

Volume II - Guide to Designing Curriculum

Honoring Tribal Legacies: An Epic Journey of Healing



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Front Cover art: Nez Perce Village at Ahsahka (where the North Fork of the Clearwater meets the Clearwater) circa 1805. Image courtesy of the National Park Service, Nez Perce National Historical Park. Nakia Williamson-Cloud, artist.

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CHAPTER 4

Primary Sources For American Indian Research



Carol Anne Buswell, MA,
Education Specialist, National Archives

Introduction

Academics, educators, and most school children know primary sources are very important for conducting research and providing information for writing projects. In spite of this, many (if not most) are puzzled as to how to find them and exactly how to treat them when they are finally found. A few *potential* historians may not even be absolutely sure they could identify a primary source if they saw one.¹ In addition, when looking for primary sources about American Indians, the records themselves are often hidden under several added layers of complexity. This sometimes leaves even seasoned researchers feeling lost and confused.

The Basics

Definitions

First, the following is a rather general definition of a primary source from Yale University.

Primary sources provide first-hand testimony or direct evidence concerning a topic under investigation. They are created by witnesses or recorders who experienced the events or conditions being documented. Often these sources are created at the time when the events or conditions are occurring, but primary sources can also include autobiographies, memoirs, and oral histories recorded later. Primary sources are characterized by their content, regardless of whether they are available in original format, in microfilm/microfiche, in digital format, or in published format.

(http://www.yale.edu/collections_collaborative/primarysources/primarysources.html)

If you were to tell or write a story about an event in your life, you would be a “primary source.”

You were there at the time and you participated in it yourself.

In order to understand this concept even better, let us look at what a primary source is not. It would go without saying, that a primary source is not a secondary source. So let us look at the definition of a secondary source from Princeton University.

A secondary source interprets and analyzes primary sources. These sources are one or more steps removed from the event. Secondary sources may have pictures, quotes, or graphics of primary sources in them.

Some types of secondary sources include publications, such as textbooks, magazine articles, histories, criticisms, commentaries, and encyclopedias.

Examples of secondary sources include a journal/magazine article which interprets or reviews previous findings, a history textbook, [and] a book about the effects of WWI.

(<http://www.princeton.edu/~refdesk/primary2.html>)

Therefore, going back to the first example, if you were to tell a story in your own words about an event someone else had told you, your story would be a secondary source. Or, if you had read a collection of documents, come to a conclusion and wrote a book, drawn a picture, or sung a song about what you found, that book, picture or song would be a secondary source because your own opinion would now be included in the information.

In conclusion, as long as nobody has interpreted it for you, a government document, letter, photo, cartoon, drawing, painting, oral history, moving picture, object or other material created by someone who was there at the time of the event is usually a primary source.²

For a curriculum designed to teach children the concept of primary and secondary sources, see featured curriculum Exploring Your Own Community (Buswell, 2015) available at HonoringTribalLegacies.com

Careful Analysis of Primary Sources

Now that you have a basic understanding of primary sources, does it mean the information you find there will always be true? Think about this for a minute. Everyone has, at some time in their lives, heard, read or even told stories that are purely fabricated. They may have even sworn the story was true. Government officials, estranged spouses, wayward children, and the rest of humanity might occasionally falsify something as well, even in a primary source document, such as a job application, an IRS Tax Return, or a letter back to the main office. That is why careful analysis is so important.

Doing careful analysis of a source does not need to be difficult. There are basic questions that should always be asked when first examining a document. Think of the journalism questions, who, what, where, when, and why.

1. Who was writing (or photographing, or drawing, or recording, etc.) the source document?
2. What information does the document contain?
3. When was the document created?
4. Where, geographically, was the document recorded? Sometimes documents are recorded far from the actual home of the Tribal community or communities.
5. Where did the subjects of the document actually live?
6. Why was it created? What was its purpose?

After doing this for the first few documents, it seems to come almost automatically and will take only a few minutes.

The next questions that must be asked are also fairly simple and usually become part of an “analysis arsenal” very quickly.

1. Is the document portraying the truth?
 - a. Can you find evidence from other sources to back it up?
 - b. Does it make sense given what is already known about the subject? (However, always be aware that sometimes the source you are analyzing may be the only accurate account available.)
 - c. Do the time-frames match known historical facts?
2. Is the author of the document showing a particular bias?
 - a. Is there evidence of prejudice, either for or against the subject of the document?
 - b. Does he/she have a cause to promote?
 - c. Does the document itself promote or negatively target any particular group?
3. Are there cultural or language differences that need to be taken into account? This question is a little harder and requires some sensitivity and advanced preparation.

You should keep this question in mind when doing secondary source research, early in the process.

Always look for other clues as well, such as signatures and marks. For instance, notes written on a document or stamps placed there might indicate additional information. It is very easy to completely overlook these marks. Sometimes they are very important or tell a related story. For instance, a document marked “Secret” may be followed at a later date by a “declassification stamp” and date. This could tell you when the public, the press, and legal reviewers were able to actually see the document. Some documents have been kept classified for 50 years or more, making the information virtually inaccessible to the public during that time. Even after a document is “declassified,” it does not follow that the public will become aware of it immediately. It just means they can see it if they can find it in an Archives somewhere.



