



The History of Your State

How can you learn about your state's history?

Introduction

What is your state like? How did it get to be that way? Who settled your state? Who built its towns, cities, and farms? Why did these people choose your state as a place to live? Questions like these are what history is all about.

Studying history is like solving a mystery, and historians are like detectives. When you study history, you use all kinds of clues to determine what happened in the past. As you find clues, you find out more and more about history.

These clues can be written records, like journals, newspapers, and letters. People may have seen or taken part in the events described in these written records. Sometimes, they write these events down to share with other people. Historians also investigate the things you see around you, like old buildings, cemeteries, and bridges. These places show us how people in the past lived. Each of these has a story to tell you about the past. These clues help you to understand the connections between people and the events they experienced.

Discovering these clues and finding out about your state's history can help you appreciate the place where you live. It can help you understand why your state is the way it is today. It can even help you predict what your state might be like in the future.

- ◀ Clues to your state's history can be found in old buildings, newspapers, and photographs. In Boston, the historic Old State House is dwarfed by modern buildings. But the Old State House is an important part of the state's history.

Social Studies Vocabulary

primary source

secondary source



History

1. How We Explore the Past

The clues historians use come in many forms. You must use many types of clues to build a clear understanding of the past. You can find clues in letters, journals, newspapers, and photographs. These are all **primary sources**. Primary sources are sources created by people who have seen or taken part in the events they describe. Suppose your state's first governor made a speech about his hopes for the state. That is a primary source. When you read the speech, you learn about the past from someone who was there.

You can also use **secondary sources**. Secondary sources are created by people who have not experienced the events described. This book is a secondary source. It has information about history, but its writers did not witness that history.

A secondary source may include primary sources and describe their importance. For example, a secondary source might explain why your state's first governor gave that speech. It might tell how people reacted to it.

Primary and secondary sources are both useful. They each give different types of information. A primary source may have rich detail, but it gives just one opinion. A good secondary source draws information from many sources. It can help explain how different views and opinions fit together. Use both types of sources when you study the past.

primary source a source created by someone who has seen or taken part in the events described

secondary source a source created by someone who has not seen or taken part in the events described

A primary source gives a witness's account of a past event. This newspaper and photo both tell a story about the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco, California.





Primary sources include personal records, such as family photos. These records help historians understand connections between people and the events they experienced.

2. Why We Study the Past

Why do we live where we do? Who were the people who came before us and what events did they live through? How did those events shape their actions? How did those events shape what they believed? By studying history, we can find the answers to questions like these. We can see that events did not happen by accident and that past events have shaped our lives today. We can even find clues about how the future may unfold.

History can teach us a great deal. If we understand our history, we can better understand who we are.

Think about yourself for a moment. How would you help someone understand who you are? You might describe your family members, like your parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. You might say where they came from and how they came to live where they do. Or you might discuss your goals and all the things you want to do in your life.

Who you are is the result of things that happened long ago. What happens in your future depends on what you do today. Historians think about those connections. Studying history helps historians understand who we all are.



The Cliff Palace in Colorado is the largest cliff dwelling in North America. Pueblo peoples lived in the area for 700 years.

3. The Settlement of a State

Learning about your state's history can help you appreciate where you live. So, start at the beginning.

The first people to live in most of our states were American Indians. They probably came looking for a good place to hunt or to grow food. Your state, community, or street may have an American Indian name. Names are often clues to a place's past.

In the early 1500s, Europeans began to settle in North America. Some hoped to find riches or natural resources, and others came here in search of religious or political freedom. You can find out when and why settlers came to your state.

In many areas, the new settlers drove the American Indians off of their land. The settlers brought their own ways of living and introduced new languages, including English and Spanish. They built towns and farms, and they formed governments. Many of us live in or near the towns the settlers built. We use a system of government these people created.

You can find many details about the settlement of your state. Then you will begin to know the story of your state.

4. The Expanding United States

Do you live in one of the original 13 states? If so, you may know about the rich history of these states. Many contain battle sites from the American Revolution and historic towns and buildings. There are monuments to many great events and people from our country's early history. You can learn a lot about these states by visiting or reading about such sites.

Other stories unfolded in states that joined the country later. After its founding, the United States expanded to the west and began adding new states. Many of these states were created as the result of a law called the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. You can still read this law today. The document tells how states near the Great Lakes area were formed. If you live in one of those states, this primary source might interest you.

The United States also acquired lands from other countries. Can you find these lands on the map? In 1803, the United States almost doubled in size when it bought territory from France with the Louisiana Purchase. You can read primary and secondary sources about that purchase. These resources would help you learn how Louisiana and other states northwest of it were formed.

When it was still just a new nation, the United States began expanding west. It bought lands from foreign countries and acquired land through war and cession.





During the Gold Rush, miners helped California's population grow rapidly.

5. Westward, Ho!

The United States continued to expand west. As the population grew, new states were established.

Settlers in the West arrived from other countries and the eastern states. What did these settlers come to find? In the 1800s, many people were looking for land and open space. They wanted to get as far away from other settlements as they could. Many people moved west because of the promise of inexpensive land. Farmers settled many states of the Great Plains, such as Kansas and Nebraska.

Some people who traveled west followed the Oregon Trail to the Pacific coast. They settled in what would become the states of Oregon and Washington. Some of them were drawn by dreams of finding riches. In 1848, a mill worker discovered gold in the West. Tens of thousands of people came looking to strike it rich and many stayed. They formed a new state—California.

What drew people to your state? How did people build lives there? Every state has its own history. Asking questions like these and researching the answers can help you learn about the unique history of your state.



