Editorial

Indexing in South Africa

Notable indexing efforts in South Africa only started during the 19th century, and were undertaken by book collectors rather than librarians. In most instances the indexes were linked to bibliographies or so-called ‘lists of books’ (with an inventory-like character) of private collections, with keywords assigned according to the personal needs of such collectors. Of course, indexing as a method of access to information (as we understand it) was unknown, and it was only after the first library schools were established that indexing, together with cataloguing and classification, formed part of training programmes. Today the picture has changed completely and most indexing products are available online and/or on the Internet.

The aim of most of the articles in this issue of *The Indexer* is to provide an overview of the development of indexing in South Africa. There are quite a few national indexing projects building large databases, but also institutionalized and private indexes, all part of an effort to gain access and control over the mass of information available. Most indexers in South Africa are associated with libraries, where they work on specific indexing projects. Back-of-the-book indexers are mostly freelance (or contract) indexers, practising librarians, or former librarians in Information Science teaching departments. It is sometimes assumed by publishers that book indexers are *au fait* with reference techniques and ‘while you are indexing, just check the references and bibliography’ is often heard. We all know that editing bibliographic style can in certain instances be more taxing than the indexing! In South Africa, many indexers accept this situation. As it is a large country, South African indexers live far apart and it is not easy to organize meetings to discuss indexing problems and standards.

Training of indexers takes place in library schools at undergraduate level, but a need for training outside formal educational programmes has arisen during the past few years. The Association of Southern African Indexers and Bibliographers (ASAIB) has recognized this need and started indexing workshops on back-of-the-book indexing in August 2002. The workshop programme will be expanded to include periodical indexing (and abstract writing), database indexing, metadata indexing, and so forth. ASAIB is a small professional society founded in 1994 to serve the best interests of Southern African indexers and bibliographers and to promote all aspects of indexing and bibliographic activity throughout the region. At present, it has only one branch, the Cape Branch, chaired by Mary Lennox.

ASAIB has begun to update the list of active indexers in South Africa; when complete, this will be available on the ASAIB website. This list is useful to publishers and other organizations in need of indexers.

ASAIB’s annual conferences, which address the needs of both indexers and bibliographers, are always well attended with positive feedback. The 2002 conference focused on bibliography and included an exhibit of bibliographies that drew a lot of interest. The ASAIB award for the best bibliography published in Southern Africa during 1999–2002 went to David Ambrose of the National University of Lesotho.

In the UK, outstanding indexers are awarded the Wheatley Medal, named after one of the country’s pioneering indexers, Henry Benjamin Wheatley. This year, the Society of Indexers has published facsimile reprints of his two best-known works – *What is an index?* and *How to make an index* – but most indexers know little about the man himself and his other work. This situation is remedied in this issue of *The Indexer* by David Lee’s article on ‘the father of British indexing’.

ASAIB is proud to be associated with the Society of Indexers and the other indexing societies worldwide, and tries to have at least one representative at the SI annual conferences. Contact with indexers on an international level is very important to us. If you want to know more about ASAIB, please visit our website at www.asaib.org.za or contact us directly at burgem@unisa.ac.za

Thank you for giving South Africa the opportunity to present our indexing contributions in *The Indexer.*

Marlene Burger, Guest Editor
ASAIB chairperson