"convict hat-makers, of course, have to be trained, but so, also, do indexers." He also thinks it is unjust to the prison system to conclude that they would allow such bungling of indexing to be done. Finally, he says that '...certain "professional indexers" must be convicts in disguise...' since many important indexing errors have been exposed in the columns of The Nation as occurring in Poole's Index.

A week later, W. I. F. got in the last word of the debate (often the Editor of The Nation would end these types of exchanges simply by saying he could not print any more letters on a certain topic). W. I. F. elaborates by saying that convict indexing '...lacks brains and heart, and that indexing which shows neither intelligence in nor love for the work is fairly called convict indexing."

In the end a stalemate seems to have been reached, but tempers must have flared more than a little throughout. After reading these five letters, one well might wonder why indexing societies were not formed as early as 1883.

References
1. The Nation, 36 (919) 8 Feb. 1883, 123.
2. The Nation, 36 (929) 19 Apr. 1883, 340
3. The Nation, 36 (930) 26 Apr. 1883, 360.
5. The Nation, 36 (932) 10 May 1883, 402.

Letter to the Editor

Must indexes be typed?

I read with much interest the symposium 'Indexers at work' (The Indexer 11 (4) 213-219), but was surprised that one of the contributors states he types the finished manuscript and another refers to typing the manuscript.

I can understand if some indexers prefer to type their entries on the slips rather than write them, but it has always amazed me that a number will go to such laborious lengths as to type the whole of the finished work before dispatch. In more than 50 years of indexing I have never typed an index, and none of the publishers/printers with whom I have dealt has ever asked or expected me to do so.

Some of the hundreds of works I have indexed over the years (I have lost count of the number) have included encyclopaedias which I have either indexed myself or to which I have contributed and edited—in one instance the slips numbered more than a quarter of a million. If my printers have been prepared to set from such large numbers of written slips then others ought to be similarly prepared in the case of considerably smaller works.

May I suggest that those indexers who regularly type their finished indexes before dispatch think again before undertaking such a time consuming and, in my view, unnecessary chore?

Yours faithfully,
A. R. Hewitt.

Law on information

Public awareness of how indexed information stored and manipulated by computer systems can affect everyone's life is evident from the amount of legislation which has been passed in a single session of the US Congress. A special feature in Information Hotline 11 (8) 1979, 15-20, entitled 'Public laws relating to computers and information policy' gives an annotated list of laws passed by the 95th Congress (1977-78), grouped under the following headings: Creating information inventories, programs or clearing houses; Providing for the dissemination of information; Creating new information systems or computerized data bases; Pertaining to telecommunications, broadcasting, and satellite transmissions; Pertaining to government records, documents and paperwork; Providing for library policies, procedures and assistance; Pertaining to information disclosure and confidentiality/right of privacy; Other related information legislation.

An opinion survey reported in the same journal (No. 10, 1979, 1, 9-11) shows that most Americans view data processing as a threat to privacy. Seventy-two per cent agree that 'most organizations that collect information about people ask for more sensitive information than is necessary'. A report from the National Bureau of Standards summarized in the same issue recommends guidelines for fair information practices.

S [The] modern device of consulting indexes ... is to read books Hebraically, and begin where others usually end.—Jonathan Swift, A letter of advice to a young poet (1720).