Sheldon: Impressions of a first Canadian conference

In a recent meeting of the Editors’ Association of Canada, British Columbia (BC) branch, one of my colleagues tabled these questions:

- Editing – is it a skill, or an illness?
- Do we help, or do we need help?

Some of us may well ask ourselves the same questions about indexing, especially as we grapple with a particularly challenging project. One presenter at this year’s IASC/SCAD conference in Ottawa expressed kindred ambivalent feelings when saying she loves ‘having indexed’ something; going through the actual process can, on the other hand, induce various symptoms ranging from mild frustration, through crises of self-belief, to advanced existential angst.

The nature of this experience is not always readily communicable to those in other fields. Indeed, when I say, ‘I create indexes’, the most common response I receive from those outside the overlapping worlds of publishing/writing/editing/ indexing is: ‘What’s that?’

Explaining that I create those useful bits at the backs of books (my work has so far been on back-of-the-book indexes) draws looks of dawning comprehension combined with mild incredulity. Family and close friends benevolently lump this activity in with my overall obsessive-compulsiveness, noting that at least it brings in some money, whereas my involuntary straightening of the pictures on their walls is merely irritating.

It was thus both comforting and enjoyable to meet and mingle with fellow indexers at the June conference, especially as I am just this year getting back into the field. A great deal seems to have transpired since I created my first two indexes back in 1998. At that time, I was a full-time volunteer in the production department of Douglas & McIntyre/Greystone Books in Vancouver; the opportunity to learn indexing ‘on the fly’ came when the last-minute crunch of publishing schedules threw two outdoor travel manuscripts in my path. I was hooked.

Seven years later, hook still embedded, I decided to brush up and catch up by taking an indexing course offered by Simon Fraser University’s Writing and Publishing Program. Through instructor Annette Lorek’s highly informative online lessons, I learnt of IASC/SCAD, as well as sister associations such as the ASI and SI. What better next step to take than to join IASC/SCAD and meet other indexers, seasoned and new?

I decided to attend the conference for a few reasons. First was the happy coincidence of the indexing conference being right before the annual conference of the Editors’ Association of Canada/Association Canadienne des Réviseurs (EAC/ACR). As a new member of the EAC/ACR executive team, I had resolved on being in Toronto for that event, so the location and timing of the two was ideal. I don’t know if

References


Jane Purton is a liaison librarian at the Churchill campus of Monash University Library, and a member of the Victorian branch committee of ANZSI. An interest in indexing as a complementary subject arose through her work. Following the completion of several indexing courses conducted by Max McMaster of the Victorian branch of ANZSI, she became a Registered Indexer. After taking part in the first mentoring scheme held in Australia, she has successfully produced her first professional index. Email: jane.purton@lib.monash.edu.au

Impressions of a first Canadian conference

Dania Sheldon

The 2005 annual national conference of the Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada/Société Canadienne pour l’Analyse de Documents (IASC/SCAD) was held in June in Ottawa, the national capital. Anglophone and francophone members gathered for an intensive four days of pre-conference and conference sessions, which are summarized in the following article by a new Society member and first-time conference attendee.

In a recent meeting of the Editors’ Association of Canada, British Columbia (BC) branch, one of my colleagues tabled these questions:

- Editing – is it a skill, or an illness?
- Do we help, or do we need help?

Some of us may well ask ourselves the same questions about indexing, especially as we grapple with a particularly challenging project. One presenter at this year’s IASC/SCAD conference in Ottawa expressed kindred ambivalent feelings when saying she loves ‘having indexed’ something; going through the actual process can, on the other hand, induce various symptoms ranging from mild frustration, through crises of self-belief, to advanced existential angst.

The nature of this experience is not always readily communicable to those in other fields. Indeed, when I say, ‘I create indexes’, the most common response I receive from those outside the overlapping worlds of publishing/writing/editing/indexing is: ‘What’s that?’

Explaining that I create those useful bits at the backs of books (my work has so far been on back-of-the-book indexes) draws looks of dawning comprehension combined with mild incredulity. Family and close friends benevolently lump this activity in with my overall obsessive-compulsiveness, noting that at least it brings in some money, whereas my involuntary straightening of the pictures on their walls is merely irritating.

It was thus both comforting and enjoyable to meet and mingle with fellow indexers at the June conference, especially as I am just this year getting back into the field. A great deal seems to have transpired since I created my first two indexes back in 1998. At that time, I was a full-time volunteer in the production department of Douglas & McIntyre/Greystone Books in Vancouver; the opportunity to learn indexing ‘on the fly’ came when the last-minute crunch of publishing schedules threw two outdoor travel manuscripts in my path. I was hooked.

