Front Line

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President, ALIA

TAKE 600 delegates, add a theme on 'Making Contact', put in the Christchurch Town Hall, add a touch of fine sunny weather, shake together and the result? — the New Zealand Library Association Conference, 12–16 February, 1989. The theme chosen was to emphasise the need for libraries to keep in touch with each other and with their communities.

As President, I brought greetings from ALIA to the NZLA and spoke briefly about our name change, new objectives and the move to Canberra.

The Conference was well attended by national, tertiary, public, special librarians as well as library educators. Discussions with these colleagues showed them coping with similar problems as Australian librarians with increasing demands for service but reduced staffing and funding and with greater stress from authorities on accountability and on revenue raising.

New Zealand has been through a period of considerable structural change recently with major reports on schools and on tertiary education, with large scale local government mergers, strong emphasis on cost recovery and revenue raising, restructuring of Government departments and agencies and a downturn in its economy. All of these events have affected libraries and many of the sessions dealt with these problems and proposed solution.

Two major strands within that theme were Biculturalism and National Information Policy (NIP). The Maori people form a larger proportion of the population in New Zealand than do the Aborigines in Australia. Their wish to have their heritage and culture more widely incorporated into the life of the community is evident. Sessions on how libraries may best include Maori culture into their collections and services were very well attended. The Maori Studies Librarian at the University of Auckland Library and a Maori library student from the New Zealand Film Archive presented examples of good programs as well as bad ones. One lively lunchtime rap session held to discuss the New Zealand 1990 Literacy Program developed into an intense discussion on whether the New Zealand Library Association should accept funding for the literacy programs from the 1990 Commission, the New Zealand equivalent of the Australian Bicentennial Authority. It was clear that similar tensions exist to those among Aborigines in Australia in 1988 to the celebration of the arrival of the First Fleet in Sydney.

The Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. Geoffrey Palmer in his address at the opening function spoke on new legislation on Privacy and on Freedom of Information and both his and other papers suggested a more narrow view of NIP than commonly held in Australia. Dennis Lewis, Director, ASLIB, the Association for Information Management at his plenary session suggested a low key approach to NIP while Grant Hammond, Professor of Law at the University of Auckland outlined the theoretical basis for NIP. Warren Horton, Director-General, NLA in the closing plenary session, provided a stimulating and entertaining address on NIP arguing strongly for the creation of an integrated, central NIP for the coherent, consistent and co-ordinated development of information activities.
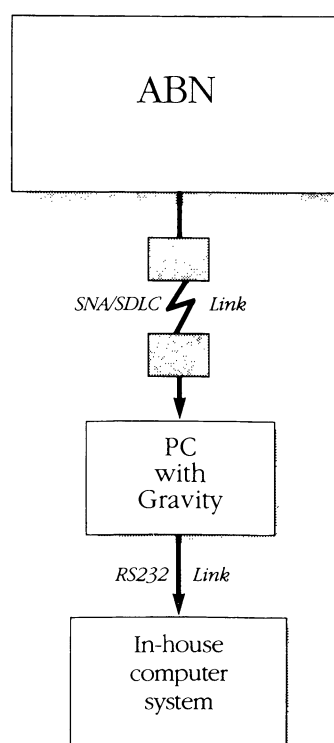
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In South Australia a computer network (SAENET) had been set up in 1978 to serve all of the computing needs of the advanced education sector in that State. A Subcommittee of SAENET for several years and very successfully operated an automated acquisitions and shared cataloguing system for college libraries, in co-operation with the computer bureau Libramatics. In 1980 a Networks Working Party reported to the South Australian Libraries Automation Steering Committee, a body that had been established in 1976 by the State Public Service Board to provide a means of co-operation and resource sharing. This report favoured the establishment of a CAVAL or CLANN type organization but its recommendations appear to have been subsumed by the emergence of ABN. In later years the SAENET library system was phased out in favour of ABN. This process was hastened by the takeover of Libramatic Systems by IDAPS Australia.

A similar fate befell the initiatives that occurred in the early 1980s in Western Australia in respect to the creation of a Western Australian Library Network (WALN) and which for a short time received strong support from a significant group of libraries. However, by 1983, the emergence of ABN was seen to make irrelevant any such local initiative aimed at establishing a local company on the CAVAL model.

