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The Civil War: A Newspaper Perspective. Accessible Archives.

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Some background first. Whether justified or not, I consider myself a journalism historian, and my primary research interests are nineteenth century newspapers of the antebellum and wartime periods. I found exciting, then, this opportunity to review a CD-ROM collection containing the complete texts of three major Civil War era newspapers, the Charleston *Mercury*, New York *Herald*, and Richmond *Enquirer*. "What a great deal," I thought naively. "I'll be combining my research with a fun review, and I won't murder my eyes sitting in front of a dim microfilm reader. Glory!" The process was not fun. I had to overcome a number of problems to use the compact disk containing these wonderful files. That most frustrating problem is the confusing and difficult to master user interface and search engine. Months have passed since I began working with *The Civil War*. Instead of reading, analyzing, and reacting to 19th century newspaper content, much of my time with the CD over these months was devoted to figuring out how to make it run on my computer; and then, once that was accomplished, figuring out how to operate the cumbersome program. The disk contains the text copy of stories from the three newspapers. It also contains graphic files for maps and some advertisements. The disk does not contain newspapers in their original layout. The disk is not a microfilm-type collection of old newspapers. Instead, the disk contains story transcriptions. Because the compact disk is a collection of text, word searches are relatively quick and thorough. However, structuring word searches is a cumbersome process, and, after several months of using the disk, I still do not feel as though I mastered its search procedure. Searching for stories containing one word is a snap. The user simply brings up the search win-

dow, types a key word, commands search, and within a few moments all articles on the disk containing the key word are presented on the screen as a readable, printable, downloadable collection. For example, if one is interested in articles referring to William Gannaway Brownlow, a search for "Brownlow" generates a list of about twenty or so articles. If, however, you search for "William Brownlow," the result includes all articles containing the word William as well as all of the articles containing Brownlow. Although a technique for multiple word searches may exist, I could not figure it out, and if it does exist, then its existence only demonstrates the weakness of the instructions. The CD's on-screen instructions are hard to follow. At least, the instructions were difficult for me to follow. Although it may be vanity on my part, I think that if I (the person known by his colleagues as the "department computer freak") has trouble figuring out and applying the instructions, a number of users will find the disk difficult to use. My "bottom-line" reaction to the collection is that the publishers have a very good concept and a terrific idea because the selection of these three newspapers for inclusion on a disk retrieval system is appropriate to the era. However, I fault the design of the software application required to access the archive. It is cumbersome, difficult to use, and difficult to understand. *The Civil War* is a valuable addition to journalism history research. The technical presentation, however, disappointed me. The disk is, in my opinion, difficult to use, even in its natural DOS environment. The encouraging element in the appearance of the archive on CD-ROM is that, perhaps, the publishers will benefit from public criticism and will improve future editions. Maybe the user interface will be simplified. Maybe, in short, this concept will turn into research gold.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-civwar>

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