American Society of Indexers
(nos. 84, 86, 87)

As the President writes in no. 84 (November/December 1987), 'ASI is on the move!' With this issue comes an attractive publications list: offers include A guide to indexing software, and issues 1–60 of the 'Newsletter', plus index, on microfiche. As well as national conferences in New York and San Francisco, the first of regular Regional Conferences is announced. Group medical insurance is to be considered for ASI members—who will no doubt be happy to comply with the exhortation to enrol a new member when they renew their own subscriptions.

Under the heading 'Mystery Poet Strikes Again', US indexers are urged (more or less metrically) to submit entries for the Wilson Award. Editorial comment on this is also listed in numbers: not for the first time, indexers are showing a happy propensity for laughing at themselves in the very act of striving towards serious goals. Presumably quite seriously meant was the 'amazing recipe' for index compilation quoted from the journal Byte, which begins: '1. Atomize: Remove all punctuation, capital letters, apostrophized endings, etc. and put each word in the book on a separate line ...'

Hans Wellisch describes the British Library survey of Personal bibliographies and their computerization; and notes a new periodical, Righting Words, (subtitled 'The journal of language and editing') from the correspondence column of which he has learned that Laurence Urdang aims to ward off parking tickets by using a car-sticker reading 'LEXICOGRAPHER ON EMERGENCY CALL'. Carolyn Bridgers has found a computer manual index which seems to be well down to the fearful standards common in these indexes: it contains such entries as 'A Tree of Files' and 'Some More Useful Batch Files'.

Linda Fetters' 'Electronic Shoebox', now established as a solidly invaluable contribution in the field of computer-assisted indexing, gives details of updated features in various indexing programs: as well as ever more sophisticated aids to sorting and formatting (and the provision of a mouse for Macrex), the acceptance of electronic publishing as the norm, and of the Chicago typesetting codes, is noteworthy.

We regret that no. 85 was not available at the time of going to press.

ASI's Newsletter editors have always been ready to experiment with format, but by no. 86 (March/April 1988) the revolutionary new format is in being; it is certainly a handsome production. It has a red masthead, and is beautifully reproduced on biscuit-coloured A4 sheets; corner-stapled with margin perforations for filing. Moreover, contributions are expected to arrive wherever possible on disk or via modems. Caxton would have been proud.

The front page no longer carries the President's Column. In its place there is an exploration by Ruthanne Lowe of some sorting anomalies, concentrating less on letter-by-letter/word-by-word problems than on the grey areas between filing-by-meaning (Maclaren with McLaren and M'Laren—though not with the African M'Bala) and filing-as-is (Maclaren, M'Bala, McLaren, M'Laren). While acknowledging the inherent shortcomings of any system of alphabetization, Ms Lowe feels that much software sorting shows confusion and inconsistency, and asks indexers to inform themselves thoroughly of the rules, 'so that we know when we are choosing to do things in a nonstandard way and can intelligently defend our position'; to encourage software publishers to improve their own sorting standards where necessary and to provide good override facilities; and to encourage the publishers of style-manuals to adapt to the latest filing guidelines. A test-sort is provided. This is a challenging article of general interest. In keeping with the hi-tech image, ASI asks for volunteer members to maintain its various databases—software will be provided.

'Chapter News' includes two general articles on individual chapters: the Twin Cities contact mentions the 'informal networking' that takes place between the arranged meetings; while the long-established Golden Gate chapter publishes a quarterly newsletter and a directory, and holds meetings that range from a large-scale midwinter conference to 'a pot-luck picnic ... with no charge and no planned program except to talk shop'.

'Electronic Shoebox' brings some more updates, and notes briefly two new programs. This issue brings a new feature: 'Software Library News'. ASI has set up a library to make inexpensively available to its members relevant software both in the public domain (which may be freely copied) and copyrighted 'shareware' programs.
(this system allows software developers to distribute their programs without high overhead costs, while receiving a 'registration fee'). As if all this were not enough, we have the detailed results of ASI's occasional Survey of Indexer/Abstractor Economics; 112 responses are analysed and provide thought-provoking, and sometimes surprising, data.

