

J. Eugene Smith Library Finding Primary and Secondary Sources

What are Primary Sources?

What are Secondary Sources?

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Example of a Search for Primary Sources: Connecticut Flood of 1955

What are Primary Sources?

Primary sources are original records that document evidence or supply first-hand testimony of a particular time period, event, or subject. This record or documentation is usually created close to the time of the occurrence by a participant or observer. If created at a later date, the documentation would take on the form of an autobiography, oral history, or memoir.

Primary source accounts can be a person's recollection or description of a particular event or time, there may be misunderstandings or misinterpretations. When looking for primary sources, it is helpful to obtain more than one account of a particular event in order to determine the reliability of the information.

The following are generally considered primary sources:

Personal Accounts

Diaries, interviews, letters, manuscripts, memos, speeches
autobiographies, memoirs, oral histories

Original Recordings of an Event, Time Period, or Place

Books, journal, magazine and newspaper articles, advertisements, photography, audio and video recordings, pamphlets, broadsides/posters, maps

Organization or Government Agency Records

Minutes of meetings, agendas, correspondence

Research Data and Reports

Public opinion polls, census records, laws, experiments, studies, statistical data

Creative Expression

Works of art, literature, poetry, architecture, music

Artifacts

Physical objects, clothing, tools, furniture

What are Secondary Sources?

Secondary source materials are produced by analyzing and interpreting a particular time period, event or subject. The authors of this interpretation are not first-hand participants or observers of the event. Primary sources are often used to provide the evidence for secondary source materials.

Examples of secondary sources are biographies, journal articles, and documentaries written some time after the event being studied. Historical textbooks, for example, are often compiled by analyzing and interpreting primary sources.

Other Interpretations of Primary Sources

[How to Distinguish Between Primary and Secondary Sources](#) - University of California, Santa Cruz

[Examples of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Sources](#) - James Cook University

Beginning the Research Process

As a first step, it is advantageous to locate background information for a more complete understanding of the subject being studied and to help narrow a topic. This will help to establish an historical framework of specific events, dates, and names of significant individuals within the timeframe being studied. For this purpose, subject-specific encyclopedias and historical survey books can supply a broad overview of an event or time period. The information gleaned from these resources will also help to provide terms and keywords to use for more relevant searches within catalogs, databases, and Web sites.

The following are a few examples of books at ECSU related to American History, primary sources, and the research process. These are good starting points that can be used for background information related to American History.

Also note that in our Catalog/CONSULS there is a selection that can be made to search "ECSU Reference". This option is found on the drop down under "Search All Libraries".

Visit or call the reference desk (465-4699) for assistance in locating other subject-specific encyclopedias and historical survey books related to a particular topic or geographic location.

Reference/2nd Floor
Library Use Only

Atlas of American History (G1201.S1F4 1987) Found in Reference and Stacks

Atlas of American Migration (G1201.E27F5 1998) Oversized Reference

American Decades Primary Sources (E169.1.A471977 (2004) Covers 1900-1999

American Eras (E169.1.A47 1979 (1997-1999) Covers 1600-1899

Dictionary of American History (E147.D52 2003 v. 1-10)

Dictionary of American Immigration History (JV6450.D53 1990)

Facts on File: Weekly World News Digest With Cumulative Index (Serials, Index and Abstract Area)

Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups (E 184.A1H35 1980)

Historical Dictionary of the Civil War (E468.J777 2002 v. 1-2)

A History of Women in the United States: State-by-State Reference (HQ1410.H58 2004 v. 1-4)

Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1771 – 1789 (LC 1.34: v. 1-26) US Documents

Encyclopedia of the American Civil War (E468.H47 2000 v. 1-5)

Encyclopedia of American Historical Documents (E173.E54 2004 v. 1-3)

Encyclopedia of American Social Movements (HN57.E594 2004 v. 1-4)

Stacks/3rd Floor

These Can Be Borrowed

The American Republic: Primary Sources (E173.A7535 2002)

