

### History Sources and Where to Get Them!!

Historians use two types of sources—primary and secondary. As you know by now you will use secondary sources for much of your paper, but you are required to use some primary sources.

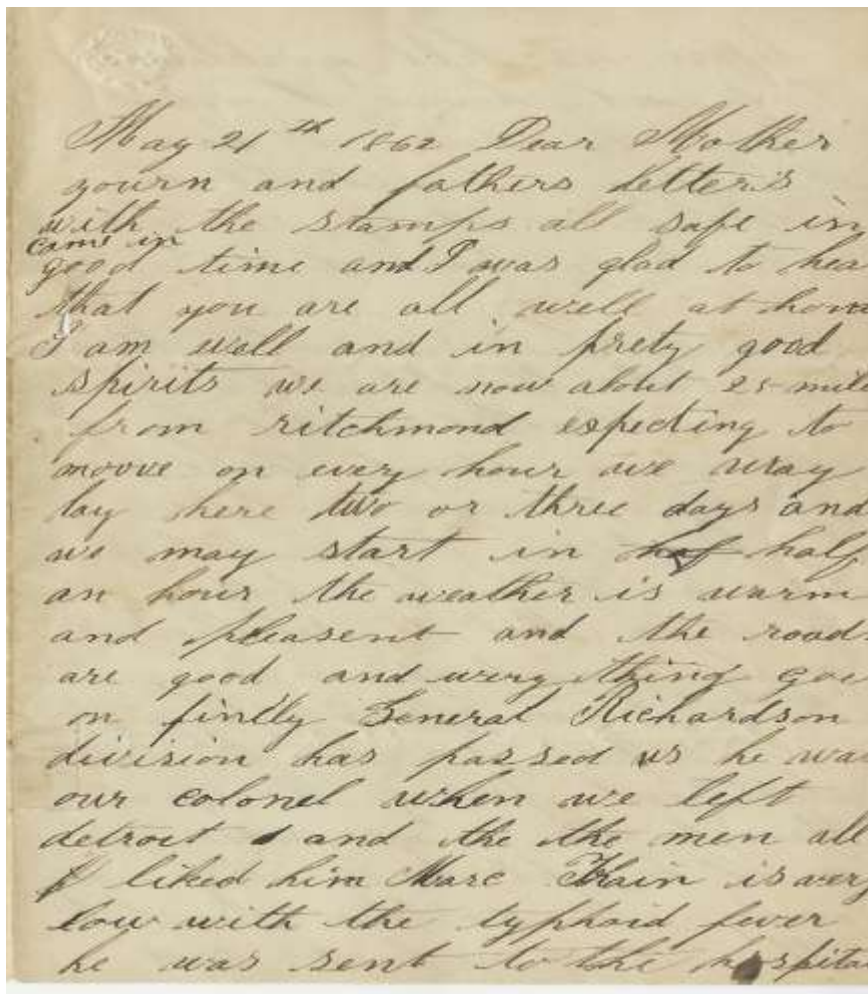
#### Primary Sources

A primary source in history is a source created by people during the time you are studying.

Here are some examples of a letter written in 1862:

..the original hand written letter from Frank Mottly, 2nd Michigan Infantry, written to his mother on May 21, 1862, and archived in readable condition is an excellent example of a primary source. (Exhibit A—available in the original in Dr. Holland's office)

..a photographed image of Mottly's same hand written letter, posted in print or online is also an excellent example of a primary source. (Exhibit B. below)



May 21<sup>st</sup> 1862 Dear Mother  
your and fathers letters  
with the stamps all safe in  
<sup>came in</sup> good time and I was glad to hear  
that you are all well at home  
I am well and in pretty good  
spirits we are now about 25 miles  
from richmond expecting to  
move on every hour we may  
lay here two or three days and  
we may start in half  
an hour the weather is warm  
and pleasant and the roads  
are good and every thing goes  
on finely General Richardson  
division has passed us he was  
our colonel when we left  
detroit and the the men all  
I liked him Marc Chain is very  
low with the typhoid fever  
he was sent to the hospital

..a typed transcript of Mottly's letter published either offline or online is another example of a primary source.

In these examples you have the same primary source as an original, as an online image, and as a transcribed source.

The original letter is relatively easy to use and to verify as long as the letter is held in a reputable archive. The photographed source (B) is also similarly reliable, except that one must verify that all of the document is included in the image (the image above is only a partial scan), and that the print or online source has proper permission to use the image. As we move further from the original, we sometimes lose some of the veracity of the primary source, so be aware. If you use a transcribed copy of the letter then the same cautions apply, plus you must verify that the transcription is likely an accurate one.

Examples of primary sources for this research project abound:

- ..Civil War cookbooks, diaries, letters (found mostly online)
- ..Official Civil War Records (print and online)
- ..photographs of the war (print and online)
- ..sketches of Civil War battles (found mostly online)
- ..maps of Civil War engagements (found mostly online)
- ..official congressional records of Union and Confederate governments (found mostly online)
- ..published autobiographies of people from the era (print and online)

Each primary source above can be found in original formats, in print or online images of originals, and various forms of transcribed formats.

Sometimes people of a subsequent era create primary sources to celebrate or remember a past era. For example, artists in the 1880s may have depicted a Civil War battle fought in 1863. Or Ulysses Grant may have written an autobiography telling his vision of the war. These too can become primary sources.

Since you cannot travel to research libraries and archives, this course guides you to substantial online sources. See *Web Resources for History Students* inside the course.

### Secondary Sources

You will also use secondary sources. Usually these are books or articles written by professional historians about the subject you are studying. Consult the bibliography in your course text for ideas here. Also *Creating a Working Bibliography* inside the course. Most of these books are available in the MTC library as a library holding or as an inter library loan. You also have access to other local libraries for secondary sources.

### Plan Your Sources

You are required to use a minimum of six sources, excluding the course text book. Think this over and plan a methodical search for the best materials. Of the six, one must be an online source, but in reality you may use mostly online sources. Of the six, two must be primary sources. Depending on your thesis and topic, here is a possible plan:

...one secondary source (a book or article by a historian) for general background of the topic, the battle, the issue, the person.

...one secondary source (a book or article by a historian) specifically written as close to your topic as possible.

...a third secondary source (a book or article by a historian) that disagrees with or challenges your thesis.

...two online sources that are primary sources related to your topic—you may have to be creative here are search for online letters or other online testimony as examples related to your thesis.