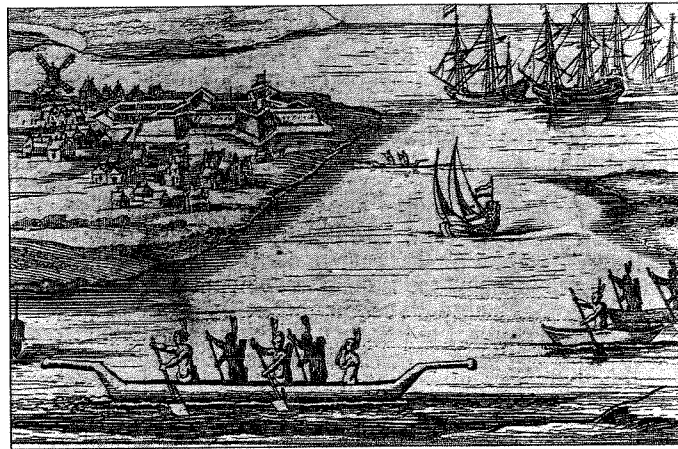


Encounters in the New World

A History in Documents



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What Is a Document?

To the historian, a document is, quite simply, any sort of historical evidence. It is a primary source, the raw material of history. A document may be more than the expected government paperwork, such as a treaty or passport. It is also a letter, diary, will, grocery list, newspaper article, recipe, memoir, oral history, school yearbook, map, chart, architectural plan, poster, musical score, play script, novel, political cartoon, painting, photograph—even an object.

Using primary sources allows us not just to read *about* history, but to read history itself. It allows us to immerse ourselves in the look and feel of an era gone by, to understand its people and their language, whether verbal or visual. And it allows us to take an active, hands-on role in (re)constructing history.

Using primary sources requires us to use our powers of detection to ferret out the relevant facts and to draw conclusions from them; just as Agatha Christie uses the scores in a bridge game to determine the identity of a murderer, the historian uses facts from a variety of sources—some, perhaps, seemingly inconsequential—to build a historical case.

The poet W. H. Auden wrote that history was the study of questions. Primary sources force us to ask questions—and then, by answering them, to construct a narrative or an argument that makes sense to us. Moreover, as we draw on the many sources from “the dust-bin of history,” we can endow that narrative with character, personality, and texture—all the elements that make history so endlessly intriguing.



