**Guide to Primary and Secondary Sources**

Primary Sources:

Primary sources are materials that offer “eyewitness” accounts of people, places, and events of the past. Primary sources provide researchers withfirst-hand evidence of what occurred in the past. Examples include:

* Letters, diaries, and other documents in which people record their thoughts, observations, experiences, and activities. These often include descriptions of places and events as well.
* Records of governmental agencies (birth certificates, court records, etc.) and businesses (annual reports, meeting minutes, etc.) that document events and activities.
* Photographs, audio, and video recordings of people, places, and events.
* Published materials (books, articles) written at the time an event occurred. If a publication is written by an author looking back in time, it is usually a secondary source.

Secondary Sources:

Secondary sources are works that study or interpret people, places, and events of the past. They usually are not written by someone as an eyewitness account. Secondary sources are typically published works like books or articles. For example, the book “*Drake University through 75 years”* is a secondary source. The endnotes and bibliography of this book reveal that the authors’ research was based on both primary sources and secondary sources.

Examples:

Primary source (evidence) Secondary source (interpretation)

WWI letters from a US soldier Book on the American Army in WWI

Diary of a 1960s anti-war protestor Article on anti-war protests at colleges

Photos of Alaskan glaciers in 1900 Thesis on glacial changes in Alaska