

Ryerson Index Inc

President's Report

Presented to the AGM on 22nd September 2012

Welcome everyone to our fourth AGM, and let me start out by thanking Therese for her hospitality in providing such an excellent venue. Thank you Therese.

Before giving my usual report, I'd like to pay tribute to Joyce Ryerson, who passed away recently aged 95. Joyce was the person who jump-started our back-indexing, when in May 1999 she donated a run of SMH death notices covering the period 1986-1999 to the Sydney DPS. It took us many months to index those notices, but by the time we had finished them we knew we had to expand Ryerson to include both current notices and back-indexing.

Joyce had not been able to attend DPS meetings for some years, but she always followed the progress of "her" index. She figured prominently in some articles published in the SMH in 2005, on the occasion of our first million notices.

We will all miss her.

Let me turn now to a report on our progress during the year just completed.

It has become a habit to report record indexing progress at our AGMs, but this year, after three years of spectacular growth, we have eased off somewhat. Looking at the figures for the number of records indexed over the past few years, we have:

Date	Total	Increase
30 June 2008	1,750,286	
30 June 2009	2,091,363	341,077
30 June 2010	2,503,696	412,333
30 June 2011	3,066,875	563,179
30 June 2012	3,559,727	492,852

But we have added almost half a million records in the past year, and that is still an exceptional achievement by any measure.

While we continue to increase the number of current papers we index, our back indexing has eased off, due in the main to a couple of our more prolific back-indexers either retiring, or taking an extended break for family and employment reasons.

Our new method of allocating back-indexing to indexers via Google Docs has been slow to take off. There is quite a supply of back-indexing available there, so if you have a wet Sunday afternoon to fill in, grab a file or two and index!

Our newspaper coverage continues to expand, with 216 papers now being indexed. Given the recent turmoil in the newspaper industry, it is likely that the number of papers in print in Australia has contracted slightly, but we are still a long way from indexing all the roughly 750 papers currently produced.

Looking at the newspaper industry as a whole, and its effect on Ryerson, there are many who say the era of print is dead, and online is the way of the future. We have already seen this happen on the Gold Coast, where the *Tweed Daily News* now only appears in print on a Saturday, despite retaining the word "Daily" in its title. This paper is an APN publication, but it is not difficult to foresee Fairfax and News Ltd taking the same path, with at least some of their papers.

The discontinuance of printed editions, should it become widespread, will cause considerable difficulty to future researchers. Online notices stay available for, in most cases, seven days. Some websites retain the notices but charge an access fee to read them after the initial period, while other websites just delete them altogether. Neither of these approaches is one that helps Ryerson.

Our aim is to point a researcher to the source of a particular notice. When we can no longer do this, because the source has not been retained, then it will be future researchers who suffer. We have therefore taken the conscious decision to not index any notices published solely on-line, unless they are being saved by a Family History Society (or similar organization), because of the future access difficulties.

I think we are in for an eventful couple of years, as the major players sort out their approach to publishing. Watch this space!

Turning now to our financial position, I am very pleased to report that we have considerably strengthened our position in the past year, mainly due to an additional corporate sponsor coming on board during the year, with a donation of \$3,900 and the promise of more to come on an annual basis. Furthermore, subsequent to year end another corporate sponsor has signed on, also with a donation of \$3,900 – this will be included in next year's figures. Further details will come from the Treasurer in due course, so I won't steal Therese's thunder, other than to say we are in a better financial position than most other organizations to which I belong.

Ryerson is now at the stage where we need to prepare an annual budget to properly manage our expenditure, and the first steps in this process were taken at the May committee meeting, where a simple budget for the 2013 FY was put forward. Details can be found in the meeting minutes on the website.

During the year, Ryerson has been well-represented at family history shows and fairs. We have now adopted a procedure to only consider accepting unsponsored invitations to fairs remote from Committee members' residences when we can have both a speaking slot and a table, and where we see potential to promote Ryerson. This decision came about when we found ourselves travelling to distant family history fairs, usually with overnight accommodation costs incurred, to man a table and field maybe half a dozen questions, for no obvious gain to Ryerson.

Our public profile also grew in 2012, with the creation of a wikipedia entry for the Ryerson Index – and it wasn't done by me!

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the outgoing committee for their hard work during the year. As we become a larger organization, more work falls on the Committee, and we now have a team which works very well together. All committee members are offering themselves for re-election, and I hope you will support them all with your vote.

So, on behalf of the Committee, I thank you all for your efforts during the past year, and feel confident in saying that we can all look forward to another highly successful year.

John Graham