THE INDEX COMMITTEE OF THE SOCIETY

Indexing, the process of creating a systematic guide to the contents of a text, has been a much neglected aspect of Canadian scholarship. In recognition of the lack of proper indexing in Canada and as a means towards improving a related field of endeavour, the Bibliographical Society of Canada established a permanent committee to study this subject in the fall of 1969.

In May 1970 an open letter, "On the Formation of an Index Committee," was sent to members of the Society by the appointed chairman. Response was immediate and by June the Committee had a membership of some twenty interested persons ranging from Alberta to Nova Scotia. Since then the membership, restricted to Society members, has grown to nearly fifty individuals and institutions.

By August 1970 an Executive had been formed, consisting of Mr. Peter Greig as Chairman/Editor, Dr. J.B. Rudnyćkyj and Miss S.K. Wigmore as regional Technical Advisors, and Miss Elizabeth Spicer as Retrospective Index Project Advisor. The first meeting of the Executive was held on March 20, 1971 at which time the role and the activities of the Index Committee were discussed. For geographic reasons more frequent meetings of the executive have not been possible.

The initial objective of the Index Committee, as expressed in the open letter, was to maintain the index to the Society's *Papers* and to index other publications "allied to the interests and purposes of the Society". At the same time certain theoretical aims were outlined centering on the promotion of indexing and indexing methods.

A certain misconception grew out of this simple statement of purpose, to the effect that the Committee was expected to provide indexers on request. While it is planned eventually to establish a register of willing and experienced indexers, there has never been any feeling that this should be the *raison d'être* of the Index Committee. This same question was discussed during the Executive meeting, at which time it was decided "that the Index Committee should concern itself primarily with the promotion of indexing and the training of indexers, rather than undertaking major indexing projects". The latter is viewed as the prerogative of the individual member, although the Committee will provide such assistance as lies within its power.

With regard to the Index Committee's original objective — that of maintaining an index to the Society's *Papers* and of indexing like materials — a continuation of the index which appeared in volume 6 of the *Papers* is in progress. The obvious importance of *Canadian Notes and Queries/Questions et Réponses canadiennes* (1968 -) led to the preparation of an index which appeared in the December 1970 number of that publication. A member of the Index Committee was also responsible for the index to the recently published second edition of the *Bibliography of Canadian Bibliographies*.

The Index Committee approached the promotion of indexing and indexing techniques in three related ways. From the outset it was recognized that to bring

a geographically divided membership into contact with one another some form of communication was essential. In July 1970 a *Newsletter* was begun with the purpose of providing information to the Committee members on indexes in progress or completed and on methods of indexing. The issues to date have provided check lists of books and periodical articles on indexing as well as informative notes on indexing methods and activities in Canada.

The *Newsletter's* section on indexes in progress or completed suggested a need for a more comprehensive knowledge of the past and present state of indexing activity in Canada. The compilation of a union list of published and unpublished indexes was undertaken with the first step being an attempt to discover the local centres of indexing activity. In March 1971 a survey questionnaire was mailed to almost 400 institutions across Canada. The replies, when compiled, will comprise a valuable corner-stone in the planned union list. Already a number of queries have been received from the compilers of projected indexes who wish to avoid unnecessary duplication. Another possible outcome of this survey will be a list of experienced indexers.

The third, and possibly, most obvious way in which the Index Committee approached the promotion and improvement of indexing was through training. A fruitful model workshop was held at the School of Library Science in Toronto in October 1971. The success of this initial workshop will act as a powerful stimulus for future meetings. At a less personal level the Index Committee also maintains a small library of reference texts which are available for loan to Committee members.

It is difficult to foretell at this formative stage what the future may hold for the Index Committee. At the outset some fear was expressed that the Committee might restrict itself solely to areas of literary and historical interest. Yet, as a note in the first *Newsletter* indicated, the development of a broadly based Committee is the responsibility of an active and interested membership whose reflection it will be. The promotion of indexing methods — whether we speak of an index or of information retrieval — is equally dependent on the individual interests and capacities of Committee members. Certainly there is a growing awareness of the need for information provision and the Index Committee may well be in the vanguard of those setting the objectives and providing the direction for such a movement.

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Chairman