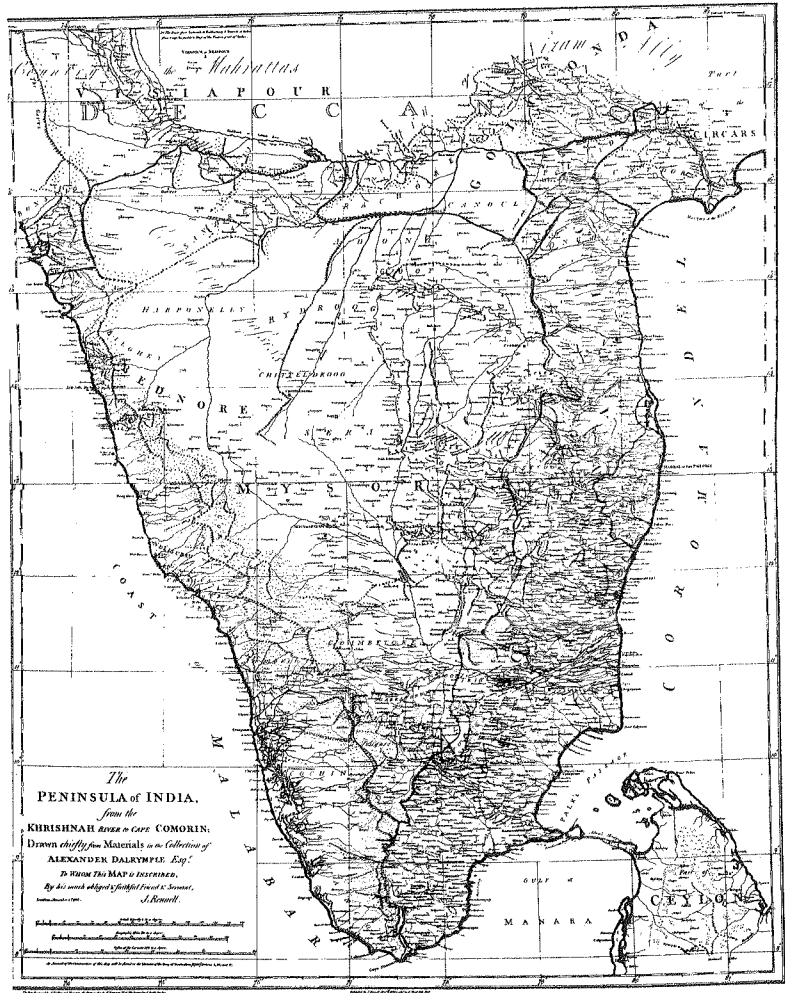
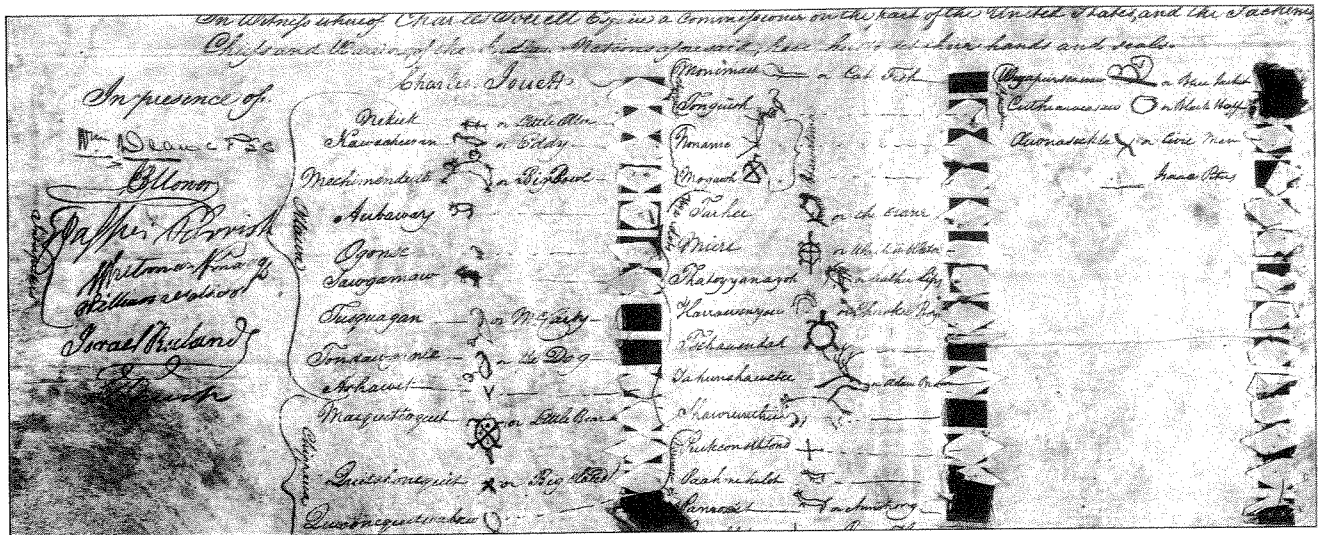
Cartoon

This political cartoon addresses the issue of church and state. It illustrates the Supreme Court's role in balancing the demands of the First Amendment of the Constitution and the desires of the religious population.



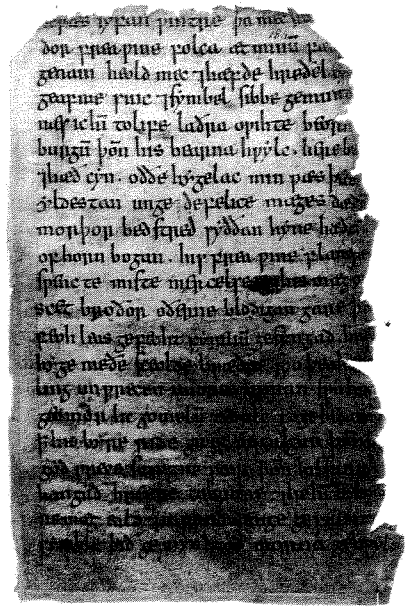
Illustration

Illustrations from children's books, such as this alphabet from the New England Primer, tell us how children were educated, and also what the religious and moral values of the time were.



