

## Proving NYS Marker Inscriptions with Primary Sources



NYS marker for the steamboat, *Buttercup*, Long Lake, NY.

### Overview

Welcome to the Pomeroy Foundation's primary source documentation guide.

Over the next few pages, we outline the important role primary sources play in supporting a successful New York State marker grant application.

We break it down for you in four parts:

### What You'll Learn

1. Why the Pomeroy Foundation requires primary source documentation.
2. The difference between primary and secondary sources.
3. An example of a real-life marker inscription and the sources used to prove it.
4. Common missteps to avoid when preparing your marker grant application.

## We Require Primary Sources

By now you know the Pomeroy Foundation's New York State program commemorates historic people, places, things and events.

In this signature program, primary sources are required to verify the historical accuracy of the marker's inscription. That's because we have made a commitment to our applicants and the public that if a historic marker is funded by the Pomeroy Foundation, then they can be absolutely assured the facts presented are indisputable today and in the future. That's a promise we can only keep by having primary source documentation on file to support the text on a marker.



Trolley Depot marker in Brockport, NY

## Primary Sources vs. Secondary Sources

What are primary sources and how are they different from secondary sources?

- A primary source is a firsthand account or firsthand evidence of an event.
- Secondary sources represent a secondhand or compiled account of an event.

This is the high-level view. In the following section, we explain the differences.



NYS marker for the Old Croton Aqueduct, Yonkers, NY

## Identifying Primary Sources

One way to help identify the type of source you are working with is to ask yourself this simple question:

- Was the person giving the account **present** at the event?

Your answer is “YES” if you are dealing with any of the following examples:

- diaries and journals;
- autobiographies;
- speeches;
- letters;
- contemporaneous news articles;
- and, *some* photos

These types of sources often are created at the time of the event. They present a description or view of an event by someone who was there to see or experience it.

Additionally, records produced as a result of an event may be primary sources. Examples include birth, marriage and death records; deeds, meeting minutes, and Census records.

## Identifying Secondary Sources

By comparison, secondary sources offer a description of an event based on research, written or retold by someone who was **NOT** there to see or experience it.

Let's return to our question: Was the person giving the account **present** at the event?

Your answer will be “NO” for the following examples:

- textbooks;
- encyclopedias;
- biographies;
- local history & compiled publications;
- family histories and stories;
- some non-contemporaneous newspaper, magazine articles or websites;
- and, most transcriptions

We don't accept secondary sources for proof of marker text. But keep in mind - some secondary sources may include information that leads you to identify a primary source, such as footnotes or references section in a book.

## A Real-Life Example

To further illustrate how you should utilize primary sources to prove your marker's inscription, let's review a real-life example from our New York State program.

We will guide you point by point through the facts presented in the inscription for the "Timbuctoo" marker commemorating the 19th century African American community established in the Adirondacks.

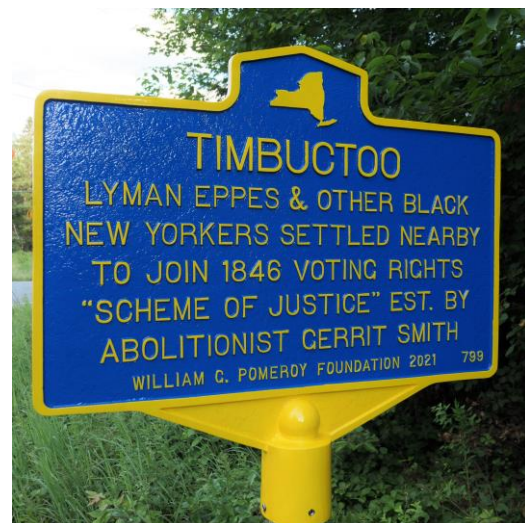
As you will see, we need citation information for each source, not just a snip or excerpt without any context. A copy of the title page or screenshot of the website – including the URL – is useful so we can locate the full source for evaluation.

### Timbuctoo Primary Sources

Here's our first example ...

The first two lines of the inscription were proven with **tax records** from the Town of North Elba, as well as Census records.

Together, these primary sources provide evidence of the date, location and landowner names associated with the Timbuctoo community.



