

How to Find Primary Source Material

What is a primary source?

A primary source is a document, object, or other evidence that was created *during* the time period under study (or after the time period in the form of memoirs or oral histories). Primary sources come in many forms, such as diaries, letters, speeches, government documents, books, pamphlets, periodicals, interviews, music, photographs, and artifacts. Because they were created by people living in the period under study, primary sources provide a direct, inside look at events, attitudes, and customs. **Finding primary sources can be difficult, so don't hesitate to ask a reference librarian for help.**

Using the Library Catalog to Find Primary Sources

- In the library catalog, use the “Guided Keyword” search. In the first search box, type one or more keywords describing the event or topic of interest. In the second search box, type one or more of the following special subject headings that are typically used to identify primary sources. If you use more than one of these, be sure the drop-down menu next to the search box says “any of these.”

sources	interviews	early works	speeches
correspondence	manuscripts	narratives	letters
diaries	posters	pamphlets	documents
- Search for materials written by key participants (people or organizations) in the events of interest. In the library catalog, click “Quick Search;” type the author name in the search box, and change the drop-down menu to read “Author.” (Use the search hints on the screen to properly enter the author name.)

Using Library Databases to Find Historical Newspaper Articles and Photographs

Except where noted, access these at library.uvm.edu > “Find Articles & More” > “Alphabetical List of Databases”

Associated Press Photography Archive—1 million Associated Press photographs, 1826-present.

Vermont Newspaper Index—Citations to articles in the *Burlington Free Press* or *Rutland Herald*, 1984-present; locate full text on microfilm in the Periodicals Department (2nd floor).

NOTE: To find earlier citations for articles in the *Burlington Free Press*, use the card-file index in the reference area covering the years 1827-1836, 1896-1898, 1950-51, and 1959-1983; then locate full text on microfilm.

New York Times Online—Full text of the *New York Times*, 1851-2001.

Palmer's Index to The Times (London)—Citations to articles in *The Times*, 1790-1905; locate full text on microfilm in the Periodicals Department (2nd floor).

Launch the CD-ROM database from the desktop of any library computer in the reference area.

Using Guides and Indexes to Find Primary Source Materials

The following books, indexes and databases either contain primary source materials or will help you identify them.

Indexes to Historical Periodical Literature

- *Nineteenth Century Readers Guide to Periodical Literature* (1890-1899), Reference Z 1219 .N56
- *Poole's Index to Periodical Literature* (1802-1881), Reference Z 1219 .P659
- *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature* (1900-2006), Reference Z 1219 .R48
- *Readers Guide Retrospective* (1890-1982) [online database], library.uvm.edu > “Find Articles & More” > “Alphabetical List of Databases”

Indexes to Government Documents

Visit the Government Documents Department (ground floor) for help in using these and other indexes:

- *American Foreign Relations Since 1600: A Guide to the Literature*, Documents and Reference Z 6465 .U5 G84 2003
- *Cumulative Subject Index to the Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications 1900-1971*, Documents Index Z 1223 .A182
- *Guide to American Foreign Relations Since 1700*, Documents and Reference Z 6465 .U5 G84 1983
- *Guide to the Sources of United States Military History* (1600-1973), Reference Z 1249 .M5 G83 1975

Speeches

- *Representative American Speeches*, Bailey/Howe Books PS 668 .B3
- *Speech Index: An Index to 259 Collections of World Famous Orations and Speeches for Various Occasions* ("earliest times"-1980), Reference Z 6514 .O7 S87 1966 (+ supplement)
- *Vital Speeches of the Day*, (1934-2006), Access full-text via the library catalog

Diaries and Letters

- *American Diaries : An Annotated Bibliography of Published American Diaries and Journals, Volume 1: Diaries Written from 1492 to 1844*, Reference Z 5305 .U5 A74 1983
- *North American Women's Letters and Diaries* [online database], library.uvm.edu > "Find Articles & More" > "Women's and Gender Studies"
- *Personal Writings by Women to 1900 : A Bibliography of American and British Writers*, Reference Z 1229 .W8 D38 1989
- *The Published Diaries and Letters of American Women : An Annotated Bibliography* (1669-1982), Reference Z5305.U5 G66 1987

Collections of Various Primary Source Materials

- *Annals of America*, Reference E 173 .A793—2,289 articles, speeches, letters, songs, poems, documents.
- *Documents of American History*, Reference E 173 .C66 1973c—Mostly official and quasi-official documents from the Age of Discovery to 1973, including speeches, debates, court cases, laws, and policies.

Finding Primary Sources on Microfilm

UVM Libraries owns many collections of primary sources on microfilm, including personal narratives from the civil war, photographs of the 1930s depression, confidential documents from the State Department, testimony of the Indian Claims Commission, and papers of the NAACP. Ask a reference librarian to show you the guides to microfilms and browse to see what's relevant to your topic.

Finding Primary Sources in Special Collections (ground floor)

If your research concerns Vermont or UVM, consult the *Wilbur Collection*, which includes hundreds of thousands of books, pamphlets, photographs, maps, manuscripts, Vermont legislative records, and state agency documents. Special Collections also maintains a reference file of news articles and pamphlets on issues pertaining to Vermont. Faculty and staff can also help you access the *University Archives*, which houses administrative files, faculty lecture notes, student diaries, and assorted other UVM-related materials from the 1790s to the present.

Finding Primary Sources on the World Wide Web

- *American Memory*—Premier collection of digitized American primary source material, from texts to photographs. Created by the Library of Congress (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amhome/html>).
- *EuroDocs: Primary Historical Documents from Western Europe*—Links to selected primary source documents (transcribed, reproduced in facsimile, or translated) arranged by country (<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/eurodocs/>).
- *Making of America*—Large and diverse full-text collection of books and journals, mainly from 1850-1870, made available by the University of Michigan (<http://moa.umdl.umich.edu>).
- *Primary Sources on the Web*—A gateway site providing links to various digital collections (<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/PrimarySourcesOnTheWeb.html>).