Map
 A 1788 British map of India shows the region prior to British colonization, an indication of the kingdoms and provinces whose ethnic divisions would resurface later in India's history.

Treaty
 A government document such as this 1805 treaty can reveal not only the details of government policy, but information about the people who signed it. Here, the Indians' names were written in English transliteration by U.S. officials; the Indians added pictographs to the right of their names.



Literature
 The first written version of the Old English epic Beowulf, from the late 10th century, is physical evidence of the transition from oral to written history. Charred by fire, it is also a physical record of the wear and tear of history.

How to Read a Document

This book is a collection of documents, or primary sources, from the age of encounters. Most of the primary sources in this book are written documents, often letters written by people far from home describing what they have seen and done in the New World.

Reading these documents can be a bit tricky. To understand a written document it is important to know who wrote it and for whom, when, and why. Here is an example:

Our Lord pleasing, at the time of my departure
I will take six of them from here to Your High-
nesses in order that they may learn to speak.

If you were to read this sentence out of the blue it would not tell you much. But if you discovered that it was written by Christopher Columbus in his ship's log on October 12, 1492, you would know a great deal: Columbus is planning to take six Indians back to Spain and present them to the patrons of his voyage, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella.

Even knowing the circumstances in which a document is written, however, is not enough to understand it. It is important to ask more questions. Why does Columbus think his patrons will want six Indians? Why must the Indians learn to speak? Do they not speak already? It is also important to "get outside" the document and ask questions about what it does not say. What do the Indians think of Columbus? Would they want to go to Spain?

Reading documents is all about asking questions. It is not always possible to find the answers, but sometimes the questions you ask are just as important.

Cartouche

Maps usually include cartouches, or labels, like this coat of arms. Cartouches are often engravings depicting important people—monarchs, mapmakers, explorers—and provide clues about who drew the map and for whom. This cartouche is Sir Walter Ralieghe's coat of arms, indicating that he governs the Virginia Colony.

Compass

This map includes a compass, or wind rose. It helps orient the viewer to north, south, east, and west. It is also a decorative element, and further enhances the beauty of the map.

Decorations

Sea creatures, whales, dolphins, fish, and sailing ships decorate the ocean on this map. A map is a document that is also a piece of art, like a painting, and mapmakers were considered artists. Just because parts of a map are decorative, however, does not mean that they should not be "read." The mapmaker drew sea creatures on this map not only to fill in the empty space but also to show sailors the ocean's dangers and wonders. Some maps from this period include half-sunken ships near coastlines that are particularly difficult to navigate.