No. 87 (May/June 1988) naturally gives the lion's share of its space to a detailed report of the proceedings of the 20th Anniversary Meeting; the Proceedings are to be published ($30.00 to non-members, from Learned Information; also audio-cassettes from Minute-Tapes International). The conference theme, The State of our Knowledge and the State of our Ignorance, gave an opportunity for discourses of considerable breadth and depth. Hans Wellisch had found some disappointments within the literature of indexing, and doubted whether automated indexing could ever dispense with the human input to cope with 'a language that is unpredictable and ever-varying'. Dorothy Thomas had described automated indexes as neither art nor science, but 'simple short-shrifting for money'; the language of indexing needed new agreement, to be expressed through 'a good glossary or dictionary', widely distributed; lively discussion had followed her words on indexing principles and ethics. Linda Fetters had examined the whole field of indexing software, both indexer-controlled and software-controlled; Jessica Milstead had discussed database design; Barbara Preschel had explored the retrieval implications of print, online and CD-ROM indexing.

After lunch (and a birthday cake), the business meeting had celebrated a year of confident expansion; and the H. W. Wilson Award for 1987 had been presented to Jean Moody for the index to the Raptor Management Techniques Manual. More papers had followed. Everett Brenner had discussed the retrieval differences between controlled and uncontrolled vocabulary, and between free-text and thesaurus-controlled searching; describing an American Petroleum initiative in which '70 per cent of the indexing was successfully done automatically and 30 per cent by a human indexer', he had asked, 'Is 30 per cent of what we as indexers do intelligent and the rest rather simple-minded?' Jim Anderson had spoken on the relationship between indexing and classification, adding that vocabulary control would be better named vocabulary tracking: 'We track the vocabulary users use, not limit it'. W. Bruce Croft had spoken on automatic indexing, and on the implications of knowledge-based retrieval; Tefco Saracevic had continued the theme of retrieval success (success-rates in experiment might seem low, 'but we do not know for certain what is high'); and Ben-Ami Lipetz had rounded off the conference with a paper on the usefulness of indexes.

Thomas Kemp, as outgoing President, celebrates the recent achievements of ASI and of its officers; a second President's Column gives the incoming Bella Hass Weinberg an opportunity to express her hopes for a more broadly based membership and for 'attractive publications that are well publicized'. There are letters replying to Lowe's article on sorting in the previous issue (with a helpful editorial comment on the basic ASCII sort); and on the indexing of 'main characters' (the ones who 'show up on every other page but only rarely do anything of significance'). There is a lengthy report on the last ASI Board meeting.

'What's New' precedes a review of Aitchison and Gilchrist's Thesaurus construction (2nd edition) with a witty essay on the subject ('One of the nicest parlour games invented during the past three decades is thesaurus construction . . .'); and follows it with a broadside at a sample page, used in a publisher's advertisement, from the index to Electronic publishing abstracts: 'mindless automatic indexing gone haywire'. 'Electronic Shoebox' is devoted to a review of a new program, WINDEX; despite various drawbacks, in particular deficiencies in sort-forcing facilities, the verdict is not unfavourable. 'Software Library News' describes some new disks now available to ASI members, including QEdit for processing ASCII text files ('has many features that make final editing of text files a pleasure'). As a bonne bouche, there is a new subscription renewal form—no doubt to be photocopied by those members who do not want to lose the 'Tidbits' page of which it is the verso; the subscription, varying for student and corporate members, includes annual dues for the chapter of the member's choice. A Happy Birthday, indeed.

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Australian Society of Indexers
(Vol. 11, no. 4; Vol. 12, no. 1)

As expected, George Levick's contribution on indexing to the AGPS Style manual, and Janet Hine's reply to it (see The Indexer 16(1), Apr. 1988, 49), generated much response, and the AusSI newsletter no. 11/4 (November 1987) prints some of this: a rational clarification of his position by Levick, and Blackburn's and Greig's comments from the Canadian Society's newsletter of October 1987. We can only agree with both the original writers that there are 'a number of issues to which . . . there are no final answers, and that they remain for the profession as a whole to discuss, perhaps indefinitely'.

