

HISTORICAL ACCURACY

by Carol Cramer

When determining the historical accuracy of written materials, it is important to study the sources that were used. There is a significant difference between primary and secondary sources.

The following primary sources are considered the very best:

- Deeds
- Assessment records
- Court records
- Other legal records (marriage, death, etc.)
- Census record
- Journals
- Letters
- Business/city indexes
- Maps
- Phone books
- Photos

Newspaper articles, oral histories, and memoirs may be slightly less accurate but are still considered primary sources, especially when combined with one or more of the sources listed above.

When facts can be verified by two high level primary sources, researchers are very confident in the accuracy of the information. Having three primary source verifications is considered as proof of the ultimate degree of accuracy.

Secondary sources are materials that have been written using other sources. When reading these materials, it is important to check what sources were used.

Materials written by writers who use all primary sources, as noted in their bibliography or footnotes, would be considered as having the highest degree of accuracy for a secondary source.

A secondary source with no sources noted or the sources noted are secondary sources, would be almost devoid of any verifiable historical accuracy. In other words, verify information with primary sources.

Remember, when reading historical material check the sources.