

PRIMARY SOURCES ([print pdf version](#))

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What is a primary source?

A primary source is original material, recorded in various formats, during the time of the event or person in which you are interested. Primary sources can also be recorded after the events, such as an autobiography. Many materials are considered primary sources, for example:

Diaries

Government Documents

Speeches

Treaties and Agreements

Memoirs

Letters

Newspapers or Other Periodicals

Interviews

Autobiographies

Oral History

In what formats are primary sources available?

Primary sources are available in many formats. Original documents, books, microfilm or microfiche, artifacts, CD-ROMs, DVDs, VHS, Audio tapes, MP3s, films, digitized versions available online. Researchers can also conduct an interview with a person involved in the event. The formats in which primary sources can be found will continue to evolve with the changes in modern technology.

How do I cite a primary source?

Citing the material depends on the citation format that your professor asked you to use. Copies of books of the more common citation formats (APA, MLA, Turabian, and Chicago) are available for use in the library. The books have an index located in the back where you can look up the specific type of material you need to cite. In addition below are some suggested websites to help you locate citation information.

<http://library.cnu.edu/style.html>

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/learn/start/cite/index.html>

<http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/workscited/>

Ask your professor or consult with the Writing Center if you are having problems citing a particular document.

How do I evaluate a primary source?

Primary source materials should be critically evaluated just as you would evaluate any source that you use in your paper. Be sure to take into account who created the material and whether or not they are biased toward a particular point of view or were an objective observer.

Evaluate all materials found on the internet carefully. Be aware of the site - is it a legitimate website? - is there a chance they may have altered the information in some way in order to fit their point of view? Try and stay with reliable government and educational websites or sites recommended by your professor or a library - don't just hope for the best with Google.

Suggested ideas for evaluating the site include: Who sponsors the site? Is this a reliable organization? Is an author or webmaster listed as being available for contact? Check the about area of the site to find the reason it was created. Does the purpose seem legitimate or was it created to support a specific point of view? Where did the website locate the primary sources that have been digitized?

More detailed information on primary sources can be found from the following web pages:

Introduction: Using Primary Sources

(<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook01.html#Introduction:%20Using%20Primary%20Sources>)

Information on primary sources provided by the Internet History Sourcebooks Project.

Library of Congress Learning Page - What are Primary Sources

(http://lcweb2.loc.gov/learn/start/prim_sources.html)

A site designed by the Library of Congress to explain the difference between a primary and secondary source. The site describes different types of primary source materials from artifacts and documents to oral histories and photographs.

Using Primary Sources on the Web

(<http://www.lib.washington.edu/subject/History/RUSA/>)

Provides information written by the Instruction & Research Services Committee of the Reference and User Service Association History Section in the American Library Association. Discusses primary sources on the internet including how to locate them, how to evaluate them, and how to cite them.

Where do I find primary sources?

Today there are many options for locating primary sources. Below are some of the ways students can access primary source materials through the Tribble Library, on the internet, and selected local repositories.

Check the bibliographies of secondary sources. The authors have done the research and tell you where to find it. Check the [online catalog](#) to see if the library has the sources the author listed, use the interlibrary loan system to try and get the materials from another library, and look at any websites listed.

Use the library's online catalog (<http://read.cnu.edu>)

The online catalog is a search engine of the print and media resources owned by the library. Suggested terms to look for include - *diary, diaries, letters, papers, documents, documentary or correspondence.*

Combine these these terms with the event or person you are researching.

For example: **civil war diary** as a keyword search leads you to resources such as:

Captain Greenlee Davidson, C.S.A. : diary and letters, 1851-1863 / [compiled by] Charles W. Turner. (Rare Books [E605 .D26 1975](#))

A diary from Dixie, as written by Mary Boykin Chesnut, wife of James Chesnut, Jr., United States senator from South Carolina, 1859-1861, and afterward an aide to Jefferson Davis and a brigadier-general in the Confederate army ; ed. by Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avary. (General Collection [E487.C524 D5](#))

A Confederate girl's diary [microform] / by Sarah Morgan Dawson ; with an introduction by Warrington Dawson and with illustrations. (Microforms [MICRO LAC 16356](#))

Also search by subject for specific people and events, then scan the titles for those keywords or others such as memoirs, autobiography, report, or personal narratives.

