

# American History – Colonial Period, Revolutionary Era, and Early Republic

The Newberry is an especially rich resource for the study of Early American history. Some types of primary sources one might find include colonial records; published state archives; historical and genealogical society papers; state, county and town histories; newspapers and periodicals; missionary accounts; travel literature; diaries, sermons and hymns; Indian captivity narratives; and historical monographs. These original sources are complemented by later published editions of primary sources, such as the Early American Imprints and Early American Newspapers microfilm series.

## Colonial Period

Attempting to include all phases in the development of European colonies in the Americas, the Newberry has an abundance of primary source material documenting the British, French, Spanish and Portuguese colonies. Like other subject areas within American history, the [Ayer](#) and [Ruggles](#) collections have a wealth of material for the study of the Colonial Period.

**British Colonies:** The Newberry's British Colonial History collections demonstrate the history of the settlement of the Atlantic Coast and the western movement into its hinterland. A complete list of the Newberry Library material for the British Colonies would reveal such rarities as

- All the early editions of John Smith's *New England and Virginia*
- *A Briefe and True Relation of the Discoverie of the North Part of Virginia* by John Brereton (London, 1602)
- *Voyage Made this Present Yeere 1605* by James Rosier (London, 1605)
- A complete set of the Eliot tracts, 1643-1671

In addition to these rare histories, there are a large number of pamphlets on the French and Indian War, extensive material on the Hudson Bay Company, Indian Wars, Captivities and Treaties, and a great wealth of printed archival material.

**French Colonies:** The Newberry, often within the Ayer collection, has many important sources on the history of the French colonies. Some of the special sources of note are

- A complete set of the Jesuit Relations in original Cramoisy editions
- Multiple editions of Hennepin and Champlain

And many other items, printed and manuscript, are essential sources on the history of the French colonies in North America.

**Spanish Colonies:** No less interested in those sections of the continent that were formerly under Spanish dominion, the Newberry has collected extensively for the history of Mexico and Latin

America for the period of discovery, conquest, and colonization. Some of the rare printed works include:

- Multiple editions of *Las Casas* between 1552 and 1877
- The works of Oviedo and many editions of Acosta, Herrida, and Solis

Many manuscripts and transcripts of archives relating to the conduct of the Spanish colonies are available at the Newberry, most often within the Ayer collection. These collections generally consist of documents from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries which relate to the history of the territory of the United States formerly held by Spain. Transcripts have been copied from the archives of the Indes at Seville, Simancus, Madrid, Nacogdoches, and Matamoras.

For more information see the [Latin American History](#) page.

**Portuguese Colonies:** The Newberry Library has wonderful collection on the growth of colonial Brazil. In addition to the rare Portuguese colonial materials found in the Ayer collection, as a working library of Luso-Brazilian research materials, the [Greenlee Collection](#) is one of the finest in existence.

## Revolutionary Era

The library has a very strong collection of primary sources for the study of the Revolutionary Era.

One important source for the exploration of period is a collection of over 700 American Revolutionary pamphlets (1750-1786). Because the Newberry's American Revolutionary pamphlets were acquired for their texts rather than as imprints, some rare imprints are not present; however, the proportion between the American and British, the Whig and Tory, furnishes a comprehensive view, affording the opportunity for the study of the rise and progress of the controversy from several angles. The following groups are included:

- Preliminaries (1750-1763). Pamphlets discussing the political principles and philosophy of the colonies.
- The Revolution (1763-1783). Controversial pamphlets, both British and American.
- Revolutionary propaganda (1775-1781). Sermons, orations and other material printed to influence public opinion during the conflict.
- Political pamphlets (1781-1786) reflecting on the progress and results of the Revolution.

British and American state papers and the important sets of diplomatic documents printed during the period 1775-1786 complement the pamphlet collection.

Extensive local and family history materials - for instance, a practically complete set of the publications of historical societies and colonial governments - contribute to the rich tapestry of potential sources from which to approach the Revolutionary Era. The Ayer and Ruggles collections add to the wealth of material for the study of this era. For more information on these special collections please see their descriptions.

## **Early Republic**

For the formative developments subsequent to the Revolutionary War, the Official Publications of American State Constitutional Conventions is a valuable collection. Here, the Library has nearly every text and more than two-thirds of the recorded editions. Included are not only the more valuable 'Journals,' 'Proceedings,' 'Minutes,' or 'Debates,' but also minor items such as rules, ordinances, reports of committees, and speeches so that the scholar may approach the subject from multiple angles.

As for other areas of American history, the Newberry holds extensive genealogical materials - for instance, a sizable collection of New England genealogies and local histories - that contribute to the rich tapestry of potential sources from which to approach the Early Republic. The Ayer and Ruggles collections have rare and unique sources that inform our understanding of the expansion of the young nation: for instance, a nearly complete collection of Indian captivity narratives can be found at the Newberry.

### **[Bibliographic Guide for American History](#)**