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America's Historical Newspapers

Janice G. Schuster

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ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

America's Historical Newspapers

Date of Review: March 9, 2010

Composite Score:	★★★★ 3/4	**Reviewed by: Janice G. Schuster** Phillips Memorial Library Providence College 1 Cunningham Square Providence, RI 02918 <jschuster@providence.edu>

Pricing Options

Readex offers tiered pricing based on an institution's mission and size. For example:

> In 2010, before any applicable discounts, the price for Early American Newspapers, Series I, 1639–1876 ranges from about $9,913 for a four-year college with 1,000 FTE to about $90,846 for ARL-member institutions.

> The price for Early American Newspapers, Series 7, 1773–1922, including a prepublication discount (before any other applicable discounts) ranges from about $9,161 for a four-year college with 1,000 FTE to about $86,480 for ARL-member institutions.

> Discounts are available to institutions that hold the microform edition of Early American Newspapers, Series I, as well as to institutions that hold other Readex digital collections and/or acquire one or more individual collections at the same time.

Product Description

America's Historical Newspapers features cover-to-cover reproductions of historic newspapers. The first series of this collection is based largely on Clarence Brigham's History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690–1820 and offers an unprecedented look back into the extraordinary history of the United States—the story of its people, ideals, commerce, and everyday life. The core of the Readex collection is formed by Isaiah Thomas's collection of colonial and early national period newspapers and supplemented by nearly two million issues added by Thomas' successors at the American Antiquarian Society. Numerous other institutions and historical societies have contributed to the collection including the Boston Athenaeum, the Connecticut Historical Society, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Library of Congress, the libraries of universities such as Brown and Harvard, and private collections. The database consists of multiple parts including Early American Newspapers, Series 1 to 7, 1690–1922; Twentieth–Century American Newspapers, Series 1 to 3, 1923 and forward; and American Ethnic Newspapers, currently including African American Newspapers, 1827–1998, and Hispanic American Newspapers, 1808–1980. This review concentrates on Early American Newspapers, Series 1 through 7, 1690–1922.

Critical Evaluation

Search Interface   The top of the initial search screen defaults to a search box with a drop-down menu of options. Links to add or remove search fields are prominent. Tabs below the search screen give limiting options: Dates and Eras, Article Types, Languages, Places of Publication, and Newspaper Titles. It was very easy to navigate among all of the different options. The search interface also makes it very easy to move around the various searching pages. For example, the link to return to the searching screen after one goes to My Collection, etc., is obvious.

Searching   The initial search screen makes it very clear which searching options are available. One can immediately start searching using the Google-like search box and the drop-down menu of searching options, including Headline, Standard Title (i.e., publication title), and Title as published. Moving from basic to advanced searching (though the interface does not label the search options as such) is easy.

Results   I searched for "U.S. constitution" in full text, which retrieved over 168,000 items. Limiting the search to the headline field in the dropdown menu narrowed the results down to approximately 1,700 items.

The results list includes a wealth of information for each item, including title of publication; publication date; published as; location; headline, and article type. It appears that if the headline information on the results list is in brackets, then the information was added by the vendor even though it is not actually included in the headline. If there are no brackets, the words appear in the article's headline. Adding this type of metadata enhances the database's usability for researchers.

The yellow highlighting of the search term is a very useful feature and makes it obvious where the term appears on the page image; otherwise it might be difficult to determine why an article was retrieved. The results list also includes a thumbnail image (actually larger than a thumbnail) of a portion of the article. This facilitates research by making it easy to browse through and eliminate irrelevant items. There are three ways to order the results list: chronological (oldest to newest); reverse chronological (newest to oldest); and best matches first.

The results list includes a box to Add to My Collection, but the information about the item that appears on the default My Collection screen is very brief, giving only the publication date, headline (if any), and keyword entered. The full information is available by clicking on the publication title link (or on No Headline), but I would prefer that the information appear on the initial My Collection screen. E-mailing an article from the My Collection screen worked seamlessly, but users might need to be careful about the e-mailed article ending up in a spam filter. I don't see a way to keep items in My Collection for future use (as is possible with EBSCO's My EBSCO), which might be a problem for a researcher doing ongoing work. I suggest that Newsbank implement a method for saving items.

In addition to the Basic and Advanced searches available at the top of the main search screen, there are tabs on that screen to limit the search. I find this tab system to be user-friendly and intuitive. I tried a search for "John Adams" in the headline field and used the Article

Americas Historical Newspapers Review
Scores Composite: ★★★★ 3/4

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★★★★

The titles included are available exclusively through this database.

Searchability: ★★★★★

Both the Basic and Advanced searching and the limiting mechanisms (tabs) are straightforward and easy to navigate. A user should be able to begin searching immediately with almost no learning curve, since the search screen is intuitive and uses everyday language. There is even a box that recommends how to find an exact phrase (by using quotation marks). The Help link leads to a list of Help topics.

Pricing Options: ★★★★

My only criticism is the high cost of the database. I did not receive specific pricing from the vendor, but I know from personal experience (our library purchased series 1, 2, 6, and 7) that the price is very high. However, the quality is also very high, and the content cannot be found elsewhere.

Contract Options: ★★★★★

Newsbank is open to changes in the licensing agreement. For example, a few months ago, Newsbank readily agreed to my institution's request to add an ILL clause to the licensing agreement. All of the Newsbank staff involved were diligent in listening to our request and following up, and the entire process of amending the agreement took only a few weeks.

Types tab to limit the search to front page items, narrowing the search results from about 19,000 to about 2,400. I further narrowed the results using the Places of Publication tab, which listed each state separately and also showed them graphically on a map. I chose Massachusetts, but it would be interesting to choose another state to see what other parts of the country were reporting about Adams. The Newspaper Titles tab provides not only an easy way of limiting to one or more specific titles but also a convenient list of the titles included. Compared to other databases that sometimes make it difficult to find a list of titles included, this one gives you a list that is straightforward, easy to find, and includes useful details such as language, number of issues included, and start/end dates. The ability to sort the list by various categories is useful. For example, I clicked on the Newspaper heading that alphabetized the list; I also sorted the list by publication start date.

Content   The list of titles included is impressive. The publications list indicates details of what is included in each title, including name changes, etc. The fact that all titles are full-image enhances the use of the database for research.

MARC Records   Readex supplies newspaper title data to Serials Solutions, ExLibris SFX, TDNet, EBSCO, and Openly Informatics (part of OCLC). Readex did not define what is included in "newspaper title data," but I assume it includes at least ISSN and holdings information. Our library has purchased Early American Newspapers series 1, 2, 6, and 7; we selected those databases in our Serials Solutions Client Center and will receive MARC records for our OPAC (Innovative) during the next load. (I am grateful to the knowledge management librarian of our HELIN (Higher Education Library Information Network) consortium, Martha Rice Sanders, for helping me understand this process).

Contract Provisions and Authentication

The licensing agreement appears to be standard. Academic institutions may authenticate users by IP address range or by other secure method.

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About the Author

Janice G. Schuster is the coordinator of research services and research librarian, associate professor, at Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island, since 1991. Her primary responsibilities include research, managing the library's electronic resources, overseeing development of the reference collection, library instruction, and serving as library liaison to four academic departments. She previously served as reference librarian (head of reference) at Stonehill College and as reference/circulation librarian at the University of South Carolina-Coastal Carolina College (currently Coastal Carolina University). She holds B.A. and M.L.S. degrees from Indiana University-Bloomington. ■