For example: a subject search for **Kennedy, John F.** leads to:

Report of the Warren Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy. Introd. by Harrison E. Salisbury . With additional material prepared by the New York times exclusively for this edition. (General Collection [E842.9 .A55 1964](#))

Letters to Kennedy / John Kenneth Galbraith ; edited by James Goodman.

(General Collection [E842 .A4 1998](#))

Search for specific people that you are aware of that were involved in the event, knew the person, or for the person himself as authors.

For example: an author search on **Nixon, Richard** leads to:

RN : the memoirs of Richard Nixon . (General Collection [E856 .A35 1988](#))

And an author search on **Liddy, G. Gordon** leads to:

Will : the autobiography of G. Gordon Liddy . (General Collection [E860.L713 W6](#))

Examples of Primary Sources available in the Tribble Library

General

Great Books of the Western World (General Collection [AC1.G786](#))

A 54 volume set that includes, among others,

Dialogues / translated by Benjamin Jowett. *The seventh letter* / translated by J. Harward. [Plato] (v. 7)

A letter concerning toleration . [Translated by William Popple] *Concerning civil government, second essay* . *An essay concerning human understanding* . By John Locke. *The principles of human knowledge* , by George Berkeley. *An enquiry concerning human understanding* , by David Hume. (v. 35)

American state papers . [*Declaration of independence* , *Articles of confederation* and the *U.S. Constitution*] *The Federalist* , by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay. *On liberty, Representative government [and] Utilitarianism* , by John Stuart Mill. (v. 43)

The origin of species by means of natural selection . *The descent of man and selection in relation to sex* . [Charles Darwin] (v. 49)

Capital , by Karl Marx. Edited by Friedrich Engels. [Translated from the 3d German ed. by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. Rev., with additional translation from the 4th German ed., by Marie Sachey and Herbert Lamm] *Manifesto of the Communist Party* , by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. [Translated by Samuel Moore, and edited by Friedrich Engels] (v. 50)

Major works. [Sigmund Freud] (v. 54)

Harvard Classics (General Collection [AC1.H339](#))

A 45 volume set that includes, among others,

The autobiography of Benjamin Franklin (v. 1)

An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations / by Adam Smith (v. 10)

The voyage of the Beagle / by Charles Darwin (v. 29)

American historical documents, 1000-1904 (v. 43)

American

American history told by contemporaries / edited by Albert Bushnell Hart. (General Collection [E173.H325](#))

I. Era of colonization, 1492-1689.--II. Building of the republic, 1689-1783.--III. National expansion, 1783-1845.--IV. Welding of the nation, 1845-1900.--v. Twentieth century United States, 1900-1929.

The complete works of Captain John Smith (1580-1631) / edited by Philip L. Barbour. (General Collection [F229.S652 C65 1986](#)) 3 volume set

Diary and autobiography of John Adams / L.H. Butterfield, editor ; Leonard C. Faber and Wendell D. Garrett, assistant editors.

(General Collection [E322.A3 B988 D5](#))

v. 1. Diary, 1755-1770 -- v. 2. Diary, 1771-1781 -- v. 3. Diary, 1782-1804. Autobiography to October 1776 -- v. 4. Autobiography, 1777-1780.

Documentary history of the Truman presidency / general editor, Dennis Merrill. (General Non-Circulating [E813.D56 1995](#)) 30 volume set

Documentary source book of American history, 1606-1926 , edited with notes by William MacDonald. (Reference [E173 .M135](#))

Documents of American History (Reference [E173.C734 D6](#)) V.1 (To 1898) and V.2 (2. Since 1898)

Early western travels, 1748-1846 : a series of annotated reprints of some of the best and rarest contemporary volumes of travel : descriptive of the Aborigines and social and economic conditions in the middle and far west, during the period of early American settlement / edited with notes, introduction, index, etc., by Reuben Gold Thwaites. (General Collection [F592 .T54](#)) 10 volume set

Letters of Louis D. Brandeis . Edited by Melvin I. Urofsky and David W. Levy. (General Collection [E664.B819 A4](#)) 3 volume set

Library of American Civilization (LAC)

A title search on [Library of American Civilization](#) will allow you to browse through the over 9000 titles included in this collection of microfiche.

