



Locating Primary Sources

Selected Resources

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The following is a selected list of resources. If you need additional assistance, please contact a reference librarian at the number listed above, at webref@jaguar1.usouthal.edu or Ask a Reference Librarian (Live Chat) on the University Library homepage.

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PRIMARY SOURCES

Primary Sources are materials produced by participants or observers at the time of an event or during a particular span of years. They are “original” in that the recording of the event or experience originates with the participants or direct observers. Some examples of primary sources are:

- Diaries, journals, memoirs, letters, speeches, correspondence, autobiographies, oral histories,
- Official documents or records from government or private organizations (minutes, reports, etc.)
- Books, magazines, journals and newspapers produced at the time of the event
- Court decisions, transcripts, and other legal papers
- Research data (reports, market surveys, public opinion polls, statistics)
- Films, photographs, paintings, video recordings
- Novels, poetry, and plays
- Artifacts such as works of art, tools, and weapons

NOTE: The nature and value of a source cannot be determined without reference to the topic and questions it is meant to answer. The same document may be a primary source in one investigation and secondary in another. The search for primary sources does not, therefore, automatically include or exclude any category of records or documents

SECONDARY SOURCES

Secondary sources are materials that interpret, analyze, describe, or explain primary sources. Textbooks, encyclopedias, biographies, and journal articles are examples of common secondary sources. These sources are “secondary” in that usually they are one step removed from the event about which they comment or analyze.

SOUTHcat CATALOG

Use the Libraries’ Catalog to locate books, video and audio material located in the USA Library. Use some of the keywords listed in the examples under Primary Sources and add a personal name, country or time period. You may also search Subject Heading Keyword using many of the same terms.

Examples of Keyword Searches:

elizabeth browning letters
thomas jefferson correspondence
“civil war” “united states” “personal narrative?”
renaissance sources
george washington papers
lewis clark journals
michelangelo drawings

Examples of Subject Heading Keyword:

“united states” history sources
women diaries
presidents speeches
faulkner correspondence

NEWSPAPER OR JOURNAL ARTICLES

Use *Articles*, *Indexes*, *Databases* link on the Library homepage to find indexes to newspaper and journal articles written at the time an event occurred. For time periods not covered by many of the electronic resources, the University Library has print indexes for the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and print and microform indexes for the Times (London).

EVALUATING RESOURCES

Primary sources may be available in print or on the web. All formats need to be evaluated carefully.

When evaluating print primary sources, the following questions might be asked to help ascertain the nature and value of material being considered:

- How does the author know these details (names, dates, times)? Was the author present at the event or soon on the scene?
- Where does this information come from—personal experience, eyewitness accounts, or reports written by others?

When evaluating web resources, ask the following questions:

- *Who is responsible for the website?*

edu = educational institution	http://docsouth.unc.edu
.gov = US government site	http://memory.loc.gov
.org = organization or association	http://www.theaha.org
.com = commercial site	http://www.historychannel.com
.museum = museum	http://nc.history.museum
.net = personal or other site	http://www.californiahistory.net

- *What is the Origin of the Document?*

In a website of primary sources it is important to determine where the author got the documents. The best sites clearly state the source of the original material.

Is the content clearly explained, organized, and accessible? Is the document complete or just an excerpt from a primary source, such as a diary or letter?

Good web design not only makes an electronic resource easier to use, it is also one indication that the content has been provided, and is being maintained, by a trustworthy source. Although standards of what constitutes "good web design" vary widely, clarity, simplicity and easily-understandable navigational cues are some of the obvious signs.

- *What is the format of the document?*

An electronic version of a primary source can be either a scanned image of the original document or word processed (text) version. Ideally, a primary source on the web should be made available in both forms when originals are difficult to read and to provide keyword searching of the text.

- *Is there a fee for use?*

Fee-based sites must be weighed against their value. It is possible that the same (or similar) content, may be available through another electronic source free of charge. Public, school, and academic libraries may offer access to fee based electronic collections of primary resources.

SELECTED TITLES IN USA LIBRARY

Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Microfiche, Library of English Literature
Civil War and Reconstruction: An Eyewitness History. Bookstacks E 601 .K569
Lives and Voices: Sources in European Women's History. Bookstacks HQ 1587
.D53 2000

Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers: Primary Documents on Events of the Period. Bookstacks E 187 .C78 2000
Inaugural addresses of the Presidents of the United States, 1789-1985. Reference J 81 .C85 1985
Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Bookstacks F 592.4 1983
Papers of George Washington. Presidential series. Bookstacks E 312.72 1987b
Northern Renaissance art, 1400-1600: sources and documents. Bookstacks N 6370 .N67 1995
Drawings by Michelangelo. Bookstacks NC 1055 .B9 B763
Voice of the People: Primary Sources on the History of American Labor, Industrial Relations, and Working-Class Culture. Bookstacks HD 8066 .V65 2004

SELECTED WEB RESOURCES

Alabama Mosaic [<http://www.alabamamosaic.org/collections.php>]
American Journeys [<http://www.americanjourneys.org/>]
American Memory [<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>]
Browse collections by topics such as Literature, Performing Arts, African American History, Culture and Folklife
Avalon Project [<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/avalon.htm>]
Digital History [<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>]
Digital Library of Georgia [<http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/?Welcome>]
Documenting the American South [<http://docsouth.unc.edu/>]
DScriptorium [<http://www.byu.edu/~hurlbut/descriptorium>]
Duke Papyrus Archives [<http://odyssey.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/homepage.html>]
Historical Maps of the United States [<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/histus.html>]
Internet Library of Early Journals [<http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/ilej/>]
Library of Congress. Digital Collections.
[<http://www.loc.gov/library/libarch-digital.html>]
Making of America [<http://moa.umd.umich.edu/index.html>]
Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia:
Presidential Recordings Project
[<http://www.millercenter.virginia.edu/academic/presidentialrecordings/>]
Presidential Oral History
[<http://www.millercenter.virginia.edu/academic/oralhistory/>]
National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)
[<http://www.nara.gov/nara/searchnail.html>]
Perseus Digital Library [<http://perseus.tufts.edu>]
Tudor England: Primary Sources [<http://englishhistory.net/tudor/primary.html>]
University of Southern Mississippi Oral History Civil Rights Documentation Project [<http://www.usm.edu/crdp/>]
World War II Resources [<http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/>]