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MINERVA — Dodging the paper wait

MINERVA, the worthy old Roman Goddess who lent her name to William Lane's late 18th Century printing endeavours, re-established her connections with libraries at the Sydney launch of the Minerva Library System at OTC House on October 21.

Developed with the co-operation of the National Library, State Library of NSW and OTC, the basic MINERVA electronic mail facility has been tailored to support the communication/information needs of Australian libraries.

As a result of these developments and the efforts of an LAA Public Libraries Section deputation, the Premier of NSW, Mr Wran, recently announced that funds would be made available to install microcomputers and modems in all sizeable NSW public libraries.

MINERVA can be accessed using a PC, VDU, Micro or word processor connected to a modem, a device that enables the telephone network to be used for computer-to-computer transfer of data. Each MINERVA user is assigned an electronic mailbox number and a password. Once connected to MINERVA via AUSTPAC or MIDAS, an eight item MINERVA library menu is presented to the operator.

The one hundred and fifty librarians who attended the launch were particularly interested in the demonstration of the online inter-library loan form. This enables same-day placement of requests from anywhere within Australia. When consigned to a printer at the receiving end, the form is 'AACOBS compatible' in that it contains all key bibliographic elements and is capable of being filed with existing paper stationary.

The form has a number of pathways and develops on the screen in response to requests for monographs or periodicals, and the requirements for a loan, copy or location. Upon completion, the form is despatched to a designated library by entering the comand SEND.

The State Library of NSW is making efforts to develop disk programs to enable requests to be compiled offline before transmitting via MINERVA at high speeds. As MINERVA charges are incurred at the rate of 25 cents per minute, and it takes some 2-3 minutes to type out a request, dramatic savings are possible when online time is reduced to a few seconds per request. US experience with this method has resulted in a time saving of more than half.

MINERVA allows for fast access to a number of overseas databases including DIALOG, ESA, ORBIT, BRS, and DOW JONES. Bibliographic citations can be transferred during an online search to an inter-library loan request form.

Minerva Library System Launch, OTC House, Sydney, October 21. Left to right: John Wright (ILL Librarian, State Library NSW), Russell Doust (State Librarian, NSW), Andrew Marston (Minerva Client Consultant, OTC).

Photo: Deborah Gillespie

At some future date, when ABN receives a loans package from its American parent, the WLN, MINERVA will still be relevant for inter-library loan purposes due to gateway connections that allow communication with the 1200 North American libraries that form ALANET — the ALA's equivalent to our fledgling MINERVA Library System.

Joel Lee, ALANET's Systems Manager, has helped with MINERVA developments and it may be possible to include the ALA inter-library loan form on our Australian menu. The Library of Congress Loans Dept has a mailbox, as does the New York Public Library, National Library of Canada and the National Library of Medicine. Medical libraries will also be able to communicate with the 93 medical organisations that form MEDLINK.

Although not necessary for loan or electronic mail purposes, the State Library of NSW has joined ALANET, making it the first Australian library to do so and the fourth outside North America. Membership will provide access to the full American menu, an up-to-date library directory, and the opportunity to exchange ideas with American colleagues engaged in all aspects of library research and development.

The MINERVA Library System includes a library directory that is key word associated for rapid searching. Information given for each entry will include NUC symbol access, full postal address, contact person, phone and telex numbers.

MINERVA's XMAIL facility allows for communication with Australian and overseas telexes, and it is possible for one message to be sent to up to 30 telex machines at the one time. Telex machines can also send messages to MINERVA electronic mailboxes.

The basic MAIL facility allows the user to READ or SCAN the contents of a mailbox or to SEND messages to other libraries. Messages can be compiled offline to save costs or typed online with the attendant advantages of a spelling check and right margin justification. Messages can be broadcast to a number of libraries at the one time, and by adding AR (Acknowledgement Required) a notification is placed in your mailbox to inform you that the recipient has read your message.

MINERVA is known by other names in other places but all make use of the American DIALCOM software. New Zealand joined on November 1 with their MAILNET system. In the UK it is BRITISH TELECOM GOLD, in Canada, INFOTEX; the list of countries grows by the month and Australian users can communicate with all international participants. In addition to the regular 25 cents per minute charge, an additional 13 cents a minute is incurred when overseas connections are established.

Interest has been shown in placing book ordering forms on the MINERVA library menu, as exist for ALANET. Other forms might relate to conference registrations and reference enquiries. A bulletin board already exists, and it is possible to use MINERVA for electronic publishing. A job market is another possibility, and if an international job exchange becomes a reality, you may yet get that longed for working holiday OS!

