete coverage, like the perfect bibliography, may remain a mirage on the horizon; however, it is certain that Canadian indexers are continuing to attempt to turn the hypothetical into reality.

(1) Canada. Senate. Special Committee on Science Policy. Proceedings, no. 78, p. 9156 (Recommendation no. 23).
(2) Scientific and technical information in Canada. [Ottawa] Science Council of Canada [1969] Part 2, chap. 5, pp. 1, 48 (Appendix A, pp. 71-76 provides a summary of 'Selected information and data systems and services in Canada, in being or proposed').
(3) Canada. Senate. op. cit. (Recommendation no. 18).

ROMANIZATION OF JAPANESE

Consideration of ways in which the letters of the roman alphabet can be made to represent the characters of languages which use quite different written forms is being undertaken by a British Standards Institution Committee. The work of this committee has resulted in standards for the transliteration of Cyrillic and Greek (BS 2979) and of Arabic (BS 4280), and the latest publication to emerge is BS 4812, Romanization of Japanese.

BS 4812 does not contain a new method for the romanization of Japanese; it confirms that the long-established Hepburn system is still the one best suited for use in the English-speaking world. By means of notes and tables it gives full details of the form generally known as 'modified Hepburn'. Some useful information concerning other systems is also provided, together with a list of variants.

Future plans include a British Standard for the romanization of Chinese.

Copies are available from BSI Sales Branch, 101 Pentonville Road, London, NI 9ND.