

# The Indexer as Consultant: Collaborative Indexing of Community Newspapers

by Carolyn G. Weaver

In the fall of 2003, while getting ready to leave for a two-week camping trip, I received a telephone call from Rayna Holtz, a librarian at the Vashon Island (Washington) Public Library, asking for advice on what to include in a grant proposal due within a week to produce an index to eight weekly newspapers published on Vashon Island over the last century.

Holtz explained that Vashon and Maury Islands are a pair of islands connected by a narrow strip of land at low tide, located a short ferry ride away from downtown Seattle. The Vashon Library, originally founded by the Vashon Island Women's Club in 1916 but now a branch of the King County Library System (KCLS), serves a population of about 10,500 residents who are highly educated, with strong interests in social and environmental issues and the arts. The library staff wanted a cumulated newspaper index that could be made available via their online system to respond to questions from the Vashon-Maury Island Community Council, Island service organizations, students, genealogists, community activists, and the rest of its core community. Her basic questions for me: What should she include in a grant proposal, and how much money should she ask for?

Holtz was referred to me by another Pacific Northwest Chapter/ASI member who knows that I specialize in journal indexing and have handled large cumulated projects in the past.<sup>1</sup> I was intrigued, since I am both a local history buff and an amateur genealogist; but I also knew from experience as a librarian that adequate funding for a hundred-year cumulated index would be hard to come by, and that it was unlikely that any public library would be able to afford professional indexing for the entire project. However, I decided to answer the question as asked. Because there was no time to get sample papers to me for review prior to my trip, my response would of necessity be general.

I outlined a number of considerations for such a project:

- The evolution of the papers over time in terms of number of pages, format, and density of indexable material. The current papers are apt to be totally different in character and content from those published in the early 1900s.
- Vocabulary control. Reporters don't use standardized terminology within a single issue of a paper; so the changes in terminology likely to occur over 100 years would be astronomical.
- The need to clearly define "indexable" items, since a large portion of the content of any newspaper is non-indexable.
- The proliferation of personal and organizational names.
- Database-related issues: Which search engine would be used, and which elements should be searchable?
- The sheer magnitude of the project. Assuming 52 issues a year averaging 16 pages per issue, there were a lot of pages to be indexed!

I referred Holtz to the ASI website for general information about indexing, and suggested she take a look at other newspaper indexes, both print and online, for ideas as to how the index should be structured.

In addition, I made two initial recommendations: (1) plan on using dedicated indexing software for data entry, and (2) look for existing subject heading lists that might be adapted for local use. I also suggested the library consider working with a professional indexer in setting up the index while relying on library staff and volunteers to perform the actual data entry (the consultant model).

Because there was no time to prepare a true cost analysis or time projection, I simply pulled figures out of my hat and recommended she request \$10,000 (a nice, round figure!) as start-up funding, which should cover the purchase of indexing software, plus

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hiring a professional indexer to produce a prototype index, develop indexing protocols, and train library staff and volunteers in indexing. I guesstimated six months to complete the prototype index, plus another year (a significant underestimate, as it turned out!) to complete indexing of the backfiles. I followed up with an emailed confirmation of our conversation and went back to packing for my camping trip.

About a month later, Holtz contacted me again, reporting that she had collected about \$7,500 from various sources for start-up funding, substantially less than the \$10,000 I had recommended. Would that be sufficient to get started, and was I still interested in working with them?

I replied that I was indeed interested, and that the scope of work could be tailored to fit the funds available. We then exchanged a series of emails and telephone calls over the next few months, as I helped library staff clarify exactly what they wanted in terms of index coverage and database design.

In early March 2004, I met with library staff and got my first look at some sample newspaper issues. As Figure 1 shows, the *Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber* (the current newspaper) is the lineal descendent of the *Vashon Island News* and its succes-

sors. *Island Views*, a short-lived photo-heavy tabloid, and *Island Shopping News*, a largely non-indexable shopper, were published concurrently with the other Island 'papers of record.'

| Title                                  | Publication Dates            |
|--|------------------------------|
| <i>Vashon Island News</i>              | 1907 – 1915                  |
| <i>Vashon Island Record</i>            | 1916 – 1919                  |
| <i>Vashon Island News-Record</i>       | 1919 – 1954 (film/fiche)     |
| <i>Island Views</i>                    | 1948 – 1949                  |
| <i>Island Shopping News</i>            | 1950 – 1951                  |
| <i>Islander</i>                        | 1954 (Jan-May)               |
| <i>Island News-Record</i>              | 1954 (June) – 1957           |
| <i>Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber</i> | 1957 – date (fiche/hardcopy) |

Figure 1. *Vashon Island newspapers*

It was obvious in examining the samples that ergonomics could be an issue, as, with the exception of current issues of the *Beachcomber* in hard copy, most issues are on microfiche or film. The indexer would need readers adjacent to a computer to do the indexing. This produced a recommendation that the library consider using a notebook computer for data entry.