Figure 1 - Photo of a Japanese Balloon Bomb recovered from the Cheyenne River (South Dakota) Indian Agency in 1945. <http://research.archives.gov/description/285259>. (U.S. National Archives) Near the end of the Second World War, thousands of balloon bombs were released by the Japanese government. Nearly a thousand reached the United States, traveling on trade winds. Amazingly, even the press kept them secret. The U.S. Government felt if the public knew about them, it would threaten national security. Documents regarding the subject of Japanese War Balloons were classified until about 1970. Still, their existence remained virtually unknown for another 20 years. (Mikesh, 1990)

The Importance of Where And When

When looking for primary sources about a particular Native American community or even a larger topic, such as the development of fishing rights, following good basic historical research procedures is important. First, you must start with at least an overall understanding of the Native community or topic in question. This information is usually most efficiently gathered in secondary sources. Study the history of the community or subject. Locate people or events in geographic space. Then relate that geography to a specific time period.

When and *where* events happened are the two most important elements for locating a primary source. The reason for this has to do with the way primary sources are housed. They are usually found in archives, library special collections, historical societies, museums, or Tribal offices. There is one major difference between the records government archives store and those records found in a library special collection, museum, historical society, and the like. Collections of records, such as those found in libraries, museums, and historical societies have been collected based on pre-determined collection rules and availability. The organization may decide that only part of an available collection suits their needs. Therefore, you may find John Doe's original collection split up and residing in more than one university, library, historical society, or museum.

Governments, on the other hand, have a different approach to archiving records. An archives is a repository. Government agencies are required to save all permanent records and send them to their respective archives. A permanent record is one that is deemed necessary for historical, administrative, or day-to-day business. All other records are destroyed. Therefore all permanent government records will be held in their respective archives. Government records are stored approximately as follows:

- 🌐 Federal government permanent records go to the National Archives of the country.
- 🌐 State government permanent records go to the State Archives of that state (such as the Washington State Archives).

🌿 County government permanent records usually go to the county archives of that county (although sometimes they go to the state archives).

🌿 Local government records most often go to a local archives or the county or state archives in which they reside.

The records in both “collections” and “government repositories” most often consist of loose papers, photos, video, audio tapes, maps, or drawings of some kind. They are most often stored in file folders, filing cabinets, boxes, map cases, and the like. They are usually organized in whatever way the original owner or government agency arranged them.

When receiving documents, the first thing the archivist, librarian, or Tribal officer usually does is label them by their “creator.” For instance, in the case of a library Special Collection, if materials were received from the John Doe estate, the first level of organization would be “John Doe.” The records themselves might be records John Doe wrote himself or collected from other sources. The library would probably call them the “John Doe Collection.”

The procedure is much the same when a government archives receives material from a particular government agency. The government archivist labels them by the agency name first, which is essentially the “creator.” Often the specific office of the agency becomes an essential part of the agency designation as well. The documents themselves are carefully maintained in the original filing system and order determined by the “creator.” Over a period of time, they are carefully preserved, usually in acid-free folders, photo protectors, and boxes before they are put on a shelf.

Once the creator is determined and recorded, “series lists” are compiled. Related groups of records within the collection are each called a series. For instance, accounting records would be one series, a photograph collection would be another, recorded oral histories might be another, and correspondence might be another series. If a date range for the records can be identified, it is always attached to the series name. You might end up with something like:

(Creator) Bureau of Indian Affairs, Grand Ronde Siletz Agency, Oregon.

(Series) Land, Resource and Allotment Records, 1870–1954.

There probably will be other series in the same group of records as well. For instance, in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Grand Ronde Siletz Agency, Oregon records there are many more, including:

(Series) Case Files for Grand Ronde, Siletz, and Roseburg Allottees, 1894–1956.³

(Series) Decimal Files, 1897–1955.⁴

Tribal officers, government archivists, or librarians then make a “finding aid,” listing each series under the name of the creator with at least a general description. They then file the boxes away in a specific location in their archives or special collections area so they can be retrieved easily when requested. These areas are usually not open directly to the public. They usually must be requested from the archivist on a form of some kind. Then the archivist or librarian will bring them out on a cart to view in a special, secure room.

Now, the records are ready to be searched. Sometimes there are indexes available within the series, but more often there are none. Some documents may have been scanned and placed online, but often there is limited time or a shortage of funds to finance such a venture.⁵

A Note About Handwriting

It should be noted that older primary sources are usually hand-written. This proves to be a stumbling block for some students. Although transcriptions are sometimes available for more famous documents, the more obscure, ordinary documents usually are not transcribed into typewritten form. Since real ground-breaking historical discoveries are very often found in the obscure and ordinary files, it may be advantageous to give (or receive) instruction for those who cannot read handwriting. There are many cursive handwriting lessons available online.