Seven years later, hook still embedded, I decided to brush up and catch up by taking an indexing course offered by Simon Fraser University’s Writing and Publishing Program. Through instructor Annette Lorek’s highly informative online lessons, I learnt of IASC/SCAD, as well as sister associations such as the ASI and SI. What better next step to take than to join IASC/SCAD and meet other indexers, seasoned and new?

I decided to attend the conference for a few reasons. First was the happy coincidence of the indexing conference being right before the annual conference of the Editors’ Association of Canada/Association Canadienne des Réviseurs (EAC/ACR). As a new member of the EAC/ACR executive team, I had resolved on being in Toronto for that event, so the location and timing of the two was ideal. I don’t know if

References


Jane Purton is a liaison librarian at the Churchill campus of Monash University Library, and a member of the Victorian branch committee of ANZSI. An interest in indexing as a complementary subject arose through her work. Following the completion of several indexing courses conducted by Max McMaster of the Victorian branch of ANZSI, she became a Registered Indexer. After taking part in the first mentoring scheme held in Australia, she has successfully produced her first professional index. Email: jane.purton@lib.monash.edu.au

Impressions of a first Canadian conference

Dania Sheldon

The 2005 annual national conference of the Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada/Société Canadienne pour l’Analyse de Documents (IASC/SCAD) was held in June in Ottawa, the national capital. Anglophone and francophone members gathered for an intensive four days of pre-conference and conference sessions, which are summarized in the following article by a new Society member and first-time conference attendee.

In a recent meeting of the Editors’ Association of Canada, British Columbia (BC) branch, one of my colleagues tabled these questions:

- Editing – is it a skill, or an illness?
- Do we help, or do we need help?

Some of us may well ask ourselves the same questions about indexing, especially as we grapple with a particularly challenging project. One presenter at this year’s IASC/SCAD conference in Ottawa expressed kindred ambivalent feelings when saying she loves ‘having indexed’ something; going through the actual process can, on the other hand, induce various symptoms ranging from mild frustration, through crises of self-belief, to advanced existential angst.

The nature of this experience is not always readily communicable to those in other fields. Indeed, when I say, ‘I create indexes’, the most common response I receive from those outside the overlapping worlds of publishing/writing/editing/indexing is: ‘What’s that?’

Explaining that I create those useful bits at the backs of books (my work has so far been on back-of-the-book indexes) draws looks of dawning comprehension combined with mild incredulity. Family and close friends benevolently lump this activity in with my overall obsessive-compulsiveness, noting that at least it brings in some money, whereas my involuntary straightening of the pictures on their walls is merely irritating.

It was thus both comforting and enjoyable to meet and mingle with fellow indexers at the June conference, especially as I am just this year getting back into the field. A great deal seems to have transpired since I created my first two indexes back in 1998. At that time, I was a full-time volunteer in the production department of Douglas & McIntyre/Greystone Books in Vancouver; the opportunity to learn indexing ‘on the fly’ came when the last-minute crunch of publishing schedules threw two outdoor travel manuscripts in my path. I was hooked.

Seven years later, hook still embedded, I decided to brush up and catch up by taking an indexing course offered by Simon Fraser University’s Writing and Publishing Program. Through instructor Annette Lorek’s highly informative online lessons, I learnt of IASC/SCAD, as well as sister associations such as the ASI and SI. What better next step to take than to join IASC/SCAD and meet other indexers, seasoned and new?

I decided to attend the conference for a few reasons. First was the happy coincidence of the indexing conference being right before the annual conference of the Editors’ Association of Canada/Association Canadienne des Réviseurs (EAC/ACR). As a new member of the EAC/ACR executive team, I had resolved on being in Toronto for that event, so the location and timing of the two was ideal. I don’t know if
there was friendly collusion between the two associations, but if so – bravo! I’d encourage similar cooperation in future. I could not have afforded two flights in one year, and suspect that many of us, labouring more for love than for money, are similarly financially constrained.

Naturally, my other reasons for attending were to network and to learn. Although email is undeniably a blessing (well, most of the time), for me there is nothing to match face-to-face conversation when forging new connections. This year’s conference proved well worth the journey from mild Vancouver to sweltering Ottawa.

The conference was very well organized, in both the lead-up and the execution. Accommodation was available in the University of Ottawa dormitories; for those optimistic enough to stay in rooms without air conditioning, the room temperatures soared above 40 degrees Celsius, with additional humidity. However, by marshalling a Zen-like mindset, and draping towels soaked in cold water over the lower extremities, we found this bearable. The lecture theatre in which the conference talks took place was bright, airy and cool.

Our Ottawa IASC/SCAD hosts were quietly but warmly welcoming, and ran the proceedings with relaxed professionalism. As one might expect, they showed particular attention to details. As just one example, everyone who volunteered to help with the conference was given a locally handcrafted piece of ironwork. Even those of us who had come on board as conference ‘reporters’ were remembered. It was this sort of awareness of the fine points that contributed to the event’s success.