NYS marker for Timbuctoo, N. Elba, NY

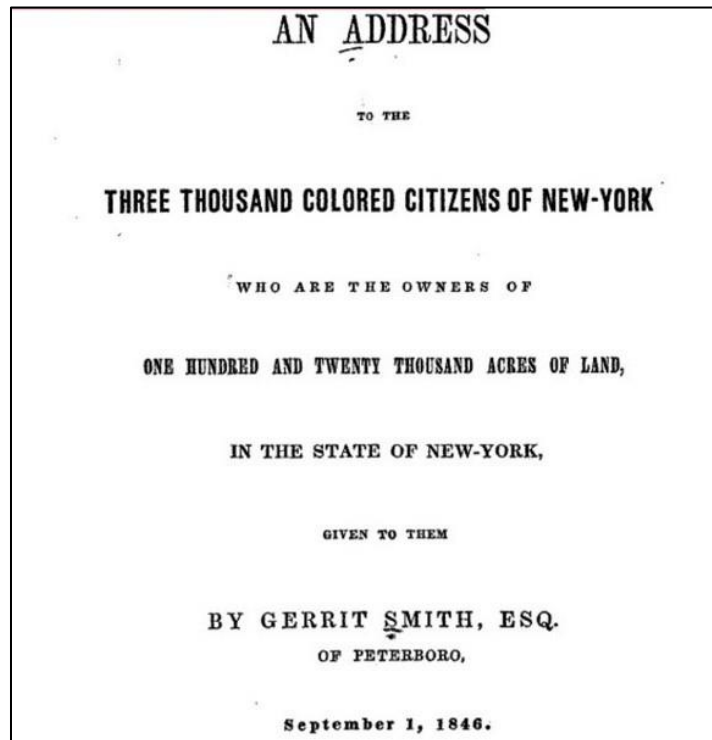
Tax record 1-Assessment Roll of the Town of North Elba, County of Essex, State of New York, AD 1851; Essex Co. Clerk's Office, Elizabethtown, NY.

Name	Residence	Acres	Value	Assessment	Notes
Henry Dickinson	12	1.00	250	1.50	
Lyman Epps	12	1.00	250	1.50	
James Henderson	12	1.00	250	1.50	
...	...	...	...	...	...

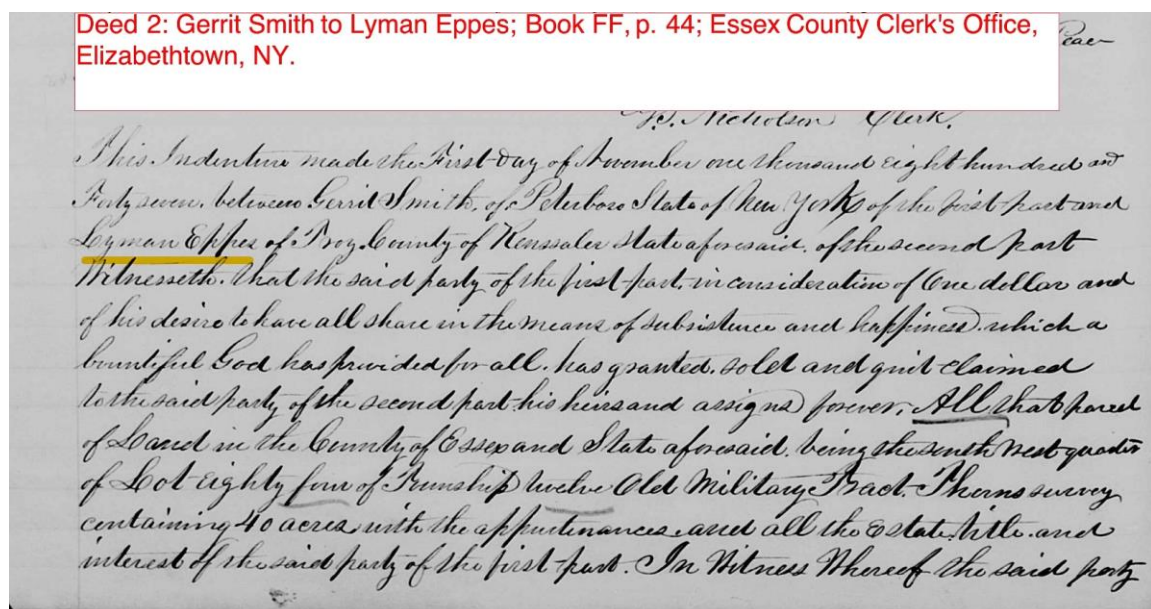
**Tax Record:** Assessment roll for town of N. Elba, Essex Co, 1851 showing land-owners names and lot numbers for Henry Dickinson [sic], Lyman Epps, and James Henderson.