With an eye to the future, the State Library of NSW plans to conduct experiments to see if

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he State Library's optical character recognition computer, the Kurzweil Reading Machine, can dump text into an Apple II for transmission via MINERVA.

MINERVA has a number of competitors capable of performing loan request and messaging tasks. TELEMEMO, VIATEL and ACIMAIL appear to be the main contenders. Careful selection of versatile hardware, especially modems capable of a number of speed configurations, provides for multiple system access.

At this stage of electronic mail development, OTC's MINERVA is the only one to offer such a comprehensive library package. Whichever system gains precedence, it is important for Australian libraries to overcome the impositions of distance, nationally and internationally, through the judicious use of new communications technology.

John K. Wright
Inter-Library Loans Librarian
State Library of NSW

WA GIFT TO DEVELOP ABN PROGRAM

The Library Board of Western Australia has given $25,000 to the Australian Bibliographic Network to develop a more direct way of getting cataloguing information from the Network database.

'This is a great initiative', the Director-General of the National Library, Mr Warren Horton, said. 'The Board's generous contribution will help us develop a special program for members of the Network.' He said that libraries across Australia use the computerised cataloguing network, which is operated by the National Library on their behalf.

The new system, called down-line loading, would let a number of the participating libraries get information they need immediately. Today, most libraries using ABN regularly receive updated catalogues of their holdings on microfiche. Other libraries, using their own computer systems to enter catalogue data into the database and to control loans, can get their records on magnetic tape from ABN, which are then loaded into the libraries' own systems.

Either way, there were delays in these methods of returning updated catalogue information to the libraries, Mr Horton said. The material was physically handled at some stage and sent out from Canberra by road, rail or air. 'Down-loading will allow a number of the larger libraries, such as the State Library Service in Western Australia, to update their catalogues swiftly, using national data communication links,' he said.

Mr Horton said that the ABN system operates with software from the US Western Library Network. National Library staff have developed many enhancements to the system since it was installed in 1979, responding to the needs of ABN users.

'Now, with this magnificent contribution from the Library Board of Western Australia, we are employing contract programmers to develop down-line loading for the Network's large Fujitsu computer,' said Mr Horton. 'We expect the new facility to be operating early next year and it is quite likely we will develop future programmes the same way, if similar financial assistance can be provided by our Network members.'

Library Association of Australia

HONORARY AWARDS

H.C.L. Anderson Award

The General Council may confer the H.C.L. Anderson Award on any person who is a professional member of the Association or who holds an overseas qualification in librarianship or archives which is recognised as a professional qualification by a library association or archives association in the country concerned, and who has rendered outstanding service to librarianship or to the library profession in Australia, or to the Library Association of Australia, or to the theory or practice of librarianship.

Redmond Barry Award

The General Council may confer the Redmond Barry Award on any lay person who is not eligible to be a professional member of the Association and who is not employed in a library who, in the opinion of General Council, has rendered outstanding service to the promotion of a library or of libraries, to the Association, to the theory or practice of librarianship, or to an associated field such as bibliography.

Ellinor Archer Award

The General Council may confer the Ellinor Archer Award on any person employed or who has been employed in libraries, who is not eligible for Associateship of the Library Association of Australia, who has rendered outstanding service to a library or libraries, the promotion of a library, or libraries, to the theory or practice of librarianship or to an associated field such as systems, conservation, management or bibliography.

Letter of recognition

The General Council may on the recommendation of the Honorary Awards Committee present a Letter of Recognition to a person or an institution or organisation who/which has rendered a significant, specific service to a library or libraries, to the Library Association of Australia or to the promotion or development of libraries or library science or who has over a period demonstrated significant service well over the call of duty in these fields.

Nominations

Members of the Divisions of the Association may make a recommendation that an honorary award be conferred by writing confidentially to Convenor LAA Honorary Awards Committee, C/- LAA, 376 Jones Street, Ultimo NSW 2007.

Confidentiality

It is essential that nominees should NOT be aware that they are being nominated for an award. Nominations are considered by the Honorary Awards Committee and Council **in committee**, and details are published only when the nomination is successful.
Divisions of the Association particularly are asked not to note nominations in their agenda papers or minutes. Disclosure of such details can prejudice a nomination.

Nomination Forms

Nomination forms for each of the awards may be obtained from the Acting Executive Director, Library Association of Australia, 376 Jones Street, Ultimo NSW 2007.

Nominations for the H.C.L. Anderson Award, Redmond Barry Award and Ellinor Archer Award close on **Friday 14 February 1986**. Nominations for Letters of Recognition may be made at any time, and will be considered at the first available meeting of the Honorary Awards Committee.

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