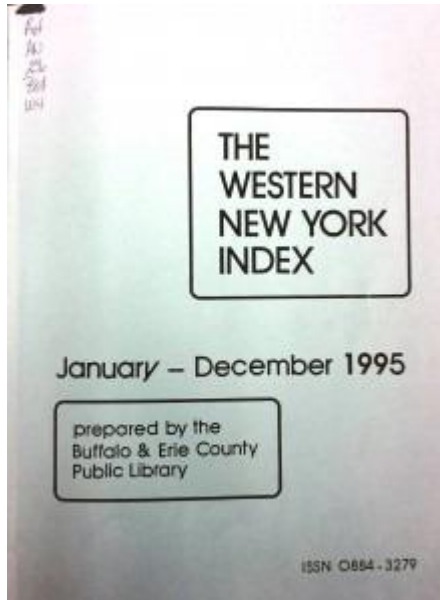


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## The Rise and Fall, and Rise Again, of WNYIndex



In October 2015, WNYLRC and the University at Buffalo completed [the addition of the Western New York Index to New York Heritage](#), making a wealth of information available to researchers of local history. While the digitization and upload only took a couple of weeks, it was the culmination of a project that began over 30 years ago as a print publication of the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library. The project, with a goal of indexing local news publications of the time, was spearheaded by **Mike Lavin** and **Mary Schnabel**. Mary has since passed away, but Mike, who is semi-retired and now works part-time as a reference librarian at Canisius College, graciously agreed to tell me about how it all began (with additional info provided by **Ann Kling** and **Maureen McLaughlin**).

In the early 1980s, the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library had been indexing local newspapers in-house for many years. Each department did their own indexing, for example, the music department indexed music-related stories. These were all done by hand, transcribed on index cards, and each department had a cabinet full of these cards. Then the library system switched to an electronic catalog system, DRA (Data Research Associates), which was internally referred to as TOLIS (Total Online Library Information System). This software included an

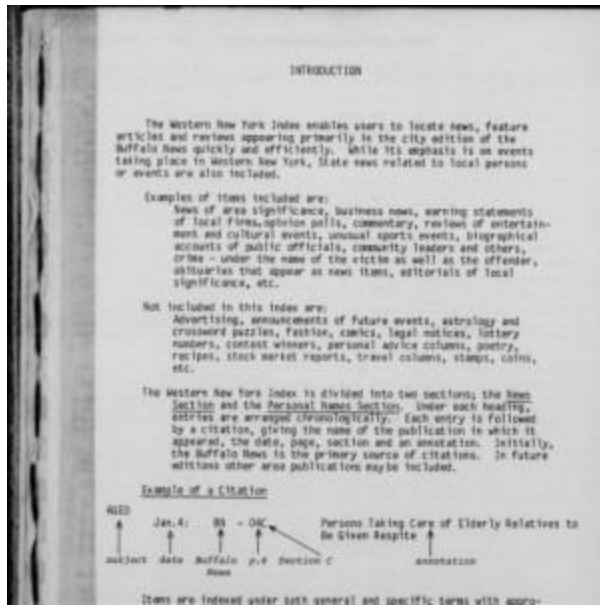
indexing package that could be used to print your own indexes, so a decision was made to use it for a local news index.

It took a year of planning to get the index officially up and running. This included discussions of exactly what articles would be indexed and how the headings would be constructed. As editors of the publication, Mike Lavin and Mary Schnabel came up with the headings and the indexing structure.

There was some disagreement about whether to have broad or specific headings. A compromise was reached in which the index would have broad headings, but these would be subdivided into more specific headings. The publications that were indexed included:

- Buffalo Business Journal
- The Buffalo News
- Buffalo Spree
- Business First of Buffalo
- Business New York
- WNY Genealogical Society Journal
- Western New York Magazine

Because it was a print publication with limited space, they had to decide just how much indexing would be done. General policies were created, such as indexing local news only, with state news included if it had local impact. Syndicated stories and columns were not included. Sports scores were not included, but stories with something significant about the team or local economy were. Death notices were not indexed, but obituaries were. See this page from the first annual edition for more info.



Mike and Mary did a lot of the indexing themselves, with assistance from the librarians in “Area 6” (History/General Information) and “Area 8” (Business/Science/Technology). The indexing software included 2 sections: subjects and personal names, so the Western New York Index was structured the same way. However, the librarians had to be judicious in who was included – the article had to really be about the person in order to index it under their name.

For each heading created, there would be an alpha-numeric code. For a subject heading, it was 2 letters and 3 numbers, so for example, “shopping malls” might be coded as SH100. For personal names, it was 1 letter and 4 numbers. Instead of writing out each heading, a librarian would just use the code.