The main article in this issue, by Sue Harvey, pleads for indexing to become 'a quality-control mechanism for the information industry'. The increase in the number of
databases had been huge; databases were often by-products (for example whole runs of journals), not designed with electronic retrieval in mind, and very difficult to use for the purpose; systems analysts and users alike lacked understanding of ‘the idiosyncrasies of information’. There was some evidence of decline in service industries, which might be due in part to neglect of quality in favour of short-sighted economic policies; the information industry was tending to fail in such areas as full-text databases, while reference databases (such as citations or abstracts) were more stable. From these starting-points Ms Harvey proceeds to her argument that it is good-quality indexing, by its creation of access-points, by its control of vocabulary, by its conscious linking of the user’s mind with the concepts of the text or data, which can play a major part in the use and usefulness, and the profitability, of databases and indeed of all indexable material. She concedes that the largely manual process of true indexing is expensive, and that its benefits are difficult to quantify precisely, but believes that the costs of failed retrieval are often clearly quantifiable and would alone make good indexing cost-effective.

No. 12/1 (March 1988) brings the annual report: a satisfactory bank balance, a net increase in membership numbers, and the growth or survival of many of the Society’s initiatives; some disappointment that a formal workshop had not been held during the year and that no index had met the judges’ standards for the Society’s Medal; hopes for a substantial indexing component in two projected graduate diplomas in Editing and Publishing—other countries please take heed. There is a full list of members (including two ‘country members’ in New Zealand). The rest of the issue continues the Great Debate (see above): Janet Hine takes some space to clarify her position and to take the debate a little further. Under the title ‘New Mousetraps for Old’ she escalates her spirited attack on idées reçues and ambiguous terminology, and on a great many other targets too (in particular the index to the 1983 edition of the Australian encyclopedia). She hopes that ‘others will now join in the discussion’ and that she ‘can now return to the sidelines and learn something useful from their experience’. Will those who think they may have invented better mousetraps please step forward.

IASC*SCAD

Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada

(Vol. 10, no. 1)

Though this issue (of April 1988) contains no major article or reproduction of a learned lecture, it manages, as so often, to be chock-full not only of news and views but of food for thought. In particular the two book-reviews can be seen as considered articles in their own right. Michèle Hudon discusses Timothy Craven’s String indexing in detail, observing what she sees as its good points and its drawbacks as a textbook, and asking ‘in which ways string indexing systems are superior to other indexing systems, why they should be so widely adopted, and why they do not raise much enthusiasm among information specialists and end-users at the present time?; in the process she provides us all with a lucid introduction to the subject. Similarly, Mavis Cariou’s review of Editing Canadian English (prepared for the Freelance Editors’ Association of Canada) provides an opening in itself on to a world of which all book-indexers are an honoray part. These ‘uniquely Canadian views of the editorial process’ have apparently been framed in a way that meets with the reviewer’s approval: largely non-prescriptive, the book explores how real editors and publishing-houses attempt to solve the everyday problems of style, substance and standards; while some questions—libel laws, French copy in English texts—are particularly Canadian, much of the material would surely be of interest throughout the English-speaking world. [Our own review appears on page 143.]

As well as supplying an entry form for IASC/SCAD’s own Annual General Meeting, which is to concentrate on ‘Software for Indexers’, the Bulletin announces several other conferences and seminars, and notices some published indexes. Among these the Hippocratic concordance (Concordantia in corpus Hippocraticum) is referred to as an ‘outstanding achievement of Canadian scholarship in the history of medicine”; while the index to Saturday Night magazine and the Canadian short story index are clearly welcome additions to their fields. Regional groups have been active. Peter Greig produces Tigerak as a new newsletter for the Ottawa group; Quebec has been looking at aspects of thesauri; Toronto has been hearing about the Financial Post online database, and the challenges of online indexing in general. The Bulletin also looks abroad, with its regular pull-together of the contents of the other Societies’ newsletters.

