

U.S. history

Primary and secondary sources

by Paul A. Frisch

In February 1996, *C&RL News* published "American History Resources on the Internet"¹ Not surprisingly, many of the resources from the early days of the Web were gopher sites. The Web sites reviewed in this article link to primary and secondary sources and will be useful to librarians, students, and historians. The limitation of space necessarily excludes many deserving topics and sites.

Meta sites and directories

- **About.com Guides.** An impressive Web directory, About.com lists 30 subjects with links to more than 700 sites covering centuries, biographies, and topics reflecting traditional time frames, major events, gender, race, and ethnicity. The About.com site also provides access to forums, chatrooms, and brief introductory articles. *Access:* <http://americanhistory.about.com/index.htm>.

- **WWW Virtual Library History: United States.** The History Index Network is maintained by Lynn H. Nelson, professor emeritus of medieval history at the University of Kansas. The U.S. history portion is superbly organized into three major categories with many topics. The first category, Research Tools, includes bibliography, materials, research aids, and associations and societies, which each have more specific categories. The second major category lists 19 historical topics. The third major category is divided into

11 chronological periods from pre-Columbian contact to the 20th century. *Access:* <http://www.ukans.edu/history/VL/USA/index.html>.

- **American and British History Research Guides.** This well-organized and easy-to-use site is maintained at the Rutgers University Libraries. The guide contents include reference sources, archival and manuscript guides, general history portals, sites organized by subject, sites organized by period, full-text documents by period, history associations, and history electronic lists. *Access:* http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/rr_gateway/research_guides/history/history.shtml.

Primary sources

Primary sources provide the documentation for history as it is being made. This original stuff from which history is written includes text, sound, picture, and artifact. Primary sources continue to proliferate on the Web as institutions dedicated to preserving the historical record rush to digitize their sources, making them readily accessible and, in some cases, rescuing their content from deteriorating documents.

The primary sources reviewed here include text, photographs and film, oral history and speeches (voice and transcripts), and maps and data.

- **American Memory: Historical Collections for the National Digital Library.** The

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Library of Congress' huge project to create a national digital library, representing American history and culture, so far offers more than 7 million digitized items from more than 100 his-



torical collections. These primary sources include text, photographs, film, maps, and music (sound and sheet). American Memory provides the capability to search for items across its collections and links to digital collections from around the world. *Access:* <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ammemhome.html> or <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/amhome.html>.

• **National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).** As the official depository for U.S. government materials, NARA is a treasure trove of sources. Search the NAIL (NARA Archival Information Locator) for digital or non-digital sources. American Originals provides access to digitized copies of the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and other important or unusual documents ("When Nixon Met Elvis"). There is technical guidance concerning archival preservation and management, and resources for at-home recordkeepers. *Access:* <http://www.nara.gov/>.

• **Making of America (MOA).** The MOA Collection includes more than 4 million pages from more than 13,000 volumes of primary source materials found in the libraries at

Cornell University and the University of Michigan. The focus of the initial phase of MOA, which is funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, is the 19th century, especially 1850 to 1877. Cornell's site covers 22 journals of the period, mainly general interest publi-

cations with some specific areas, such as agriculture. Fewer than 300 monographs are included. Michigan's site has digitized about 8,500 books and 50,000 journal articles, primarily in the areas of education, psychology, American history, sociology, religion, science, and technology. *Access:* Cornell at <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa> and Michigan at <http://moa.umdl.umich.edu>.

• **The Avalon Project at the Yale Law School.** This far-ranging digital project collects legal, historical, and diplomatic documents. Among the areas covered are colonial charters and grants, state constitutions from 1776 to present, U.S. statutes on slavery and on Native Americans, papers of the Confederate States of America, treaties with Native Americans and with foreign countries, and economic and legal treatises. *Access:* <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/avalon.htm>.