Print indexes to the LAC are also available in the library's microform area with a second copy on the print index shelves:

The microbook library of American civilization . ([E178 .M626](#))

[v.1.] Author catalog -- [v.2.] Title catalog -- [v.3.] Subject catalog -- [v.4.] Biblioguide index.

Many of the titles included in this set are also available online. Terry Ballard at Quinnipiac University has compiled a [list](#)

(<http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x1849.xml>)

Official records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion . Ser. 1, v. 1-27; Ser. 2, v. 1-3 (General Non-Circulating [E591 .U58](#))

Official records of the Union and Confederate navies in the war of the rebellion : Ser. I, v. 1-27, Ser. II, v. 1-3 / Published under the direction of the ... Secretary of the Navy by Richard Rush ... [et al.] (Nautical [E591 .U54 1987](#)) multi-volume sets

The papers of Ulysses S. Grant . Edited by John Y. Simon. (General Collection [E660 .G756 1967](#)) 16 volume set

Runaway slave advertisements : a documentary history from the 1730s to 1790 / compiled by Lathan A. Windley. (General Collection [E446 .W73 1983](#))

Speeches and orations of John Warwick Daniel , comp. by his son, Edward M. Daniel. (General Collection [E661.D184 S7](#))

The War of the Rebellion : a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies / prepared under the direction of the Secretary of War by Robert N. Scott. Washington, Govt. Print. Off., 1880-1900. (General Non-Circulating [E464 .U6 1971](#)) multi-volume set with a Supplement set

Virginia

Official letters of the governors of the State of Virginia . (General Collection [F221.V817 O3](#))

v. 1. The letters of Patrick Henry.--v. 2. The letters of Thomas Jefferson.--v. 3. The letters of Thomas Nelson and Benjamin Harrison.

Virginia historical index ... by E.G. Swem.. (Reference [F221 .S974](#) v.1 and v.2)

Not a primary source itself, but an index to several works containing primary source materials on Virginia such as [The Virginia magazine of history and biography](#) (Periodicals), [Virginia historical register](#) (Reference F221 .V819), [Hening's Statutes at large, being a collection of all the laws of Virginia, 1619-1792](#) (Reference KfV2425.2 1809 and Rare Books KfV2425.2 1619a), and [Calendar of Virginia State papers and other manuscripts preserved in the Capitol at Richmond, 1652-1869](#) (Reference F221 V817).

World

Calendar of state papers, domestic series, of the reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth [and James I] 1547-1625 : preserved in the State Paper Department of Her Majesty's Public Record Office / edited by Robert Lemon. (General Non-Circulating [DA25 .E3 1967](#)) 12 volume set

A descriptive catalogue of the works of the Camden Society : stating the nature of their principal contents, the periods of time to which they relate, the dates of their composition, their manuscript sources, authors, and editors, accompanied by a classified arrangement and an index, and by some illustrative particulars that have arisen since their publication / by John Gough Nichols.
(General Non-Circulating [DA20 .R91 1st Ser.](#)) Multi-volume set. See [Catalog](#) for individual volume titles.

English historical documents / general editor, David C. Douglas. (General Collection [DA26 .E58](#)) 10 volume set

Historic documents of Year (General Non-Circulating [E839.5 .H57](#)) Multi-volume set

Horace Walpole's correspondence with George Selwyn, Lord Lincoln, Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, Henry Fox [and] Richard Edgcumbe .
Edited by W. S. Lewis and Robert A. Smith. (General Collection [DA483.W2 A41 v.30](#))

The Lisle letters / edited by Muriel St. Clare Byrne. (General Collection [DA335.L5 L771](#)) 6 volume set

The major international treaties of the twentieth century : a history and guide with texts / edited by J.A.S. Grenville and Bernard Wasserstein.
(Reference [JX171 .G828 2001](#))

Memoirs of Louis XIV and the regency, by the Duke of Saint- Simon , translated by Bayle St. John, with a special introduction by Léon Vallée.
(General Collection [DC130.S2 A3 M5](#)) 2 volume set

They saw it happen : an anthology of eye-witnesses' accounts of events in British history, 1689-1897 / by T. Charles-Edwards and B. Richardson ; with a foreword by David Mathew. (General Collection [DA470.C477 T4](#))

[Uncovered Editions](#) . See the online catalog for specific titles and call numbers.

