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Contact:

Mindy Weinberg

Communications Liaison, Penn Libraries

215-746-1342

[wmin@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:wmin@pobox.upenn.edu)

### **Penn Libraries' Guide Named to 2013 ALA List of Best Free Reference Web Sites**

PHILADELPHIA, PA - The [Historical Newspapers Online](#) reference website created by Nick Okrent of Penn Libraries has been named to the list of **Best Free Reference Web Sites 2013**. In its 15<sup>th</sup> year, the list is initiated under the auspices of a committee of the American Library Association to recognize outstanding reference sites on the World Wide Web.

The award-winning Penn Libraries site was selected on criteria that include ease of use; quality, depth and usefulness of content; and uniqueness of the resource as a whole. Open access was one of Okrent's primary motivations for creating the resource. Okrent, who is Undergraduate Services Librarian and Liaison to the History Department, noted the prohibitive costs charged by vendors who license newspaper databases. "The databases cost a lot of money," said Okrent, "and the Libraries can't afford to continually add new ones."

Ease of discovery was another of Okrent's design goals. "I believed we could do a better job than Wikipedia has done, particularly in exposing students to high quality, free newspaper sources for research." Over the past five years he has compiled a list of approximately 550 newspapers throughout 47 states plus the Virgin Islands. These titles cover a time span of more than 380 years, beginning with the digitized editions of the *Virginia Gazette*, which published from 1736 to 1780.

In addition to links to full text, *Historical Newspapers Online* provides descriptions of the significance of the newspaper, which capture the variety, focus and social character of newspapers in America, past and present. For example, a mimeographed school newspaper called *The Little Cowpuncher* (1934-1943), issued from five different rural schools in Southern Arizona was written and illustrated by Anglo and Mexican-American ranch children and provides a chronicle of their lives; one of the original "alternative newsweeklies," the *Village Voice* is available from 1955-2004 with local news and coverage of art, culture, and entertainment in lower Manhattan and

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throughout New York; *The Silent Worker*, originally known as the *Deaf Mute Times*, was a popular national newspaper among the deaf community, first published in February 1888 and written by deaf American authors.

Okrent hopes to improve the findability of the site by revising metadata that raises the site higher in search results. He continually searches for new content and carefully curates the existing links, since, as Okrent is quick to point out, “Links move or die so the work is never-ending.”

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