

## *Using Derivative History Sources to Find Primary Sources.*



Sometimes in Genealogy research, we get so wrapped up searching for original sources that we tend to overlook derivative sources. While not primary sources, derivative records are proven to be a vital tool in our research.

What constitutes a derivative record?

United States Department of Commerce says “Derivative Classification is the incorporating, paraphrasing, restating, or generating in a new form, information that has already been classified. Derivative Classification can only be performed by a trained Derivative Classifier using existing, properly marked, classified source documentation.”

In short, a derivative source is any record that relies on other records for its information. These can be record transcripts, record abstracts and summaries or even written family records. The most commonly used derivative records are history books.

How are History books written?

History books are written from the perspective of the compiler. They, however, may not have lived during the time frame about which they are writing. Maybe they did live during that time frame and are writing the history they remember. They may even contain some measure of bad information. Typically, histories are written from local sources available to the compiler. They are then passed off to the author to arrange them into a sensible order and add his incite. In many cases, compiler and author are one in the same.

How these derivative sources lead to original sources.

This is where a history book may be the most valuable tool in your toolbox. We should always presume that, while sources may be misquoted or manipulated to fit the author’s narrative, they were all original sources. Either found in original court or military journals or from someone’s recollection of their earlier times. Many of those sources used by the compiler are still out there somewhere! If he (or she) refers to, let’s say, tax lists; look for them! If they refer to a historical event, find more information on that event.

Further searches may not refer to your direct family, but they will give depth and insight into how families lived during the given time period. From that you may have an idea of other sources you want to look at.

Always remember that even as history books are, in and of themselves, derivative sources: They are also primary sources of information that leads to original sources. Don't put down a book after first glance, thinking it bears no useful information. I would go as far as to recommend that you read as many history books, cover to cover, as may be available for the time period and location you are researching for your genealogy project.

### Writing citations for Derivative Sources

Citations should always contain author's name, title, date of publication, page no. A brief description of information. Where the source can be found, i.e. web site w/ film and image no.; web address or repository and location w/ call no., and date accessed.

Don't be afraid to add any information that may be helpful to anyone trying to locate the source you used.

### Helpful Links

Hathi Trust: Stewards of the largest digitized collection of knowledge allowable by copyright law.  
<https://www.hathitrust.org/>

Internet Archive: Internet Archive is a non-profit library of millions of free books, movies, software, music, websites, and more. <https://archive.org/>

Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/>

Family Search Digital Library: Over 500,000 genealogy books, family histories, maps, yearbooks, and more. <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/>

World Cat: Find items in libraries near you <https://search.worldcat.org/>

The history of New-Hampshire; Belknap, Jeremy, 1744-1798 Joseph Meredith Toner Collection (Library of Congress) Boston : Published by Bradford and Read, 1813.

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcmassbookdig.historyofnewhamp01lcbelk/?sp=5&r=-1.38,-0.055,3.76,1.92,0>