"... are historic official papers which have not previously been available in a popular form. The books have been chosen for the quality of their story-telling. Some subjects are familiar, but others are less well known." [from the [Uncovered Editions](#) website (http://www.timcoatesbooks.com/uncovered/uncovered_main.html)]

[Works issued by the Hakluyt Society](#) . See the online catalog for specific titles and call numbers.

"The Hakluyt Society publishes historical accounts of travel and explorations, and voyages of discovery." [From the [Society's](#) website (<http://www.hakluyt.com/index.htm>)]

Ancient

Ancient records of Egypt; historical documents from the earliest times to the Persian conquest, collected, edited, and translated with commentary, / by James Henry Breasted. (General Collection [DT57.B828 A5](#)) 5 volume set.

The complete works of Aristotle : the revised Oxford translation / edited by Jonathan Barnes. (Aristotle 384-322 B.C.)
(General Collection [B407 .S6 1984](#)) 2 volume set

The Jugurthine War [and] The conspiracy of Catiline . Translated, with an introd. by S. A. Handford. (Sallust 86-34 B.C.)
(General Collection [DG207.S169 H236 1963](#))

[Loeb Classical Library](#) . See the online catalog for specific titles and call numbers.

"The Loeb Classical Library® is the only series of books which, through original text and English translation, gives access to all that is important in Greek and Latin literature. Epic and lyric poetry; tragedy and comedy; history, travel, philosophy, and oratory; the great medical writers and mathematicians; those Church fathers who made particular use of pagan culture--in short, our entire classical heritage is represented here in convenient and well-printed pocket volumes in which an up-to-date text and accurate and literate English translation face each other page by page. The editors provide substantive introductions as well as essential critical and explanatory notes and selective bibliographies." [From the [Loeb](#) website (<http://www.hup.harvard.edu/loeb/>)]

Speeches

General Speeches

[Vital Speeches of the Day](#) (check for [Journal Finder](#) for availability dates)

The publishers of Vital Speeches believe that "the important addresses of the recognized leaders of public opinion constitute the best expressions of contemporary thought in America, and that it is extremely important for the welfare of the nation that these speeches be permanently recorded and disseminated." [From the [Vital Speeches](#) website (<http://www04.mcmurry.com/product/VITAL/>)]

The world's best orations; from the earliest period to the present time . David J. Brewer, editor; Edward A. Allen, William Schuyler, associate editors.
(General Collection [PN6121 B847 W9](#)) multi-volume set

Lend me your ears : great speeches in history / selected and introduced by William Safire. (Reference [PN6122 .L4 1992](#))

Representative American speeches. (General Collection [PS668 .R46](#))

The world's great speeches . (General Collection [PN6121 C782 W9](#))

Multicultural and Women's Speeches

The voice of Black America; major speeches by Negroes in the United States, 1797-1971 . Edited, and with commentary by Philip S. Foner.
(Reference [E185.F673 V8](#).)

Voices of multicultural America : notable speeches delivered by African, Asian, Hispanic, and Native Americans, 1790-1995 / Deborah Gillan Straub, editor. (Reference [PS663.M55 V64 1996](#))

Indian oratory ; [electronic resource] : famous speeches by noted Indian chieftains [by] W.C. Vanderwerth. Foreword by William R. Carmack.
Available via CNU's [NetLibrary](#) subscription (<http://0-www.netlibrary.com.read.cnu.edu/>)

Man cannot speak for her / Karlyn Kohrs Campbell. [Volume II - Key texts of early feminists] (General Collection [HQ1154 .C28 1989](#) V.2)

We shall be heard : an index to speeches by American women, 1978 to 1985 / by Beverley Manning. (Reference [PS408 .M37 1988](#))
Does not contain the actual speeches, but provides information on where to locate them.

British Speeches

Orations of British orators, including biographical and critical sketches ; with a special introduction by Julian Hawthorne.
(General Collection [PN6121 .O64](#))

Greek and Roman Speeches

Greek orations; Lysias, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Aeschines, Hyperides and Letter of Philip / edited, with an introd. by W. Robert Connor.
(General Collection [PA3481.C752 G7](#))

Greek political oratory ; selected and translated with an introduction by A. N. W. Saunders. (General Collection [PA3634.S257 G7](#).)

