BOOK INDEXING IN CANADA

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The historical development of indexing, at either an international or a national level, is virtually impossible to trace. A. L. Clarke, in the first edition of his Manual of practical indexing, remarked that 'of history in the proper sense attaching to the art there is little or none'. This situation, beyond the addition of a few anecdotes relating to various early book indexes and a limited amount of scattered documentation on the growth of periodical indexing in the late nineteenth century, remains remarkably unaltered. Following the establishment of national library associations in the United States and Great Britain after 1876, as well as the short-lived Index Society, a definite interest in the provision of periodical indexes became apparent. This interest, consolidated by the growing number of articles and monographs on index methodology which had appeared before the turn of the century, served as well to influence the provision of book indexes. Certainly book indexes appeared more frequently in the last quarter of the century than they had done previously.

Various factors delayed the common appearance of book indexes in Canada until the present century. The late arrival of the printing trade in this country, combined with the slow and uncertain development of the publishing industry, serve to indicate the major reasons behind this delay. To a lesser degree, the failure until recent years to establish a national library association capable of demanding standards and maintaining interest in the art should also be considered as a contributing factor. Despite such considerations, book indexes were produced occasionally during the nineteenth century, although various pre-index devices appear more commonly.

The use of pre-index devices is not confined to Canadian books alone. In Great Britain, France and the United States—the three countries which, by reason of their extensive book exports to Canada, exerted the greatest influence over the Canadian publishing industry—these ancestral index forms were equally prevalent. The most common pre-index device was the detailed table of contents, frequently corresponding to the highly structured subsections of each chapter. Occasionally this correlation between the table of contents and the textual structure was made explicit by the use of either a varying heading at the top of each page, or by a marginal gloss; more rarely the actual words used within the text were set out telegraphically in bold face type, achieving a key-word-in-context effect.

The name index represents the most common form of index to be found among nineteenth century Canadian works. The possible combination of the detailed table of
contents with the name index represents a primitive post co-ordinate approach—although it is unlikely that readers of that period made use of the technique. To a large extent the name index has been superseded in this century by the full subject index for all serious works of non-fiction.

This development, however, has not been so evident among French language publications in Canada. Despite a long history in the production of non-fiction works, the *table des matières* approach and the name index continue to predominate over the use of subject indexes. In a large measure these usages derive from the influences of the publishing industry and book production in France. Indeed, so common has the name index become that a writer of a guide for library students was able to describe an index as simply *une liste alphabétique des noms de lieux et de personnes mentionnés dans le volume* \(^{(2)}\). Despite a reliance on the name index and a preference for classified listings (more evident in periodical indexes), it would appear that French language book indexes are becoming more subject-orientated in nature. This view is supported by Léandre Poirier’s definition of an index in *Au service de nos écrivains*:

> "Index—recueil fait par ordre alphabétique des mots couvrant un matériel donné avec les références précises, mais sans explication." \(^{(3)}\)

The subject emphasis is further elaborated in the chapter concerning index methodology.

Government documents, by reason of their generally serial nature, do not fall readily within the scope of this article. Those occasional non-serial materials produced by the various governments or their departments frequently are intended for immediate use in explaining current policies or programmes. Often such publications are little more than pamphlets for which a table of contents is considered sufficient. The more extensive publications which are produced vary greatly as to whether they contain an index or not. Those works issued for either government service employees or for the reader accustomed to government terminology generally use a classified listing in preference to an index. Major publications of lasting public value appear to represent the most frequently indexed category of books, although the depth of indexing and the expertise with which the work is done continue to vary with each individual title. At the Federal Government level there is little evidence of co-ordination with regard to either indexing policy or practice, regardless of the stricture that *an index is desirable for every publication that will be used for reference* \(^{(4)}\). Nor has the presence of a central agency, in the form of the recently established Information Canada, served to standardize anything more than the distribution of government materials. Ultimately both the decision-making and the technical responsibilities of index provision rest with the individual body for which the work is produced. A clear and definite policy is required, embracing the totality of government services, before the efforts of the various elements can be co-ordinated and standardized.

In August 1972, the Index Committee of the Bibliographical Society of Canada undertook a survey on the policies and practices governing book indexing in Canada. The mailing list of 161 publishers and twelve associations of publishers and/or authors comprised the total number of Canadian publishers listed in the *Canadian almanac & directory* for both 1971 and 1972, and in the first edition of *A guide to scholarly publishing in Canada* \(^{(5)}\). In addition, a survey form was sent to the Commissioners of the Ontario Royal Commission on Book Publishing. The publishers included 110 English language firms, forty-six French language firms and five which issue publications in both languages. The associations may be divided on a similar basis, including seven English language societies, three French language societies and two which have bilingual memberships.