The Voice of the People: Primary Sources on the History of American Labor, Industrial Relations, and Working-Class Culture (HD8066.V65 2004)

What American Women Did, 1789 - 1920: A Year-by-Year Reference (HQ1154.C665 2001)

The Oxford Guide to Library Research (Z710.M23 1998)

See index for chapters on primary sources, archives, manuscripts, and public records

Student Guide to Research in the Digital Age: How to Locate and Evaluate Information Sources (ZA3075.S74 2006) Available in 3rd Floor Stacks and Reference Section. See index for chapters on primary sources discussed in several forms.

Tip

Secondary sources such as books and scholarly journal articles written after an event or time can also be a good resource to find primary sources. Footnotes and bibliographies in secondary sources can point to primary source materials.

Finding Primary Sources in the Library Catalog: CONSULS

CONSULS (Connecticut State University Library System) is the shared library catalog of the four Connecticut State University Libraries and the State of Connecticut Library in Hartford. Searching CONSULS will locate library materials within each of the five libraries. There is an opportunity to limit a search to only one library at a time if preferred.

Some of the materials in CONSULS include books, audio-visual materials, titles of periodicals, government documents, and more. You will not be able to search for articles in CONSULS. For this purpose, refer to our databases that can be reached from the library homepage.

Getting Started in CONSULS

- Starting from the [J. Eugene Smith Library homepage](#)
- Select [Online Catalog - CONSULS](#) tab
- Use a Keyword or Subject Search
- For a Keyword search, you can either search all of the CSU libraries or select "Search ECSU" from the drop down, if only interested in materials at ECSU.

Note: If searching the entire CONSULS CSU system (CCSU, ECSU, SCSU, WCSU) simply enter terms without any selection or modifications. If the items are not found at ECSU, most of the materials from the CSU system can be requested online in CONSULS, except for reference materials.

Examples of primary source terms to use in a search:

- sources or history sources
- archiv* (Example use of asterisk to find archive, archives, archival)
- history
- autobiography
- correspondence
- diary
- interview
- letter
- oral history
- manuscript
- map
- memoir
- narrative
- records
- speech

Keyword Search in CONSULS

Try using a keyword search by inserting a relevant term or person's name along with the operator AND with one or more of the terms that are listed above:

Type in your search terms and click "Search".

If the material in CONSULS is at another Connecticut State University (Central, Southern, Western), simply select "Request". After requesting an item, you will be able to pick it up at our circulation desk after being contacted within approximately 2-3 business days.

You will need a Library PIN Code to use "Request".

Keyword Searches: Carefully read the instructions for keyword searching in CONSULS.

Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT), truncation, and use of parentheses work very well in a keyword search.

More examples of terms to use to find primary sources:

Using an asterisk (*) in CONSULS allows for a selection of any and all endings after the letters you type in. Example: diar* will pull up diary, diaries, etc.

primary sources and america*

revolution and sources and war (this can be narrowed further)

vietnam and diar*

war and autobiog*

massachusetts and lowell and women

primary sources and african americans

(african americans or minorities) and civil rights and sources

primary sources and war (in place of war, type in a specific war with dates included)

primary sources and women and (narrow by adding suffrage, feminism, employment, etc.)

women and america* and diar*

stowe, harriet and letters

caribbean and sources

french and (united states or america) and 1600 – 1763

Subject Search in CONSULS

Subject searches in CONSULS can be effective if the correct subject headings are used.

Individual records contain Library of Congress subject headings. For help in finding a variety of subject headings used by the Library of Congress, select the subject search tab in CONSULS and the link to "Library of Congress Subject Headings." Here you will be able to type in your terms and obtain specific subject headings.