• **History Channel: Speeches.** The site hosts hundreds of speeches available in audio files that can be searched by speaker, topic, or time period. An alphabetically arranged speakers index can also be browsed. Speech categories are politics and government; science and technology; arts, entertainment, and culture; and war and diplomacy. A written context is provided for each speech. *Access:* <http://www.historychannel.com/speeches/index.html>.

• **Project Oyez: U.S. Supreme Court Multimedia Database.** Leading cases from legal casebooks and textbooks were selected for inclusion in this database at Northwestern University. Most cases are text only, but many cases from recent years have an audio portion that plays as the text scrolls. *Access:* <http://oyez.nwu.edu/>.

THE OYEZ PROJECT NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

• **Historical Picture Collections.** Steven Schoenherr, an American historian at the University of San Diego, provides pictures in such categories as presidents, states, cities and regions, aviation, military, movies and radio, railroads, science and technology, ships, and space images. *Access:* <http://history.acusd.edu/gen/documents/clipsources.html>.

• **Perry-Casteneda Library Map Collection: Historical Maps of the United States.** The categories used by the University of Texas map library are early inhabitants, exploration



and settlement, U.S. territorial growth, later historical periods, military history, historical maps of Texas and U.S. cities, and national historic sites. There is a link to other map sites. *Access:* <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/histus.html>.

• **United States Historical Census Data Browser.** Using data compiled by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, the University of Virginia Libraries have created easily browsed data files that describe the people and economy of each state and county from 1790 to 1960. *Access:* <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census>.

Topics and chronological periods

• **H-NET: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.** H-NET is an interdisciplinary organization of scholars and teachers who maintain edited lists and Web sites with peer-reviewed essays, multimedia materials, and discussion. Many H-NET sites cover topics in American history. *Access:* <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/>.

• **The American Revolution: National Discussions of Our Revolutionary Origins.** The site was created by H-NET to serve as a place for discussions and research sources, complementing the official companion site to PBS's Liberty! documentary series. Noteworthy links on the site include a selected bibliography, scholarly essays, maps, images, documents, and secondary sources. It also covers links to colonial American history. *Access:* <http://revolution.h-net.msu.edu/intro.html>.

The American Civil War Homepage

• **The American Civil War Homepage.** George Hoemann (University of Tennessee at Knoxville) maintains this massive collection of hypertext links that print out to more than 40 pages. The 12 categories, many with subheadings, emphasize political and military aspects of the Civil War: general resources, secession crisis and before, images of wartime, biographical information, histories and bibliographies, documentary records, state and local studies, battles and campaigns, rosters and regimental histories, other military information, Civil War reenactors, and Civil War round tables. *Access:* <http://sunsite.utk.edu/civil-war/warweb.html>.

• **The United States Civil War Center.** The Special Collections Department of the Louisiana State University Libraries operates the Civil War Center and its homepage for "promoting the study of the Civil War from the perspectives of all professions, occupations, and academic disciplines." The first section of the homepage deals with Civil War information, providing an alphabetically arranged list of links to full-text sources on a range of military and non-military subjects as disparate as animals/veterinary science, pop culture, sociology and work, and writers and literature of the period. The Civil War resources section provides more traditional military categories with links to Web sites. *Access:* <http://www.cwc.lsu.edu/cwc/index.htm>.



• **H-SHGAPE Internet Resources.** The Society for Historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era's site examines the period between 1877 and 1918, combining links to primary and secondary sources for the following topics: general resources, political leaders, transformation of the West, the rise of big business and American workers, literature and culture, the crisis of the 1890s, the war with Spain and the aftermath, the new immigration and urban America, Progressive reform, and the Great War and America. *Access:* <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~shgape/internet/index.html>.

• **American Cultural History: The Twentieth Century.** Peggy Whitley and other reference librarians at Kingwood College have constructed an entertaining, informative decade-by-decade tour of 20th-century America. Each decade explores the following eight cultural areas: art and architecture, books and literature, fads and fashion, education, historic events and technology, music, persons and personalities, and theater and film. Each cultural area offers a brief overview with a picture and links within the text, Library of Congress browsing call letters, a short list of books, and a few Web sites. *Access:* <http://www.nhmccd.edu/contracts/lrc/kc/decades.html>.