Explanations for the meanings of old script, which can be challenging for anyone, can be found in several sources. For instance, a tutorial on Old English script can be found at

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/> (National Archives of the UK).

A very interesting online article about the cultural significance of handwriting in early America relating to American Indians in the seventeenth century can be found at

http://cdm.reed.edu/cdm4/indianconverts/studyguides/colonial_american_handwriting/cultural_significance.php (Reed College).

Finding Primary Sources About Native America

Identifying the Subject, Tribe, or Community

As in all research, it is important to narrow your topic so limited research time is well-used and the resulting article, book, paper, blog, etc., is focused enough to be interesting. With Native American research, the methods used to file, arrange, and store their records make this careful approach even more important.

First, American Indian records are most often filed or identified by a Tribe or community in a particular geographic area. This, of course, is partially because Tribes were, from the time of European contact, essentially individual countries. Native government entities potentially had their own treaties with Spain, or Russia, or France, or England, before they made a treaty with the United States.⁶ Even after United States independence, each Tribe was treated separately as an individual foreign country until 1831, when the U.S. Supreme Court declared them all to be “domestic, dependent, Nations” (United States Supreme Court, 1831). The United States continued to make treaties with individual Tribes throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.⁷

Although sometimes more difficult to access and search, records from locations other than the Federal Government, such as Tribal governments, private collections, and state and local governments, often list their materials by individual Tribes, bands, or communities as well. Once again, they focus on time and place and they focus on a single Tribe or small group of Tribal communities. For larger subjects or concepts, it is best to concentrate on a few Tribes to use as examples, at least at first. This will help you find records more quickly and easily.

The Reason Federal Records Are So Important

The permanent records of all United States federal agencies are stored in the National Archives of the United States. The National Archives holds records in one of several physical locations.

Because of the “domestic, dependent, Nations” designation, Tribal governments have always held a unique political position directly under the United States government. Because of this, they were not directly subject to state or local governments until the twentieth century, when they could choose a relationship (or not) for economic or other reasons. Therefore, there are records in the National Archives for Native Americans that are not there for the rest of the population. For instance, birth records, kept in county and state archives for the rest of the population, are sometimes found in the records of the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs records at the National Archives.

Reports of Births and Deaths at
Fort Berthold Indian Agency for March 1889.

Deaths.

Date.	Name.	Trib.	Sex.	Age.	Cause of Death.
March 1 st	Rindaman	S.S.	F.	23	Miscarage.
" 3 rd	Quol	"Res"	S.S.	2	Consumption.
" 4 th	Syn Phrasauk	S.S.	M.	1	Pneumonia.
" 14 th	Yellow Backch	Res	F.	57	(not known).
" 17 th	Mauy goes out	S.S.	F.	7	Pneumonia.
" 19 th	Keas to Ma Woods	Res	F.	28	Pneumonia.
" 13 th	Lean Bear	Mauhan	M.	51	Acute Rheumatism.
" 15 th	Sam Homan	Res	F.	28	Consumption.
" 18 th	Good Bear (chief)	S.S.	M.	2	Pneumonia.
" 20 th	Gene Homan's (chief)	S.S.	F.	2	Pneumonia.
" 26 th	Stank's (daughter)	Res	F.	17	Consumption.
" 30 th	Bessie Smith's child	S.S.	M.	-	Still Born.
" 31 st	Bessie Smith	S.S.	F.	18	Pneumonia hemorrhage.

Births.

Date.	Name of Parents	Sex.	Trib.
March 1 st	Mrs Crowstark	F.	S.S.
" 30 th	Bessie Smith	M.	S.S.

Respectfully,
J. J. Beshm
Agency Physician.

Figure 2. Reports of Births and Deaths, 1886–1890. (Image 21 of 36). Bureau of Indian Affairs. Fort Berthold Agency. <http://research.archives.gov/description/7570279> (U.S. National Archives)

Given this unique relationship between Tribes and the Federal government, it seems as if finding records in the National Archives should be easy.

- ✿ There should be little or no searching through state, county, or local government records.
- ✿ Everything seems as if it should be in one place.
- ✿ Records are becoming more easily accessible online.

To some degree this is true. At the same time, it is also not true. For instance, commercial Internet access is, like everything else, determined by usage and economics. If a Tribe, band, or community has a small population it might not be the first in line to have records included on a commercial, or even a government website.

The truth is, many primary sources for American Indians are still sitting in archives boxes and will not be available online for years. Even when they are online, it is best if you understand the “old ways” of finding documents so you can more quickly and efficiently find them in the online search engines.

Many Federal Agencies

Native American Tribes, bands, and communities have had different sorts of relationships with the federal government. As a result, evidence and documents are residing in the National Archives from several different agencies, depending, again, on place and time. Remember, when looking in archives, you need to search first by the creator of the documents.