As expected, the papers varied greatly in format and characteristics. Papers from the early 1900s thru the 1920s tend to be 4-8 pages per issue, filled with dense columns of local gossip, with items such as "Mr and Mrs Sam Brown just returned from a trip to Seattle where they visited with their daughter, Mrs. John Eccles, and her family." Indexable items (births, deaths, marriages) are often buried among the gossip, with no headlines to cue the indexer – meaning that all columns have to be read carefully. Modern journalistic conventions had not yet appeared. Ads often appear on the first page, and true news stories are buried on interior pages, often without distinguishing headlines. Fiction, poetry, and farming or domestic hints are featured prominently, along with reprints from other papers and wire service fillers. Editorials are not always differentiated from news – which makes for interesting reading but questionable indexability.

By the mid-1930s, *Vashon Island News-Record* issues were averaging 8-12 pages per issue, conventions such as headlines, bylines, and differentiation between news and editorials were adopted, and photos were an important part of the papers. The gossip is still there, but true news items tend to appear as distinct articles. *The Beachcomber* (the current publication) averages 16-24 pages per issue of news, reflecting modern journalistic practices. Wire service fillers have disappeared, and the focus is on in-depth coverage of Island concerns.

## Development of the Consultant Model

Although the ideal would have been to have all indexing done by a professional, it was obvious from the start that this was not going to happen. While seed money from eight different community organizations and private donors was sufficient to get started, there was no ongoing source of funding and no commitment from the library administration for continued support of the project. By default, therefore, a consultant model was created, in which a professional indexer would design and produce a prototype index and train library staff and volunteers to do the indexing as time and funds become available. Library staff, with their intimate knowledge of community concerns, would serve as content experts, providing the indexer with regular

feedback on format and terminology, so that the index would be both responsive to community needs and compatible with other resources already available on the Library's website.

We worked backward in defining the scope of work. What consultation services could be provided in less than one year (the term of the grant) for the funding that was available? We agreed on the following deliverables:

- Creation of a prototype index to include three months of the current paper (*Beachcomber*) plus four issues from each of the other seven papers. This content was selected because the *Beachcomber*, published continuously for the last 50 years, was of primary interest to library users; and a three-month sample should be representative of the indexing issues likely to be encountered in the paper as a whole. A four-issue sample from each of the other seven papers should be sufficient to determine how each differs in format and content.
- Indexing of one full year of the *Beachcomber*, following the style of the prototype. This would produce a concrete product to show to donors within a reasonable period of time. The average time required per issue to index a year of the *Beachcomber* plus 28 issues of the other papers could also be used to estimate the time, effort, and resources (including computer disk space) needed for the index as a whole.
- Development of a prototype thesaurus and written indexing protocols and procedures.
- Advice on selection of dedicated indexing software and index-related considerations in database development. The Library was considering use of either existing library search software or an Access database – decisions that still had to be made – and I agreed to be on call to discuss database-related questions with the Library's systems staff.
- Training of library staff and volunteers as required.

I supplied demo copies of all three major indexing software programs on disk at our initial meeting and encouraged library staff to try the programs for themselves. They chose Cindex™ for the project and investigated the possibility of shared purchases with other KCLS branches that were considering indexing projects of their own.

The prototype index was to be delivered within three months from signing of the contract, the complete year of the *Beachcomber* within five months, and all other deliverables by the end of the year. I was to be paid on an hourly basis, billed as each deliverable was submitted. Up to one hour a week of phone and email consultation was included without charge, to encourage library staff to contact me as questions arose, without the necessity of keeping track of brief interactions.

## Development of the Prototype

The prototype index was first priority for the project. Goals included:

- Establish the overall structure of the index with regard to style and format.
- Determine how each paper differs in format and content.
- Define indexable items and depth of indexing.
- Decide how to handle personal and organizational names.
- Begin development of a controlled vocabulary list.

