

# Research from Start to Finish: Using the Archives in a Scaffolded Research Project

an in-archives exercise by Geoff Zylstra

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**Students examine suites of primary sources related to various topics in early American history and produce a final research paper.**

## Introduction

This semester-long research project requires students to conduct archival research on an aspect of early American history. This scaffolded model allows students to choose their topics as well as their sources, but still allows beginning students to benefit from a structured and guided experience.

Students complete a series of steps that lead to a final research paper:

- Annotated Bibliography
- Archives Visit #1
- Short Document Analysis Essay
- Archives Visit #2
- Final Research Paper

At the beginning of the semester, students rank and are assigned one of five possible topics:

- First Nations
- Dutch Settlement and Early American Agriculture
- Slavery and African American Life
- The Revolutionary War
- City Services

These were determined by the collections available at our local historical society, by the content objectives of the course, and by my own research interests. During the archives visits, students work in topic-based groups which creates an opportunity for dialogue and collaboration. However, they complete each assignment individually.

When I first designed this project, I wanted to bring my students to the archives primarily to acquire data for the research paper. But I quickly found that the visits also serve as valuable opportunities for metacognition, or examining what we know about thinking and learning. The visit allows students to produce new knowledge by analyzing primary sources and to reflect on the experience of creating, not just consuming, history.

## Objectives

Students should be able to:

- Make observations about and to analyze primary sources studied in the archives
- Refine initial analysis to craft an argumentative thesis statement about one document
- Synthesize secondary source research and archival analysis into a final research paper
- Recognize that the creation of historical knowledge is interpretive, and to reflect on their experience creating knowledge through this project

## Context

Students initiate the research project by compiling an annotated bibliography of at least 5 secondary sources related to their topic. This step provides the necessary context for subsequent research in the archives. See instructions [here](#).

Because of the timing of the visits to the archives (about five and ten weeks into the semester, respectively), not all of the topics will have already been covered in class. The annotated bibliography is therefore very important to all students, but especially to groups whose topics fall later in the chronology of the course.

## Visit

Number of Visits: 2

Duration of Visit: 1 hour 45 minutes each

The first visit occurs after each student has put together an annotated bibliography. The class visits the archives again after each student has completed a short document analysis essay. In this second visit, students reevaluate their documents or look at new ones in preparation for the final research paper.

### Visit 1 Agenda

15 minutes	<b>Standard introduction</b>
1 hour 15 minutes	Document analysis
15 minutes	Wrap up

Groups of three to five students examine several pre-selected documents related to their topic (see Archival Materials Used below). Students are free to look at all or some of the documentations at their station in any order they choose.

I provide each group with a set of document-specific questions related to the items at

their station. The handouts help model analysis and, in the case of longer documents, points students to particularly interesting passages:

[Group 1 handout](#)

[Group 2 handout](#)

[Group 3 handout](#)

[Group 4 handout](#)

[Group 5 handout](#)

## Wrap Up

Students reconvene to reflect on their findings. I ask pointed questions to push students to connect their experience in the archives back to the overarching thesis of my class, that “history is an argument.” (See an article I wrote on this subject [here](#)).

## In Between Visits

Students write an essay that interprets one of the documents they analyzed at the archives. The essay must contain an argumentative thesis statement. See the instructions [here](#).

## Visit 2 Agenda

5 minutes	<a href="#">“Refresher” introduction</a>
10 minutes	Research paper overview
1 hour 15 minutes	Document analysis
15 minutes	Wrap up

The second visit to the archives lets students re-examine their sources or conduct further research. At the start of the visit, the professor ties the archives visit to the final research paper.

Most students have a sense of what their final argument will be, so they should have more pointed goals for their research during this visit. This might include filling particular knowledge gaps, taking transcriptions or photographs, or consulting additional primary sources.

## Wrap Up

Students reconvene and share how they plan to use the documents they examined as evidence for their research papers

## End Products

### Final Research Paper

Students complete a six-page research paper blending research from the archives with secondary materials. See instructions [here](#).

