

Indexing Local History

Mary A. Hamil

If you are considering initiating an indexing project, "Historical and Genealogical Gold Mine: An Index Project for a Small Town Newspaper"¹ would provide a good background for some advance decision making.

All indexes done by the Davidson County Community College Learning Resources Center have been done manually on 3" x 5" index cards by library technicians whenever they had free time. The index was typed; and as part of the editing process, all references to one person, whether given with nicknames, initials, or full name, have been combined. Many indexers prefer listing each separately, which is certainly easier and safer, but it is not as helpful to researchers.

Basic decisions, such as word by word rather than letter by letter alphabetizing, filing of "Mc," and initials, have been made according to the rules by which catalog cards are filed.

Subject indexing is the most difficult to handle, especially in old documents, since terminology sometimes changes as the years pass. The term used in the document should be used but a *see reference* from the more current term increases the usefulness of the index. Chapter VI of Cleveland's *Indexing and Abstracting*² contains good guidelines on some of these points.

Even though there seem to be some problems involved in an automated system, a simple, inexpensive indexing program for the IBM PC is being sought by our staff. A discussion of automated vs. manual systems is included in an article by B.M. Hall in *Indexer*³ for April, 1983.

This project began about five years ago when a staff member did a brief subject index for *Homespun*, a magazine published by the school children of Davidson County from 1973 to 1983. A copy of this index was sent to each public school in the county.

Mary A. Hamil is Director of Library Services at Davidson County Community College in Lexington.



The next effort was largely a name index and relied on the detailed table of contents to provide subject access to Dr. Jacob Leonard's *Centennial History of Davidson County*. This was undertaken largely as a means of answering reference questions on local history. When members of the newly formed Genealogical Society wanted to purchase copies, the Learning Resources Center (LRC) had the index printed by the campus print shop, commissioned a drawing of the old county court house for the cover, and discovered it had a sort of business sideline. Not only local individuals and institutions but libraries such as the Newberry in Chicago purchased copies!

The number of copies of the *Centennial History* index which were sold seemed to indicate that this project filled a real need and should be continued.



Our third publication was not a true index but rather an alphabetical arrangement of the records of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation at Sandy Creek Meeting House. The transcription of these records was done by Mary Jo Shoaf, President of the Genealogical Society. The earliest record is a baptism which occurred in 1787. It is interesting to note the inclusion of a list of "culord members." One is specified as a free man, the others as servants (slaves?).

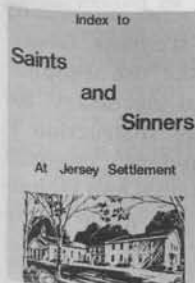
Davidson County has five churches dating from the mid-eighteenth century whose early records survive, so the staff began to access these. The oldest organized congregation in the area is Pilgrim. In actuality, three congregations, two Lutheran and one German Reformed, shared the





Pilgrim Building until 1903 when the Reformed group purchased the building at auction. In 1979, Rev. James E. Neese published a book called *The Dutch Settlement on Abbott's Creek* which is a history of Pilgrim Reformed United Church of Christ (the German Reformed Church,

as a result of several mergers, became a part of the United Church of Christ in 1961). Rev. Neese did not include an index with his book, so the LRC produced one in the same format as the other two but secured in a 3M binder. This is the format we are still using for our indexes.



The next effort was to index Garland Hendricks' 1964 book, *Saints and Sinners at Jersey Church*. This 1775 Baptist church is of particular interest since there are over 70 slave members whose names appear in the record.

Abbott's Creek Baptist Church was organized in 1783, and their records are available on microfilm, but the Genealogical Society has indexed the earliest of these records in their *Journal*, so there is no need for the LRC to index them.

Most of the first indexes were primarily of the Lexington area, so fairness indicated that index number five should be a Thomasville history, *Wheels of Faith and Courage*, which was written by Jewel Sink in 1952.

During the 1984-85 year, Brenda James indexed *Rowan County, A Brief History*, written by James S. Brawley and published by the N.C. Division of Archives and History. This was chosen because Davidson County was formed out of Rowan. She has also indexed a bicentennial publication called *Historical Gleanings of Davidson County*.



The current project is a 120-page typescript of local history columns of a 1905 Lexington newspaper, *The Dispatch*. This is very interesting material since it con-


tains much local folklore which has never been published in book form.

When an order is received for any one of the indexes, a small slip listing all the indexes and prices (mostly in the \$4.00 to \$5.00 range) is enclosed with the shipment. Copies of each index are sent to the Division of Archives and History and the North Carolina Genealogical Society. The Society lists the indexes in its publication and that takes care of our marketing effort.



We have also been involved with a hardback book, *Country College on the Yadkin*, by Virginia Fick, who teaches English at our school. Some of the material for her book was obtained from Davidson Room files in the LRC. Our Dean of Learning Resources, John Thomas,

helped in the negotiations with Hunter Publishing Company; and our Audiovisual Coordinator, Michael Anthony, took many of the pictures.

North Carolina is fortunate to have had the *North Carolina Historical Review* and the University of North Carolina Press which have done an outstanding job of publishing North Carolina materials for more than half a century. Davidson County Community College's effort certainly is not in the same league with their products but does make a small contribution toward preserving our heritage and making it accessible. 

References

1. Armstrong, T.F. and Fennell, J.C. "Historical and Genealogical Gold Mine: An Index Project for a Small-Town Newspaper." *RQ* 22 (1982): 140-145.
Bakewell, K.G.B. *Symposium: Inadequacies of Book Indexes*. New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1974.
2. Cleveland, Donald B. and Cleveland, Ana D. *Introduction to Indexing and Abstracting*. Littleton, Col.; Libraries Unlimited, 1983.
Fennie-Collura, M. "Librarian as Entrepreneur Indexer." *Reference Services Review* 11 (1983): 83-87.
3. Hall, B.M. "Getting the Index Right: Roles and Responsibilities." *Indexer* 13 (1983): 166-172.
Rubinstein, E. "Saints and Indexers." *Indexer* 12 (1981): 213-214.
Spiker, Sina. *Indexing Your Book, a Practical Guide for Authors*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975 (c1954).
"Symposium: Indexers at Work." 11 (1979): 213-219.
Thornton, J.L. "Progress in Indexing: Factor or Fiction?" *Indexer* 11 (1978): 7-8.

Photos by Mike Anthony