The earliest federal records were kept by the *U.S. Department of War* and its sub-department *The Bureau of Indian Trade*. U.S. records from both of these agencies have largely been transferred to the *Bureau of Indian Affairs* (Record Group 75). War Department records include journals and reports. Trading houses (also known as “factories,” and run by “factors” or “traders”) were often the first point of contact between Native communities and Europeans.⁸

The *Bureau of Indian Affairs* has been the primary agency responsible for administering Tribal land, leases, annuities, allotments, removals, BIA schools, special censuses and similar issues

for the Federal Government since 1824. This is the creator that archivists most often refer their patrons to for American Indian records. The *Bureau of Indian Affairs* is known to archivists as “Record Group 75.” It is the primary creator for federally recognized Tribes.

But, what about the treaties? Where are they? What about Tribes that were “terminated” or otherwise lost their federal recognition? What about Tribes who were later restored to federal recognition status? What about Tribal people who traded their allotments for land in the public domain, away from Tribal areas? What about Tribes who refused to move to a reservation and disappeared into the general population? Where are their records? And where are those famous photographs of Native chiefs and ambassadors to Washington D.C. that are seen so frequently on the web? Are they in the Bureau of Indian Affairs records? Are they somewhere else? Are there photos of ordinary Tribal citizens? Where are they?

The truth is most are stored in the National Archives in the records of *other* Federal agencies, such as the *Records of the U.S. Government* (Record Group 11, where all original treaties between the US and other countries as well as with American Indian Tribes are kept), the *Records of the Bureau of Land Management*, *Records of the U.S. District Courts*, *Records of the Bureau of the Census*, *Records of the Department of the Interior*, *Records of the Smithsonian Institution: Bureau of Ethnography* (photographs), the *Records of the U.S. Signal Officer* (photographs), the *Records of the National Park Service* and many others. (See Buswell, Appendix, for a list of relevant federal agencies.)

For Tribes who have been terminated or otherwise lost their federal recognition, there are the records of the *U.S. Census*, the *Bureau of Land Management*, and hundreds of other agencies whose records record the general population. Tribes that have been restored in the twentieth century have records, but they usually are not stored at the National Archives. Their records ordinarily remain with the *U.S. District Courts*, the *Bureau of Land Management*, and the *Bureau of Indian Affairs* themselves, as well as in other federal agencies. Usually, they were created too recently and have not yet been released to the National Archives.

When searching primary source documents in person, remember the highest level of archival, special collection, or museum organization will probably be the “creator” of the document.

- 🌀 Ask an archivist or librarian to suggest appropriate “creators.”
- 🌀 Choose a creator to search.
- 🌀 Ask the archivist or librarian to locate appropriate “finding aids” that list the series filed under that creator.
- 🌀 Search the series listings and their descriptions.
- 🌀 Request the documents.
- 🌀 Look through documents in person or hire someone to do it for you. (Sometimes hiring a professional researcher is less expensive than traveling to a distant facility).

Physical Locations of Original Federal Agency Documents at the National Archives

The National Archives holds over 12 billion original paper documents, as well as digitized copies and records that were “born digital.” These documents take up a lot of space. In an attempt to “regionalize” many records, separate facilities were built across the United States at various times. There are facilities located in Washington, D.C. ; College Park, Maryland; Boston, Massachusetts; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Atlanta, Georgia; New York, New York; Kansas City, Missouri; Chicago, Illinois; Fort Worth, Texas; San Francisco, California; Riverside, California; Seattle, Washington; and St Louis, Missouri.

Each of these facilities (except those in Washington, D.C. ; College Park, Maryland; and St. Louis, Missouri) holds records from federal agency field offices located in the states within a specific geographic region. Washington, D.C. , on the other hand, holds early administrative records of all federal agencies across the entire United States, as well as more modern records of agencies in outlying areas, such as Alaska. College Park, Maryland holds more modern administrative records of all federal agencies, as well as most photographs, moving pictures, cartographic records, electronic records, and sound recordings. St. Louis, Missouri, holds modern military records, particularly records of individual service performed since World War I.

The records you are seeking might be in any of these locations. For a listing of *Bureau of Indian Affairs* records by state and Tribe, see <http://www.archives.gov/research/Native-americans/bia.html>. For a listing of local facilities of the National Archives and the states whose records they hold see Buswell (2015) or look for the facility nearest you at <http://www.archives.gov/locations/>.

The National Archives Online Catalog

It is a good idea to keep all possible federal agencies in mind when searching the National Archives Online Catalog, also known as Online Public Access (OPA).

- 🌀 When searching the *National Archives' Online Catalog* at www.archives.gov/research/search, a broad search is possible, but topics are not clearly defined so your results may be variable. For instance, by using a simple term, such as “Choctaw,” only series descriptions or individual documents that have been *identified* as “Choctaw” will appear.⁹
- 🌀 An even better approach is to type in the name of the Tribe and the word “Indian.” Records in the National Archives usually refer to Native Americans by this term, probably due to the existence of the *Bureau of Indian Affairs*.
- 🌀 Better yet is to conduct an advanced search and focus your search by federal agency, Record Group Number, or Tribal name. Use several different search terms, not simply the first one that comes to mind. Also, consider using two-word searches.
- 🌀 When searching the Bureau of Indian Affairs, first go to <http://www.archives.gov/research/Native-americans/bia.html> to identify all possible agencies who may have administered the business of the community over time. Then use the agency names in the Online Catalog search box. Bureau of Indian Affairs agency offices were also known as an “agency,” “subagency,” “Superintendency,” or “Area Office.”

