



Finding Primary Sources

Resources from the Ithaca College Library
library.ithaca.edu

Primary sources are original records created at the time historical events occurred or well after events in the form of memoirs and oral histories. Primary sources may include letters, manuscripts, diaries, journals, newspapers, speeches, interviews, memoirs, documents produced by government agencies such as Congress or the Office of the President, photographs, audio recordings, moving pictures or video recordings, research data, and objects or artifacts such as works of art or ancient roads, buildings, tools, and weapons. These sources serve as the raw material to interpret the past, and when they are used along with previous interpretations by historians, they provide the resources necessary for historical research.

(from <http://www.lib.washington.edu/subject/History/RUSA/> -- Instruction & Research Services Committee of the Reference and User Service Association History Section in the American Library Association)

Finding sources in the library

Many primary sources have been published and are available in book form. Search the online catalog in keyword mode and modify your basic subject area with the following terms (for best search results, use "and" between your search terms):

- Narrative or narratives (personal narratives in subject advanced)
- Diaries
- Letters
- Correspondence (excellent choice)
- Manuscript or manuscripts
- Sources (do advanced search with subject)
- Collections
- Interviews
- Conversations
- Oral history

These searches may yield records with an LAC call number; this is an ultrafiche collection that is housed on the main floor of the library. Many of these titles are available full text online somewhere; the Making of America collections are a good place to start looking for these titles:

- Making of America, Michigan <http://www.hti.umich.edu/m/moa/>
- Making of America, Cornell <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/>

Newspapers are also a primary source. The Ithaca College library has numerous historic and current newspapers, including:

- Cheyenne daily leader, 1875 - 1880
- Ithaca Journal and Ithaca Journal-News, 1919-
- Nippon times, (Jan. 1943) - (Sep. 1945)
- The Pennsylvania chronicle, and universal advertiser, 1767 - 1774
- The Pennsylvania gazette, no. 40 (1729 Nov. 2) - no. 2533 (1778 Jun. 20)
- Richmond Whig & public advertiser, 1835 - 1861
- The Rocky Mountain news, 1859-1869
- The Times [London], 1788-

Online full text newspapers include the historic New York Times (1851-1999) and Wall Street Journal (1889-1985) accessible via the [Electronic Resources](#) page. The Ithacan is also available full text online, 1926-2001 at <http://www.ithaca.edu/library/archives/ithacan.php>.

Journals/periodicals/magazines

The best point of access to our extended journal collection is through the Full-Text Journals page linked to the library's main web page. This includes links to full text online titles from the Making of America as well as the library's paper and microfilm holdings. There is no easy way to browse the online catalog for periodicals from a particular era.

To find topical citations for popular literature, try using **Reader's Guide Retrospective**, an online index covering the years 1892-1982.

The **CQ Public Affairs Collection** contains many primary documents relating to United States history and government.

The **Alexander Street press collections** are composed of primary documents. Look for collection names in Research by Subject: History – United States -- North American Women's Letters and Diaries, American Civil War: Letters and Diaries, Early Encounters in North America: Peoples, Cultures and the Environment, North American Immigrant Letters, Diaries, and Oral Histories.

Paper indices for primary sources in the reference collection include:

Poole's Index to Periodicals ,1802-1907 (REF AI3 .P71).
International index to periodicals, 1907-1965 (REF AI3 .R49)

After finding an article, check the Find Journals by Title page to see if we have access to the item.

Primary documents on the Web

<http://www.lib.washington.edu/subject/History/RUSA/> is a terrific website that provides information about finding sources on the web, evaluating them and citing them.

Many libraries and archives are putting primary sources on the web. Since they are in databases, the documents are not always available via Google.

Some sample primary documents for a variety of eras:

American memory: <http://memory.loc.gov/>

The Geography of Slavery in Virginia: <http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/>

Women and social movements in the United States, 1775-2000:

<http://www.binghamton.edu/womhist/index.html>

Virtual Shackleton: <http://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/library/archives/shackleton/>

Documenting the American South: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/>

When in doubt about a primary source, consult your instructor. If you need additional assistance in locating primary sources, librarians will be happy to help

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