ABN

It has often been suggested that it was the emergence and subsequent quick success of the regional i.e. State networks that motivated the National Library to get its act together in respect to a national shared cataloguing network. After having been in the doldrums for most of the late 1970s the National Library in 1982 launched its proposal for an Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) by means of a national 'roadshow' and a trial operation in selected sites. Within 12 months ABN was fully operational and rapidly attracting participants amongst the major Australian libraries.

The reality of ABN was met in divergent ways by the regional networks. Whereas CAVAL, after some hesitation, decided to abandon its regional shared cataloguing operation in favour of ABN, CLANN decided to remain outside ABN and to continue to operate its own shared cataloguing service. Technilib being a centralized processing and cataloguing agency for public libraries rather than a shared cataloguing network was less affected by ABN. As we have seen, in other States the creation of ABN seems to have brought to an end some emerging local initiatives for co-operative organizations. Interestingly, the nationwide school library cataloguing network ASCIS which began after ABN had been established felt that school cataloguing needs were sufficiently unique not to join ABN.

In the seven years of its existence ABN has become a very major operation as some facts and figures will bear out. By mid-1988, 324 Australian libraries were participating in ABN as full contributing users. A further 500 or so libraries used ABN for enquiry only, or merely as a source of catalogue records, i.e. without contributing holdings or catalogue data. ABN uses the Western Library Network software on an IBM 3081K mainframe computer, serving a network of almost 700 active terminals. There were more than 5 million records on the bibliographic file at the end of April. The holdings file contained 2.6 million titles and 7 million locations. ABN is planning to install the WLN inter-library lending software in early 1989.

As I wrote in February 1988 in my paper on ABN for the Australian Libraries Summit:

> ABN has been successful beyond the expectations of almost everyone associated with its establishment. It has succeeded not merely as a national shared cataloguing network but as a focus of inter-library cooperation and a source of technical and (hopefully) political strength for the library community. The visibility of its achievements has boosted the morale of the library profession and enhanced the status of the National Library. ABN's most significant long-term result is the creation of the National Bibliographic Database, as a timely replacement to NUCOM and its companion union catalogues (SSAL and SALSSAH). ABN has not merely rescued them from obsolescence and imminent collapse but has vastly improved their accessibility, accuracy and coverage.

Simultaneously with ABN, however, those regional networks that were already in existence at the time ABN was established, have continued to thrive.

To be continued next issue: **Regional Networks** and **Outlook for the Future.**

Electoral Microfiche

The Australian Electoral Commission now has available for sale two sets of microfiche electoral material.

- *House of Representatives Election Statistics 1969–1983, Results of Scrutiny of First Preference Votes by Polling Place* — which releases for the first time statistics previously held in a limited edition by the Commission.
- *Commonwealth Electoral Maps* — showing proclaimed boundaries for all federal electorates after each redistribution since 1901.

For more information on these collections contact: The Information Officer, Australian Electoral Commission, PO Box E201, Queen Victoria Terrace, Parkes ACT 2601.

End of an era at Macquarie University

In November last, 90 graduates, colleagues and friends gathered to farewell **Noelene Hall** on her retirement from Macquarie University where her name has become synonymous with the teacher-librarianship course within the University's Teacher Education Program.

Noelene was appointed in 1971 to design and teach in this area and over the past 17 years the course has developed a solid reputation with about 200 graduates now being employed in government and independent schools, educational administration and a range of library and information agencies.

Speakers on the night paid tribute to Noelene's contribution both within Australia and internationally.

November marked the end of an era because the University decided in 1985 to 'rest' the course from the end of 1988. Tribute was also paid to the course's other lecturing staff, **Margaret Sim** and **Alison Glasscock.**

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The New Zealand Library Association President for 1989, Geoff Chamberlain, City Librarian, Takapuna Public Libraries, was installed with appropriate ceremony at the Annual General Meeting and presided at the meeting of the NZLA Council which I attended as an observer on 17 February. As professional associations it is obvious that we have many common interests and goals. Issues of intellectual freedom, maintenance of a professional publications program, training and continuing education are common threads.

A joint meeting of the two Executives agreed that another joint Conference would be held, in Wellington in 1994. Every six years thereafter a joint conference will be held, with the next being held in Australia in 2000. Both Associations confirmed their commitment to the development of closer ties to the mutual benefit of members. It is sensible for two such similar Associations in the same area to keep in close touch and work.

The Conference was a great success, well organised with a stimulating program. New Zealand librarians gave their Australian guests a great welcome. It is obvious that a vigorous and energetic library profession exists across the Tasman, and there are clear mutual benefits in developing a library/information CER of our own.