Beginning in 1983, the library published a print index every month, and then every year they would accumulate them into an annual edition. The primary purpose was for the indexes to be available at each library in the system, but paid subscriptions were also available to other libraries. About 30 other libraries, including area college libraries, the New York State Library, and WNYLRC, purchased a subscription to these spiral-bound volumes.

This publication was a big boon to local researchers at the time. Mike remembers that while later working at the University at Buffalo libraries, they would often direct patrons to it.

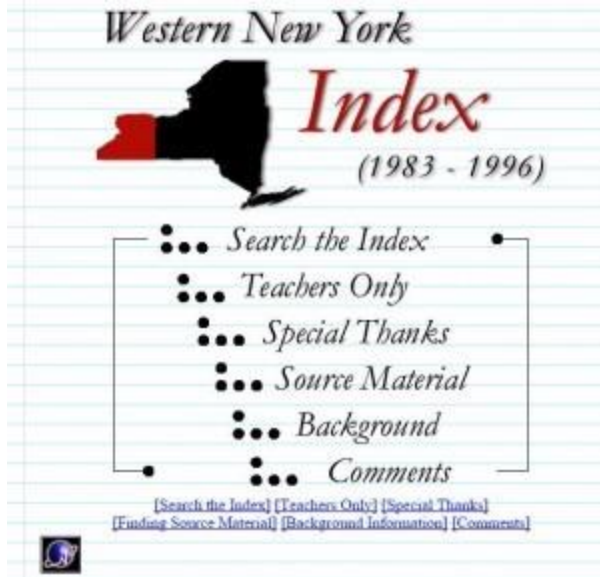
The WNY Index ceased publication in 1996. Mike Lavin was no longer with the library system at the time, but says that it most likely ended because by this time, there was direct access to the Buffalo News and many of the other papers online.

From here, the story picks up with Buffalo State College. **Randy Gadikian** is now the Library Director at the State University of New York at Fredonia, but in the mid-90s he was Coordinator of Systems & Technology at Buffalo State College. I talked to him about the next incarnation of WNY Index.

About a year or two after the print version stopped, Randy had the idea to put it online. The paper version had been used a lot at Buffalo State, and he felt people could benefit from another way of accessing it. He applied for a state Electronic Doorways Libraries Grant through WNYLRC to fund the project, and remembers receiving a lot of encouragement from WNYLRC and Buffalo State's library director at the time, Mary Ruth Glogowski.

Randy acquired the tapes from the library system that had the WNY Index data, which he took to the college's computing center, because many of the tapes were in an obsolete format. The computing center read them and put them into an electronic file, which the library was able to turn into a workable index. To do this, Randy worked with undergraduate Computer Science students, and a library school student. The process took several months.

The site, located at <http://www.wnyindex.org> (no longer a working address) originally ran as a beta server on campus at Buffalo State, before being transferred to the WNYLRC office. It just included the text, with no scanned images as we have now on the New York Heritage Collection.



Randy remembers having a “grand opening” event for the site, held at the Council, to which members of the county legislature and state government were invited. Mugs and t-shirts with the site’s logo were also printed up for the event.

WNYLRC promoted the site to our members, as you can see in this flyer from 1999.

[flyer file unavailable]

From here, the details get a little fuzzier. According to [the Internet Archive](#), the WNY Index site was around through at least 2001, but I was unable to find what happened after that or why the site was taken offline.

So let’s fast-forward to 2013. WNYLRC’s copies of the bound WNY Index were looking beat up, and we began to explore the idea of fully digitizing them for inclusion in [New York Heritage](#). We got quotes from vendors, although the project was stalled a bit during staffing changes at the Council. In 2015, **Ron Gaczewski** at the University at Buffalo stepped in to help. He offered to arrange the digitization with a vendor, first copying the print version to microfilm for archival purposes, and then digitizing them.

UB also has their own paper version of WNY Index, and **Don Hartman**, Lockwood Library Reference Coordinator, tells me that it is still used by University staff who remember it. Nothing else indexes that time period, and if someone at the library

is looking for local news/information from the 1980s, that's the publication to use. Since the online version of the Buffalo News (through library databases or the News' website) only goes back to 1989, it fills a gap from that time period.



In October 2015, the vendor uploaded the digitized files to New York Heritage, and after I reviewed the metadata, it was ready to go live. Now, for the first time, we have both the scanned images and searchable text of the Western New York Index online at <https://nyheritage.org/collections/western-new-york-index> . We hope this will continue to be a useful tool for researchers for years to come.

Thank you to everyone who contributed information to this article:

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Sheryl Knab

Maureen McLaughlin

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