Always keep in mind that only a small percentage of existing primary sources about any Tribe is on line at the National Archives at this time.

DOCSTEACH.ORG

Another National Archives resource, created especially for teachers and students, is DocsTeach at www.docsteach.org. The Native American related documents have been selected specifically to give a small representation of records from every Bureau of Indian Affairs agency for which digital images have been included in the Online Catalog. This, at the very least, can give you an idea of what is available.

Treaties, photographs, and other relevant documents are being added to DocsTeach on a regular basis. There is a special Native American landing page on DocsTeach at <http://docsteach.org/home/Native-americans>, where one can focus a search even more. DocsTeach is also available as an iPad application, so it can be used by teachers and students alike. The documents and activities on both the website and the iPad app have been meta-tagged, so topic searches are often quick and easy.

National Archives Social Media, Publications, and Exhibit Sites

Collections of documents from the National Archives can be found in various places organized by topic. These are not consistent for every Native community, but can be useful when they are available. For instance, the National Archives is represented on many social media websites. Most of them can be found listed at the bottom of the main Archives webpage at www.archives.gov. These can be important for various reasons.

- Long videos are sometimes placed on the National Archives' YouTube Channel, while the Online Catalog may only contain a short clip. All YouTube Channels from the National Archives are available at <http://www.archives.gov/social-media/youtube.html>

- Portions of exhibits created by one of the National Archives offices across the country are sometimes included on the National Archives' Flickr Channel and nowhere else. Other materials are added by the National Archives regularly. Starting at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usnationalarchives/>, type in U.S. National Archives Indian (or the name of a Tribal community).

🌐 *Prologue Magazine*, published regularly for over 40 years, is partially represented on line and contains articles, usually written by archivists, giving background information and several primary sources on a specific topic. Use the general search box in the upper right hand corner of the main website at www.archives.gov to search this publication. Use “Prologue” as one of your search terms.

🌐 Several blogs are regularly written by National Archives staff members. These discuss primary sources by topic or highlight one interesting document. Use the general search box in the upper right hand corner of the main website at www.archives.gov to search for specific articles. Use “blog” as one of your search terms, and then “Indian” or a Tribal name.

🌐 Online exhibits produced by the National Archives can be located on the main website or in other locations on the web. A central location for finding these records is at <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/index.html>. The newest exhibit, “Records of Rights,” includes a significant American Indian section.

Presidential Libraries

The Presidential Libraries and Museums (Herbert Hoover through George W. Bush) represent an important subdivision of the National Archives. Each library or museum holds materials collected by or for that specific U.S. President. Following is a list of the Presidential Libraries holding significant primary sources relating to Native Americans during the President’s term in office. Check their search engines, finding aids, and subject guides. The term “American Indian” is the most profitable search term; however you may need to try others. Occasionally a subject guide or guide to holdings must be located first.

🌐 Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org>.

🌐 Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home,
<http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov>.

🌐 John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, <http://www.jfklibrary.org>.

🌐 LBJ Presidential Library, <http://www.lbjlibrary.org/>.

- ⊗ Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, <http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/>.
- ⊗ Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/>.
- ⊗ Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/>.
- ⊗ Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum,
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/textual/whormsub/whormsub.html>.
- ⊗ George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/>.
- ⊗ William J. Clinton Presidential Library, <http://www.clintonlibrary.gov/>.

The National Archives' Record Center at Lenexa, Kansas

A National Archives' Record Center stores both permanent and non-permanent records directly under the control of federal agencies themselves. This particular Record Center also houses records created in a joint venture between the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and the Department of the Interior, known as the American Indian Records Repository (AIRR). It stores primarily modern records. Not many of these records are available to the public. According to their website, at

http://www.doi.gov/ost/records_mgmt/american-indian-records-repository.cfm:

AIRR provides authorized researchers, federal employees who are conducting the historical trust accounting, Tribes, and contractors secure access to inactive records for research. Records are stored in strict compliance with NARA standards.

A YouTube video about the AIRR is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JunJCRhxnFk> (Native Report, 2013).

Selected List of Other U.S. Federal Resources

Bureau of Indian Affairs

The Bureau of Indian Affairs sometimes retains records in their own offices rather than sending them to the National Archives, particularly for records of federally recognized Tribes since about 1990 but also for some much earlier. Check the National Archives Online Catalog first to

see if the records you are seeking have been transferred to the National Archives before contacting the Bureau of Indian Affairs directly. Information about BIA regional and other offices can be found at <http://www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/index.htm>.

The National Museum of The American Indian

There are two facilities of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian, one in New York and one in Washington D.C. Both facilities hold many collections of Native artifacts and other primary source materials from across the entire United States. Many images of their artifacts and other materials are available online at <http://nmai.si.edu/>, as well as engaging educational materials. A convenient compilation of records, along with a game using primary sources, can be found at <http://www.nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/infinityofnations/>.

