# DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

## Primary Sources

"A **primary source** is a piece of information about a historical event or period in which the **creator of the source was an actual participant in or a contemporary of a historical moment**. The purpose of primary sources is to capture the words, the thoughts and the intentions of the past. Primary sources help you to interpret what happened and why it happened." (from the National History Day web site at https://www.nhd.org/how-enter-contest).

## Examples of primary sources

- Memoirs, letters, interviews, autobiographies, diaries, personal narratives
- Magazine or newspaper articles from the time period of a historic event
- Speeches
- Photographs, cartoons, advertisements
- Audio recordings and video recordings
- Ephemera – buttons, banners, leaflets, posters
- Congressional information and records of government agencies like the Census Bureau

## Finding primary sources in library databases

Denver Public Library has primary sources about many topics and time periods.With your library card, you can access these databases from anywhere. If you don't have a library card, register online for immediate access to these resources. Find these databases on the Teen History page.

## Newspaper Databases

Researchers investigating a specific event sometimes use newspapers from the place and time in which the event occurred to uncover details and perhaps find firsthand descriptions. Historical newspaper coverage can be found in the Databases A-Z list:
- **New York Times Historical Backfile on Proquest** Contains full-text and images in PDF format of the New York Times from 1851 to three years before the current year.
- **Denver Post** Search the full-text of the Denver Post from 1989 to present.

## Research Databases

**Student homework databases that include some primary sources:**
- **Explora for Teens** Search by keyword and narrow your 'Source Types' to 'Primary Source Documents.'
- **Readers' Guide Retrospective: 1890-1982** Index to 100 years of periodical literature. Find article citations and ask our librarians about getting scanned copies of articles.
- **Student Resources in Context** Search by keyword and narrow by 'Primary Sources.'
- **Gale Virtual Reference Library** Search by keyword and narrow by 'Primary Source' under 'Document Type' field.

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**Library Books**

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**Books in the library collection may contain primary sources.**
For finding sources on people or organizations, add the word [**sources**] to your catalog search.
For finding sources on topics, add the word [**archives**] to your catalog search.
For books with material written by participants in a historical event, add search term [**personal narratives**] or [**correspondence**].

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**Colorado, Western United States, and African American Research Collections:**

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[**Digital Collections**](#) Online collection containing a selection of photographs, maps, broadsides, architectural drawings and other documents from the collections of the Western History/Genealogy (WHG) department.
[**Western History Subject Index**](#) Citations to historical local newspapers (entire runs of the Denver Post and Rocky Mountain News), local histories, biographical works, newsletters and journals. Search for articles; [contact WHG](#) to access copies of articles.
[**Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library**](#) A research archive featuring African-Americans who settled the West from early pioneers to present-day heroes.
The collection includes photographs, manuscript collections, letters, and diaries,

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**Recommended Primary Sources Online**

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Universities and colleges often make **primary source collections accessible online**. Search [topic] [primary sources] [site:edu]

**Library of Congress** site - http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/finding.html

**National Archives (NARA)** site - https://www.archives.gov/education/research/primary-sources

**Hathi Trust:** https://www.hathitrust.org/

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Contact the Reference Services department for help with your research project:
- Phone us, 720-865-1363,
- Visit us, reference desk on Floor 3 of the [Central Library](#),
- Chat with us online with the [Ask Us!](#) Service,
- Meet with us in person or online to work [one-on-one with a librarian](#).