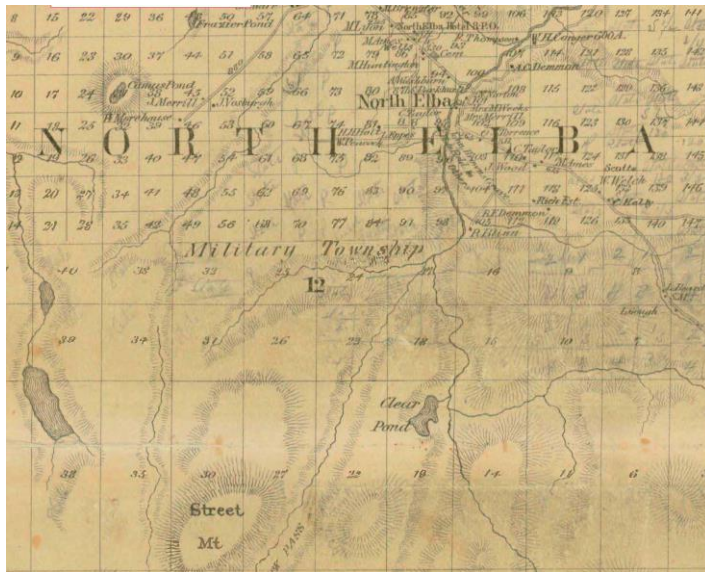
Timbuctoo's formation was based on the "Scheme of Justice" created and advocated for by abolitionist Gerrit Smith, which is referenced on lines three, four and five of the marker inscription. This information is described in **Smith's address published** in 1846, an original copy of which was supplied.



In addition, the **three deeds** displayed on this slide demonstrate that abolitionist Gerrit Smith deeded the specified land to the individuals involved with establishing Timbuctoo in Essex County, New York.



Lastly, a **topographical atlas map** and **newspaper clipping** from the time period were supporting evidence for this marker inscription. They are relevant primary sources that further establish time and place. While every word of the proposed inscription needs to be proven with a primary source, please refrain from submitting sources that do not support the proposed inscription.



Topographical atlas map.



News clip from time period.

## Common Missteps When Preparing Documentation

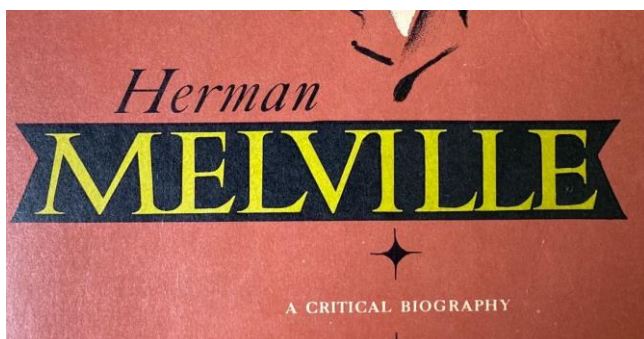
Now that we've outlined one example of how to properly utilize primary sources, let's cover some of the challenges applicants face when preparing their documentation.

Foundation staff have reviewed nearly 2,000 applications with primary sources. The following are some of the most common missteps.

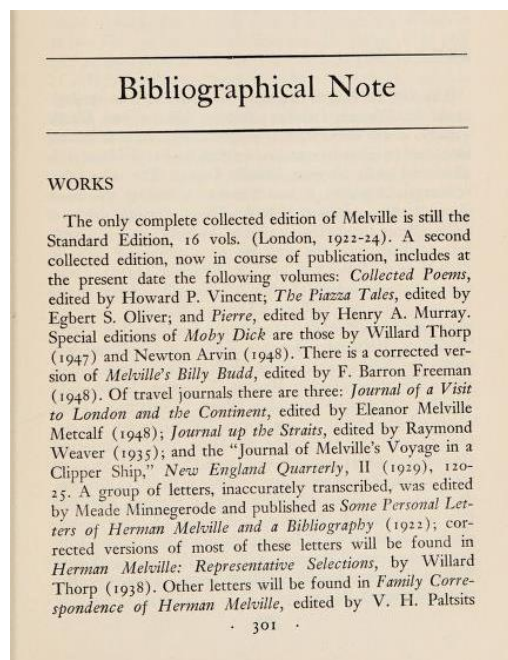
During application review, we often find that a secondary source has been misidentified as a primary source.

For example, unlike autobiographies, biographies **ARE NOT** primary sources. A primary source is a firsthand account or direct evidence concerning the subject being researched. Remember, just because a source is old, doesn't mean it is primary.