Since the index would be exported from Cindex™ to the database as a plain text tab-delimited file, use of special typography (boldface, italic, etc.) was not possible without considerable manipulation of the

# Feature Article

data. We therefore decided that subject headings, whether thesaurus terms or personal or organization names, would be entered all caps. (Figure 2.)

| RECORD FORMAT                             | DATA ENTRY VIEW   |
|---|---|
| <b>Main:</b>                              | <b>Main:</b> ADVERTISING                                |
| <b>Sub1:</b> Headline or other descriptor | <b>Sub1:</b> Advertising vs. community service (Arthur) |
| <b>Sub2:</b> Newspaper abbreviation       | <b>Sub2:</b> Beachcomber                                |
| <b>Page:</b> YYYY/MM/DD pXX               | <b>Page:</b> 2000/07/19 p4                              |

Figure 2. Record structure

Since this was to be a dictionary-style index, with authors and names as subjects interfiled<sup>2</sup>, we distinguished between names as subjects and names as authors by entering author and photographer names in upper/lower case as main headings, followed by (au) or (ph) respectively. In subject entries, the author's last name is in parentheses following the article headline. (Figure 3)

| FORMATTED AUTHOR ENTRY  | FORMATTED SUBJECT ENTRY   |
|---|---|
| Arthur, Allison (au)<br>Advertising vs. community service<br>Beachcomber, 2000/07/19 p4 | ADVERTISING<br>Advertising vs. community service (Arthur)<br>Beachcomber, 2000/07/19 p4 |

Figure 3. Author entries

Although headlines are used as the first subheading in most cases, non-descriptive headlines must be reworded or glossed to reflect the actual content of the article. The newspaper abbreviation is placed in the second subhead field rather than in the locator field for ease of searching by title and display of the results in chronological order, which is also the reason for entering the locator in year/month/day order.

A minor challenge was to establish easily interpreted abbreviations for eight papers with very similar titles. We adopted the scheme shown in Figure 4. The abbreviations are defined in a headnote that can be displayed as a splash screen during log-on to the database.

| ABBREVIATION   | TITLE                                  |
|----------------|--|
| Beachcomber    | <i>Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber</i> |
| Island Sh-News | <i>Island Shopping News</i>            |
| Island Views   | <i>Island Views</i>                    |
| Islander       | <i>Islander</i>                        |
| Islander NR    | <i>Island News-Record</i>              |
| VI News        | <i>Vashon Island News</i>              |
| VI News-Record | <i>Vashon Island News-Record</i>       |
| VI Record      | <i>Vashon Island Record</i>            |

Figure 4. Newspaper abbreviations

Because the file is to be imported into a database, all records must contain the same number of fields, and no fields can be left blank in a cross-reference record. A non-printing placeholder {#} is inserted in cross-reference subheading fields to guarantee that cross-references import correctly. (Figure 5)

| DATA ENTRY                  | FORMATTED VIEW  |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Main:</b> ADVERTISING    | ADVERTISING. <i>See also</i> SIGNS  |
| <b>Sub1:</b> {#}            | Advertising vs. community service (Arthur)  |
| <b>Sub2:</b> {#}            | Beachcomber, 2000/07/19 p4  |
| <b>Page:</b> See also SIGNS | To distribute postage stamps advertising the state<br>VI News-Record, 1930/01/09 p4 |

Figure 5. Cross-reference format

## Indexing Procedures

Indexing procedures were developed on the fly while writing the prototype index, with frequent samples submitted by email to the library and the format and terminology revised to reflect feedback received.

Two basic principles governed the project as a whole:

1. *Write the index from the user's viewpoint.* Users of the Vashon Library Newspaper Index were expected to be library staff and clients, whether using the index within the library or remotely via the Internet. Terminology should therefore reflect the concepts that users are likely to be seeking, regardless of the specific wording used in the article.
2. *Focus on the historical or genealogical interests of Vashon/Maury Island residents.* Only articles that are of lasting historical value to the Vashon Island community would be indexed. The basic question in deciding whether to index an item is, "Will anyone be interested in this article ten years from now?"