Subject Searches:

(limit to searching only ECSU to narrow search, if desired)

industrial revolution

adams, john quincy (type in any famous or political figure)
civil war 1861 – 1865
world war 1914 – 1918
world war 1939 – 1945
prohibition
emigration and immigration
african americans history
french americans history
marriage records connecticut
diaries
census
school census
household surveys
government questionnaires
laws

You can also try a title, author, or number search in CONSULS if this information is known.

**Ask a reference librarian for help with selecting search terms
when looking for primary source materials.**

[J. Eugene Smith Library Archives](#)

Our library archives are a good resource for finding primary sources. You can locate some of these materials when searching the CONSULS catalog or browsing the Archive Collection List that contains some of the archive holdings.

[The Connecticut State Library](#)

The State Library has a great deal of primary source materials. Most items are only available at the library at 231 Capitol Avenue in Hartford, CT. Some materials can be accessed full-text online via the Connecticut Digital Archive. Note that many documents that the State Library holds are also at ECSU within our Government Documents and Connecticut Archives sections.

The Connecticut State Library is part of CONSULS. Notice StLib for items held by the State Library.

[Connecticut Digital Archive](#)

Use the Connecticut Digital Archive link for step by step instructions on finding a document in CONSULS and connecting to the full text. Scroll down to "How to Find a Document in the Connecticut Digital Archive."

[Index to Connecticut State Library Research Resources](#)

An alphabetical index to the Connecticut State Library's research resources. With the many and varied resources available in this collection, viewing the index helps in selecting materials by subject

area and also provides direct access to these materials. While the index is quite broad, it does not contain everything available on the CT State Library Site.

[Connecticut State History Resources](#)

Links to an abundant list of Connecticut history resources organized by historical periods and topics. Some of the databases are only available at the Connecticut State Library.

Finding Primary Sources in Periodicals Journals, Magazines, Newspapers

Finding specific articles about an event, subject, or time period requires use of an index (print or online) or searchable database. Indexes include the *New York Times Index* and the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature* found on the 2nd Floor in the Reference/Index area.

Select a database that contains journals, magazines, newspapers, etc. in the subject area being investigated. Be sure to notice the dates of coverage.

JSTOR is one of the resources included in our History Research Databases. JSTOR contains an archive of core scholarly journals from a variety of fields such as arts and sciences, language and literature, music, and business. Some of the journals are archived back to the 1800s.

Project Muse is another ECSU database that can be searched for historical resources. When opening the Project Muse search interface there is an opportunity to also select searching within JSTOR simultaneously. Project Muse contains *American Periodicals, a Journal of History, Criticism and Bibliography*.

WorldCat (OCLC) contains periodicals as well as a variety of other historical records from libraries represented in over 80 countries. Includes manuscripts written as early as the 12th century. A good database for finding archival materials. In the advanced search mode, select archival materials.

Newspapers

[New York Times](#)

Search the NYT web site of several million articles from 1851 – Present by keyword, phrase, author, headline or date. Also check CONSULS for dates of coverage in microform or link to a database at ECSU to find full-text.

(If the above NYT web site does not obtain the desired results, there is also the option of using the *New York Times Index* found on the 2nd Floor in the Reference/Index area. Select the desired year and locate a topic area. After finding a specific article date and location, go to the 1st Floor microform area to find the actual article. Ask a librarian for assistance in this process).

[Hartford Courant](#)

Search the Hartford Courant web site for articles from 1764 – Present and also check CONSULS for dates of coverage in microform or link to a database at ECSU to find full-text.

[The Chronicle, Willimantic Chronicle](#)

Search The Chronicle web site for articles from 1999 – Present
Also check CONSULS for dates of coverage in microform at ECSU to find full-text.
Our CT Studies Collection on the 4th floor has a complete run of the newspaper on microfilm dating from 1879-present.

Note: This newspaper has changed its name several times. AKA The Chronicle (most recent), Willimantic Chronicle, Willimantic Daily Chronicle.

[Other Newspaper Archives](#)

Search the Internet Public Library's list of U.S. and world newspapers on the Internet.

