

Producing a local newspaper index

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The article relates some of the problems encountered and decisions taken in designing and implementing a manual newspaper index.

My decision to index the *Grand Forks Herald*, our local newspaper, was a response to an observed need. Having changed jobs and moved from New Jersey to North Dakota, USA, I was lacking basic information about local government, politics, people, events, and history. This was apparent when I was confronted with reference requests related to the region. Answers to some of these queries were easily located in directories, manuals, and handbooks; however, some questions had no answers in those sources because the information was either not 'new' enough or it was simply beyond the scope and intention of the book. Answers to these and many other questions could be found in newspapers. Subsequently, I began to look for local newspaper indexes in North Dakota.

North Dakota newspaper indexes

I soon found that there were several of them. The North Dakota State Historical Society has a 'card file' index, but it is kept up only as time allows, and often abandoned for several years together. At the North Dakota State University Library there is a card file index to the *Fargo Forum* dating back to the mid-1970s. The Jamestown Public Library began a project in 1979 to index 25 years of the *Jamestown Sun*. The University of North Dakota had a project to index the *Grand Forks Herald*; it died, but left a printed index for the years 1959-62. I concluded that the need for an index was more than a personal one, for there was little or no printed access to news about the Grand Forks area or even the state of North Dakota.

My next step was to convince my supervisors of the value of compiling an index. They were well aware of the inadequate access to North Dakota news, and I was awarded the project as an experiment. At about the same time I applied for and received a University of North Dakota Faculty Research Grant for \$494 to cover costs of supplies, reproduction, and personnel for six months.

Scope, coverage, and subject headings

Before I could begin indexing I had to decide the scope of the index and which newspaper(s) to cover.

Since I wanted to include both North Dakota news and Grand Forks news, the logical choice was to index both the *Grand Forks Herald* and the *Bismarck Tribune*, but shortage of time forced me to eliminate one. The *Tribune* is very strong on state news but weak on Grand Forks news. Logically, the *Herald* is very strong on Grand Forks news but weaker on North Dakota news. Since the University of North Dakota is located in Grand Forks, I felt it was wise for the index to concentrate primarily on Grand Forks news. The *Herald* graciously supplied the newspapers in exchange for a copy of the index and the right to pass reference requests concerning indexed information to the University Library.

Soon after I started performing trial runs I discovered it would take too long to index every item in the newspaper, so I had to decide what to include. My primary goal being access to local and state news, it was reasonable to eliminate national and international stories unless they directly affected this area. The *New York Times Index* and other national newspaper indexes provide sufficient access.

I began indexing with the intention of 'working out' the remaining problems of coverage as they developed, but this may have been a mistake, for there were many items that I did not expect. After about six weeks' work, however, I was able to finalize the coverage. It included: local, regional, and state news and editorial opinion; athletic events on at least the state championship level; local political cartoons; reviews of local theatrical performances; reviews of books by North Dakotans, about North Dakotans, or about North Dakota; significant letters to the editor; births of the region; and obituaries of the region. The coverage now seems satisfactory but remains flexible for additions or deletions.

Sears list of subject headings, 11th ed. (1977) was chosen as the authority file. It has proved dependable as well as portable; I can take my indexing along with me. However, like most subject heading lists, *Sears* is not always precise, and when necessary, either the *Library of congress subject heading list* or *Reader's guide to periodical literature* is consulted. If these give no help, a heading which I think is accurate is adopted. These 'added headings' are pencilled into *Sears* for others to see. *Sears* headings and the 'added headings' are heavily augmented by the names of local institutions, places, people, and events. A sample count has shown that

approximately 50% of the headings are 'augmented names' and those remaining are 'Sears and added headings'. There are no cross-references. A user looking for broader, narrower, or equivalent terms must consult *Sears*.