Library of Congress

The Library of Congress holds both primary and secondary sources. The Library's primary purpose is to collect relevant source material and books for the United States Congress; however, these materials are also available to the public. The Library's holdings are varied and include millions of primary source documents from across the globe. Many thousands are available online at <http://www.loc.gov>. There is an active Education program at the Library of Congress, and many online educational materials related to American Indians are available, including the following:

- Classroom themed sets: Native American, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/themes/Native-americans/>.
- Exhibits of themed materials, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/>.

National Park Service

The National Park Service has created many online and on-site educational programs centered around Native America. Many of these programs provide direct access to oral histories and other primary sources. Included in these programs are lesson plans, field trips, curricula,

traveling trunks, distance learning, institutes and field schools, and media for loan.

🌐 The main website for educational materials (focused for American Indian) is located at <http://www.nps.gov/teachers/teacher-resources.htm?q=American%20Indian&o=-date:D:L:d1>.

🌐 An important National Park Service website containing easily accessible oral histories is the Lewis and Clark Trail, Tribal Legacy Project at <http://www.lc-Triballegacy.org/main.php>.

Important Resources Outside the Federal Government

Tribal Sources

The most important place to learn about each Tribal community is from the Tribal citizens themselves. Most federally recognized Tribes have websites and education departments, but very few actually display copies of primary sources online. The most recent listing of federally recognized Tribes is published in the Federal Register on an annual basis. The January, 2014, listing is located at <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2014/01/29/2014-01683/indian-entities-recognized-and-eligible-to-receive-services-from-the-united-states-bureau-of-indian>. Most Tribal websites can be located through a Google search online. Documents held by individual Tribes may not be available to the public.

Library Collections, State and Local Government Archives and Departments

University and public library special collections, private collections, as well as some state and local government departments of education and archives, are also great resources for primary sources about American Indians. Remember most of these are “collections,” so items in their listings may be copies of government records, material gathered from outside sources, and/or secondary sources. Collections may not have all of what was originally available, so look for more of any collection elsewhere as well. Some of the catalogs return both primary source finding aids

and secondary sources. Including the word “document” in your search will sometimes result in more primary sources.

A short list of available materials in non-government and state government locations across the United States follows. Please keep in mind that this list barely scratches the surface of what is available. Googling the terms Indian and Archives, as well as similar searches, will net a huge number of additional sources.

- ✿ Oklahoma Historical Society (an affiliate of the National Archives):
 - See a YouTube video about the holdings of OHS at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0ihGj_4N3E.
- ✿ Oklahoma State University digital collections including:
 - Transcriptions of most Indian treaties (Kappler), <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/index.htm>.
 - Index to the decisions of the Indian Claims Commission, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/icc/index.html>.
- ✿ University of Oklahoma digital archives
 - Western History Collection, <http://digital.libraries.ou.edu/homehistory.php>.
- ✿ University of Oregon Special Collections
 - Native American subject guide to finding aids, <http://library.uoregon.edu/speccoll/guides/Native.html>.
 - Historic Oregon Newspapers (a digital, searchable collection on line and free), <http://oregonnews.uoregon.edu>.
 - SWORP (Southwest Oregon Research Project, 1850–1950), which consists of photocopies of original documents from national repositories that relate to “the history of Native peoples of greater Oregon.” Finding aid can be found at: <http://nwda.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv14723>.
 - Microforms Subject Guide to Native American Studies, <http://library.uoregon.edu/govdocs/micro/Native.htm>.

- 🌐 Montana State Department of Indian Education, <http://opi.mt.gov/programs/indianed/>.
- 🌐 Northwest Digital Archives
 - Compiled finding aids for many colleges and universities in the Pacific Northwest, as well as the Siletz Indian Community records on line at <http://nwda.orbiscascade.org/>.
- 🌐 Southeastern Native American Documents Collection (a Georgia state-wide project called GALILEO, most easily searched in WorldCat), <http://www.worldcat.org/identities/lccn-no00-18881/>.

Conclusion

Primary sources by and about Native Americans in the United States can be found in many places. It is important to think of American Indian communities as independently functioning, sovereign governments under the purview of the U.S. Federal Government. This makes the National Archives and other federal agencies extremely rich sources for primary source information.

Tribal governments are the most reliable source for information about each individual Tribe, although they might not always make their own documents available to the public. Each Tribal government makes that decision independently. Collections of primary sources found in libraries, state and local government archives, private collections, and departments of education may not represent all that is available on any particular Tribe or subject. Parts of any original collection could be in several places.

Remember, only a very small percentage of the vast array of primary sources connected to any American Indian community are likely to be on line at this writing. Familiarize yourself with the history and geography of your Tribal community. Practice searching and analyzing the records themselves. You will find the process becoming easier and easier. Using these principles will also make you more proficient in discovering what IS available online.

Do not give up. You will succeed. The records you find will certainly increase your understanding, and when you share what you have learned the collective understanding of all of humanity will increase in turn. Understanding can change viewpoints and even the course of history. Understanding can change the world.



Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.

