



SAMPLE GUIDE C: LIST OF PRIMARY SOURCES VS. SECONDARY SOURCES FOR GENEALOGICAL DOCUMENTS

- **An Original Record Provides Primary Information – aka Primary Source:** (firsthand) created by people who actually saw or participated in and event and recorded that event immediately the event.
 - birth record
 - marriage record
 - divorce record
 - death record
 - land record & plat
 - lease
 - diplomas or certificates of degree
 - military & pension record
 - tax record
 - family bible (if the events were recorded at the time they actually occurred)
 - newspaper article (if the author witnessed the event and wrote the article shortly thereafter)
 - probate record
 - church record
 - school record
 - court record (civil & criminal)
- **A Derivative Record Provides Secondary Information – aka Secondary Source:** (secondhand) records that are created some length of time after the event or for which information was supplied by someone who was not an eyewitness to the event. A secondary source can also be a person who was an eyewitness to the event but recalls it after significant time passes.
 - old letters
 - books
 - oral interviews
 - transcriptions/translations
 - indexes
 - federal & state census information: censuses rely upon self-identification
 - newspaper articles written after a significant time passes
 - obituary
 - tombstone photograph
 - family histories or published genealogies
 - Bible Records
 - published county histories
 - published biographical histories
 - documented oral histories/interviews (interviews for modern period – not hearsay)
 - personal papers (such as letters, diaries, journals, reunion records, and manuscripts)
 - vital records for events other than what they were written for (A death record would be considered a primary source for the death information it contains and a secondary source for the birth information it contains).

- **Federal Decennial Census Clues:**

- Federal Decennial Census for 1900 and 1910 has a separated American Indian Schedule
- Federal Decennial Census for 1790 through 1840 only lists the head of household by name
- Federal Decennial Census for 1850 through 1940 lists each member of the household by name

- **North Carolina Vital Record Clues:**

- North Carolina is an “open” vital records state, meaning you can access the vital records for anyone (with the exception of adoptions), regardless of age within the county in which the event occurred.

- North Carolina’s civil records began the following years:

	Birth	Marriages	Deaths
Earliest	1659	1659	1911
Statewide Registration	1913	1868	1913
General Compliance	1920	1868	1920

- **Key Question:** Ask yourself... Did the creator of the document witness the event?

Yes = Primary Source No = Secondary Source

- **Summary:** Although secondary sources are not as reliable as primary sources, that doesn’t mean secondary sources are always wrong or aren’t useful. A good deal of the time, the information is correct, and such records provide valuable clues to locating primary source information.