## Archival Material Used

### Group 1: First Nations

Gabriel Furman, Notes Geographical and Historical, Relating to the Town of Brooklyn, 1824; Gabriel Furman papers, ARC.190, box 6, folder 3; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Jaspar Danckaerts, [Image of a Native American Woman], 1679, M1979.23.1; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Mac Leod, William Christie, ed. *The Indians of Brooklyn in the Days of the Dutch*. New York: U.S. Work Projects Administration, 1941; Main collection F129.B747 I54 1941; Brooklyn Historical Society.

### Group 2: Dutch Colonists and Early American Agriculture

Photograph of Bedford Corners, ca. 1832; St. Peter's Church certificates of incorporation, 1974.150; Brooklyn Historical Society.

[Image of Harbor], 1679. Jaspar Danckaerts, M1979.23.2; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Mac Leod, William Christie, ed. *The Indians of Brooklyn in the Days of the Dutch*. New York: U.S. Work Projects Administration, 1941; Main collection F129.B747 I54 1941; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Vanderbilt, Gertrude Lefferts. *The Social History of Flatbush and Manners and Customs of the Dutch Settlers in Kings County*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881; Closed Stacks F129.B7 V36 1881; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Samuel Booth materials, 1835, 1864; Samuel Booth papers, 1974.155; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Plan of the town of Brooklyn and part of Long Island, circa 1850; Flat Maps B A-1766-1767 (185-?).FI; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Map of the Van Pelt Manor, circa 1800s; Flat Maps B P-[18-?]e.FI; Brooklyn Historical Society.

### **Group 3: Slavery and African American Life**

Henry Onderdonk Jr. *Documents and Letters Intended to Illustrate the Revolutionary Incidents of Queens County, N.Y.*, 1884; Henry Onderdonk papers, ARC.045, box 1, folder 5; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Bills of sale, 1751 – 1793; Queens County, N.Y. slave bills of sale, 1978.010; Brooklyn Historical Society.

### **Group 4: Revolutionary War**

Henry Onderdonk Jr. *Documents and Letters Intended to Illustrate the Revolutionary Incidents of Queens County, N.Y.*, 1884; Henry Onderdonk papers, ARC.045, box 1, folder 5; Brooklyn Historical Society.

An inventory of stock taken from Benjamin Sands, September 16, 1776; Sands family papers, ARC.096, box 1, folder 5; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Plan of the Positions and Movements of the British and American Army, 1869; Flat Maps Rev. War-1776 [1869].FI; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Manhattan Island at the close of the Revolution, 1909; Flat Maps Rev. War-1783 [1909].FI; Brooklyn Historical Society.

### **Group 5: City Services**

Section of sewer for the City of Brooklyn, circa 1850; Flat Maps B A-[185-?]e.FI; Brooklyn Historical Society. [click for image](#)

Map showing line of the Brooklyn Water Works; 1864; Flat Maps B A-1864.FI; Brooklyn Historical Society. [click for image](#)

Map of the City of Brooklyn, 1856; Flat Maps B A-1856.FI; Brooklyn Historical Society. [click for image](#)

Petition of the freeholders of the City of Brooklyn, 1841; Catherine and Main Street Ferry Company records, 1977.051, box 1; Brooklyn Historical Society. [click for image](#)

Records relating to the purchase of loads of dirt, 1827; Catherine and Main Street Ferry Company records, 1977.051, box 1; Brooklyn Historical Society. [click for image](#)

## Further Reading

### Group 1: First Nations

Cronon, William. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2003.

Lindeström, Peter Mårtensson. *Geographia Americae: With an Account of the Delaware Indians, Based on Surveys and Notes Made in 1654-1656*. Philadelphia: The Swedish Colonial Society, 1925.

Sanderson, Eric W. *Mannahatta: A Natural History of New York*. New York: Abrams, 2009.  
Strong, John A. *Algonquian Peoples of Long Island From Earliest Times to 1700s*. Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1997.