With these principles firmly in mind, an *indexable item* was defined as news that is of lasting historical, cultural, or genealogical interest to the Vashon/Maury Island community. Examples:

- Coverage of community organizations, events, government, schools, sports, cultural activities, churches, businesses, services, economy, health care, etc.
- Birth, marriage, and death announcements
- Photographs of community events, including name subject entries for all local residents identified in captions
- Vashon/Maury Island history
- Display advertisements of historical or lasting importance
- Crime and accident reports affecting Island residents, excluding routine police reports
- Local coverage of elections and political campaigns
- State or national news that directly affects or discusses Island residents
- Letters to the editor

*Selectively index* if of lasting interest to the Vashon community:

- Gossip columns with substantive content. In early 20th century papers, indexable birth, marriage, or death notices with no separate headlines are often buried in gossip columns; so all columns must be carefully scanned, watching for substantive items of genealogical or historical interest to Vashon and the surrounding area.
- Editorials with substantive content.
- Arts Briefs and Business Briefs (columns): substantive items of historical interest.
- Movie, television, and book reviews if of local interest, e.g., movie filmed on the island; book by local author.
- Detailed reports of social or club activities that have lasting or historical value.
- Fiction/poetry if by a local author or addressing Vashon as subject; add FICTION or POETRY subject headings as appropriate.

*Non-indexable items* (see exceptions above):

- National and wire-service stories that do not directly cover local residents or community interests.
- Classified and display advertisements (unless of historical interest).
- Legal notices.
- Homemaking/farming hints and reprints from other sources unless specific to the Vashon community.
- Routine police or sheriff's reports.
- Routine meeting reports and announcements of clubs and other organizations.
- Gossip columns containing brief social items of no lasting or historical importance.

## Vocabulary Control

Index terminology development evolved into a true collaboration between library staff and consultant. I was provided with a 12-page, double-column annotated list of recommended subject headings, based on the library staff's familiarity with the papers and the Islands. This proved to be invaluable, since it reflected current terminology and interests of index users, as well as identifying Island organizations and their relationships to one another. (Figure 6)

Schools, elementary  
 See also *Burton Elementary School (1954); Burton Grade School (1920); Burton Grade School (1930); Chautauque Elementary School (1992?); Vashon Elementary School; Vashon Grade School (1887); (1954);*  
 Schools, health & safety  
 Schools, high  
 See also *Burton High School (?); Burton Union High School (1904); FamilyLink; StudentLink; Union J High School (1913); Vashon High School (1912); Vashon High School (1929)*

Figure 6. Library's term list

The library's list was only a starting point for vocabulary development, and there were regular exchanges of email clarifying particular terms. Library staff promptly resolved questions about organizational names, and I educated the staff on such fine points as the fact that a single heading for Vashon High School (without a date) is sufficient, since from an indexing standpoint it doesn't really matter that a particular school was in different buildings in 1912 and 1929 unless the building itself is the subject of the article.

We agreed that **organizational names** would follow the usage of the period. However, organizational names are wildly inconsistent in usage, and different versions may appear in the same issue. The most prevalent usage is therefore selected as the main entry for a particular era, with cross-references from alternative forms of the name used concurrently. When there is a formal name change for the organization, a 'see also' reference is added to link to the newer name – or to a previous name, since papers are not necessarily indexed in chronological order.

A good example of organizational name variations is provided by Glacier Northwest, Inc., the owner of a gravel mine on Maury Island that regularly appears as the subject of *Beachcomber* articles addressing its environmental impact. The following Glacier terms therefore appear in the thesaurus:

MAURY ISLAND GLACIER NORTHWEST  
 GRAVEL MINE  
 UF: Lone Star Gravel Mine  
 Northwest Aggregates Gravel Mine  
 RT: GLACIER NORTHWEST, INC.  
 LONE STAR NORTHWEST, INC.  
 MINES AND MINING

**Names of communities** are also problematic. For instance, Vashon Island is a geographic feature in the middle of Puget Sound. But it is also a town (which does not have the same boundaries as the island) that is frequently referenced as part of the hyphenated

Vashon-Maury Island community. Then there is Vashon Heights (a residential district) in the early 1900s that a century later is simply known as The Heights. To accurately assign subject headings therefore requires an intimate knowledge of the community and the history of the island. Vocabulary-related issues such as this require a true collaboration between an indexer and a community content expert.

**Personal names** are perhaps the greatest conundrum in a community newspaper index, because all significant references to residents' activities – births, deaths, marriages, and achievements – need to appear in the index.<sup>3</sup> And it is impossible to predict how those names will appear in an article.