In the two days prior to the conference, registrants had the opportunity to attend pre-conference workshops on either MACREX (two days) with Gale Rhoades, or CINDEX (one day) with Frances Lennie. I opted for the latter, and it proved to be a goldmine and an enjoyable mental workout for both beginners, such as myself, and more experienced CINDEX users.

In the following two days, the workout continued, punctuated by fine food and conversations. An evening ‘show and sell’, at which some attendees displayed materials from their past and current work, got everyone engaged in eclectic subjects; any remaining ice (not terribly thick to begin with) was broken as we warmed to our common interests and learnt about new ones.

The keynote address was delivered by author, musician, songwriter and teacher Phil Jenkins. Phil gave a delightful talk, interweaving his experiences as a non-fiction author, his observations on the central role of storytelling in our lives, and his passionate love of being a ‘reader’ (the designation he would like to see printed on the ‘Occupation’ line in his passport). ‘We read to talk to ourselves better,’ he maintains.

Phil’s reading and research for his best-selling An acre of time (Jenkins, 1996) brought him into contact with genealogical indexes, as he sought to unearth the life events of those who had lived on a particular one-acre piece of Ottawa land. This search for a connection with others’ narratives, past and present, provided much of the energy for Jenkins’ long months of (unpaid) research and travel. ‘Life is the clash between the poetic and the financial,’ he mused, but in the midst of this clash he seems to be having a tremendous time.

After Phil’s cheering opener, first in the roster of formal indexing sessions was ‘Indexing in a multicultural and multilingual environment’, presented by Michèle Hudon. Michèle works in the fields of classification structures and thesaurus design and use. In this ‘global age’, numerous barriers still restrict the availability and accessibility of ideas and data. Indexing in such an environment poses many challenges, including transcription and transliteration issues, and the importance of preserving quality and equality of access to information. Hudon skilfully summarized the key problems of cross-language retrieval.

Next was Gay Lepkey, a professional librarian who manages the cataloguing of a wide range of the Canadian federal government publications, and has been responsible for maintaining the government’s classification scheme and its Core Subject Thesaurus. His presentation conveyed the complexities of making metadata and controlled vocabularies workable tools within an enormous, decentralized bureaucracy.

After a half-hour discussion of the UK SI’s offer to make its training course and accreditation procedures available to sibling indexing associations (an offer which met with favourable responses among attendees), we adjourned for a relaxing but intellectually and professionally invigorating evening of dining and networking.

Day two commenced with a three-person panel on genealogy indexing: Patricia Roberts-Pichette, Sylvie Tremblay and Ruth Pincoe. Patricia began with an account of her work for the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa, specifically on the Middlemore Home Children. Dr John T. Middlemore established Children’s Emigration Homes in Canada, through which children in severely deprived circumstances were found permanent homes in Ontario and the Maritimes. Patricia indexed the Middlemore Home Children, a huge project, the difficulties of which she shared in depth.

Sylvie Tremblay, genealogist for the Association des Tremblay d’Amerique, followed with her experience of indexing the Canadian Tremblays. All are descendants of Michel Tremblay, an arrival on pre-Canada shores in 1647 who fathered four sons in New France. In 2003, the number of index entries for Tremblay marriages numbered 66,325; with the addition of information on other individuals who did not marry, by 2005 the number of entries had swelled to 70,340. Québec (New France included) has had excellent indexing for maintaining the government’s classification scheme and its training course and accreditation procedures available to sibling indexing associations (an offer which met with favourable responses among attendees), we adjourned for a relaxing but intellectually and professionally invigorating evening of dining and networking.

Day two commenced with a three-person panel on genealogy indexing: Patricia Roberts-Pichette, Sylvie Tremblay and Ruth Pincoe. Patricia began with an account of her work for the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa, specifically on the Middlemore Home Children. Dr John T. Middlemore established Children’s Emigration Homes in Canada, through which children in severely deprived circumstances were found permanent homes in Ontario and the Maritimes. Patricia indexed the Middlemore Home Children, a huge project, the difficulties of which she shared in depth.

Sylvie Tremblay, genealogist for the Association des Tremblay d’Amerique, followed with her experience of indexing the Canadian Tremblays. All are descendants of Michel Tremblay, an arrival on pre-Canada shores in 1647 who fathered four sons in New France. In 2003, the number of index entries for Tremblay marriages numbered 66,325; with the addition of information on other individuals who did not marry, by 2005 the number of entries had swelled to 70,340. Québec (New France included) has had excellent record keeping, with a retention rate of approximately 85 per cent. Some information, however, has been lost or concealed, posing knotty challenges for the determined indexer.

