Indexing of smaller-circulation daily newspapers

Lesley McGee Sandlin, June H. Schlessinger, and Bernard S. Schlessinger

An analysis of eight projects in the literature that dealt with indexing of small daily newspapers showed incomplete reporting of the results. Tabular treatment of the data indicated general lack of agreement on formats, marking, citation format, arrangement, subject authority choice, and items indexed and not indexed. The steps used in arriving at a set of procedures for indexing of the Texarkana gazette are described, and the decisions reached for procedures to be used and items indexed and not indexed are reported in detail. The project produced three indexes (a personal-name index, a subject index, and a special-interest index). Pilot-testing of the indexing procedures on two weeks of the newspaper produced 93 subject headings, 252 name entries (22 unique names), and 83 entries in the special-interest (cemetery) index.

Introduction

Local newspapers provide the key to unique factual information about a locality—data on people, places, and events that will never appear in any major indexed newspaper. It would seem, therefore, that the importance of indexing small daily newspapers, to provide access to this data, would be recognized, and that there would be a significant body of recent literature on the subject. However, current literature concentrating specifically on the topic of indexing of small daily newspapers was found to be limited in the literature search that preceded this study.

Perhaps the best most recent overview of this area is Cherry’s article,1 which provides an update on news indexes, indexing and indexers, discussing indexes produced by commercial organizations, as well as those produced by libraries and newspapers. Other overall views are provided by Cole2 (in bibliography form) and Perica.3 Probably the most useful procedural materials for small newspaper indexing can be found in Einhorn’s4 work, which defines ‘local news’, provides guidance for handling problem areas—such as individual names, organizations, politics, town agencies, statistics, sports, awards, crimes, pictures, etc.—and presents guidelines for marking the paper, indexing and typing. Other useful literature includes an ERIC document by Irwin and Shook5, which outlines instructions for indexing, filing, editing, and typing; an article by Lathrop6, which discusses use of IBM punch cards and cost-effectiveness in indexing; a discussion of an economical approach by Lothrop7; Smith’s8 twenty-three rules for heading selection and use, indexing, and filing; and the manual on indexing of local history and current newspapers by Trice.9

The studies noted above are concentrated primarily in the 1970s. Very little has been written in the eighties, although two short pieces, by Hales10 and Knee,11 deserve mention. Recognition of the paucity of literature was an impetus to the work reported here, as was the desire to provide indexing procedures for creation of an index to the Texarkana gazette (Texas, USA), the home-town newspaper of the first author (LMS).

Analysis of previous indexing projects

In preparation for developing procedures for indexing the Texarkana gazette, eight projects of a similar nature were analysed, referred to in this paper as: Flint Journal Project,12 Huron Public Library13, Northern Arizona University Flagstaff Library14, Newspaper indexing—™, Westerly Public Library,16, Napa City-County Library17, Newspaper indexing handbook18, and Denton record-chronicle19.

Table 1 presents the techniques of format, marking, citation format, arrangement and subject authority choice for the eight projects listed above. Several points are worth noting:

1. The choice of format was predominantly 3” x 5” cards (seven of the eight projects).
2. Marking procedures varied from no marking (direct indexing from paper copy or microfilm) to marking, usually with different-colored crayons.
3. Citation formats generally contained the essential information of date, page, section and column number. Two unique variations were used—at the Westerly Public Library Project, which identified names by N for native, R for resident, V for visitor, and by the Flagstaff Library Project, which used a library date stamp on the cards.
4. Four of the projects mentioned alphabetizing word-by-word as the preferred arrangement.
5. Generally, external subject heading authority lists were not mentioned (only two projects noted these). It might be assumed that natural language indexing was employed.

Tables 2a and 2b summarize the information, as available in the published reports, on those items that were
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<tr>
<td><strong>Format chosen for index</strong></td>
<td>IBM punched cards--limit of 43 letters including spacing</td>
<td>3x5 cards</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Marking Procedure</strong></td>
<td>Each article to be indexed noted in red crayon and each name in blue crayon</td>
<td>Check mark put in corner of article--CL added if a clipping of article is desired Names under scored in 2nd color crayon</td>
<td>Index directly from microfilm</td>
<td>May mark or note headings on separate slips of paper</td>
<td>Article outlined on 3 sides with bright crayon Subject heading written above headline</td>
<td>Not described</td>
<td>No marking 3x5 scratch paper used for temporary file before final cards are typed</td>
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<td><strong>Citation Format</strong></td>
<td>Date-page-col. punched in card and asterisk * if article contains a photo</td>
<td>Mo.-day-year page-col. Date stamp used for citation Sp. Ed. for Special Edition</td>
<td>Mo.-day-year page: col.</td>
<td>Mo.-day-year photos indicated</td>
<td>Mo.-day-year special code for name of newspaper since index includes several</td>
<td>Usual format &quot;(sic)&quot; indicates misprint but no corrections made</td>
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<td><strong>Alphabetical arrangement</strong></td>
<td>Word-by-word</td>
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<td><strong>Subject heading lists</strong></td>
<td>Natural Language No list agreed upon ahead of time</td>
<td>Reader's Guide Sears Subject Headings Christian Sci. Monitor Index Rhode Island Index</td>
<td>P.A.I.S. Bulletin Reader's Guide LC Headings Natural Language</td>
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Table 1. Techniques
Table 2a. Items indexed in selected projects