In praise of later Roman emperors : the Panegyrici Latini : introduction, translation, and historical commentary, with the Latin text of R.A.B. Mynors / C.E.V. Nixon and Barbara Saylor Rodgers. (General Collection [PA6166 .P36 1994](#))

Newspapers

The full-text of back issues of some newspapers are available in Tribble Library.

The New York Times

Microfilm (September 18, 1851 - December 31, 2006) [Paper copy is retained for one month]
[Proquest Historical New York Times](#) (September 18, 1851-December 31, 2004) [Subscription Database]
[Newsbank Access World News](#) (January 1, 2000 - Current) [Subscription Database]
[Factiva](#) (Rolling 90 days available) [Subscription Database]

The (London) Times

Microfilm (1969-1978)
[The Times Digital Archive](#) (1785-1985) [Subscription Database]

The Virginia Gazette
Microfilm (1736-1780)
[Online](#) (1753-1780) [Free Online Resource]

The Wall Street Journal
Microfilm (1965 - 2006) [Paper copy is retained for one month]
[Factiva](#) (June 13, 1979 - Current) [Subscription Database]
[Proquest](#) (January 2, 1984 - Current) [Subscription Database]

The Washington Post
Microfilm (1977 - December 31, 2006) [Paper copy is retained for one month]
[Newsbank Access World News](#) (January 1, 1977 - Current) [Subscription Database]
[Factiva](#) (January 1, 1984 - Current) [Subscription Database]

Other Newspapers

[Newsbank Access World News](#), [LexisNexis Academic](#) and [Factiva](#) are databases to which the library subscribes where you can find electronic back issues of various newspapers. Go to the database to see the available titles or use [Journal Finder](#) to look up a specific title.

Subscription Databases

Trible Library subscribes to a number of resources through which you may be able to locate primary source materials. Below are some of the databases and information on what you may be able to locate there. Other databases may contain re-prints of primary source materials located in a journal article on a specific topic.

[Congressional Universe from LexisNexis](#)
Provides access to laws, bills, the Congressional Record, etc.

[Factiva](#)
Primarily a business database, Factiva does contain the full-text from a number of newspapers.

[Facts.com World News Digest](#)
Click the *Historic Documents* link Under the *Special Features* section. Documents can be browsed by year or by title. Contains documents from the Mayflower Compact in 1620 to documents related to current issues.

[HarpWeek](#)
Digital access to Harper's Weekly - "America's leading 19th century illustrated newspaper."
Available dates: 1857-1865 (The Civil War Era), 1866-1871 (Reconstruction I), and 1872-1877 (Reconstruction II).

[JSTOR](#)
This journal database contains issues of scholarly journals, many dating back to the 1800's. Not everything in JSTOR is a primary source, but primary source materials may be available in these early issues or even as reprinted or excerpted materials in later issues.

[LexisNexis Academic](#)
Provides access to newspapers and legal documents, as well as business information.

[New York Times](#) (1851-2004)
Provides digital images of the New York Times newspaper. Can be searched or browsed.

[Newsbank](#)

Access World News

Access the full-text of newspaper articles from local, regional, and international papers.

Business Newsbank

Newspaper articles specifically geared toward business related topics.

[The Times Digital Archives](#)

Provides digital images of the (London Times) newspaper. Can be searched or browsed. Sunday dates are not available.

Internet Sites

Use the drop down filter menu to select a subject or browse through the all the listing. A [Google Custom Search](#) is also available.

Other Local Resources for Primary Source Materials

Information about finding materials in local libraries, archives, repositories, etc

Christopher Newport University - Tribble Library Archives (<http://library.cnu.edu/archives.html>)

Materials focus mainly on Christopher Newport University, for example, student and faculty publications. In addition the archives contains music collections, including Cary McMurrin, Harold Chapman and Josephine Hughes collections.

College of William and Mary - Swem Library (<http://swem.wm.edu/>)

"The [Special Collections](#) in the Earl Gregg Swem Library of the College of William and Mary in Virginia define and enhance the history of the University and promote and preserve the scholarly pursuits of its faculty, students, alumni, visiting scholars, and friends. The Special Collections contribute to the excellence of our scholarly reputation by providing the College with the rare books and unique manuscript and archival materials that make primary research possible."