The questionnaire used in the survey, with slight additions, was that designed by Mr.
Oliver Stallybrass which appeared as an appendix to his article ‘The author, the publisher and the indexer’ (6). The additions consisted of a directive to the publishers to answer the questions solely on the basis of their Canadian output, and a new question to determine if publishers who rely on outside indexing maintain files of known indexers. A French translation of the questionnaire was prepared through the courtesy of Mlle Esther Senneville of the Index Section of the Library of Parliament, Canada.

The limited response to the book indexing survey may be attributed to various causes. In part, the numerous briefs and surveys which accompanied the studies of the Ontario Royal Commission on Book Publishing may have convinced many publishers that the provision of further information was unnecessary. For this reason it is unfortunate that the scope of the Royal Commission was concentrated on the marketing and distribution problems of the publishing industry, rather than on the more technical aspects of book production.

The purpose in sending the survey forms to related associations of publishers and/or authors was to determine if they had considered, or involved themselves in, the provision of book indexes. The three replies received indicate a lack of policy in this area with regard to either publishers or authors. Since such considerations need not form a necessary part of a society’s role towards its membership, these returns may not prove significant. However, it would appear that the absence of any indication of policy at this level denotes a common failure to recognize the need for either standards or standardization in book indexing.

The 161 survey forms directed to English and French language publishing firms elicited thirty-one replies. Of these, ten returns were discarded immediately: either because the firm did not produce books with indexes due to the nature of the material it published; or because the publisher was acting solely in an agent capacity for a foreign parent firm. The former are generally small publishing houses specializing in poetry and/or fiction; although one firm in this category produces only pre-school materials designed specifically for mass-distribution outlets. The remaining twenty-one forms represent replies from nineteen English language and two French language publishing houses. However, it should be noted that where percentages and generalizing terms are given below, they refer specifically to a base of twenty-one. It did not prove possible to make any distinction between the English and French language publishing groups, or to discuss the various specialized categories of scholarly and legal publications. The majority of the firms delineated below are involved in general publishing including a certain amount of text-book publishing as well. In addition, four firms specialize exclusively in the publication of school books, while two produce only trade books.

In general the decision for index provision is based on the book’s use and its subsequent effectiveness in answering a user’s needs. This common criterion of use is bolstered by additional considerations to determine whether a given work will have an index or not. These include the length, type and subject complexity of the book, its market, the anticipated age level of its audience and the type and cost involved in producing the index. In addition, one publishing firm even attempts to anticipate the reaction of reviewers and the public to determine whether or not an individual book should be provided with an index.

With a single exception, all of the publishing houses which replied to the questionnaire indicate that the decision on index provision is made at the typescript stage. Almost invariably this decision is left to the copy editor responsible for that individual book. In a few instances this decision is reached by the senior editor, or after consultation between the senior editor and the copy editor. One firm also consults with the author at this stage as well. Despite these
limited examples of co-operation, few of the publishers appear to have a fully co-ordinated policy of index provision, even when the indexes are produced in-house.

At the same time, even before an indexer may have been approached, 70 per cent of the firms estimate the size of the planned index and instruct the printer accordingly. The approximate nature of this calculation is made apparent by the fact that only one publisher holds the indexer to the estimate. Over 25 per cent of the firms allow the indexer a moderately free hand, although three others indicate that they would 'tailor' the index if necessary. Four of the publishers simply indicate a convenient number or multiple of pages.

Twelve of the firms which returned the survey form require an index cost estimate as well, although this may not be done immediately at the typescript stage. Two-thirds of these publishers attempt to adhere strictly, or as closely as possible, to the estimate produced. One publisher noted that it is always possible to modify the specifications to account for higher-than-estimated costs. A further consideration in this calculation, the fee, or estimated fee, of the indexer, will be discussed below. It is interesting to note, however, that those publishers which require cost estimates are evenly divided between the use of in-house and outside indexers.

Only a single publisher reported that it had not provided an index as yet for any of its publications. Approximately 25 per cent of the firms indicate that a substantial majority of their works are indexed. Another 20 per cent of the firms index half or about half of their books, while a similar number consider each work on an individual basis. The remainder of the replies are evenly divided between publishers which provide indexes to all their works, and publishers which provide them for only a minority of their output.