| Indexing Category | Accidents | Advertisements | Book reviews | Births | Buildings | Business & Industry | Churches | Columns | Crime | Editorial |s | Governmental bodies | Holiday | Festivals | Legal proceedings | Letters to the editor | Library | Marriages | Minority groups | Obituaries & Clippings | Politics | Schools | Sports | Town Agencies |
|-------------------|-----------|----------------|-------------|--------|-----------|--------------------|----------|---------|-------|-----------| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Flint Journal Project 1964 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Huron Public Library 1969 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Flagstaff Library Project 1974 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Newspaper Indexing... Perica 1975 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Westerly Public Library 1976 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Newspaper Indexing Handbook Smith-1978 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Napa City-County Library 1979 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Denton Record Chronicle 1982 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Indexed (Table 2a) and those that were not (Table 2b). Perhaps the most interesting feature of these two tables is the lack of agreement exhibited on what should or should not be indexed. Since indexing is based on the nature of the audience and the questions expected from that audience, one might expect that, for the audiences of small daily newspapers, there would be agreement in this area. That there is not indicates the variable nature of the audience and the subjectivity of the indexing process.

It is interesting to note that, of those items specifically mentioned, four or more of the projects indicated the indexing of advertisements, clubs and organizations, crimes, business and industry, marriages and schools. Three projects mentioned accidents, births, obituaries, photographs and clippings, and sports. Of those items mentioned specifically as not being indexed, only advertisements were mentioned by at least three projects, and no category by more than three.

Interviews

It was apparent to the authors that analysis of the literature from previous indexing projects did not
provide the body of decisions needed to establish indexing protocols. It seemed, further, that many of the decisions were made on the basis of local needs. Two examples may be noted: 1) the specific note of indexing advertisements by four projects and of not indexing the same by three; 2) the inconsistencies in indexing of various records (births, marriages, etc.), probably related to the availability or lack of same of effective local record-keeping agencies.

To determine what was the practice in indexing other small Texas, USA city newspapers, and to determine the local needs in Texarkana, several interviews were conducted with the librarian of the Texarkana gazette, the director of the Texarkana Chamber of Commerce, the curator of the Texarkana Historical Museum, the director of the Texarkana Public Library, two librarians at the college library which houses the microfilm collection of the Texas gazette, and a librarian at the Denton (Texas) Public library, which indexes the Denton record-chronicle.

Table 2b. Items not indexed in selected projects

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<tr>
<th>Indexing Category</th>
<th>Accidents</th>
<th>Advertisements</th>
<th>Awards</th>
<th>Book reviews</th>
<th>Births</th>
<th>Business &amp; Industry</th>
<th>Churches</th>
<th>Clubs, organizations</th>
<th>Columns</th>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>Editorials</th>
<th>Fillers</th>
<th>Governmental bodies</th>
<th>Holidays &amp; Festivals</th>
<th>Legal proceedings</th>
<th>Letters to the editor</th>
<th>Library</th>
<th>Marriages</th>
<th>Minority groups</th>
<th>Obituaries</th>
<th>Photographs &amp; clippings</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Sports</th>
<th>Town Agencies</th>
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<td>Flint Journal Project 1964</td>
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<td>Denton Record Chronicle 1982</td>
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For anyone beginning a newspaper indexing project, interviewing persons like those noted above is highly recommended.

Protocols and index form

Having reviewed the literature and attempted to analyse it, and having interviewed pertinent individuals, we made the following decisions as to what should be included in the index and how the indexing should be accomplished. These decisions were tested by constructing an experimental pilot index, using two weeks of issues of the Texarkana gazette. The pilot-testing of indexing procedures on a small but representative sample of the population proved very helpful in reaching final decisions, and should be included as part of any such indexing project.

Basic decisions that were reached in the procedures area included:
1. Unruled 3" x 5" cards were used for recording the index entries.
2. Paper copies of the newspaper were marked with crayons, and the suggested subject headings for an article to be indexed were written in red pen above the headings for the articles.
3. Natural-language format was used. It was assumed that standard terminology would be incorporated into an authority/informational file accessible to any indexer working on the project.
4. The index was divided into three sections: a) a personal name index, b) a subject index, and c) a cemetery index. The division into three indexes was decided on as the result of input from the interviews. For any project, the personal name index and the subject index would seem to be appropriate. The cemetery index was appropriate for Texarkana, because of the volume of questions received by the librarians interviewed. It is representative of special-interest indexes that would be indicated by the special needs of a community.
5. Each index was alphabetically arranged, word-by-word.
6. No separate headline or by-line index entries were made.
7. The location notation used was Month/Day/Year/Section/Page. Thus, 9/14/82/B2 would be read Page 2 of Section B of the September 14, 1982 edition. In some cases, additional information was included following the notation. For example, editorials were indicated by (ed.), letters to the editor by (let.).
8. Local news was defined as items affecting the community and surrounding small communities for which the Texarkana gazette served as the major community newspaper.

