Primarily History in America: How US Historians Search for Primary Materials at the Dawn of the Digital Age

by Helen Ruth Tibbo
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- information retrieval
This article reports on a survey that asked historians teaching American history at sixty-eight top-ranked institutions how they located primary resources for their research.”
Most Important, and Most Often Used Materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Often Used</th>
<th>Most Important</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Newspapers</td>
<td>Newspapers</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Unpub. Correspondence</td>
<td>Unpub. Correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pub. Pamphlets</td>
<td>Unpub. Diaries or Journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Handwritten Manuscripts</td>
<td>Gov. Papers &amp; Reports</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Unpub. Diaries or Journals</td>
<td>Pub. Pamphlets</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Gov. Papers &amp; Reports</td>
<td>Gov. Correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Typed Manuscripts</td>
<td>Handwritten Manuscripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Gov. Correspondence</td>
<td>Typed Manuscripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Unpub. Minutes</td>
<td>Scholarly Periodicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Photographs</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The search Habits of Historians with relation to Archives

- What strategies do researchers employ?
- Which catalogs were searched? Were they the correct catalogs?
  - RLG, OCLC
  - OPACs

Finding Aids

Digital and/or Print

Contacting Archivist
- 76% reported using printed Finding Aids
- 78% utilized print repository guides
- 51% still use NUCMC (National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections)
  - Latest volume 1993 edition
  - All NUCMC records from 1986 – present are added to the RLG
FIGURE 3. Use of Traditional Retrieval Strategies

- Printed finding aids
- Printed repository guides
- Printed NUCMC
- Other, traditional sources
Electronic searching

![Bar chart showing use of online retrieval strategies](image-url)
Remote Repository requests

- Email vs. traditional methods of requesting holdings information, finding aids, and copies.
On-site searching

- Use of printed finding aids – 90 %
- Electronic finding aids – 55 %
- Assistance from Archivists