Moreover, we often receive proposed evidence from local history books and compiled publications. These types of works are not primary sources; however they may lead you to locating primary sources. Related to this, we often see applications that include a National Register nomination form, which is technically a compiled source, **NOT** a primary source.



*Is this a primary source?* This biography was published in 1950 and is considered a secondary source, but the letters written by Melville listed in the bibliography are primary; this publication tells you where you can locate them.



## Citing Your Sources

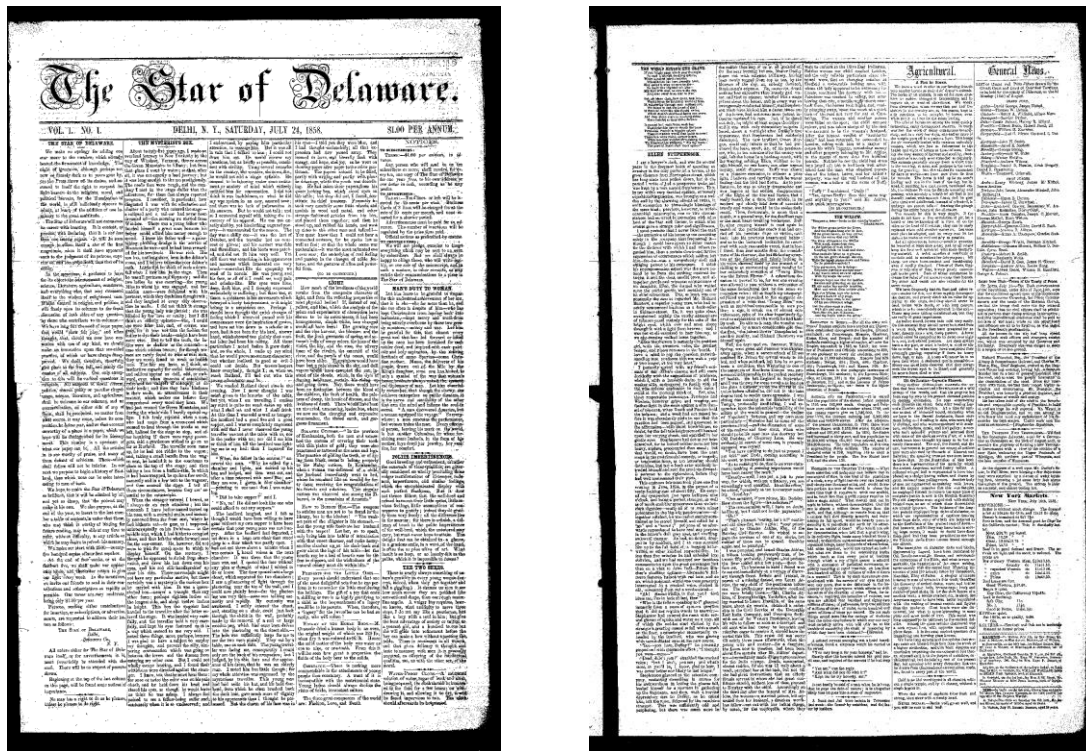
Many submit newspaper articles and ads without displaying a corresponding publication name, date and page.

If there is not a date and publication name on the page you are citing, be sure to locate it and take a photo or screenshot clearly displaying that information. You must submit the masthead information along with the necessary page in order for us to consider it primary source documentation.



The same goes for meeting minutes. ... Meeting minutes, or minutes, are a contemporaneous written record of what was said or heard at a meeting, recorded by someone who was present.

While this original document is a primary source, we need the title page and the page or pages that show the date of the entry. We also need a citation for each source, not just a snip or excerpt without context.



News clips showing title, date and pages.

## Submit Clearly Legible Documentation

Lastly, please be sure to submit documentation that's legible so we are able to clearly validate the source. We cannot accept blurry or grainy images that are illegible.

Additionally, if a document is too highly compressed before it's uploaded, it will not be readable on our end. These are instances that will slow the evaluation process.



## More Information

For more information, visit our [NYS primary sources webpage](https://www.wgpfoundation.org/nys-primary-sources-webpage). If you are looking for complete details about marker criteria or how to apply online, visit our [NYS marker grant program](https://www.wgpfoundation.org/nys-marker-grant-program) webpage at [wgpfoundation.org](https://www.wgpfoundation.org) where you can also review our PDF guides.

If you need further assistance, please contact Christy at [info@wgpfoundation.org](mailto:info@wgpfoundation.org) or 315-913-4060, Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. (EST).

Thank you and good luck with researching your marker inscription. We look forward to reviewing your application.



NYS marker for Shaker Tract in Sodus, NY