We decided that personal names would be indexed only if the person is the subject of the article and not merely quoted. The form of the name used in the article is indexed, with no attempt made to reconcile spelling unless the indexer is certain which spelling is correct – a not unlikely event in a small community when the indexer is a third-generation resident who is related to the person mentioned in the article.

Individual name entries for both husband and wife should be provided. Although the first name of married women should be used, this is not always possible prior to the mid-1960s, when women were often referred to simply as "Mrs John Smith," regardless of the context of the article. Personal names are not added to the thesaurus.

Special treatment is given to articles of interest to genealogists: marriages, births, and death notices.

**Marriages** receive separate name entries for bride and groom, using "marriage to \_\_\_\_" as the subheading. For example:

DAHL, JULIAN  
 Marriage to Linnea Hodgins  
 Beachcomber, 2000/02/02 pA12  
 HODGINS, LINNEA  
 Marriage to Julian Dahl  
 Beachcomber, 2000/02/02 pA12

**Birth announcements** receive name subject entries for both child and parents. This is one occasion when husband and wife may properly be indexed with a single entry. However, parents' names, depending on the conventions of the era, also require individualized treatment.

# Feature Article

*When parents have the same last name:*

ALDRICH, BRADY AND ROBYN  
birth of Brianna Mary Aldrich  
Beachcomber, 2000/12/20 p10

ALDRICH, BRIANNA MARY  
birth (daughter of Brady and Robyn  
Aldrich)  
Beachcomber, 2000/12/20 p10

*When parents are identified only as "Mr.  
and Mrs.":*

BACON, FRANK  
birth (son of Mr. & Mrs. Robert Bacon)  
Islander NR, 1954/06/03 p2

BACON, ROBERT (MR. & MRS.)  
birth of Frank Bacon  
Islander NR, 1954/06/03 p2

*When parents have different last names:*

BAIN, BARBARA  
birth of Forest Joseph Dempsey  
Beachcomber, 2000/07/05 p8

DEMPSEY, BRIAN  
birth of Forest Joseph Dempsey  
Beachcomber, 2000/07/05 p8

DEMPSEY, FOREST JOSEPH  
birth (son of Barbara Bain and Brian  
Dempsey)  
Beachcomber, 2000/07/05 p8

**Obituaries and death notices** are indexed under the name of the deceased, with the subheading "obituary" instead of a headline.

**Business names**, as legal entities, are indexed as stated in the article, e.g., A. C. FRY & CO., and are not inverted, although inverted cross references may be added if warranted. Business names, like personal names, are only indexed if the article is about the business itself, with double-postings under the specific type of business. Many of the more commonly used business names have been included in the thesaurus.

## Special Indexing Problems

A number of indexing problems unique to newspapers surfaced during the writing of the prototype index.

1. **Unnumbered pages.** Pages are not always numbered in papers from the early 1900s. The assumption is that the page with a nameplate is page 1 and page numbers are assigned sequentially in index entries. Unnumbered inserts are identified as such in the locator field.

2. **Letters to the editor.** Signed letters to the editor should always receive an author entry, with the gloss [letter] following the headline. Subject entries include the author's name in parentheses following the headline, followed by the [letter] gloss. For author entries, a parenthetical gloss is added after the headline, e.g., [arsenic] if needed to clarify the topic.

4. **Photographs.** Photographs were not a significant aspect of these newspapers until the 1920s; but together with the caption, they may now represent the entire story. The following photo policies were established:

- Index under the subject PHOTO-GRAPHS when the photo and caption are the entire story.
- Provide name entries for all people identified in photos, and add [photo] as a gloss only for the actual subject(s) of the photograph. If, for instance, an article receives name subject entries for four people, but only two are pictured in the photo, only the latter would include the [photo] gloss.
- Do not index head shots of columnists or people mentioned only in passing in an article.

**Photographic gossip columns** are a prominent part of many community papers. These candid shots are of genealogical and historical interest. Name subject entries are provided for local residents, organizations, events, etc., identified in the photo, with a brief description of the event where possible. The column name is not indexed. Subject entries are provided selectively as needed:

ABEL, NATALIE  
4-H Awards banquet. Scene & Heard  
[photo]  
Beachcomber, 2000/12/06 p12

## Documentation of Protocols and Terminology

Indexing of the prototype began in April 2004, and all indexing was completed and the final revisions accepted in early September. The files were delivered in three formats: the Cindex™ file for import into the Library's copy of Cindex™, a formatted .rtf file, and a tab-delimited text file for import into the database, along with the Cindex™ abbreviations file created during data entry.

