List of Australian Subject Headings

A NEWS ITEM in the 21 September 1979 issue of the *Australian Library Journal*, under the quaint heading 'Time for a disciplined LASH', described the preparatory work which was being undertaken to prepare a full 'first edition' of *A list of Australian subject headings.*

The matter has, as they say, proceeded apace. As a focus for debate, the *LASH circular* has been established. Two issues have been produced so far, which have been sent to the secretaries of the Cataloguers Sectional Groups and to some other interested correspondents. The circulars have two main functions. Firstly, they are a means of communicating with a large and informal panel of editorial advisers. Secondly, they are a means of disseminating ideas, proposals and questions, and for re-cycling responses to these proposals.

The circulars have included a variety of items so far. A list of errors in *LASH* has been given, and a new error has been created in the process. Clearly, I am incapable of getting the heading for Tramways correct. The circulars have provided a list of possible variations to *LASH,* involving reversing headings and see references, separating these into parallel headings, adding some subdivisions or deleting others, and so on. The resolution of these matters is dependent on the establishment or re-establishment of the principle on which the new *LASH* will be based.

The circulars have also given a list of proposed new headings, ranging from Margarine to Two Up, and just about anything in between. Some of these suggestions are already adequately covered by *LCSH. LASH* will eventually be fully correlated with the 9th edition of *LCSH* which is due late in 1980, covering additions and changes to the end of 1978. Some other suggestions are weak on literary warrant — but what constitutes literary warrant? One book, several books, many articles, or what?

The circulars have also commenced debate on a number of substantial issues as well as on individual headings. These include *LASH* in relation to *Sears,* place names, natural history headings and headings for works about Aborigines. Each of these is considered briefly below.

The proposal to correlate *LASH* with *Sears,*

as well as with *LCSH,* in order to make it more suitable for smaller libraries, has attracted no interest whatsoever. There is plenty of evidence that *LASH* is of interest to smaller libraries, but these libraries obviously do not use *Sears.* Perhaps what is really needed is for someone to update Sherrie and Mander Jones's *Short list of subject headings,* taking note of *LASH.*

The exclusion of place names from the preliminary edition of *LASH* was a matter of regret to many people. I proposed for discussion purposes that place names be included in the full edition, in line with current *LCSH* policy — that is, excluding place names which may occur as author headings (states, cities, territories, municipalities and so on) and excluding regions of cities and metropolitan areas, but including named regions, mountains, other natural features, and such like. The problem is to give effect to that policy.

As an experiment, a selected list of place names has been compiled, mainly through the diligent efforts of Janet Hine. The list is long, some 1000 names, and would cause a questionable bulking and bias in *LASH.* Perhaps even more importantly, there is no guarantee that any such lists compiled by any two persons would agree, and there is some actual evidence that they would not.

A more feasible alternative would be to do as is done in *Canadian subject headings.* That is, to include examples 'selected to illustrate a particular problem', with sufficient variety 'for guidance in establishing such subject headings'. That might mean for Australia, selecting a hundred headings, which would be a less contentious and more manageable listing.

Natural history headings present some of the same problems as place names. *LCSH* includes a random selection and *LASH* includes many of these plus its own arbitrary collection. Everyone seems to agree that natural history headings should be included in *LASH,* and that the coverage should be wider and more systematic. To that end, a draft list of 150 headings has been compiled, including exclusively Australian headings as well as those with a strong Australian relevance. The list actually runs from Abalones to Yabbies, but includes along the way animals, birds, insects, plants, fish and much else.

Finally, a variety of opinions have been expressed on headings for Aborigines. Some people would like to see the headings changed to some other form such as Aborigines or Aboriginal Australians or Black Australians. Aside from the inverted form used by the National Library, 'Aborigines, Australian', having no supporters, there seems to be no consensus on a preferred form.

A similar uncertainty exists with the subdivisions for the heading, whatever the heading is to be. The *LASH* list is a combination of *LCSH* subdivisions, others stolen by analogy from the headings for Indians, and subdivisions used in a number of Australian libraries. There are at least two alternatives to this. One is to use subdivisions only for those aspects which would be represented by subdivisions under the heading for 'Australians' or similar national headings. This would mean, in effect, next to nothing except form subdivisions. The remaining aspects being transferred to the topic in whatever what it is treated in *LCSH.* A second approach would be to use a new and simplified set of subdivisions such as is used in the *Current bibliography* of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS) except that it seems to use a different approach every time.

Perhaps the most pressing problem is the forms of names for tribes, tribal groups and languages. I have obtained from AIAS their *Short list of Aboriginal languages,* and I have been experimenting with it, but the problems are enormous. I feel, at the moment, that *LASH* may have to refer cataloguers to outside sources for guidance.

I am not sure how many more issues of the *LASH Circular* there will be. There is certainly need for more discussion on Aboriginal headings, place names and natural history, and eventually the circulars must get around to the most vexing topic of all, the editorial principles for the revised edition of *LASH.*

In the meantime, comments are welcomed on any or all aspects of *LASH.* Anyone who would like to contribute to the revision should contact the secretary of their local Cataloguers' Sectional Group. Alternatively, send comments direct to John McKinlay, La Trobe University Library, Bundoora, Vic 3083. We need your help to make *LASH* better. *John McKinlay*

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