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## NYS Historic Newspapers

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## Digital Media Reviews

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### NYS Historic Newspapers

Created and maintained by Northern New York Library Network  
<http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/>

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In years past, research of historic newspapers required an outing: a trip to a major research library, hours combing through bound volumes, wrestling with finicky microfilm readers, and a search for the elusive coins to feed crummy photocopy machines. The Northern New York Library Network has come to our rescue, at least when it comes to research of early New York state newspapers.

The NYS Historic Newspapers database is a fully searchable archive of 637 New York–based daily and weekly newspapers published from 1725 to 2016. The titles include the *Brooklyn Eagle*, the *Evening Post*, *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, and the *Evening World*. The library consortium scanned the newspapers through optical character recognition software, so researchers can perform full-text keyword searches across the collection. There are some 7.7 million pages available for searching as of August 2018.

I spent several months using this database for a paper on the pioneering New York business journalist John Kiernan, best known for training Charles Dow, Edward Jones, and Charles Bergstresser before they left in 1882 to launch Dow Jones & Co. and the *Wall Street Journal*. Simple keyword searches of “John J. Kiernan” from 1845 to 1895 brought up 107 results, including legal notices. This search engine is so powerful that it brought up articles about the misadventures of a Brooklyn police officer named John J. Kiernan, who was getting into trouble for his off-duty antics. Search results are highlighted on the pages. I examined the articles for relevance and was able to download a full-page image of the newspaper in a PDF format. A single full newspaper image would range from one to four megabytes in size, so you

will need some hard-drive space for detailed research projects. I set up a spreadsheet with the date, title, subject and copy the relevant URL to maintain a working bibliography.

The website contains a useful zoom tool to examine the text in more detail. Researchers can also zoom in on the search results and perform a screen capture (on a Mac, the Grab tool is your friend). During my research in 2017 and 2018, I found the site available at all hours, with the downloads slower during regular business hours. One surprise was to see that the site had an extended outage in the summer of 2018. The NYS Historic Newspaper site reported a July 29 power failure led to a problem with restoration of the site. By August 9, the site was still down as the staff worked to repair a damaged hard drive. The site was fully restored by August 22.

My research method involved manual searching, and the library consortium discourages data mining of this resource. "Downloading a large number of files is not permitted," according to the consortium. The newspapers loaded onto the New York State Historic Newspapers website are either in the public domain, which they define as "any papers published before January 1, 1923," or they have been "cleared for usage by the original copyright holder for members of the public for noncommercial, educational, and research purposes."

The site has more than 260 titles dating back to the nineteenth century. I found the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* collection quite useful, with some 18,000 issues ranging from 1841 to 1902. Also of note is the *New York Evening Post*, with some 34,000 issues from 1832 to 1917. Other nineteenth-century titles include the *Oswego Daily Palladium*, with 7,089 issues from 1851 to 1887; the *Watertown Times*, 6,740 issues from 1870 to 1891; and the *Buffalo Daily Republic*, 3,938 issues from 1848 to 1886.

Some eighteenth-century titles are available as well, such as the *New York Gazette*, 605 issues from 1725 to 1744, the *Commercial Advertiser*, with 1,650 issues from 1797 to 1804, and the *Otsego Herald* or *Western Advertiser* of Cooperstown, 509 issues from 1795 to 1805.

There are current issues, such as the *Freeport Baldwin Leader*, 1,299 issues from 1989 to 2016 or the *Beacon* of Babylon, NY, 313 issues from 2010 to 2015 and an earlier archive in the late 1960s. And there is the *Old Weird Herald*, published by the students of Niagara County Community College, from 1969 to 1971.

This is a deep and incredible resource, but it is not perfect. Some of the images are muddy, especially in the earlier issues, which is to be expected. The search engine will pick up everything, so care is needed with constructing search strings. Overall, it is a reliable and intuitive website and an important resource for media historians.