The general type of book for which the publisher (excluding those which replied 'all' or 'none') does not supply an index may be best described as a work intended for elementary school-age children. The main example is the text book of the reader or workbook variety. For this age level such works commonly are divided into short and well defined subject areas, easily amenable to the detailed table of contents approach. The scope of this type of work also extends to the 'how-to' book designed for children and to supplementary materials meant for classroom use. Similar works such as anthologies or books of readings and short lectures, intended for use in high schools and colleges, generally are not provided with indexes either. In addition, one publisher indicated that certain biographies would not require indexing.

The variation in replies indicates the individual basis on which the index provision for any given volume is determined. While only a single publisher specifies an age level factor, it obviously forms an important unconscious consideration as to whether a book will have an index or not. In the final analysis, it is perhaps not so much a question of the user's need as of the user's projected use, and his or her ability or training to make use of an index. A further conclusion which may be drawn from the types of un-indexed works intended for adult consumption is that they are usually brief in length and topical in nature. Generally they are meant for an immediate market and not for permanent use.

The onus of responsibility in providing an index is considered to rest with the author by almost 60 per cent of the publishing firms. In fact all but one of these include a clause to that effect in their standard contract. In addition, three publishers 'sometimes' place the responsibility of index provision on the author, although only one of these firms indicates that this matter is covered in their contract. The remaining publishers, while they do not require the author to supply his own index, do not indicate if this is generally covered by contract. Since half of these same firms otherwise provide an index where required by in-house
means, it would appear to be less a question of determining responsibility and more a matter of general policy.

The question of whether an author who supplies his own index is entitled to a separate fee was answered by barely half of the firms. Only a single publisher actually pays the author for his indexing—significantly, it is a firm which does not place the responsibility for index provision on the author in the first place, preferring to supply the index by in-house means.

Should the author have declared clearly that he or she will not provide an index, the most common method (employed by one-third of the publishers) is to supply it in-house. Of two firms in this category, both having indicated that they 'sometimes' placed the onus of index provision on the author, one deducts a fee for the staff member's work from the author's royalties, while the other stressed that in-house indexes were more satisfactory in general than those supplied by the author. In addition, there appears to be a high correlation between those firms which expect the author to supply an index, and those which turn to outside indexers either wholly or in part when the author refuses to do so. Six of the ten firms which either wholly or partially use outside labour indicate that they maintain a file of known indexers. However, half of these same ten publishers prefer to make their own arrangements with the indexer, rather than leave the matter to the author.

In terms of actual index procedure, eight of the publishing firms approach an indexer at the earliest possible moment, or as soon as an approximate schedule has been set. Significantly, six out of the eight rely on outside indexers either partially or exclusively. Two other firms approach an indexer, in both cases an outside indexer, at the galley proof stage. Approximately a quarter of the publishers wait until the page proof stage, although this group uses in-house indexers predominantly. The one exception, occasionally employing outside indexers, approaches the individual about a month before the page proofs arrive when it is apparent that the work cannot be done in-house. Generally in-house indexing is performed by the copy editor for the particular book in question. The copy editor, with a firm grasp of the book's schedule and a previous acquaintance with the subject content, should know the appropriate moment at which the indexing should begin.

The majority of publishers tend to wait until the page proof stage before the indexer receives the material to work on. The in-house indexer, for reasons already mentioned, almost invariably begins work at this time. In a single instance another publisher using in-house indexing methods begins the work at the typescript stage and checks this version against the page proofs. Understandably this procedure finds less favour among those publishers which employ outside indexers. Although a large number of these firms indicate that they begin work at the page proof stage, rather than at the time the galley proofs are ready, there are an equal number which vary their pattern with the situation. One publisher in this category leaves the matter to the indexer's preference.

Normally the indexer receives only a perfunctory briefing from most of the publishing houses. While this may vary with the individual title under consideration, the high incidence of in-house indexing appears to preclude any necessity of discussing house preferences. Eight of the ten publishers employing outside indexers tend to provide some form of briefing. Despite the fact that in excess of 80 per cent of the publishers consulted with the author as to the nature and scope of the index, only four included the indexer in this discussion. Significantly, three of these firms employ outside indexers. Presumably in-house indexing allows a greater amount of unrecorded consultation between the author and indexer. In general, the author is involved to a greater extent when the index is actually finished: sixteen publishers send the author both typescript
and page proof versions of the index, one sends the galley and page proofs, and three send only the page proofs. Only a single firm does not send any version of the index to the author; however, since the indexing is done by the copy editor, the author is likely to be aware of its existence.

