



Types of Primary Sources and Where to Find Them

Primary sources are original documents, official records, or physical objects created by individuals who participated in or witnessed past events. Virtually anything from the time period being studied can be a primary source, including written documents, photographs, audio or film recordings, works of art, household furnishings, personal belongings, and even buildings.

Using primary sources, students can interpret history through the eyes and experiences of the people who lived it. Primary sources enlarge students' view of history, making it more than simply a series of facts and dates. Analyzing primary sources helps students establish historical context and attach meaning and significance to basic facts.

Primary sources should never be taken solely at face value. Informed, critical, objective evaluation is essential. Primary sources are pieces of historical evidence that are subject to interpretation. Every historian's challenge is to establish the authenticity of each primary source and to determine how it reflects the personal, social, political, or economic perspective of its creator. At the same time, every historian must be acutely aware of the bias that her or she brings to the interpretation process. Individual life experiences influence what we observe in documents and the meaning we ascribe to primary sources.

Primary sources may include but are not limited to:

account books	flags	personal belongings
advertisements	household furnishings	photographs
architectural plans	interviews	poetry
artwork	inventories	posters
buildings	manuscripts	quotations
cartoons	maps	receipts
census records	memoirs	recipes
clothing	music	research data
coins and currency	newspapers	speeches
correspondence	obituaries	tombstones
court records	oral histories	tools
diaries and journals	pamphlets	wills



More Primary Sources

<p>Formal Personal Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contracts Agreements Wills Court Records Certificates Licenses Receipts 	<p>Institutional Records</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charters Constitutions Membership Registers Minutes Correspondence Reports Programs Publications Records
<p>Informal Personal Records</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diaries Memoirs Financial Statements Letters Memoranda Notes Family & Household Records Photo Albums Home Movies/Videos 	<p>Government Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Court Proceedings Law & Edicts Constitutions Reports Proceedings Treaties Records Census Data
<p>The Arts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fine Arts Graphic Arts Music Design Photography 	<p>Publications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treatises Periodicals Newspapers Histories/Biographies Travel Accounts Literature Maps
<p>Artifacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tools & Machines Money & Stamps Containers Furniture & Furnishings Clothing & Personal Care Items Toys and Amusements Transportation Equipment Communication Equipment Architecture 	<p>Popular Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Folklore Mass Media Organized Sports Songs & Hymns Advertising



Where to Find Primary Sources

<p>State Records Historic Registers Photographs Census Records Geological Survey Maps Military Records Fire Records Railroad Records</p>	<p>Historical and Cultural Institutions Special Collections Artifacts Archaeological Site Maps Letters Government Records Newspapers Exhibits Historical Archives</p>	<p>Home Albums Diaries Journals Letters Private Collections Genealogy Quilts Oral Histories Medical Records Military Records Photographs</p>
<p>Courthouse Deeds Wills Ledgers Estate Settlements Marriage Records City Directories Tax Records Genealogy Records</p>	<p>Library Census Records Business Ledgers Histories Reference Works Special Collections Primary Sources Magazines Books Photographs</p>	<p>Schools Yearbooks Attendance Records School Board Minutes</p>
<p>Online Primary Sources Secondary Sources Photographs Letters Census Records Genealogy Records Newspapers</p>	<p>Businesses Employer Newsletters Correspondence Annual Reports Photographs Historical Records</p>	<p>Places of Worship Memberships Names and Dates Cemetery Records Burial Practices Inscriptions</p>

In the search for history, there are times when a lot of patience is required to uncover (or discover) the right source. You now have a list of “repositories,” or places where you might find many of the resources you need for your project. However, do not limit yourself to just this list... See if you can discover and record other repositories and sources of your own!