Spelling

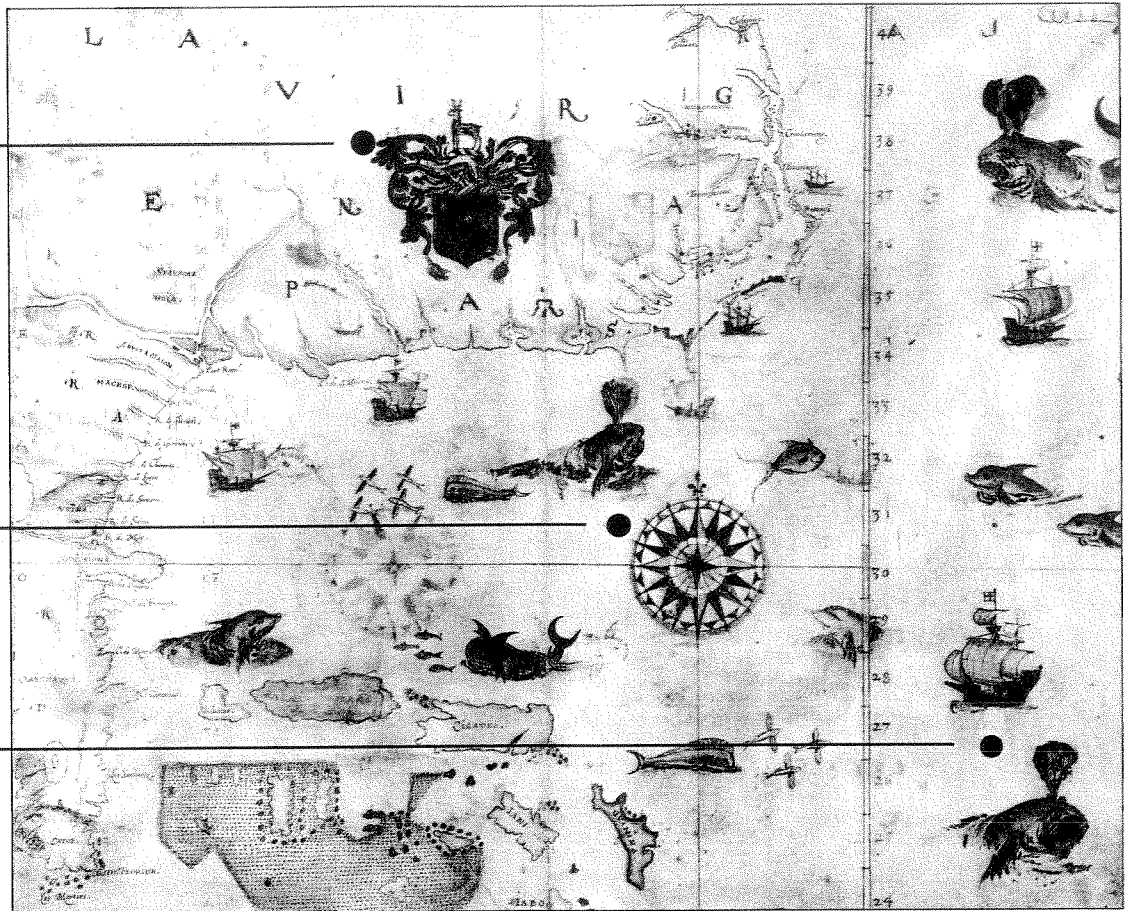
Spelling was not standardized until the 19th century, and books printed before then often spell words differently than we do today. For example, some people spelled "war" w-a-r, others w-a-r-r, and others w-a-r-r-e. None of these spellings were considered wrong.

Title and Sub-Title

Old books usually have long titles that are in fact whole sentences describing the contents of the book. Today, books usually have a brief description of the contents on the back, or on the jacket flaps, but centuries ago readers read the title and knew what the book was about.

Printer and Location

This book, like books today, has an "imprint"—a line indicating where, when, and by whom the book was published. The imprint can tell you a lot about the contents of a book. This book about a war between the Indians and the British colonists was printed in Boston, the capital of the Massachusetts Colony, the year the war was won. Is it likely to mourn the Indians' loss or celebrate the colonists' victory?



Map of the Virginia Colony by John White

BRIEF HISTORY
 OF THE
WAR
 With the *INDIANS* in
NEW-ENGLAND.
 (From *June 24, 1675*, when the first English-man was murdered by the Indians, to *August 12, 1676*, when *Philip*, alias *Matacumbe*, the principal Author and Beginner of the Warr, was slain.)
 Wherein the Grounds, Beginning, and Progress of the Warr, is summarily expressed.
 TOGETHER WITH A SERIOUS
EXHORTATION
 to the Inhabitants of that Land,
 By *INCREASE MATHER*, Teacher of a Church of Christ, in *Boston* in *New-England*.
 Levit. 24. 15. I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of the Lord.
 Psal. 107. 43. whose wife and child will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.
 Jer. 22. 15. Did not thy Faith, due Judgment and Justice, and it was well with him.
 See quos irritant animos demissa per aures,
 Quos non torquet oculis commissis in ictibus. H. r. s.
 Leg. H. Sto. iam ne sit in ictibus. C. s.
BOSTON, Printed and Sold by *John Foster* over against the Sign of the Dove. 1676.

Title page of A Brief History of the Warr with the Indians of New-England, by Increase Mather, 1676

AMERICA



T. AMSTERDAM

By Jacob van Meurs, *Placfyder en Boekverkooper op de Kerfers grift in de Stact. Meurs. 1671.*