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[Archival Chronicle Index](#) | [CAC Homepage](#)

Classes, Researchers Use CAC Sources

Today more than ever, the manuscripts, books, and newspapers at the Center for Archival Collections are in use by students, other academic researchers, and the general public. In addition to the growing number of off-campus patrons, students from several classes are preparing term papers based on information drawn from materials held by the CAC. With such intensive use, and with some collections in very heavy demand, the staff has been concerned with the continued preservation of the original materials while still being able to provide access to the collections to many users at the same time. The Web has proved to be a valuable tool in meeting those needs. The web pages provided to assist students with their courses can also be used by others pursuing similar research topics.

CAC staff members often provide orientation and overview sessions to university classes to prepare the students for research projects they will be doing in the archives. Soon after the CAC's website was established, a brief outline for one of these class orientation sessions was added to the web offerings. Students in American Environmental History are required to trace the history of a piece of property and determine the use that has been made of the land, from its days as wilderness through to contemporary use. Some of this past use is evident in the sites today, but in other cases, buildings have been razed or replaced. Students have selected properties which have been used for farming, for homesites, or for commercial or industrial purposes. This project requires detailed use of a wide variety of public records, newspapers, atlases, and manuscripts, as well as general histories and other secondary sources. Because the types of records the students are to use are so varied, CAC staff found it helpful to have a webpage with these sources listed, and research strategy suggestions, as well as links to other online sources. The pages provide reminders of the types of records that are available and the kinds of information likely to be found there. [Property Research Strategies](#) is also useful for anyone researching an historic property.

Soon other classes had online research aids: American History survey courses and the History of World War II require a term paper based on newspaper reporting of an event chosen by the student. Accustomed to working with secondary sources such as textbooks or with contemporary daily newspapers, students find it helpful to have some guidance in what to expect from historical publications written as events unfolded. See [Newspaper Research](#) for these guidelines.

[Ohio History](#) allows students to select a topic from any facet of the history of the state using original resources including manuscripts, diaries, and local government records. The CAC's research guide for this course suggests some topics which could be supported with materials drawn from our collections as well as some hints for how to work with these unique records.

The American Civil War course allowed staff to review our manuscript holdings dealing with this great conflict. Transcripts of many of the letters and diaries were available in our computer files, and with a small amount of additional coding, they were soon available directly online, each linked to the finding aid for its collection. Students in this class and in U. S. Social Movements transcribed still more manuscript material to be added to the online resources. Through this process, they became intimately acquainted with the men and women who were part of the historical events they were studying. The history became more real for them as it will for researchers around the world who will benefit from having the transcripts available just a mouse-click away.

—Lee N. McLaird