Half of the total replies indicate that the publisher does have a list of instructions regarding indexing practice, although it is not always devised by the firm itself. Among the latter, two publishers make use of G. V. Carey's *Making an index* (Cambridge University Press, 1951), one follows the University of Chicago Press's *A manual of style* (no edition specified), and the fourth makes use of the standard guides relevant to the situation. From the examples submitted by those publishers who have devised their own sets of instructions, the indexer appears to be allowed a great deal of stylistic latitude. Of the ten publishers which employ outside indexers, five firms have lists of instructions which include indexing practice, and four of the latter brief their indexers to some extent as well.

The indexer is expected to inform the publisher of any inconsistencies in spelling by 60 per cent of the firms. It is interesting to note that six of the ten publishers which normally delay the final printing of the text until the index is completed, as well as the majority of those which sometimes delay under the same conditions, figure in this percentage. Those firms which sometimes or never delay their final printing until the completion of the index are evenly divided between their use of in-house and outside indexers. Among the publishers which normally delay final printing, three use in-house indexers exclusively, one employs only outside indexers, and four utilize either method. This suggests, not unexpectedly, that a strong correlation exists between in-house index production and the individual production schedule of a particular work.

Although the majority of the publishers normally allow the indexer more time for a longer book, there is little agreement on the time permitted when the work is begun at the page proof stage. Six firms indicate that their time schedules vary greatly between individual titles, depending on the length of the work and the importance or complexity of either the text and/or the index. The largest consensus of opinion, primarily among firms using in-house indexers, is for a period of one week to ten days. Only one publisher, also providing indexes by in-house means, favours a definite period of less than a week. Another firm which may figure in this category feels that the indexer should be able to index 100 pages within three to six hours depending on the nature of the material to be indexed. Firms which employ outside indexers allow from two weeks at the outside to four weeks.

In addition to the general absence of agreement on the average indexing time permitted, there seems little accord on the number of index typescripts required. Six publishers, including four which use outside indexers, require two copies of the typescript. Another four firms require only one, while three firms specify that they need three copies at this stage. The remaining firms may require as many as six copies of the typescript. In addition, one publisher indicates that his firm normally produces three proof sets of the index.

Approximately half of the publishers supply the indexer with a proof version of his or her work. This seems somewhat prejudicial since the author, whether he has participated in the index process or not, almost invariably receives a copy of the index proof. An additional three firms send proofs to the indexer on request. There appears to be little difference between in-house and outside indexers as to whether they receive index proofs; however, it may be assumed that the in-house indexer, commonly being the copy editor, normally would see all the various stages of the index.

Only four publishers, evenly divided in their use of in-house and outside indexers,
indicate that a standard method of payment is used by their firms. In all four instances the time taken in indexing forms the main basis for the method of payment, although one firm uses contracts on rare occasions as well. Another publisher determines the payment on the basis of the length and complexity of the text to be indexed, combined with the indexer's experience and the amount of assistance provided by the firm. In a further instance, one publisher negotiates both the payment basis and the rate with the individual indexer. Both of these last mentioned firms employ outside indexers.

Although a publisher may use a standard method of payment, it does not follow necessarily that the same firm will have a standard rate of payment. Six publishers indicate that they do not have a standard rate of payment. Three of these base their method of payment on the indexing time. In addition, four of the six firms allow themselves to be guided by the indexer in the matter, three employing outside indexers either wholly or in part. Two other publishers have varying rates; one, employing outside indexers, accepts the indexer's guidance to some extent. Another firm, as indicated above, negotiates the rate with the indexer, taking into consideration his or her views on the matter. Only one publisher, basing the method of payment on an hourly basis, quotes a standard rate of $2.50 an hour.

All six publishers which indicate that they accept the indexer's guidance in the matter of payment, as well as three other firms which will consider the indexer's views to some extent, normally ask for an estimate. Six of these nine expect the indexer to base his estimate on some stage of the proofs, and two on the basis of the typescript. The remaining publisher uses either the typescript, the galley proof or the page proof as a basis for the indexer's estimate. Eight of the firms employ outside indexers, and four do so exclusively. It would appear that some correlation may exist between the cost, index size and indexer's estimates, since all but one of the nine publishers require both an index size and an indexer's estimate. In addition, seven of these same firms require a cost estimate as well. However, in only three cases, is the basis for these estimates identical: the cost estimate normally is figured at an earlier stage than either the index size or the indexer's estimate. These last two estimates, commonly figured on the same base, are more likely to be prepared at the same time. It would seem probable to assume that the index size estimate is, in fact, a part of the indexer's calculation for the publisher.

