How to Find Primary Sources(History)

Primary sources are:

- materials created by participants or witnesses of the event(s) under study
- original records created at the time the historical events occurred
- raw data for the historian

Secondary sources are:

- works that discuss a subject, but which are written after the time that the event(s) occurred - [by someone other than an eyewitness]
- works that contain explanations/judgements of past events
- works that explain or interpret primary sources

What Are Some Examples of Primary Sources
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cabinet papers	diplomatic dispatches
laws	parish records
parliamentary debates	ambassador's reports
treaties	Official records

Printed sources:

newspapers	speeches
autobiographies	pamphlets/treatises

Private sources:

letters	diaries

How Do I Find Primary Sources?

1. Use the Library Catalogue to find books related to your topic.
   - Use keywords that describe your topic together with any/some of the following words:

Autobiography/Autobiographies	Letter/Letters
Biography	Personal narratives
Correspondence	Public opinion
Diary/Diaries	Sources
Interview/Interviews	Speech/Speeches
Journal	

   - Example: **cold war and (letter$ or narrative$ or correspondence)**
     and click on: Search Everything
   - (**$** (dollar sign) is the **wildcard/truncation symbol** in the catalogue, and would retrieve
     "letter" or "letters", etc.)
   - Look at the **publication dates** of the book and the **birth/death dates** of the author:

     The date of the **original publication** may give you an indication that you have a primary
     source. Look for the publication date or a note about the original publication.
     If the birth and death dates of the author are such that he/she lived during the time of your
     event you may have a primary source.

   - Look at **notes** in the record:

     There may be notes in the record which describe the material and give clues as to whether or
     not it is a primary source. For instance, if there is a note indicating that the work is a
     facsimile or a **reprint**, then you may have a primary source.

2. Use a newspaper index to locate newspaper articles. Use the index for the years when your event
   took place.
   - The Library has a number of such indexes, including:

     The New York Times article archive (1851-

   - The QEII Library has the newspaper from 1857 to date.

     The Times (London) Index (1785-   Ref AI 21 T46

   - The QEII Library has the newspaper from 1785 to date.
   - The Library also has a number of newspapers (national, regional, and local). Most of these do
     not have indexes, but you could scan them for the time period that you are researching. Ask
     at the Research Help Desk for help in identifying these newspapers.
3. Major Collections of Primary Sources on the Internet:
   - Canada in the making
     http://www.canadiana.org/citm
   - CBC Archives
     http://archives.cbc.ca/index.asp?IDLan=1

- BBC Archives
  http://www.bbc.co.uk/cult/treasurehunt/
- Democracy at War: Canadian newspapers and the Second World War
  http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/newspapers/index.html
- Dipolmacy Monitor
  http://www.diplomacymonitor.com/stu/dm.nsf/opener?OpenForm
- Images Canada
  http://www.imagescanada.ca
- American Memory
  http://memory.loc.gov
- EuroDocs: Primary Historical Documents From Western Europe
  http://www.lib.byu.edu/%7Erdh/eurodocs/

4. Subject guides to the Internet are excellent sources of primary documents. Look for words such as *primary*, *archival*, *narrative*, etc. in the descriptions of each web site. These words are usually an indication that you have found a primary source.
   - "History Digital Library" at Academic Info:
     http://www.academicinfo.net/histaalibrary.html
   - "History" at the Librarians' Index to the Internet. Note especially the category "Primary Sources," but primary documents can also be found in other categories.
     http://lii.org/search/file/history
   - "History" at the Internet Public Library. Note especially the category "Historical Documents & Sources," but primary documents can also be found in the other categories.
     http://www.ipl.org/div/subject/browse/hum30.00.00/

5. Last, but not least, search engines are useful when researching a narrow topic or trying to locate a specific document, e.g. vimy ridge primary documents.
   - Google
     www.google.com