The available collections include: The Martha Barksdale Papers, The Papers of the Jamestown Corporation, as well as other [Manuscript Collections](#).

This library also serves as a Federal Depository Library.

Hampton Public Library Special Collections: The Virginiana Room (<http://www.hamptonpubliclibrary.org/special/virginiana.html>)

A collection of materials on local history and genealogy.

Hampton University - Harvey Library (<http://www.hamptonu.edu/universityservices/library/>)

The Peabody Collection (<http://www.hamptonu.edu/universityservices/library/Collections/Peabody.html>)

"The Peabody Collection is a distinctive group of African American resources housed in the William R. and Norma B. Harvey Library at Hampton University. The collection contains more than 30,000 items by and about African Americans. This includes about 21,300 monographs, 1,200 anti-slavery pamphlets, vertical file

materials, and other documents on slavery and the Reconstruction period in the United States."

Government Documents (<http://www.hamptonu.edu/universityservices/library/Collections/Government.html>)

"In 1977, the Federal Government designated Hampton University as a Selective Depository for housing government publications. We currently select, receive, and retain approximately 22 % of the items that are distributed by the United States Government Printing Office (GPO). The collection includes maps, posters, microfiche, publications in print, and electronic information found on the Internet."

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library (Colonial Williamsburg) (<http://research.history.org/JDRLibrary.cfm/>)

Opened in April 1997, the Library collects, at a single location, various informational resources on the culture and history of colonial British America, the American Revolution, and the early United States. It includes collections of books, journals, manuscripts, visual resources, and online services. The Library is available for "scholars, advanced students, the Foundation's staff, and the public." The site provides information on accessing the variety of sources available as well as links to internet sites. Please note that some of the sites are subscription databases and restricted. Also provides access to the library's Digital Archive.

The Library of Virginia (<http://www.lva.lib.va.us/>)

The LVA is located in Richmond. It contains a vast array of materials that would be useful in the study of Virginia History, among other things. The website provides information about a number of the collections available in the Library. Some of these collections are available online, but be aware that not all of the collections are indexed or made available online. It is possible to contact the Library to see if they would have information of use before making plans to visit.

Local Historical Societies in Virginia (<http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whoweare/directories/vhs/>)

This website from the Library of Virginia provides a list of local Virginia Historical Societies. Contact information as well as a website and e-mail are provided if available. Historical societies can often provide access to unique primary source documents.

Mariners' Museum Library & Archives (<http://www.mariner.org/library/>)

"... holds the largest maritime history collection in the Western Hemisphere." The collection includes over 1,750,000 items ranging from books and magazines, to rare materials, vessel plans, and photographs. The website provides access to the Library's online catalog and finding aids. An image database is also available for searching.

Newport News Public Library's Main Street Library Virginiana Room (<http://www.newport-news.va.us/library/virgrm/virgana.htm>)

A collection containing books, manuscripts, maps, and more on the history of Newport News and Virginia.

Norfolk State University Lyman Beecher Brooks Library (<http://spartan270.nsu.edu/>)

[Harrison B. Wilson Archives](#) "holds various forms of items including books, manuscripts, photographs, maps, microfilm, folklore items, state documents, and University records."

Old Dominion University Libraries (<http://www.lib.odu.edu/>)

[Special Collections](#) - "The Special Collections houses the University Archives, Manuscripts, and books and printed material relating to Virginia and Tidewater History. The University Archives includes the non-current permanent records of the university, theses and dissertations, oral histories, year books, course catalogs, university publications, and photographs of yesterday and today. The Manuscripts contain diaries, letters, legal and campaign files, photographs, and maps that document such subjects as the Civil War, Virginia politics, military history, African-American history, Norfolk urban redevelopment, women's history, and local history."

This library also serves as a Federal Depository Library.

Virginia Historical Society (<http://www.vahistorical.org/>)

The Society's mission "is to collect, preserve, and interpret the commonwealth's past for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations." In order to accomplish this goal the Society gives lectures, seminars, conferences and provides consulting services; publishes teaching materials and provides training for teachers; it also supports scholarly research through a fellowship program and minority internships. The Society has museum of exhibits, operates a research library and has a publication program. The site provides access to a searchable database of the library's collections.

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