Ruth Pincoe continued with insights into her experiences of indexing a variety of materials. Ruth has worked in editing, indexing and publishing for over 20 years, specializing in music as well as scholarly books. She was fortunate enough to be the indexer of the Glenn Gould archives, a fact which I found particularly thrilling to learn, being a pianist and lifelong admirer of Gould’s interpretations of J. S. Bach. She also told the audience about her other indexing projects on Canadian genealogical records.

Ruth gracefully segued into the next panel on scholarly indexing, with Noeline Bridge, Patricia Buchanan and Joan Sheldon: Impressions of a first Canadian conference

The Indexer Vol. 24 No. 4 October 2005
Sheldon: Impressions of a first Canadian conference

McGilvray. This was a relaxed, interactive consideration of questions such as what exactly is meant by scholarly indexing, how it differs from other types of indexing, what scholarly presses look for in indexers, and pay rates and schedules. For those who love the intellectual ‘high’ of the academic environment, scholarly indexing can more than compensate for its drawbacks through the tremendous intellectual stimulation derived and the usually high level of authorial enthusiasm.

The official conference sessions were skilfully concluded by Dave Ream, who guided listeners through the realm of web indexing. Essential elements in web indexing include the structure, space, style and navigation of the website, as well as features of the indexing process – among these, handling locators, the lack of ‘page numbers’ in websites, and scripting features of various sites. Several types of technology are available to web indexers, none of them entirely satisfactory at this point. Successful web indexers need to have more tools (in the form of better applications), more skills and knowledge, and more time for training and for locating work.

Dave wrapped up what was, for me, an excellent and rigorous three days in Ottawa. New relationships were struck up, and thanks to email have proven to be more than passing enrichments of MACREX. New relationships were struck up, and thanks to email have proven to be more than passing enrichments of MACREX. Successful web indexers need to have more tools (in the form of better applications), more skills and knowledge, and more time for training and for locating work.

From the point of view of value for money, I think the conference was very well priced, and certainly worth my investment. Again, while ‘newbies’ may find the cost of conferences somewhat daunting, I offer the suggestion that the British Columbia EAC branch is making to promote our 2006 national conference – for the cost of a latte a day, one can easily save for an event that will yield significant tangible and intangible returns.

Having offered to write this article, I made a point of canvassing other attendees’ reactions to the conference; their responses were universally, and unaffectedly, highly positive. Congratulations to the dedicated organizers, the knowledgeable presenters, and the energetic and focused attendees; we all contributed to making the conference a distinct success. Here’s looking forward to 2006 in Toronto!

Reference


Dania Sheldon brings a varied background to her work in indexing. She was granted her doctorate in English Literature from the University of Oxford, but has also clung tenaciously to her enduring interests in the biological and medical sciences. Dania is currently working in beautiful but rainy Vancouver as a writer and editor for the provincial government of British Columbia. She is also a freelance editor and indexer working on an eclectic mix of manuscripts, ranging through American literature, comparative literature, political history, short fiction, memoirs, psychiatry, martial arts, education, and wilderness travel guides.

Email: dania.sheldon@shaw.ca

MACREX INDEXING PROGRAM

www.macrex.com

For 24 years MACREX has been under continuous development, and as a result is the program preferred by prestigious professional indexers worldwide. An online discussion group allows MACREX users from around the world to compare notes, seek suggestions, and receive advice, while giving us the opportunity to assess users’ priorities for enhancements and modifications to the program. Workshops given regularly in the UK, USA, and Australia further encourage user input into the enrichment of MACREX.

MONITOR PROGRESS: MACREX records time taken indexing, entries per page, references per entry, etc.

ACCELERATE large projects by dividing work between several indexers and merging files

CUT COSTS by creating cumulations and updates with minimum re-keying of text

REDUCE WORK by automatically producing indexes in different styles or in different media from one source file

ENSURE CONSISTENCY by setting up style sheets for each project

EXTEND YOUR SKILLS by making full use of MACREX’s huge range of options for creating, editing, and formatting entries

MACREX is available for Windows™ 95, 98 and XP. For other platforms please contact us.

Head Office
MACREX INDEXING SERVICES
Beech House, Burn Road, Blaydon
Tyne & Wear, NE21 6JR, UK
phone: +44(0)191 414 2595
email: sales@macrex.com

for North America (USA and Canada)
MACREX SUPPORT OFFICE
P.O. Box 3051, Daly City
CA 94015, USA
phone: +1 650.756.0821; fax: 650.292.2392
email: macrex@wisebytes.biz

for Australasia and South-East Asia
MASTER INDEXING
5 Kingston Street, East Malvern,
Vic. 3145, Australia
phone and fax: +61 3 9500 8715
email: max.mcmaster@masterindexing.com