Finding Primary Sources on the Internet

Collections of Primary Sources With Citation and Copyright Guidelines as Available

[Using Primary Sources on the Web](#)

Important information about evaluating primary source web sites and citing web sites from the Reference and User Services Association of the American Library Association

[Ad* Access](#)

A collection of thousands of images from advertisements printed in U.S. and Canadian newspapers and magazines from 1911 through 1955. Subject areas include: radio, television, transportation, beauty and hygiene and World War II.

[Copyright and Citing Ad* Access](#)

[The American Civil War Homepage](#)

A general site on the American Civil War that includes links to images and photographs from the Civil War as well as links to important Civil War documents.

[American Memory Project](#)

American Memory Project provides free and open access through the Internet to written and spoken words, sound recordings, still and moving images, prints, maps, and sheet music that document the American experience. It is a digital record of American history and creativity. The material, from the collections of the Library of Congress and other institutions, chronicles historical events, people, places, and ideas that continue to shape America. Suggest using the browsing capacity by topic, time period, material type, or place.

[Primary Documents in American History](#)

[Citing Sources from American Memory Project](#)

[Connecticut History Online](#)

Includes photographs, drawings and prints about Connecticut's history. The materials can be searched or browsed in a variety of ways, including by keyword, subject, creator, title and date.

Geographical sites may be searched using a Digital Geographic Locator developed by the University of Connecticut's Map and Geographic Information Center (MAGIC).

[Citing Sources in CHO](#)

[Digital History](#)

This resource, a joint project of University of Houston, Chicago Historical Society, Museum of Fine Arts Houston and the National Park Service, provides access to primary sources, multimedia resources, curriculum based classroom activities, exhibits, reference works, textbooks and much more.

[Copyright and Citing Digital History](#)

[Documenting the American South: Oral Histories of the American South](#)

This project includes thematic collections of primary sources for the study of Southern history, literature, and culture. View the collections page for a detailed index to many important themes that shaped the lives of Southern America.

[Copyright and link to citation guide for Documenting the American South](#)

[Geospatial and Statistical Data Center/Historical Census Browser](#)

From the University of Virginia Library this resource contains data from 1790 to 1960 taken from the U.S. Census of Population and Housing. Includes data on Agriculture, Population & Housing, Education & Literacy, Economy/Manufacturing/Employment, Ethnicity/Race/Place of Birth.

[History Matters](#)

Hundreds of first person narratives of average Americans in extraordinary times. Strong in the WWI period. A project of the Center for Social History and the New Media, and George Mason University. Also includes lesson plans and teacher resources in U.S. History.

[Citing, copyright, and evaluation of digital resources for History Matters](#)

[Immigration to the United States 1789 - 1930](#)

Provides a first-hand look at the history of immigration in the United States from the years 1789 to 1930. Created as part of the Open Collections Program at Harvard University, this online archive includes thousands of books, photographs, and 200+ maps. Users can browse through the records of the Immigration Restriction League and view images at Harvard's Social Museum, which was established in 1903 to illustrate "problems of the social order."

[Linking, Permissions, and Copyright for Immigration to the United States](#)

[Library of Congress](#)

Search the Library of Congress Online Catalog, U.S. historical and cultural collections (American Memory), Prints & Photographs Online Catalog and the Library of Congress web site at the same time or select individual sources.

[Copyright and Fair Use Library of Congress](#)

[Making of America](#)

The collection currently contains several thousand books and journal articles with 19th century imprints. The collection is particularly strong in the subject areas of education, psychology, American history, sociology, religion, and science and technology.

[The National Archives](#)

[National Archives Exhibit Hall](#)

Find World War II photos, Military Service Records, Declaration of Independence, Constitution of the United States and much more.

[Citing Sources From the National Archives](#)

[The New York Public Library: Digital Collections](#)

Hundreds of thousands of images from primary sources and printed rarities including illuminated manuscripts, historical maps, vintage posters, rare prints, photographs, illustrated books, and printed

ephemera. Some of the collection categories include: Black Culture & Experience; History & Literature; Maps, Atlases & Charts; New York City & State; Performing Arts; Photographs & Prints; Science & Technology.

