

LETTERS

Free library services

'Australian librarians are dedicated to the idea that public library services should be free in all respects . . .', reported D.H. Borchardt in his book *Librarianship in Australia, New Zealand and Oceania* (Pergamon, 1975).

The concept of a free library service, defined as one which is funded indirectly by the public through rates and taxes, appears, however, to be receding further and further from the minds of many of today's librarians.

The 'user pays' principle was once restricted to less enlightened Council members but is increasingly becoming an acceptable criterion to librarians.

Charges tend to fall into two types, the deterrent charge, such as fines and deposits, and the charge for services rendered above and beyond the provision of books on the shelf, such as photocopies, reservations, audio-visual and information services.

The deterrent charges are almost invariably too low to have any effect, and evidence from libraries which have stopped imposing fines has shown that no change results in the number of books overdue. The reason in many cases for charging fines seems to be in order to swell the consolidated revenue funds of local Councils, although the relatively small amounts of money involved, and the amount of staff time required in the collection, accounting, banking and auditing of monies defeats the purpose of the exercise.

The charging of low deposits to non-residents also fails in its objective and only serves to place a barrier in the way of people who are interested enough to want to use the library.

Charging the public for services offered is completely unjustifiable as not only are customers being doubly charged but elitist elements start to appear. Should a library not be able to offer a cassette, video or computerised information service without having to charge then the provision of such a service should be left in the hands of commercial organisations. One person's needs are just as important as any other person's and the level of service each receives should not depend on their ability to pay.

What is also disturbing is the increase in charges taking place and the deliberations on the introduction of new charges. The proposed introduction of a \$5 charge for a photocopy, by the University of New South Wales, is the thin end of the wedge as far as charging for inter-library loans is concerned, and mitigates against the spirit of inter-library cooperation. Many libraries pass on, or will start to pass on, charges incurred for ILLs, which means that borrowers are being penalised for deficiencies inherent in the local library system.

Australia is not particularly rich in book resources, and librarians should be encouraging cooperation to alleviate deficiencies rather than promoting or fostering isolationism. An adoption of the principle of reciprocity in the field of ILLs, without cost, would serve to encourage rather than restrict the use of libraries.

The 'free' library is becoming an anachronism in Australia today, to the detriment of the service, the profession and, most importantly, the public.

R.H. Pestell
Public Libraries Service,
State Library of Queensland.

Library Association of Australia

**Election of
Executive Officers
to hold office
in 1983 and 1984**

Call for nominations

In accordance with Division F of the Regulations, nominations are now called from financial members of the Library Association of Australia for the following positions:

**Vice-President 1983
(President-elect 1984)
General Treasurer 1983
and 1984**

Candidates and nominators should read the relevant Regulations carefully.

Please note that nominations shall be

- in writing;
- signed by two financial members of the LAA;
- accompanied by the written consent of the nominee, who shall supply a curriculum vitae and a statement of professional concerns (each of no more than 100 words).

Nominations must reach the Executive Director, LAA, 473 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, NSW 2010, by **5 pm on Wednesday, 1 September 1982.**

Susan Acutt
Executive Director

Cataloguing system

COLAC TECHNICAL SCHOOL library has an automated cataloguing system which may be of interest to other school and special libraries.

Known as MICROMARC, the system runs on a microcomputer with a capacity of 20 megabytes. Allowing for the future addition of circulation and accounting, it can handle data for about 30,000 items.

The system produces printed catalogues at level 1 of AACRII. In addition to author/title listings, it can print a classified catalogue, or a 'direct' subject catalogue, or both.

Subject headings can be produced using either a standard list, or key words. Key words can be 'tagged' in the title. Analytical indexing is available using key words from the CONTENTS of an item.

The hardware used is a Micromation 4-user system with a hard disc drive. The software was designed by the librarian, Stephen Due, and built by Cybertech Developments Pty Ltd. It is expected the software will be commercially available towards the end of the year.

Financial Review on Ausinet

EARLY IN JUNE, an electronic index of the Australian *Financial Review* was launched by John Fairfax Ltd.

The index will be carried on the Ausinet public database operated by ACI Computer Services, and will offer Ausinet users access to a file referencing virtually all local articles appearing in the *Financial Review*. Articles from overseas news services will not be indexed.

The file will contain the headline and first paragraph of articles in the *Financial Review*, and key words and company references from the rest of the article. Ausinet subscribers will pay \$70 for every hour they are connected to the ACI Computer Services computer and searching through the new database.

New subscribers will need a computer terminal and a Telecom modem - a total cost of around \$2000.

The *Financial Review* database already contains articles from April 5, and was described by Ken McGregor, manager of the service, as a significant extension of the existing services offered by the Australian Financial Review Information Service (AFRIS).

These include access to the libraries maintained by John Fairfax, which contain news reports of more than 12,000 companies and more than 6,000 subject headings.

Success of the ORACLE

AN AGREEMENT has been signed between CONTROL DATA Canada and the Library Board of Queensland for the licensing rights for the State Library's computerised book processing system known as ORACLE.

Following the destruction of the State Library's Country Extension Service in the Australia Day Floods in January 1974 an automated cataloguing and circulation system was developed on the State Government Insurance Office's CYBER 70/72 computer to control the processing of books sent to country libraries. It was necessary for ORACLE to utilise the Machine Readable Cataloguing Data available from the National Library in Canberra, known as MARC, which amalgamated cataloguing copy supplied by the Library of Congress, the British Library, and the National Library.

The ORACLE system uses a light pen to record books on loan to country libraries, and retains a record of the loans made to individual readers for a period of two years to minimise the duplication of their requests. The system produces microfiche catalogues of almost 300,000 items contained in the State Library's Public Libraries Service collection, as well as recent books in the new State Library building, the fourth and final phase of the Queensland Cultural Centre, which is due to be opened in 1985.

All book loans as well as loans of cassettes to the visually handicapped are controlled by the system, which minimises the amount of file searching in tracing material on loan and takes advantage of cataloguing copy prepared by other libraries.

Believed to be the first computerised library system of its kind to be developed in Australia and subsequently sold overseas, it represents a major coup for the Department of the Arts, and the State Library of Queensland.