The project tasks remaining to be completed at that point included documenting the indexing protocols and procedures, writing the prototype thesaurus, and staff training. I estimated that these activities would require about 36 hours (8 hours to draft the protocols; 20 hours for the thesaurus; and 8 hours of onsite training), but only 8 hours of consultant time remained in the budget.

I reported the potential shortfall to the library and guaranteed that the protocols and staff training would be delivered under the original budget regardless of the time required, since these tasks were essential to the success of the project. As an alternative to a formal thesaurus, I offered to provide a list of the subject headings and cross-references used in the Cindex™ file as a desktop tool. However, the library agreed to fund the additional hours needed; and I was authorized to proceed with formal thesaurus development.

A 12-page "Indexing Protocols and Procedures" document was written and submitted, compiled from the detailed notes that I had been keeping throughout the indexing process as policies were established and feedback was received from library staff.

Although I had initially recommended that the library purchase a thesaurus management program<sup>4</sup>, it was apparent at this point that thesaurus maintenance would not be cost-effective for a volunteer-maintained system. I therefore developed the prototype thesaurus using MultiTes software ([www.multites.com](http://www.multites.com)) and confirmed that I would be available to provide thesaurus updates as needed in the future.

The thesaurus was created by exporting the main headings from the Cindex™ file as a

text file into Word. (Figure 7) The file was then edited to delete the terms (like personal names and headnotes) that would not be included in the thesaurus. (Figure 8)

ABEL, NATALIE  
Abel, Steve (au)  
ABLOTT, KATE  
ACCIDENTS, MARINE  
ACCIDENTS, TRAFFIC. See also TRAFFIC SAFETY  
ACCOUNTANTS  
ACUPUNCTURE  
ADAMS, ESTHER  
ADAMS, MOLLY  
ADKINS, RONALD J.  
ADVERTISING. See also SIGNS  
Aerobics  
AFFORDABLE HOUSING. See also HOUSES AND HOUSING  
AGED. See also VASHON-MAURY ISLAND SENIOR CENTER

Figure 7. Unedited text file

ACCIDENTS, MARINE  
ACCIDENTS, TRAFFIC. See also TRAFFIC SAFETY  
ACCOUNTANTS  
ACUPUNCTURE  
ADVERTISING. See also SIGNS  
Aerobics  
AFFORDABLE HOUSING. See also HOUSES AND HOUSING  
AGED. See also VASHON-MAURY ISLAND SENIOR CENTER

Figure 8. Edited text file

Finally, the edited text file was imported into MultiTes, where relationships (broader and narrower terms) and scope notes were added. (Figure 9)

ACCIDENTS  
NT: ACCIDENTS, MARINE,  
ACCIDENTS, TRAFFIC  
ACCIDENTS, MARINE,  
BT: ACCIDENTS  
ACCIDENTS, TRAFFIC  
BT: ACCIDENTS  
RT: AUTOMOBILES  
TRAFFIC SAFETY  
ACCOUNTANTS  
BT: OCCUPATIONS

Figure 9. Thesaurus entries

Errors, inconsistencies and incorrect relationships in the subject headings used in the index became apparent while building the thesaurus. The index subject headings were therefore revised to match the thesaurus terms, and a final revised index file was delivered to the client, along with copies of the thesaurus. The latter was provided in three

**(continued on page 31)**

## Indexing biographies

### **Bell, Hazel K. *Indexing biographies and other stories of human lives***

3rd edition, 2004, 106 pp., ISBN 1-871577-29-2

£15.00 (£17.50 overseas) for members of indexing societies

Now into its third edition, this popular book deals with the indexing of human lives – be they history, biography, autobiography, diaries, letters or fiction. These types of books can be difficult to index, with the indexer often having to make subjective judgements as to the choice of language for index entries. What better guide to the genre than Hazel Bell, who has written extensively on this subject and is herself an experienced indexer of biographies.

