

of volunteer subjects to determine which features (or their lack) posed specific problems. It was interesting to note that some subjects (from the School of Information Studies itself!) had little acquaintance with an index, or how to use one.

### *Professional indexers: proof of*

Ira Kleinberg spoke on professional indexers, and their assumption that they are the best qualified to index a document. He reviewed current research on indexing, especially back-of-the-book indexing, and outlined findings in a series of projects and studies. He pointed out that we do not know enough about (i) indexing standards, (ii) indexing styles, (iii) consistency, and (iv) the uses to which indexes are put, and others. Another line of research, that on information retrieval, was described, and it was suggested that it be linked to research on back-of-the-book indexing. Ira stressed the need—still—to sell indexing to the academic community.

### *Freelancers*

The conference was concluded by a panel discussion featuring five indexers: Babs Klein, Frances Lennie, Elinor Lindheimer, Jane Maddocks, and Alexandra Nickerson, chaired by Nancy Mulvany. In the first round, Nancy asked questions, and it was thrown open to the floor at the end. Questions were on (1) the kinds of indexing people do, (2) whether the current economic situation in the USA had affected them, (3) their technical situations and problems, (4) their views on accreditation. Additional topics covered were pricing



The inaugural conference reception. Foreground shows (left to right) Elizabeth Wallis (SI), Dorothy Thomas (ASI), Bella Weinberg (ASI), and Hazel Bell (SI).

for indexing work, the books that indexers have on their shelves, and publishers' perspectives on indexing.

### *Quotes from the conference*

Daniel Uchitelle: On the confusion created by a change in the layout of the worksheets, Daniel said 'It made sense to us at the time.'

Babs Klein: 'The great thing about not being rich—you don't miss it that much.'

Hanlon's Razor: 'Never attribute to malevolence what can adequately be explained by stupidity.'

GARY HALL

photographs by BevAnne Ros

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### **Original ideas in indexing?**

*The Indexer* is replete with quotations on the subject of indexing, and so I am writing to put into the record a statement on the quality of the literature of indexing made by a noted authority in the field: '... nothing truly original in indexing has been published since Ranganathan's work in the 1930s. One might even claim that no really major contribution to the literature has been made since Cutter.'

The statement was made by F. W. Lancaster in a letter responding to my review of his book, *Indexing and abstracting in theory and practice*.<sup>2</sup> In the review, which was generally favorable, I criticized the absence of citations to the works of James D. Anderson, Jessica Milstead, Hilda Feinberg, Eugene Garfield, and Hans Wellisch. Subsequent reviewers, such as Cochrane,<sup>3</sup> have also noted the bibliographic lacunae in the book.

Readers of *The Indexer* who do not have a library science background may not recognize the names of the pioneers cited by Lancaster. Charles Ammi Cutter was an American librarian who authored *Rules for a dictionary catalog*, first published in 1876 and issued in a 4th edition in 1904.<sup>4</sup> In this book, he established rules for the formulation of alphabetic-specific subject headings and for syndetic (cross-reference) structure. These rules still influence Library of Congress Subject Headings and possibly cross-reference practice in book indexes as well.

S. R. Ranganathan, a prolific Indian librarian, is credited with the invention of chain indexing as well as faceted classification, although both of these ideas have their roots in the Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index. The theory of chain indexing was applied to book indexing by J. Mills in this journal,<sup>5</sup> and I have cited Mills' paper in responding both to

your paper on indexing biographies<sup>6</sup> and to a reader's query in the *ASI Newsletter*,<sup>7</sup> as I consider chain indexing a useful structural approach to book indexing.

Although I agree that Cutter and Ranganathan contributed seminal ideas to our field, it is a serious condemnation of the indexing literature to state that nothing new has been said in it in 60—or 100—years. *The Indexer* might run a contest called 'Prove Lancaster wrong', in which readers would contribute original ideas in the indexing literature that postdate those of Cutter and Ranganathan. To place this in a more positive light, the feature might be entitled 'Great ideas in indexing'. Surely there have been some in the past few decades!

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BELLA HASS WEINBERG  
Professor  
Division of Library and Information Science  
St. John's University  
Jamaica, New York 11439, USA

The *Indexer* would welcome contributions such as Professor Weinberg suggests.—Ed.

#### Name the indexer? Yes of course!

Mrs M. D. Anderson argues against indexers' names appearing over their indexes on two counts: that there may have been unfortunate editorial changes, with no chance for the indexer to see proofs; and that the indexer is anyway some kind of self-effacing servant. (Shades of Victorian times when maids were supposed to stay out of sight, or at least turn their faces to the wall!)

I have to disagree on both counts. Indexers should be prepared to take the rap for their work, and if badly treated in the matter of alterations/proofs, should protest on the grounds of infringement of 'moral rights' (in this case the right not to have one's work treated in derogatory fashion). It may take a long time for this message to sink in but meantime should we not grin and bear it?

On the second count, even servants have a right to names. (While I hold no brief for most of the Citizens' Charter nonsense. I do applaud the requirement for name-badges to be worn by officers who deal with the public.) And until we know who the bad and good indexers *are* we shall never be able to raise standards of indexing. I am always having to ask authors who their indexers were, for future reference whether good or ill; I would rather not need to ask, but I intend to go on doing so for the good of the profession at large. A good indexer makes an invaluable contribution to a book, so Norman Knight was right! and so is BS 3700:1988 ('Publishers should offer indexers the opportunity to be named in the work').

CHERRY LAVELL  
(SI Assessment Officer)  
London

#### The need for research

I refer to the article, 'Research in Indexing: more needed?' by K. G. B. Bakewell (*The Indexer* 18 (3) April 1993). Although a newcomer to indexing, I have for some time felt that the results of a thorough research programme may well, if disseminated to the vast body of the publishing world, convince many more that (a) indexes are needed more often, and (b) that an index should be done properly, by experts.

Indeed, when I attended my first Conference, in Edinburgh, I put it to the Committee during the closing session, that we as an organization should be making more contact with the publishing faculties of universities (such as that at Exeter) to further our aims. I have heard no more of this idea, though it seemed well received at the time.

From Mr. Bakewell's article, one could deduce that a combination of funding from one or more universities, (not forgetting that august body, the John Moores University, Liverpool!) and from the British Library, the Society of Indexers, and even, dare we say it?, from publishers might well produce some research information which would be of lasting benefit to our members and to book users everywhere.

I look forward to reading the views of others in this respect—I hope we won't have to wait another thirteen years before we find we're no further forward!

VICTOR HORLEY  
Gimont, France