Weslager, C.A. *The Delaware Indians: A History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990.

### Group 2: Dutch Colonists and Early American Agriculture

Burrows, Edwin G. and Mike Wallace. *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Cochrane, Willard W. *The Development of American Agriculture: A Historical Analysis*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Crawford, George. *Early Dutch Settlers of Monmouth County, New Jersey*. Freehold, NJ: Moreau Brothers, Publishers, 1901.

Hurt, R. Douglas. *American Agriculture: A Brief History*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2002.

Jacobs, Jaap. *The Colony of New Netherland: A Dutch Settlement in Seventeenth-Century America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009.

Kulikoff, Allan. *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Linder, Marc and Lawrence S. Zacharias. *Of Cabbages and Kings County: Agriculture and the Formation of Modern Brooklyn*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1999.

Shorto, Russell. *The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America*. New York: Vintage, 2005.

Steinberg, Ted. *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

### **Group 3: Slavery and African American Life**

Harris, Leslie M. *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Hodges, Graham Russell. *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Wilder, Craig. *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

Wilder, Craig. *In The Company Of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.

### **Group 4: Revolutionary War**

Gallagher, John J. *The Battle of Brooklyn, 1776*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1995.  
Galowitz, Sam W. *Revolutionary War, Battle of Brooklyn: Battle of Long Island*. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2007.

McCullough, David. *1776*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

Schechter, Barnet. *The Battle for New York: The City at the Heart of the American Revolution*. New York: Walker & Company, 2002.

### **Group 5: City Services**

Ascher, Kate. *The Works: Anatomy of a City*. New York: Penguin Books, 2007.

Goldman, Joanne Abel. *Building New York's Sewers: The Evolution of Mechanisms of Urban Development*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1997

Koeppe, Gerard T. *Water for Gotham: A History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Melosi, Martin V. *Precious Commodity: Providing Water for America's Cities*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2011.

Melosi, Martin V. *The Sanitary City: Environmental Services in Urban America from Colonial Times to the Present*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2008.

Monkkonen, Eric H. *America Becomes Urban: The Development of U.S. Cities and Towns, 1780-1980*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988.

Stiles, Henry. *A History of the City of Brooklyn*. 3 volumes. Brooklyn, NY: Privately Printed, 1870.

*This comprehensive history of Brooklyn, written in the nineteenth century, addresses many aspects of city development, including Brooklyn's sewer system. It is available as a free and searchable ebook on Google books.*

Tarr, Joel A. *Search for the Ultimate Sink*. Akron, OH: University of Akron Press, 1996.

## This Exercise Was Used In

**History 1110: Early American History** A survey course examining society and culture in the United States up to 1877. Fulfills general education requirements.

## Adaptability

Guided by course content and available collections, an educator can adapt this exercise to other time periods and topics. It is well suited for a high school or college survey course.

## Course Materials (included)

Annotated Bibliography  
Group 1 Handout  
Group 2 Handout  
Group 3 Handout  
Group 4 Handout  
Group 5 Handout  
Document Analysis Essay  
Final Research Paper

## Cite This Exercise

Geoff D. Zylstra, "Research from Start to Finish: Using The Archives in a Scaffolded Research Project," *TeachArchives.org*, accessed [insert date here], <http://www.teacharchives.org/exercises/scaffolded-research/>.

# Annotated Bibliography Assignment

by Geoff Zylstra



Part of an in-archives exercise at <http://www.teacharchives.org/exercises/scaffolded-research>

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## What is an Annotated Bibliography?

An annotated bibliography is a list of works that also summarizes, and reflects on the importance of those works to the larger research topic.

Creating a short annotated bibliography is the first step in your larger research process. You will build on the research you conduct here when you go to the archive and write your papers.

## How to Create Your Annotated Bibliography

You need to list five secondary sources (complete with publishing information) that you might use in your paper and then annotate (or describe the importance of) them. These sources can be either books or articles from academic journals.

