Primary Sources

Primary resources are items created at the time under study and provide firsthand evidence of historical events. Examples include diaries, letters, interviews, autobiographies, news film footage, clothing, art.

Secondary sources analyze and interpret primary sources and usually are created later. Examples are textbooks and encyclopedias.

Finding primary sources in the online catalog:

Use SUBJECT KEYWORD search. Choose one of the following search styles:
- Use a word from your topic and the word *narratives*
  Example *abortion narratives*
- Use a person's name and the word *diaries*
  Example *Jimmy Carter diaries*
- Use a person's name and the word *correspondence*
  Example *Corey correspondence*
- Use an occupation (plural form) and the word *diaries*
  Example *soldiers diaries*
- Use your topic (church, revolution) and the word *sources*

Finding primary sources in SWC Library's databases:
To find primary sources about an event, you need to know the date when the event occurred. Newspaper articles about an event written at the time of the event are considered primary sources. There are several newspaper databases available, covering dates from 1690 to the present. Choose one that covers the time period of your event.

- **Masterfile Premier** Type your search term and look for *Primary Source Documents* on the left under Source Type. Note that there may not be any primary source documents for your topic in this database.

- The **World News Digest** database contains a collection of sixty years of source documents, searchable by title or by year. This collection includes many speeches, party platforms, excerpts from court cases, etc. It also contains a collection of photographs, another type of primary source.

- **Historical Newspapers New York Times** goes back to 1851. Choose *Advanced Search* and type the event or name. For the date range, choose *On this date* if you know when an event occurred (sometimes you will find it in the newspaper for the following day) or *Before this date* or *After this date* or perhaps an entire year.

- **America's Historical Newspapers 1690-2000**   Click on *Jump to an era* and then choose a year or event which interests you. On the right there will be an explanation, on the left links to primary sources. These are photostats (photographs of the newspaper clippings) and sometimes are difficult to read because in early American newspapers the letter "s" looks like "f".

A list of primary sources in the SWC Library can be found by going to the Library's website, click on *Library Instruction*, then *Tutorials and Handouts*, then *Finding Primary Sources* near the bottom. The link is http://www.swccd.edu/library/Docs/primarysources.pdf

Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature began in 1900 and finds articles in magazines. It is not a database but a hard copy index. Look for it in the Reference section of the Library. Once you find the citation (magazine, date, pages, author, title of the article), you must find a library that has the actual issue. The librarian can help you to do this.

Citing
The library provides handouts on citing in MLA and APA. Additionally, more resources can be found in the library's website (click on Internet Resources tab and then on Citing – MLA and APA). If you found resources through the databases, find out if that database has a feature to assist you with your references.

Some online collections of primary sources:

- UCLA Institute on Primary Resources http://ipr.ues.gseis.ucla.edu/

- San Diego History Center www.sandiegohistory.org
  You can also visit their research library in Balboa Park.

- Library of Congress American Memory Project http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html

- American Civil War http://sunsite.utk.edu/civil-war
  Look at *Images of Wartime* and *Documentary Records*

- Making of America http://moa.umdl.umich.edu/index.html
  Try browsing by subject

- The Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War
  http://valley.lib.virginia.edu

- Calisphere http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu/
  This website contains primary sources related to California's history and its people. You may browse or search.

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