Endnotes

¹ This has been conveyed to this author by many new researchers, students, and teachers.

² There are exceptions and extensions for nearly everything in research. The rule, however, usually applies.

³ You can see there are at least two series containing some sort of allotment records in this example. In fact, there are several more in the actual Grand Ronde Siletz Agency records.

⁴ A decimal file is a subject file using a numeric (decimal) system to identify the subjects. Sometimes a key is needed to translate the numbers into subjects, but often they are obvious.

⁵ Also, it is helpful to be aware that when individual documents are placed on line not all pages in a file are always included.

⁶ See DocsTeach Activity, Treaties and Treaty Making, at <http://docsteach.org/activities/20659/detail>.

⁷ For a more in depth explanation of Tribal sovereignty see Prygoski (n.d).

⁸ The earliest trading was done by European companies, such as the Hudson's Bay Company. Hudson's Bay Company records can be found in the National Archives of the United Kingdom. Other countries trading with Tribes and bands before the United States came into being would have records in their archives as well, usually handwritten in the language of the country.

⁹ Keep in mind, however, that important material is not always identified in such a simple way. Also, extra, unrelated material will certainly appear in the results, such as the 1940 Census records for everyone from Choctaw County, Mississippi. Broader classifications, such as "Five Civilized Tribes," or "Mississippi Indian," or "Oklahoma Tribes," may be missed by the search engine in this simple search. Creator offices such as "Muskogee Agency" may be overlooked as well.

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- United States Supreme Court. (1831). *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (30 U.S. (5 Pet.) 1).

Selected National Archives' Record Groups known to contain records related to American Indians

*From Edward E Hill, "Guide to Records in the National Archives of the United States Relating to American Indians," Washington D.C., 1982, with additions by NARA, Seattle archives staff from the Online Research Catalog at www.archives.gov. *Indicates examples are also online at www.docsteach.org*

*Record Group 11: [General Records of the United States Government, 1778–2006](#)

Record Group 12: [Records of the Office of Education, 1870–1980](#)

Record Group 15: [Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773–2007](#)

Record Group 16: [Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, 1794–ca. 2003](#)

*Record Group 21: [Records of District Courts of the United States, 1685–2009](#)

*Record Group 22: [Records of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1868–2008](#)

Record Group 23: [Records of the Coast and Geodetic Survey, 1806–1981](#). (1869 manuscript by E. Ballard on Indian place names in Maine.)

Record Group 26: [Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, 1785–2005](#)

Record Group 28: [Records of the Post Office Department, 1773–1971](#) (Post offices in Indian Territory and other Native communities.)

*Record Group 29: [Records of the Bureau of the Census, 1790–2007](#)

*Record Group 30: [Records of the Bureau of Public Roads, 1892–1972](#)

Record Group 33: [Records of the Extension Service, 1888–2000](#)

Record Group 35: [Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1953](#)

Record Group 36: [Records of the U.S. Customs Service, 1745–1997](#)
(Seamen proofs of citizenship includes indication of a few Indians.)

Record Group 39: [Records of the Bureau of Accounts \(Treasury\), 1775–1973](#)

Record Group 44: [Records of the Office of Government Reports, 1932–1947](#)
(Reports relating to state legislation.)

Record Group 45: [Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, 1691–1945](#)
(Panamanian revolt. Seminole War. Others.)

- *Record Group 46: [Records of the U.S. Senate, 1789–2011](#)
- *Record Group 48: [Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, 1826–2006](#)
- *Record Group 49: [Records of the Bureau of Land Management, 1685–2006](#)
- Record Group 50: [Records of the Treasurer of the United States, 1808–1970](#)
- Record Group 51: [Records of the Office of Management and Budget, 1905–2002](#)
(Records of Indian Day Schools, Boarding Schools and Hospitals.)
- Record Group 53: [Records of the Bureau of the Public Debt, 1775–2005](#) (Primarily for the Cherokee Outlet and Oregon.)
- Record Group 56: [General Records of the Department of the Treasury, 1775–2005](#)
- *Record Group 57: [Records of the U.S. Geological Survey, 1839–2008](#)
- Record Group 59: [General Records of the Department of State, 1763–2002](#)
(Mostly foreign relations, however there is a military commission granted to Chief Okana-Stote of the Cherokee by Governor Louis Billouart, Chevalier de Kerlerec in 1761 . . . so there may be more records between foreign dignitaries and American Indians.)
- Record Group 60: [General Records of the Department of Justice, 1790–2002](#)
- Record Group 69: [Records of the Work Projects Administration, 1922–1944](#)
- Record Group 70: [Records of the U.S. Bureau of Mines, 1860–1995](#) (Some correspondence with the Bureau of Indian Affairs.)
- *Record Group 75: [Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1793–1999](#) (This is the largest group of records relating to American Indians.)
- Record Group 76: [Records of Boundary and Claims Commissions and Arbitrations, 1716–1994](#) (Includes lists of Indian words and geographic place names, records of exploring parties, etc.)
- *Record Group 77: [Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers, 1789–1999](#)
- *Record Group 79: [Records of the National Park Service, 1785–2006](#)
- *Record Group 80: [General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1804–1983](#)
(Records of American Indian personnel.)
- *Record Group 83: [Records of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1876–1959](#)