Using either the sources listed in the assignment description or sources that you find, create a bibliography that describes the importance of each source to your larger research project. This means you need to go through each source to determine its importance. List the sources with a complete citation in Chicago style. Then follow the citation with a short paragraph describing how the information or ideas in that source contribute to the research project.

Name, course number, and research topic need to be at the top of page one or on the cover page.

## Sample Citation (Chicago Style)

Berger, Molly W. *Hotel Dreams: Luxury, Technology, and Urban Ambition in America, 1829-1929*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins: 2011.

Berger's book provides an in depth look at the creation of modern luxury hotels in the nineteenth century. Her examination of hotels covers the entire United States, but deals primarily with cities and not hotels or inns in rural areas. Focusing on both the size of the buildings, and the various technologies inside the hotels, she shows connections between urban change, the idea of "modern," and the experience of new technology. This book helps show how hotels and new technologies changed the shape and meaning of urban areas in the nineteenth century.

# In-Archives Handout

by Geoff Zylstra

Part of an in-archives exercise at <http://www.teacharchives.org/exercises/scaffolded-research>

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## Group 1: First Nations

Gabriel Furman, Notes Geographical and Historical, Relating to the Town of Brooklyn, 1824; Gabriel Furman papers, ARC.190, box 6, folder 3; Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. Much of what we learn about Native Americans comes from European documents. Does this matter?
2. Pages 5 - 6 give a brief overview of the First Nations here in Brooklyn when Europeans arrived.
3. Pages 11 - 17 contain reprinted documents from the 1600s. What political relationships do these documents describe? Can anyone buy land from the Native Americans?

Mac Leod, William Christie, ed. *The Indians of Brooklyn in the Days of the Dutch*. New York: U.S. Work Projects Administration, 1941; Main collection F129.B747 I54 1941; Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. How did the settlers and Lenape mark property boundaries?
2. What European items were traded for the land? What is Wampum?
3. What is a kills or kijls? It's a Dutch word. Look it up using Google.
4. What are your reactions to the interactions between the natives and the settlers.

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## Group 2: Dutch Colonists and Early American Agriculture

Plan of the town of Brooklyn and part of Long Island, circa 1850; Flat Maps B A-1766-1767 (185-?).FI; Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. Describe the geography of Brooklyn in 1766-7.
2. When was this map created? Notice the difference between the “date created” and the “date depicted.” How will this impact the way you will interpret the map?
3. What do the roads connect?

Map of the Van Pelt Manor, circa 1800s; Flat Maps B P-[18-?]e.FI; Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. What is this map?
2. What does this map show?
3. How does it relate to agriculture?
4. What is the date of publication? Is this a problem? How could we narrow down the date?

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## Group 3: Slavery and African American Life

Bills of sale, 1751 – 1793; Queens County, N.Y. slave bills of sale, 1978.010; Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. How much money is being transferred? Using an online historical currency calculator, convert the pounds into contemporary dollars and today's dollars.
2. What happened to the woman Peg as described in the document that is signed by John Van Wyk, Robert Howell, and John Coomes?

Henry Onderdonk Jr. Documents and Letters Intended to Illustrate the Revolutionary Incidents of Queens County, N.Y., 1884; Henry Onderdonk papers, ARC.045, box 1, folder 5; Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. Page 14: What does the incident between the black driver, Quamino, and the white gentleman of fortune, Micah Williams, tell us about black-white relations? Who are the authorities and does this matter?
2. Page 17, second column: What happened to Robin and Dick? What does this tell us about slavery?

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## Group 4: Revolutionary War

An inventory of stock taken from Benjamin Sands, September 16, 1776; Sands family papers, ARC.096, box 1, folder 5; Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. What kinds of things did Benjamin Sands report confiscated by the military?
2. How many nights did people board (stay) on his property?
3. What was the total value? Use an online historical currency calculator to convert this amount to today's dollars.

