Webb's web

Kerry Webb

He draws on the experience of American libraries funded by the Carnegie endowments of the 19th century and relates this to the recent grants from Bill Gates and Microsoft

Will libraries survive?

Geoffrey Nunberg, a principal scientist at the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center has written a very thoughtful article on the future of libraries at http://epn.org/prospect/41/41nunb.html He draws on the experience of American libraries funded by the Carnegie endowments of the 19th century and relates this to the recent grants from Bill Gates and Microsoft. You will have to read the article to find the answer to his question, but it is the sort of document that should be given to any potential benefactor.

For your internet health

Following the Online conference (http://www.csu.edu.au/special/online99/), the Information Science section will be running an Internet Clinic at the State Library of NSW on Friday 22 January 1999. Here is a chance to update your Web searching skills with the assistance of two expert searchers and trainers, Belinda Weaver of the University of Queensland and Suzanne Newton of the Internet Training Institute. For further information, contact me at kwebb@alianet.alia.org.au

War Memorial prize

Congratulations to the Australian War Memorial on being awarded the prize for top government site at the 1998 Australian Internet Awards. It features searchable collection and biographical databases of over 250 000 items including 184 000 photographic and 2400 art images, comprising Australia's largest online image database, and the online Roll of Honour, a database which lists details of the more than 102 000 Australian war dead. And it is very well designed. See it at http://www.awm.gov.au/

And also in Canberra

One feature of Online Australia Day on 27 November was the launch of the ACT's broadband network, TransAct (http://www.transact.actew.com.au). This network is being extended though one Canberra suburb initially, offering telephony, pay TV and high speed internet access to residential, business and government markets. If the initial trial is successful, it will be progressively rolled out to other suburbs from the middle of 1999.

It's a steal!

In my never-ending hunt for internet oddities, I came across a site recently where the text from a page could not be copied to the Windows clipboard (this is very bad news for the internet columnist!) but in looking for a solution, came across a handy utility called Kleptomania at http://www.structurise.com/kleptomania/index.htm This can capture text from all sorts of windows such as Explorer file folders, error messages, columns of databases or worksheets, as well as preserv-

ing the fonts used in this text.

Online recruiting

This is a good example of how the technology of the Net can be used in different ways. AvailableEmployees is a database of resumés available for viewing over the internet. You register with the site and your anonymous resumé can be read by a prospective employer, but to contact you the employer must pay a fee to the site. See it at http://www.availableemployees.com.au/ — there are quite a few librarians' resumés there already.

No — nothing to do with the Titanic

Learning About Leonardo (http://library.advanced.org/13681) is a site which explores the mystery behind the Mona Lisa smile, with a graphic illustration of how similar La Giaconda's face is to Leo's. It is a good example of how groups of school students can work collaboratively, in this case from New York (USA) and Borlange in Sweden. One useful feature is a set of links on the Credits page pointing to some of the tools that they used, covering image compression, animation and image mapping.

New at the IASL site

Anne Clyde continues her good work with the website for the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL). It is now grown to more than 200 pages, including extensive links to internet resources for school librarians. It is at http://www.hi.is/~anne/iasl.html

As long as you've got your ELF

Many years ago, the National Library started a group called the Working Group on Library Systems Interconnection, which met irregularly but usually in conjunction with various conferences. Partly to avoid endless arguments about how you pronounced WGLSI, the name was changed in 1995 to the Electronic Libraries Forum. The latest meeting was at the ALIA conference in Adelaide and there is a record with relevant links at http://www.nla.gov.au/lis/stndrds/grps/elf/291098.html

At the meeting, Mike Middleton from QUT spoke about a page that he had compiled, featuring a collection of resources on controlled vocabularies. It is at http://www.fit.qut.edu.au/InfoSys/middle/cont_voc.html