Only six publishers indicate the margin of error which the indexer is allowed in his estimate. Two of these firms instruct the indexer to fill a convenient number of pages in their consideration of the index size, and only one permits the indexer to deviate from the established cost estimate. Two other publishers establish the index size estimates on the basis of each individual title. Both of these firms attempt to stay within the cost estimate, although the indexer is allowed a reasonably free hand. Four of the six publishers permit the indexer an estimate error margin of 10 per cent based on a sight of the proofs. Not surprisingly, three of these firms employ outside indexers exclusively. Another publisher allows only 5 per cent error when the estimate is based on the proofs, although the same firm permits a 10 per cent error margin for estimates based on a typescript. The one publisher which bases the margin of error exclusively on an examination of the typescript, allows the indexer a leeway of 10 per cent.

The majority of the publishers which replied to the survey are satisfied with the index system used by their firms. This feeling was epitomized in the remark of one editor, to the effect that his firm had 'never thought of indexing as a particular problem . . . or as a process for implementation by an expert. Our books have . . . been criticized for not including an index but never, as far as I can remember, for poor or inadequate indexing'. The high incidence of in-house indexing was explained in a comment by
noted another editor: ‘ideally indexes should be done by editors, who know the content best after the author, but these editors would have to be experienced indexers to do a good job’. The frequency of remarks of this sort in association with in-house indexing, substantiates the fact that the editor invariably is expected to be experienced in indexing practices. It is interesting to note that three of the five firms which did not specify their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their current index system, use in-house indexers exclusively. Indeed, the only publisher who indicated a desire to improve upon his firm’s indexing practice, uses outside indexers exclusively and provides indexes to all publications with rare exceptions.

The results of the survey varied to such an extent that it is difficult to arrive at any definite concept of either the present state or the future development of book indexing in Canada. The satisfaction of the majority of publishers with their current policies and practices would appear to indicate that the author will continue to hold the primary responsibility for index provision. The secondary responsibility will rest with the in-house indexer, commonly the copy-editor, and to a lesser extent with the outside indexer. There is a need, however, to co-ordinate the efforts and standardize the quality of production of these various levels of responsibility. A common set of standards is required as a solid base from which newer tendencies in book indexing can develop. There is evidence of a growing awareness, particularly on the part of Canadian book reviewers, of the need not only to standardize and co-ordinate the efforts of those who have hitherto been responsible for the provision of indexes, but also to achieve a level of uniformity in the policies and practices which govern such efforts. A positive indication of this awareness is the proposed addition of a section on indexing for authors in the forthcoming revised edition of A guide to scholarly publishing in Canada.

References


(2) Vinet, Bernard. La bibliothèque, instrument de travail. Montréal, Centre de Psychologie et de Pédagogie, n.d. p. 23.

(3) Poirier, Léandre. Au service de nos écrivains : directives pratiques pour la recherche et l'édition. 5ème éd. Montréal, Fides, 1968. p. 9; indexing techniques are more fully described on pp. 96-100.


(c) A guide to scholarly publishing in Canada. Ottawa, Humanities and Social Science Research Councils of Canada [c1971]. pp. 56-111.

(6) Stallybrass, Oliver. ‘The author, the publisher and the indexers’ The Indexer, Autumn 1971, v. 7, no. 4, pp. 169-171.

TWO MORE WILSONS

Carola Oman, daughter of a famous Chichele Professor of History at Oxford, Sir Charles Oman, M.P. (1860-1946), has herself compiled the index for her forthcoming life of Sir Walter Scott, to which she is giving the title The Wizard of the North.

Kenneth Rose writes in his ‘Albany at Large’ column in The Sunday Telegraph (November 19, 1972) that Miss Oman drew his attention to two adjacent index entries:

Wilson, Harriette, courtesan. Scott remembers. 103.

Wilson, Professor John, appointed to Chair of Moral Philosophy, Edinburgh University, 239

Professor and prostitute in the closest proximity! Surely an index is the great leveller.

G.N.K.

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