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Review of the database ProQuest Obituaries

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[Visited Nov'06] Locating death notices for everyday people is often much harder than finding obituaries for the famous or infamous. Even if a death notice appeared in a newspaper, if one types a common name/surname into *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* (CH, Jan'07, 44-2430), the result is likely dozens (if not hundreds) of hits, ranging from newspaper articles to legal notices to classified ads, especially if one does not know the exact first name or years. To remedy this, ProQuest's editors went through their electronic files of seven newspapers—*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *The Boston Globe*, *Chicago Defender*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*—and extracted both the paid death notices placed by families and the obituaries of lesser-known people that appeared deeper in the newspaper. Editors manually checked and entered names, and the original microfilm images were digitally enhanced. The database includes over ten million records of ordinary people as well as B- and C-list celebrities, not the “page one” people—thus, users will not find the singer Frank Sinatra but will find a death notice for his grandfather, also named Frank Sinatra.

The search page is very straightforward; one can enter a name and also limit, if necessary, by date range, newspaper, and/or keyword. Users can sort by date, title, state, city, or publication. Since most of these newspapers began publication in the mid- to late-19th century, they correspond to the great wave of immigration to the US. A particularly valuable feature for social historians is the ability to search by keyword without having to include a surname; for example, one can retrieve all the death notices for a specific time period that mention a particular occupation. As with *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*, the obituaries themselves are displayed in PDF format, and users can print or e-mail articles. When this reviewer tested the database, records only went up to 1994, although ProQuest plans to continue to the present. **Summing Up:** Highly recommended. Libraries serv-