The Indexer Vol. 16 No. 2 October 1988
Society of Indexers
(Nos. 1/88, 2/88; MicroIndexer 9)

No. 1/88 (January 1988—optimistically subtitled 'Spring 1988' by the Editor, Geraldine Beare) comes at a busy time for SI members, and concentrates on asking them to be busier. They are invited to attend meetings: on the catalogue of the library of Joseph Banks, on the way book-packagers function, and on the work of the British Library; as well as the exhibitions and seminars of related organizations. They are asked to fill in forms: would they like an entry in Indexers available? will they send the editor of MicroIndexer data for her computer update questionnaire? will they pay their subscriptions now! If they live in or near north-west England, would they like to attend the inaugural meeting of SI's new North West Group? Also, would they like to attend a conference at Cheltenham in July on the everyday concerns of working indexers? and—goodness—might they be interested in attending a 'Conference of Pleasure' in the summer of 1989 on the beautiful island of Hvar in Jugoslvia, with some Serbo-Croat indexers, as part of a holiday tour? The Secretary would like to hear from them in confidence on indexing fees, for a survey she is conducting; and the Editor would like them to know of various newspaper and magazine articles, including one in the Irish Times which asks of indexers: 'What kind of people are they? The kind of people who are not common today . . . . How this sort of appreciation warms one people!' How this sort of appreciation warms one people!'

No. 2/88 (also, more realistically, subtitled 'Spring 1988') came in April, with promises of talks on the new, long-awaited revised version of the British Standard on indexing (BS 3700) and on possible changes in the law of copyright; of a one-day workshop on micro-indexing; of ASI's 20th Anniversary meeting. The Supervision scheme—a form of feedback providing informal assessment of an individual index—has been revised, and the new procedures are described. The Scottish Group is to hold a meeting with computer demonstrations, an explanation of the Scotsman newspaper indexing project, and an informal question/discussion session; while the North West Group has duly inaugurated itself and plans a computer hands-on workshop as its first full meeting.

Mentions of the Society in Family Wealth magazine and in the Armed Services Resettlement Bulletin had produced many enquiries and some new members. The 'Have You Seen?' feature notes that the publicity material of an indexing program designed for authors tells them of the tedium of do-it-yourself indexing with cards, and the expense and low quality of the professional indexer ('unlike the author . . . cannot have the specialist knowledge of a manuscript's purpose and contents'); while The writer's handbook has a 3,000-entry index with no mention of indexing. British authors have a hard time of it.

MicroIndexer 9 (December 1987) opens with a heartening mini-article by Moira Greenhalgh on her reluctant, sudden and total surrender to micro-indexing ('It is good to know that I can't commit any blunder that hasn't been committed by a thousand others . . . Why did I wait so long?'). The title of the next article, GAGA (reprinted from Geology Today) stands in this instance for Genuinely Awful Geological Acronyms; musing on a long list of acronyms in an earth sciences journal, the author had been struck by the lack of consistency or cohesion in this international language of instant neo-logisms. Unwieldy cincwioc and vanishingly small Ig, absurd omlet, romantic iris and stolid psfg may, or may not, suggest their true meaning: ICES has nothing to do with glaciation (or confectionery), and why should MERIT be reserved for the techniques of monitoring earth-rotation?

After this flight of fancy, the issue settles to the serious technicalities of micro-indexing. The program AnsibleIndex, for Amstrad users, will index highlighted words in Locoscript format, producing a primitively alphabetized list with page numbers (1, 2, 3 appearing as 1-3); its obvious advantages at present are mainly for authors wishing to keep a check on their work, but improvements are promised. There follows a descriptive review of CINDEX: Geoffrey Jones quotes from the program manual's own claims, and agrees with them. That's a favourable review, by any standards. The major article publishes Norman Nunn-Price's paper, from the Chester Conference, on the computer as an indexing tool; after a lucid explanation of concordance-creation, it describes how the author uses the justis system for law text retrieval as an example of storage, searching and finding. He points out that computer power increases by a factor of 10 every 5 years, and looks forward cheerfully to computers littering desks as telephones do at present.

The latest micro-indexing workshop is described, a day of demonstration, explanation and hands-on experience. Hilary Calvert contributes a clear introduction to electronic communication and bulletin boards; he looks beyond the convenience of posting a completed index down the telephone to the possibility of indexers' being commissioned from a bulletin board. Finally there is a brief review of Fetters' Guide to Indexing Software ('this valuable booklet') and of Wordwise Plus Times ('an excellent small publication').

Judy Batchelor