It was further decided:

**to index**—letters to the editor, editorials, city government news, school board news, college-related news, organizations, politics, local agencies, public library news, sports, awards, accidents, fires, crimes, city ordinances, railroad news, buildings, annual reports for businesses/banks, and celebrations

**not to index**—weather reports (unless a record was broken), foreign news, advertisements, national news (unless there was an important local application), editorial cartoons, columns, fillers, recipes and cookery articles, entertainment reviews, routine club meetings, and routine church news (although changes in personnel or building were indexed).

Even for the small pilot project, the development of an authority file for names and subjects, which became invaluable as indexing progressed, was found to be a necessity.

For the two-week period for which indexing was carried out:
1. Ninety-three subject headings were established.
2. The Personal Name Index contained 252 entries, with 22 unique names.
3. The Cemetery Index included 83 entries, with geographical locations noted.

References
12. Lothrop, pp. 11-12.
15. Perica.
16. Einhorn.
'Thankless task' accomplished for Pym

There have been many references in this journal to the novels of Barbara Pym, which feature several indexers; she may perhaps be regarded as our literary patroness. Now a volume of her diaries and letters has been posthumously published: A very private eye, edited by Hazel Holt and Hilary Pym (Macmillan, 1984). It is fitting that this should have a full and distinctive index, compiled by the writer's sister.

The index is of 20 pages, to a 334-page text, and headed 'Index/Glossary'. As the Note (oddly placed in the prelims) explains, 'The index contains biographical information, with cross-references under Christian names and nicknames, identification of places and vocabulary definitions as well as references to Barbara Pym's novels. Where the reference to an incident or a character is implied (i.e. where no actual reference to the title of the novel is made in the text) the page number is given in italics.'

The imprints page even specifies:

Barbara Pym's text, The Early Life and Index © Hilary Walton 1984.

Some entries are indeed so fully expanded as to qualify as original writing. For instance:

Arkesden, Essex (picturesque village favoured by London commuters, home of Gordon Glover)
'Cheesing' (making pleasant conversation at parties)
Dunbabin, Tom (archaeologist who was to become a hero of Crete)
Eno's (fruit salt: fizzy medicinal drink to cure indigestion)
Hartley, Lister and Rex (famous golfing brothers, members of the family jam-making firm)
Harvey, Henry Stanley
(nicknamed 'Lorenzo'; b. 1911, but reached his fifties in 1934 when Barbara made him the chief male character in what was to be her first novel, Some Tame Gazelle. After Oxford, where they met, he was at the University of Helsingfors, and later with the British Council)
'Jay' (b. 1919; a romantic encounter in 1938, for which he had all the attributes, including a central European education and political ambitions)
'Prog' (verb, to discipline undergraduates, derived from 'proctor', of which there are two; see John Betjeman, An Oxford University Chest, John Miles, 1938, p. 17)
Turban (wartime fashion for women of wearing a scarf round the head)
'Winter break' (short weekend holiday, arranged with favourable terms by various hotels)

As the Note indicates, there is assiduous detective work in identifying references to the novels that are not specified as such in the text. For example, cited in the index under No Fond Return of Love ('original title A Thankless Task') is 128. This leads to a diary entry describing Barbara Pym's embarrassment, on complaining about the cloakroom basin's being filled with flowers, at being told by an 'elderly censor' that 'she was taking them to an invalid'. Readers of that tale of romance among indexers will recognize the episode.

The entry for Pym, Barbara, occupies three columns, giving a fairly full summary of the book, with long, detailed subheadings:

she completes the draft of another novel about a provincial university, but has little faith in the future of her kind of writing, 267; . . . has ideas for a novel about people in an office on the verge of retirement, 268–72;

But there is a strong tendency through most of the index to substitute a general gloss for breakdown into subheadings, and there are many strings of whole lines of undifferentiated page references: 14 such lines for Philip Larkin, 10 for Robert Liddell. The 9-line gloss for Henry Harvey quoted above is followed by 7 lines of page references. The indexer herself is, modestly, glossed merely as (b. 1916, sister), and has then 11 lines of undifferentiated page references.

However, an index of originality and charm, showing respect and devotion for its text; wholly appropriate for the author who gave us Mildred Lathbury and Dulcie Mainwaring, and wrote so warmly and wittily of our 'thankless task'.

H.K.B.

We are grateful to Hilary Walton for permission to quote the above extracts.