Librarians in their ecological niche

At the ALA Conference this year in Washington DC, Bonnie Nardi from AT&T Labs West gave a keynote address titled 'Information ecologies' in which she reported on research that she had done at Apple Computer. It is an eye-opener because despite the excellent service provided by the corporate library, the attitude of one very senior executive was that

they 'did not really need the library because it just encouraged employees to get clever quotes for their slide presentations', while when another was being told of what information the library could provide for engineers he replied 'they should already know all that shouldn't they?' The library was closed soon after. And then they started looking around for contractors to do the library work. These, and many more observations can be found at http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/digiref/nardi.html

VALA 98

After a short delay, the papers from the 1998 VALA papers are now online at http://home.vicnet.net.au/~vala/valaweb/vala.htm Meanwhile, there's a call for papers for VALA 00 at http://www.vicnet.net.au/~vala/conf2000.htm

Screen studies

The Research and Information Centre at the Australian Film Institute has compiled a list of the most useful websites for Screen Studies, covering biographical databases, film review sites and gateway sites leading to the web pages of screen organisations, plus contacts for relevant listservs and online discussion groups. See it at http://www.cinemedia.net/AFI/reinfo5.htm

Geoff's new book

In October Wiley published a book by Australian Net guru Geoff Huston titled *ISP survival guide: strategies for running a competitive ISP*. It is not exactly what you would want to take to the beach to while away the hours, but Geoff does write well and he really knows his subject. There is a sample chapter at http://www.telstra.net/gih/peerdocs/peer.html

A warning for web-builders

A sight-impaired man in San José, California has filed a complaint against the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which oversees nine counties' mass transit systems in the San Francisco area. He says that his inability to access the Commission website's documents, including bus and train schedules, violates the *Americans With Disabilities Act*. See http://spyglass1.sjmercury.com/breaking/docs/010466.htm (which does appear to conform to accessibility guidelines).

The future of ANB

Who amongst us does not have fond memories of the ANB? It was one of the first products that I worked on when I joined the NLA. The printed ANB ceased almost three years ago and earlier this year, the National Library convened an Advisory Group to consider the future of the product, looking at users, content and format. The Advisory Group has now completed its work, and its report may be found at http://www.nla.gov.au/ANBreport.html

Public libraries and filtering

The Loudoun County Library in the American State of Virginia lost its case over the provision of filtering Net access for all patrons. The judge found that the policy deemed 'harmful to minors' was against the guarantee of free speech in the First Amendment and therefore unconstitutional. Since then, a new policy for public access has been adopted. This allows adult customers to select for themselves whether to use unfiltered or filtered access, and for minors a parent or guardian must make the same decision. An analysis of the broader implications of the case (not just for libraries) is at http://www4.zdnet.com:80/intweek/stories/news/0,4164,2172117,00.html

And a further note on filtering. A couple of months ago, I had a link to a site called 'The Modified Librarian'. An alert reader tried to follow the link but found that the IT folk in her organisation had blocked the site because of its 'sex' content. I think they have a strange idea of sex.

Lessons learned

For the past two years, the Library of Congress and Ameritech have sponsored a competition to enable libraries and other organisations to create digital collections of primary resources. By now, many of the winners of the awards have learned some lessons about digitisation projects and the staff responsible for the competition have summarised many points from the six-monthly reports submitted by awardees. The summary is at http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award/lessons.html and it makes interesting reading.

Definition of a digital library

We are all familiar with a newcomer to a list asking an 'obvious' question. Well, quite often you get some useful information in the replies. A person recently asked DIGLIB 'what is the definition of a digital library?' One response was from Steve Harter of Indiana University who posted a reference to a paper that he presented a couple of years ago. It looks at several views of a digital library and explores the issues in providing content and services. It is at http://php.indiana.edu/~harter/korea-paper.htm

And a happy thought to start the new year

Remember when we thought it was way cool to think of the internet as the 'Information Superhighway'? Well, recently there has been a bit of weblore circulating that looks at it the other way round, that is, what if highways operated like the internet? An example: 'A minimum of 237 on ramps at every intersection. No signs. Wanna get to Ensenada? Holler out the window at a passing truck to ask directions. Ad hoc traffic laws.' For a good laugh, see http://users.vnet.net/jgeater/hiway.html ∎