Henry Onderdonk Jr. Documents and Letters Intended to Illustrate the Revolutionary Incidents of Queens County, N.Y., 1884; Henry Onderdonk papers, ARC.045, box 1, folder 5; Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. Page 16: What is this printed document based on?
2. What kinds of things did the farmers in Brooklyn provide to the British? Describe the relationship between the British and the Brooklyn farmers.

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## Group 5: City Services

Section of sewer for the City of Brooklyn, circa 1850; Flat Maps B A-[185-?].FI; Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. Why might the pip be shaped like an oval, or egg? Do some research about pipe shapes.
2. This is a sewer pipe, but what other services are integrated into this technology? See D and E on the document. What does this mean about our networks of technologies?

Map showing line of the Brooklyn Water Works; 1864; Flat Maps B A-1864.FI; Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. How did the water supply system work? Look at elevation, reservoirs, engine houses, and pipes. Does the natural environment play a role in the design of these services?
2. Where does the water come from and where does it go?

Petition of the freeholders of the City of Brooklyn, 1841; Catherine and Main Street Ferry Company records, 1977.051, box 1; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Records relating to the purchase of loads of dirt, 1827; Catherine and Main Street Ferry Company records, 1977.051, box 1; Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. What is the petition complaining about?
2. What can we learn about streets and sidewalks from this document? How were different people thinking about streets and sidewalks?

Map of the City of Brooklyn, 1856; Flat Maps B A-1856.FI; Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. How many ferry lines ran between Brooklyn and Manhattan? What does this mean?

# Short Document Analysis Essay

by Geoff Zylstra



Part of an in-archives exercise at <http://www.teacharchives.org/exercises/scaffolded-research>

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Select one of the historical documents that you examined at the archives.  
Write a 2 - 3 page essay that discusses the historical relevance of this document.

Think about what you can prove historically with your document and discuss that in your paper. You will be using your document to make a historical argument. The document will be the evidence you use to make your argument. You should consider how the details of your document relate to both Brooklyn and larger national history. Use your annotated bibliography to help make the broader connections.

Ask yourself some of the following questions to stimulate ideas that you could write about. These are for brainstorming:

What basic factual information did the document provide to you?

Do these facts show anything about social power, for example class, race, or gender?

Does the document show any thing about living in Brooklyn at a certain time?  
This could be architecture, sewers and sanitation, social relationships, cultural events, government operations and control, religion, economics, etc.

Was there anything that the document did not mention that seems important in terms of the people's lives at that time?

Consider the larger events that occurred at the time of your document (you may need to use your text book or other books). Is Brooklyn similar or different than other places in North America?

# Final Research Paper

by Geoff Zylstra



Part of an in-archives exercise at <http://www.teacharchives.org/exercises/scaffolded-research>

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## Early American History Research Paper Based on Archival Research

### Format and Grading

6 pages, typed, double spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt font or equivalent, stapled. This assignment will be graded based on its (1) content, and (2) structure.

### Research Issues and Topics

This is a research paper based on both archival research from the archive and secondary library research. You need to write a Brooklyn or New York oriented paper on the particular historical time period or issue that you selected earlier in the semester.

You may focus entirely on Brooklyn or New York or you could link Brooklyn and New York to broader historical changes that occurred throughout the US. For example you could look at entertainment or slavery in Brooklyn and compare it to entertainment and slavery that occurred in other parts of the country.

You can think about your historical period and issues in different ways. For example, your paper could be a compare and contrast, describe a major historical shift, focus on something that seems historically unexpected or surprising, or answer a research question.

Your archival research must play an important role in the paper, but your paper does not need to be based entirely on the archival research. This is a broader paper than the essays that you wrote earlier in the semester that focused more directly on a single or a few documents from the archive.

In addition to the archival research, I expect you to conduct library research for this paper and you will need to cite a minimum of four scholarly sources in this paper (textbooks or encyclopedias do not count). Internet encyclopedias are acceptable, but do not count as one of your four sources. I have supplied the class with a list of books to simplify the library research.