Method of compilation

The procedure for compiling the *Index* is simple. Once a story meets one of the criteria for entry, I assign as many headings as are needed to describe the item. Usually one or two are sufficient, but there is no upper limit. The heading is handwritten across the top of a catalogue card. Below this is a brief account of the story taken either from the headline or the article, and this is followed by the date and the page number. For example:

^aELECTIONS—NORTH DAKOTA

^bCandidates have trouble raising money* c8/20 d1B

- (a) subject heading
- (b) brief account
- (c) date
- (d) page number
- (*) denotes an accompanying photograph or illustration

The handwritten cards are then filed alphabetically by the subject heading and sub-filed alphabetically by the brief account and, if necessary, by the date.

At six-month intervals the cards are edited and checked for spelling, and my occasionally inconsistent filing is checked for accuracy. The index is then typed into book format. The typescript is checked against the cards and when all mistakes have been corrected it is duplicated by offset printing at the University word-processing centre (25 copies cost \$14.00). Covers are printed by the University Press (30 covers cost \$25.00), and the indexes are bound by an inexpensive in-house method. Approximately two and a half months after indexing is complete the indexes are ready for distribution; i.e., mid-September for the January through June compilation and mid-March for the July through December compilation.

Time limitations

Newspaper indexing was new to me when I began indexing the *Grand Forks Herald*, and much of my time during the first few months was given to learning. Therefore, most of the indexing at the beginning was done in the privacy of my office. As I became familiar with newspaper indexing and *Sears*, my speed increased dramatically, until I was able to index an average newspaper in about an hour; the longer Sunday editions took about one and a half hours, and the shorter Saturday editions about half an hour.

However, although my speed increased, the indexing

began to conflict with some of my other responsibilities, and I knew that if I let this happen the whole enterprise would surely be doomed. Consequently, I began experimenting with indexing during my shifts at the reference desk. At first it was difficult, because the interruptions causing loss of concentration were very unsettling. Much to my own surprise, though, within a few weeks I adjusted to these conditions. (I always try to remember reference service comes first, and whatever gets indexed is a bonus.)

Now I do about 90% of the indexing and card filing during my weekly reference shift of 15 hours. Depending upon how busy reference is this translates into indexing and filing the cards for between 5 and 7 newspapers. During slack reference periods, e.g. semester breaks, and on slow weekend and evening shifts, I am able to catch up. I try to keep the *Index* up to date; usually this means within one week of the newspaper publication date.

Circulation

My major disappointment in the production of the *Index to the Grand Forks Herald* has been circulation. Before and after the first issue of the *Index* was ready for distribution, announcement letters were sent to all North Dakota libraries (public and academic), local school libraries, selected libraries in Minnesota and Manitoba, and several historical society libraries. I expected that between 20 and 25 copies would be sold. Fifteen copies were sold to 11 institutions at \$10.00 per copy. Three copies were catalogued for in-house use and two were donated (*Grand Forks Herald* and the Library of Congress). Thus, there are 20 copies of the *Index* in use at 14 institutions.

Increasing the circulation will not be easy. The Grand Forks region (northeastern North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota) is very sparsely populated, and the number of libraries that might subscribe is small. School libraries have been reluctant to subscribe, and an advertising campaign directed specifically to them might be productive.

Circulation is also related to other issues. For instance, the indexing procedure could be automated by the use of a word-processor or minicomputer to file the entries and print out the *Index* at various stages before the final cumulation. However, with the present circulation this would not be cost-effective.

For the future

A newspaper index has many uses beyond the obvious, and the value of the *Index to the Grand Forks Herald* will grow as the *Index* grows. Already, casual browsers and students as well as researchers have been successful in locating information through the *Index*, which has developed from the original experimental, grant-supported project to attain permanent, library-

supported status. Growing use of the *Index* by our patrons suggests another promising project: indexing all or part of the back-run of the *Herald* (1879-1980).

An enterprise of that size would be beyond the time constraints of one reference librarian. I estimate that someone working full-time at an indexing rate of one newspaper an hour would take about 18 years to complete the project. Obviously, the most reasonable

approach would be to index a portion of the 100-year run, and I am now exploring grant sources to finance hiring an indexer for one year.