- *Record Group 86: [Records of the Women's Bureau, 1892–1995](#)
- Record Group 90: [Records of the Public Health Service, 1794–1990](#)
- *Record Group 92: [Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, 1774–1985](#)
- Record Group 93: [War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, 1709–1939](#)
- *Record Group 94: [Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1762–1984](#)
- *Record Group 95: [Records of the Forest Service, 1870–2008](#)
- Record Group 96: [Records of the Farmers Home Administration, 1918–1975](#)
- Record Group 99: [Records of the Office of the Paymaster General, 1791–1917](#)
- Record Group 102: [Records of the Children's Bureau, 1908–2003](#)
- Record Group 104: [Records of the U.S. Mint, 1792–2007](#) (Indian Peace Medals.)
- *Record Group 106: [Records of the Smithsonian Institution, 1871–1952](#)
- Record Group 107: [Records of the Office of the Secretary of War, 1791–1948](#)
- Record Group 108: [Records of the Headquarters of the Army, 1828–1903](#)
- Record Group 109: [War Department Collection of Confederate Records, 1825–1927](#)
- *Record Group 111: [Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, 1860–1985](#)
- Record Group 114: [Records of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, 1875–2002](#)
- *Record Group 115: [Records of the Bureau of Reclamation, 1889 - 2008](#) (Lantern slides and photographs of Native communities.)
- Record Group 118: [Records of U.S. Attorneys, 1821–1994](#)
- Record Group 119: [Records of the National Youth Administration, 1934–1945](#) (Limited film footage of Apache.)
- Record Group 120: [Records of the American Expeditionary Forces \(World War I\), 1848–1942](#) (American Indian troops.)
- Record Group 121: [Records of the Public Buildings Service, 1801–2000](#)
- Record Group 123: [Records of the U.S. Court of Claims, 1835–1984](#)
- *Record Group 126: [Records of the Office of Territories, 1881–1976](#)
- Record Group 135: [Records of the Public Works Administration, 1933–1939](#)

- Record Group 147: [Records of the Selective Service System, 1926–1975](#)
(Men drafted from Indian Territory.)
- *Record Group 148: [Records of Commissions of the Legislative Branch, 1928–2007](#)
- Record Group 149: [Records of the Government Printing Office, 1935?–1935?](#) (Photos and lantern slides of many subjects.)
- Record Group 153: [Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General \(Army\), 1792–2010](#) (Mostly court martial records.)
- Record Group 159: [Records of the Office of the Inspector General \(Army\), 1814–1917](#) (Records of the Montana, Dakota, and Modoc Wars.)
- Record Group 163: [Records of the Selective Service System \(World War I\), 1917–1939](#)
- *Record Group 165: [Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, 1860–1952](#)
- Record Group 187: [Records of the National Resources Planning Board, 1931–1943](#) (Maps of some reservations.)
- Record Group 192: [Records of the Office of the Commissary General of Subsistence, 1818–1913](#)
- Record Group 203: [Records of the Office of the Chief of Finance \(Army\), 1792–1942](#)
- Record Group 205: [Records of the Court of Claims Section \(Justice\), 1793–1947](#)
- Record Group 206: [Records of the Solicitor of the Treasury, 1791–1934](#)
- *Record Group 208: [Records of the Office of War Information, 1926–1951](#)
- Record Group 210: [Records of the War Relocation Authority, 1941–1989](#)
(Colorado River Relocation Center relating to the Mojave.)
- *Record Group 217: [Records of the Accounting Officers of the Department of the Treasury, 1775–1978](#)
- Record Group 220: [Records of Temporary Committees, Commissions, and Boards, 1893–2008](#)
- *Record Group 233: [Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1789–2011](#)
- Record Group 235: [General Records of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1935–1981](#)
- Record Group 261: [Records of Former Russian Agencies, 1802–1929](#)
- Record Group 267: [Records of the Supreme Court of the United States, 1772–2007](#)

- Record Group 276: [Records of the U.S. Courts of Appeals, 1891–1992](#)
- Record Group 279: [Records of the Indian Claims Commission, 1946–1983](#)
- Record Group 291: [Records of the Federal Property Resources Service, 1944–1982](#)
- Record Group 306: [Records of the U.S. Information Agency, 1900–2003](#)
- *Record Group 330: [Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1921–2008](#)
- Record Group 360: [Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention, 1765–1821](#)
- *Record Group 370: [Records of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 1928–2008](#)
- Record Group 381: [Records of the Community Services Administration, 1963–1981](#)
- *Record Group 391: [Records of U.S. Regular Army Mobile Units, 1815–1970](#)
- *Record Group 393: [Records of U.S. Army Continental Commands, 1817–1947](#)
- *Record Group 412: [Records of the Environmental Protection Agency, 1944 - 2006](#)
- *Record Group 435: [Records of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, 1929–1988](#)

Also see: Records of the Presidential Libraries