

Expanding Early American Scholarship with Readex Text Explorer

Readex Case Study

INTRODUCTION

For decades, Professor Mark L. Kamrath has been at the forefront of digital humanities, building innovative tools to improve access to early American literature. At the University of Central Florida, his research and teaching focus on Charles Brockden Brown, one of the most important American writers of the Post-Revolutionary and Early Republic eras.

Professor Kamrath has not only advanced scholarship in American literature but also trained the next generation of digital humanists.

CHALLENGE

The modern humanities face new pressures: shifting political landscapes, evolving technologies, and questions about the place of humanities in 21st-century higher education. For researchers like Kamrath, one enduring challenge has been access.

Kamrath is a noted scholar of early American author Charles Brockden Brown. Brown published several well-known novels, but his works also encompass essays, pamphlets, and editorial writings. Yet for years, much of this material was scattered across archives making it difficult for scholars like Kamrath to study Brown's full corpus of writing.

TRANSITION TO DIGITAL HUMANITIES

In the late 1990s, Kamrath and his colleagues set out to address the challenge of limited access to Brown's writings. Their solution was the *Charles Brockden Brown Electronic Archive and Scholarly Edition*, a collaborative digital project inspired by initiatives such as the *Walt Whitman Archive*. The aim was to expand access to the full canon of Brown's works through digitization and open access.

Creating this archive was no small feat. The team faced significant hurdles, from establishing bibliographic control and verifying authorship to coding thousands of texts. Even today, Kamrath and his partners continue to navigate technical challenges in maintaining and updating the database platform.

By the early 2000s, the project had gained further momentum when Readex provided online access to *Early American Newspapers*. This resource allowed Brown scholars to refine the archive's bibliography: uncovering previously unknown texts, confirming Brown's commentary on specific pieces, and correcting the record by removing misattributed works. The ability to search primary texts using key word and title searches and a secondary bibliography using Library of Congress Subject Headings greatly increased access to texts for research purposes.

Over time, the archive broadened access to Brown's writings and laid the groundwork for a major scholarly achievement: the publication of seven volumes of the *Collected Writings of Charles Brockden Brown*, each produced in accordance with MLA-CSE guidelines for scholarly editions.



About the Professor

Professor Mark L. Kamrath is General Editor of The Charles Brockden Brown Electronic Archive and Scholarly Edition and Co-Director of the Center for Humanities and Digital Research. He teaches early American Literature to 1865, the American Novel to the Civil War, Native American Literature, and courses in bibliography and research as well as digital humanities.

Research Highlights

- Built a collaborative digital archive of Brown's works
- Used digital analysis to reassess Brown's depictions of Native Americans and Irish immigrants
- Published seven scholarly volumes drawn from the archive

About the Institution

The University of Central Florida (UCF), founded in 1963, is a metropolitan research university located in Orlando. Enrollment is nearly 70,000, offering students more than 245 degree programs within 12 colleges.



"Readex Text Explorer is a game changer for humanities research."

— Mark L. Kamrath, Professor of Early American Literature, English Department at the University of Central Florida

Research Innovation with Readex

Professor Kamrath's research reached new levels in early 2024 with Readex Text Explorer. By combining his archival database with Readex *Early American Newspapers, 1690-1922*, he could:

- Detect patterns in how Brown referred to Irish immigrants
- Compare these literary depictions with contemporaneous newspaper discourse
- Use sentiment analysis and word frequency to identify patterns of meaning

“The ability to search Brown’s larger corpus of writing alongside databases like Readex *Early American Newspapers* highlights the ways digital analysis of archival materials can map textual traces of sentiment or ideology into larger patterns of meaning.”



Charles Brockden Brown.—We are glad to learn that an edition of Brown's novels is in preparation at Boston. There is so much rare and surpassing genius in the productions of this first of our novelists, his pictures are so peculiar and so true, his descriptions so rich and so strong, that it is a matter of wonder and regret, that his name should be forgotten in America.

There is no gaiety nor cheerfulness in the writings of Brown. His pictures are dark and stern, and the events he relates are gloomy and appalling. His mind was tinged with gloom and melancholy at an early period. The sadness which comes so early to darken the feelings of men of genius, would almost

Charles Brockden Brown.—In concluding our extracts from *Ormond, or the Secret Witness*, we give the following account of the author as taken from the *Kaleidoscope*, a British publication of 1822.

He was born in Philadelphia in 1771, had all his life a frail constitution, and was carried off by a consumption in his 39th year. He was a student from his childhood; at the age of sixteen he sketched the plans of three epic poems on American subjects. He studied the law for some years, but relinquished it in disgust. About the age of twenty-six he became an "author by profession," the first known in America. His first novel, *Wieland*, was published in 1798. In the following year he had five novels in hand, two of which, *Arthur Mervyn*, and *Edgar Huntly*, were published before the year was out. *Ormond*, begun

Teaching Digital Humanities

Professor Kamrath incorporates digital humanities methods at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

- **Undergraduate courses** emphasize digital literacy, app evaluation, and ethical use of technology. Students read Johanna Drucker's *The Digital Humanities Cookbook: An Introduction to Digital Methods for Research and Scholarship* (2021) and propose digital projects on issues like homelessness or climate change. They also are introduced to Readex Text Explorer.
- **Graduate courses** involve collaborative transcription, XML-TEI coding, and proofing of Brown's letters. These projects emphasize teamwork, communication, and technical rigor. Here, students begin to work with Readex Text Explorer's features.

In the future, Kamrath plans to integrate Readex Text Explorer more fully into graduate coursework, enabling students to create a corpus from Readex collections and to analyze them with word clouds, sentiment measures, and frequency ratios.

The Future of Digital Humanities

Kamrath sees AI as both an opportunity and a challenge for digital humanities. While questions remain about bias, reliability, and authorship, tools like Readex Text Explorer point to a future where large-scale text analysis is commonplace.

“The ability to examine texts in this way opens the door to deeper textual analysis and understanding, especially as it concerns primary texts and what they can reveal over time.”

Kamrath also foresees greater global collaboration, more public participation in humanities research, and an emphasis on the ethical use of digital tools.

Partnership with Readex

Readex has been a consistent partner throughout Kamrath’s career. From providing access to rare primary sources to developing transformative tools like Readex Text Explorer, Readex has helped scholars expand the scope and depth of their research.

For Kamrath, the next step is greater awareness: ensuring that faculty across departments understand the power of these tools “...for analysis of large bodies of texts and the ways such research can alter our understanding of history, culture, and literature.”

Conclusion

Professor Mark L. Kamrath’s career illustrates the transformative potential of digital humanities. Combining the power of Readex Text Explorer with Readex digital collections, Dr. Kamrath has:

- Expanded access to the canon of early American literature
- Produced scholarly editions that shaped the field
- Advanced methods for textual analysis
- Trained students in cutting-edge digital scholarship

His verdict is clear: Readex tools unlock “the true potential” of primary source content—for researchers and students alike.

LEARN MORE

Available for nearly all Readex collections, including all *Early American Newspapers*, Readex Text Explorer equips researchers with flexible workflow tools for text and data analysis. To learn more, [watch this video](#) and [explore our blog](#).

The Research Value of Readex Collections

- Expand access to rare early American sources
- Provide complimentary scalable tools for large-text analysis
- Support both research and classroom applications
- Bridge traditional scholarship with digital methods

Applications for Readex Text Explorer

- **Corpus creation:** Build focused text sets for targeted analysis
- **Pattern detection:** Track word usage, sentiment, and themes
- **Contextual analysis:** Compare literary and public discourse