Working solely on the *Grand Forks Herald*, an indexer should be able to cover about six years of the newspaper in a year. 'The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.' Perhaps I'm on my second step.

Local newspaper indexing in the UK

A feature of recent years has been the growth in the number of local newspaper indexing projects, made all the more valuable as readers have been less able to browse among the yellowing pages of bound volumes and been forced instead to endure the microfilm, where soonest found, soonest done. The Library Association's Local Studies Group has been one encourager of these ventures, which may be undertaken co-operatively by members of an evening class, for instance, or under the auspices of a public library. Another organization that has shown itself in favour is the British Library, whose Newspaper Library *Newsletter* has noted those schemes as they have been reported, from its first issue in 1980 to date. Dumfries, Exeter, Monmouthshire, Cheshire, Leicestershire, Burnley, Durham, Salford, and Grange-mouth are amongst areas treated. Rarely are such indexes published, though there may be a better chance of publication where a group or individual researcher has taken one theme and searched for it in the files. The more general indexes are likely to remain in card or slip form, in a local library.

The Library Association Local Studies Group Newsletter has appealed for details of newspaper indexes, and more than 500 newspaper titles have been received. The list is being maintained by the Newspaper Library at Colindale, Colindale Avenue, London NW9 5HE.

J.D.L.

Specialized vocabularies

An alphabetical list of terms relating to **Education** is available in the *EUDISED multilingual thesaurus 1982: alphabetical list of descriptors* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1982. 148 p. 30 cm. English edition ISBN 92-871-0031-4. French ed. 92-871-0032-2. Unpriced.) This is a provisional list, in computer printout, three columns to a page, to be revised when revision of the EUDISED thesaurus has been completed. Under each term are given the equivalents in French, German, Spanish, and Dutch, together with the reference number for the subject in the thesaurus, followed by broader terms (BT), narrower terms (NT), and related terms (RT). Up to four levels of BTs and NTs may be given. Non-preferred terms are included in the list, with a reference to the preferred term.

Officially approved French **data processing terms**, updated to December 1981 and replacing previous lists, are reprinted from the *Journal officiel* of 17 January 1982 in *Documentaliste* 19 (2) mars/avril 1982, 69-70.

Some of the definitions have been redrafted after consultation with the Académie française. *Données* has been substituted for *information*, and *banque de données* has been redefined as 'a collection of data relating to a specific field of knowledge and organized so as to be accessible to users'. It is equated with the English *data bank*. Did the Immortals shudder when asked to approve such terms as *bureautique* and *info-graphic*? Probably not, since they accepted the wordy definition of *informatique*: 'The study of the logical manipulation, especially by machine automation, of information considered as the basis of human knowledge and communication in technical, economic and social fields'. Why it is restricted to information in only three fields of knowledge is anyone's guess. The definition is narrower than one currently given—though not everywhere accepted—to the anglicized term *informatics*: the study of information in all its facets and ramifications. Terminology in this field is far from crystallized.

Neologisms are not restricted to the French language in 'Petite bibliographie linguistique et lexicographique de la néologie' by J.-C. Boulanger of the (Canadian) Office de la langue française in *TermNet news* 2/3 1981, 47-72. It is an extract from the author's larger work *Bibliographie linguistique de la néologie, 1960-80: I. Études linguistiques*. Québec: Office de la langue française, 1981. 292 pp.

The latest parts of the full English edition of the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) to have appeared are BS 1000 (31) **Statistics, Demography, Population studies**; and BS 1000 (55) **Earth sciences, Geology, Geophysics**.

Root thesaurus newsletter 1, June 1982, has been issued as a single sheet by BSI. It notes that copies of *Root* have been purchased in 36 countries and that translations are in preparation into German, Portuguese, and French, while Japan and Finland are indexing industrial standards from the English text. The French version of *Root* in an 'experimental edition' can be made available upon request to BSI.

M.P.