• **New Deal Network: A Guide to the Great Depression of the 1930s and the**

Roosevelt Administration. The Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute and the Institute for Learning Technologies at Columbia University's Teachers College have developed a site suitable for undergraduate research. A documents section provides access to more than 700 articles, speeches, letters, and other texts organized by subject, date, and author, while a photo gallery has more than 4,000 images. There are also links to archives, collections, essays, and features. *Access:* <http://newdeal.feri.org/>.

• **WWW Virtual Library: The Cold War.** There are other Cold War sites with more links, but not as well organized with chronological, geographical, and topical arrangements. Some of the major topics include McCarthyism, the Korean War, the Rosenbergs, the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the causes of the Soviet collapse. *Access:* <http://www.ukans.edu/history/VL/USA/coldwar.html>.

• **Biography.Com.** The Web site for the Biography TV channel has more than 25,000 biographies with links to related biographies in the database and Web sites. *Access:* <http://www.biography.com>.

• **American Women's History: A Research Guide.** Ken Middleton, reference librarian at Middle Tennessee State University, has created a comprehensive, well-organized, up-to-date Web site, providing more than 1,600 citations to print and Internet reference sources, more than 900 links to Internet sources, and a shortcut to more than 200 links to digital collections of primary sources. The five main sections, each with several subheadings, are: general reference and biographical sources; subject index to research sources in 70 categories; state and regional sources; finding books, journal articles and theses; and finding primary sources. There is a shortcut to bookmarks that lists a dozen categories. *Access:* <http://frank.mtsu.edu/~kmiddlet/history/women.html>.

• **People with a History: An Outline Guide to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans* History (LGBT).** Paul Halsall's (Fordham University) site provides links to general LGBT history pages, collections of textual material, museums and archives, and lesbian-specific sites. These sources are difficult to find at most U.S. history sites. *Access:* <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh>.

• **African-American History: A Guide to Resources & Research on the Web.** The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs' Department of History site follows the currents of African American history through general sources, culture, Black nationalism, civil rights, the Harlem Renaissance, slavery and slave narratives, African-American women, and supplies extensive biographical links to four major 20th-century figures—W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King Jr., and Zora Neale Hurston. *Access:* <http://web.uccs.edu/~history/index/afroam.html>.

• **Latino American History: A Guide to Resources and Research on the Web.** Surprisingly, it is difficult to find a comprehensive, up-to-date, English-language site on the history of the United States' fastest-growing ethnic group. The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs' Department of History has organized its site by general resources, archives, Hispanic women's history, political movements, popular culture, religion, and a chronological arrangement of sources. *Access:* <http://web.uccs.edu/~history/index/latino.html>.

• **Ancestors in the Americas.** Several Asian American ethnic groups are covered in this companion site to the PBS series *Ancestors in the Americas*. An Asian American timeline provides historical context, but the heart of the site lists Asian American history Web sites, especially for Asian American ethnic groups: Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Pacific Islander, and Southeast Asian. Though you may find sites that provide more depth for an individual ethnicity, the inclusion of so many ethnicities makes this an exceptional resource. *Access:* <http://www.pbs.org/ancestorsintheamericas>.

• **H-AMINDIAN (American Indian History and Culture).** This is a joint effort of H-NET and Arizona State University's Department of History. Links to history sites, one of nearly 30 categories under Native links, provide an alphabetical list, with brief descriptions, to a range of up-to-date historical links. *Access:* <http://www.asu.edu/clas/history/h-amindian/index.html>.

Note

1. Stanley D. Nash, Miles Yoshimura, and William Vincenti, "American history resources on the Internet," *C&RL News* 57 (Feb. 1996): 82–84, 96. ■

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