

Library networks and co-operatives

by Hans W. Groenewegen*

Historical Background

The year just past was an important one in the calendar of library networks in Australia as it is the tenth anniversary of the incorporation of both CLANN Limited in New South Wales and CAVAL Limited in Victoria. Both networks have a previous history, and, like other Australian networks such as ABN and Technilib, their original conception goes back to the mid-1970s when the North American networks, OCLC, RLIN and UTLAS were the shining models that all the world wanted to emulate. Shared cataloguing had suddenly become a real possibility following the development of the MARC record and the successful application of large mainframe computers (there were no other kinds) to the processing of bibliographic data. During that time, too, the National

Library of Australia was developing its own resource sharing and networking strategies and appointed as its new Director General Dr George Chandler, who had been active in this area in the UK. One manifestation of the National Library's interest in networking was the publication of the BIBDATA report (in 1976), which proposed the creation of a national shared cataloguing network based on the National Library.

BIBDATA did not get off the ground for a variety of reasons, of which the following have often been quoted as the major ones:

- lukewarm acceptance of the proposal by librarians
- the fact that the service would have to run on a cost-recovery basis (in those immediate post-Whitlam years, Federal Government largesse was still assumed and the idea that user libraries would have to pay the cost of establishing the service was unacceptable to many of them)
- the fact that no suitable software package to run the service had as yet been identified.

Impatience with the National Library, coupled with some doubts about its ability to deliver a viable service, led to the establishment of a series of State-based 'networks' whose prime objective was the provision of a shared cataloguing service. The visit to Australia in 1974 by Fred Kilgour, the founder of

OCLC, did much to stimulate this development. Moreover, the librarians concerned soon recognized that as a by-product of such a service a machine-readable regional/state union catalogue would be created which would support other resource sharing activities. In early 1979 both CLANN and CAVAL launched their shared cataloguing operations. The two networks were immediately successful and within 12 months had created viable and efficient services with a rapidly growing customer base. Both used the services of Libramatic Systems, the Melbourne-based computer service bureau, to provide them with data processing capability.

In New South Wales it was initially only the colleges of advanced education that participated in CLANN. The university libraries (with the exception of Wollongong University, which is a CLANN member) remained aloof, choosing instead to form their own consortium, the Office of Library Cooperation, which was established in 1980.

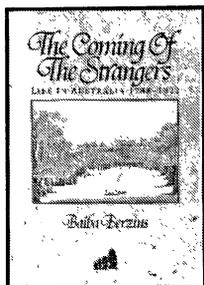
Other States at various times in the late 1970s and early 1980s explored the possibility of establishing formal organizations to promote inter-library co-operation and/or operate joint programmes. In 1977 an organization called CATL (Cooperative Action by Tasmanian Libraries) was established with the support of both the State Library and the University of Tasmania. Over the next three years CATL held informal discussions with the CAVAL group in Victoria, designed to establish some form of co-operation across Bass Strait. However, the emergence of ABN made continuation of such talks superfluous, in the opinion at least of the State Library of Tasmania. Eventually CATL was superseded by a State Library Advisory Committee.

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This article will be published in two parts, in this and the next issue of *InCite*.

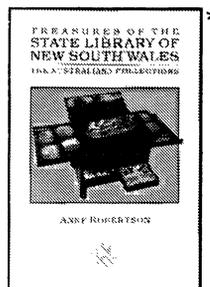
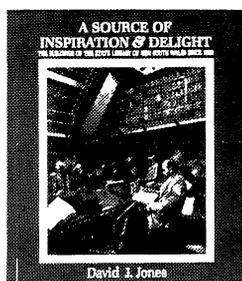
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In South Australia a computer network (SAENET) had been set up in 1978 to serve all of the computing needs of the advanced education sector in that State. A Subcommittee of SAENET for several years and very successfully operated an automated acquisitions 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.**

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

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

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.