[North American Immigrant Letters, Diaries and Oral Histories](#)

A unique and personal view of immigration to America and Canada. Includes several thousand pages of personal narratives including letters, diaries, pamphlets, autobiographies and oral histories. Representing people from many countries, the materials begin around 1840 up to present day.

[Repositories of Primary Sources](#)

A list of repositories of primary source materials in the United States and Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, Asia and the Pacific, Africa and the Near East

[The Richmond Daily Dispatch from 1860 – 1865](#)

Includes a brief Civil War period history and chronology

[US Historical Documents Online](#)

A chronology of US Historical Documents from pre-Colonial to present day. From the Magna Carta to present day State of the Union addresses. Compiled by the University of Oklahoma.

[The Valley of the Shadow: Living the Civil War in Pennsylvania and Virginia](#)

A project that interweaves the histories of two communities on either side of the Mason-Dixon line during the era of the American Civil War. It incorporates a narrative and electronic archive of the sources on which the narrative is based.

[The World War I Document Archive](#)

Brigham Young University Libraries created this archive of primary sources consisting of hundreds of transcribed documents divided into sections such as diaries, conventions, maritime war, a biographical dictionary, the medical front and links to other WW I Sites. There is an archive of photographs that contain over 1,800 photographs that document the war. The archive is international in focus, covering the Great War.

[World War II](#)

Includes pre and post-war policies. Information about Pearl Harbor and much more.

Directories with Primary Source Materials

If unable to find information in the above entries, take some time to review the many resources listed below. Some of these entries are contained separately in the above selection of Internet resources, but many are not.

The historical chronologies are particularly interesting.

[Digitized World History Sources](#)

[American Women's History: Digital Collections of Primary Sources](#)

[ECSU Collection of Government Documents](#)

EXAMPLE
A Search for Primary Sources
Subject: Connecticut Flood of 1955

Research is about the Connecticut flood of 1955. The following are a few examples of primary sources. Begin by using the ECSU Library Catalog/CONSULS

Results of CONSULS Subject Search = “connecticut history 1900s”

- Several good sources of information about Connecticut for background information: Atlas, bibliographies, biographical dictionary, CT history periodicals, anecdotes, archival resources and more. Many of the resources are at the Connecticut State Library but many are also found at J. Eugene Smith Library.

Results of CONSULS Keyword Search = “1955 and flood”

(Over 30 records)

- One of several sources includes: Flood '55: New England's Greatest Disaster (HV610.1955.C6 F555 Conn. Studies Reference). This book contains more than 200 graphic and dramatic pictures of Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Another resource: [Connecticut Flood Recovery Committee Report](#) (View this report online)

Newspaper Article:

[Hartford Courant Online](#) Archives search (Also have on microfiche at Smith Library)

Results of Search for “flood and hartford” selecting the dates for the month of August 1955. There were over 600 articles.

Also found the [flood of 1955](#) in the online Hartford Courant. These resources include newspaper articles, photos, videos, memories, and stories about victims of the flood. Video footage of the flood and an interview with a helicopter pilot depict the severity of this disaster.

Web site: [Connecticut History Online](#)

Basic Search within the Connecticut History Online Web site "1955 flood".

133 entries including many photographs of the flood damage caused by Hurricanes Connie and Diane.

Several Internet resources were found at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center at UConn. This archive has many entries for primary source materials as well as several municipal web sites whose towns were affected by the flood of 1955 in Connecticut.

Have fun searching for primary sources. As always, consult a Reference Librarian at any time by calling 465-4699 or visiting the Reference Desk on the 2nd Floor of the library.

Please contact Reference & Instruction Librarian [Carol Reichardt](#)
for any suggestions or comments about the Primary Sources Web page – Updated November 2009