This is such a refreshing book! Bell's approach to narrative indexing is flexible, subtle, interpretative, and respectful, qualities to which all indexers should aspire — Do Mi Stauber, *The Indexer*, October 2004

... reflects many of her insights and innovative work with indexing novels. She brings to all of her articles and books a clear and witty intelligence, an impressive mastery of indexing skills, and a lifetime of reading — Dave Prout, *Keywords* Jan/March 2005

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## **The Indexer as Consultant (continued from page 23)**

formats: an alphabetical list, a top term hierarchical listing showing all relationships, and a rotated keyword list. The thesaurus can also be generated as an HTML file if the Library ever wants to mount it online.

## **Staff Training and Project Wind-Down**

The final consulting activity was onsite training for library staff and volunteers. This was originally to have included initial training for Vashon Library staff, followed by a general training session for KCLS staff from other branches at a later date.

By the time training was actually scheduled, however, the project environment had changed drastically. KCLS, in reassessing priorities, withdrew support for community newspaper indexing projects by branch libraries and also refused to allow staff to work as unpaid volunteers on such projects. Holtz therefore approached the Vashon Heritage Association, one of the original donors, which agreed to sponsor the index on an ongoing basis. Although the Heritage Association has no money to contribute, they do provide a nonprofit umbrella under which indexing can continue as a volunteer effort, with the possibility of seeking grant funding at a future date.

The Pacific Northwest Chapter/ASI has a long-standing pro bono indexing program ([www.pnwasi.org/probono.htm](http://www.pnwasi.org/probono.htm)) under which non-profit agencies may request indexing support for projects that they cannot otherwise afford. Under the program, novice indexers donate their time to gain experience, and experienced indexers serve as mentors for the novices, reviewing their work and providing input as needed. One of my last activities as consultant was to suggest that the Heritage Association apply for PNW/ASI's pro bono indexing support, and to confirm with the pro bono coordinator that I was willing to serve as the mentor if their application was successful. This would offer an opportunity for a number of novice chapter members to gain valuable experience with newspaper indexing on a rotating basis, while providing continuing support for the Vashon project.

## **Conclusion**

The consultant model of indexing is applicable to any large project for which the needs

of the client exceed available funding. Non-profit organizations (libraries, churches, schools, genealogical or historical societies) often have collections of items that need indexing and a group of volunteers with the time to work on a large project such as a cumulated journal or newspaper index. What they don't have, in most cases, is an understanding of the indexing process or a large budget for professional indexing services, since grant funds are limited.

An indexer approached to provide a quote on such a project may consider it an exercise in futility to spend much time preparing a bid, knowing that the likelihood of a six-figure contract being awarded for a very large project is slim to none. However, the organization may indeed have seed money available. By offering cost-effective alternatives to complete professional indexing, both parties win: the client gets a running start on his project, and the indexer receives fair compensation for providing the client with a solid foundation on which to build the volunteer-produced index.

To summarize the consultant approach to community newspaper indexing:

- Don't underestimate the volume of work. In the Vashon project, 90 issues from 8 newspapers (the equivalent of about 18 months from one paper) produced an index file of almost 7200 records. Do the math when dealing with 100+ years of papers. And make sure you have a very large hard drive.
- Base all projections on samples from the life span of the paper. A current sample is not representative of the whole.
- Be realistic about the time required. The Vashon index averaged 1.7 hours per issue for an experienced indexer – excluding the four hours spent on the first issue. Volunteer indexers will take longer.
- Community newspaper indexing requires community input. Reporters don't define their terms, and they write for a readership that already understands the community. With "outside" indexers, someone familiar with the community needs to act as an interpreter – hence the validity of the consulting model.
- Finally, don't expect to get rich indexing a community newspaper; the money just isn't there. But don't pass up the opportunity if it is presented to you. It can be

one of the more memorable experiences of your career.

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## **Footnotes**

- <sup>1</sup>Weaver, Carolyn G. "The Gist of Journal Indexing," *Key Words*, 10(1):16-22, Jan/Feb 2002. (<http://www.asindexing.org/site/Weaver.pdf>)
- <sup>2</sup>This was a decision that is debatable. In retrospect, separate author/photographer and subject indexes might have been more user-friendly for online access.
- <sup>3</sup>This level of detail is often excluded from an index to a daily paper for practical reasons; but it is the type of information that is dear to genealogists and library users and thus a major focus of this community newspaper index.
- <sup>4</sup>A number of excellent thesaurus management software programs are listed on the ASI website at <http://www.asindexing.org/site/thesoft.shtml>



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