Settlers started farms on the Great Plains in the 1800s. These settlers could get large tracts of land for little money.



In the late 1850s, thousands of miners traveled west to seek gold in California. The city of San Francisco grew as people found work providing miners with clothing and transportation.

6. The Growth and Development of a State

The settling of your state is just part of its history. It continues to grow and develop today. People still come to the United States from all around the world. In addition, many Americans move from state to state. The new arrivals add to the history of your state.

The states in our country are alike in many ways and are different in others. Each is special in its own way.

In some states, towns and cities crowd together. Other states have miles and miles of open space. Some states have lots of businesses and factories. Others are mostly farmland.

States developed in different ways because of their natural resources. States also differ because of the people who settled them. What can you find out about how your state has grown and developed?

Lesson Summary

Learning about the history of your state can help you appreciate it and understand why the state is the way it is. You can act like a historian to learn about your state's past. Historians find clues to the past in primary and secondary sources. These records help a historian understand connections between people and the events they experienced.

To learn about your state, find out about its earliest settlers. Then, find out how your state fit in the expansion of the United States. Was your state one of the original 13 states or part of the westward expansion? Why did people settle there? Each state has its own story. By asking questions and researching the answers you can learn the unique history of your state.

Your State's History

Your state has a long history! Long before the word “state” was ever used, the land was home to American Indians. Over time, many events brought changes.

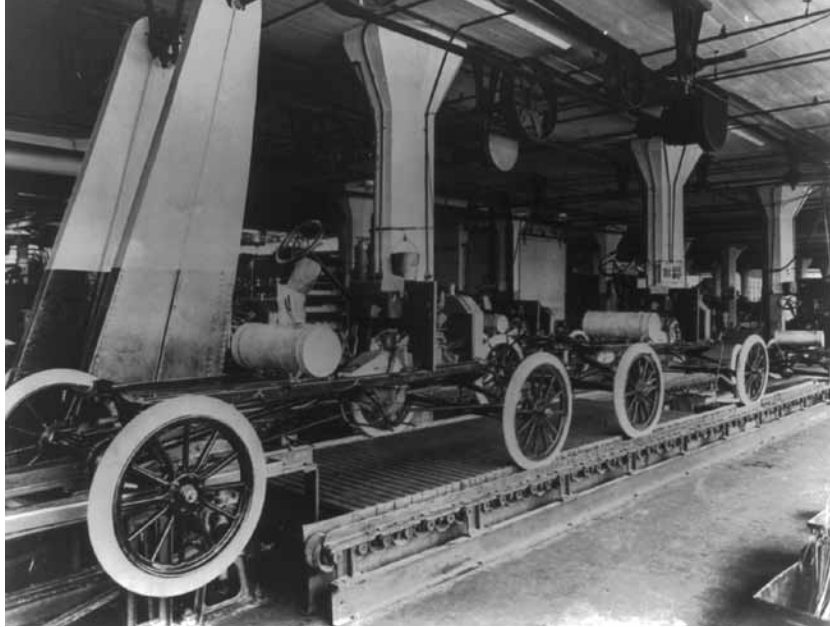
In this activity, you will answer this essential question: What was the most important event in our state's history? Not everyone will agree on an answer. People have different opinions. It is your job to find sources you can trust, gather information, and form your own opinion. Here's how to start:

Find an encyclopedia article that breaks down your state's history into eras, or time periods. If you live in Michigan, the beginning of the list might include: *American Indian days, French exploration, British control, Territory, Statehood, Birth of auto industry.*

Write all the eras of your state on a piece of paper. Then choose one that you think may include the state's most important event. Begin to research the important events of this era. You can start with encyclopedia articles and then use the Internet and library to find primary sources, such as newspaper articles or letters from the time period. Remember that primary sources give just one opinion. You can also use secondary sources that have drawn information from many sources. Record key events from this era on a table like the example shown here for Michigan.

A student in Michigan created this table to show the important events in the era called Birth of the Auto Industry.

Era: Birth of the Auto Industry	
Historical Event	Why It Was Important
1899 – Ransom E. Olds builds first auto factory in Detroit.	Cars changed how Americans travel and where they live.
1913 – The Ford Motor Company begins assembly line production of cars.	Detroit became the center of the nation's auto industry. The state population grew as people moved to Michigan to work in factories.
1917 – Car factories begin to build trucks and airplane engines during World War I.	This helped the United States win the war.



When Ford Motor Company began making cars on an assembly line, this was an important event in Michigan history. It created jobs and caused cities to grow.

Present Your Opinion!

Is there an event on the table that you believe is the most important event in your state's history? If not, create another table for a different era. When you've chosen your important event, prepare an argument to convince your classmates.

Start with a statement that names the most important event. Then support your statement with evidence that you found in your research. You could tell what happened in the event, when it happened, and where it happened. Tell about some of the important people involved in the event. All of this evidence should support your opinion that this event was very important. To do this, explain how your state changed after that event. Did more people come to the state, or did people leave the state? Did the state become famous to people in other parts of the country or world? To convince others, it will help to present information for your research. Try to include a quote by a well-respected person who agrees that this was an important event.

Make a presentation to your classmates. Then listen as they make their presentations. Tell them if you think they made a good argument. Did they support their opinions with strong information? Did they persuade you to agree with them?

Lost and Found

Philadelphia is a city with a *lot* of history. Historian Ed Lawler is proud to know that history well. Yet one day he found a history mystery right in front of him. How did he uncover clues about the past?

Ed Lawler loves to show people around his hometown of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The city has many historical sights to see, and Lawler knows a lot about them. One day, however, a cousin asked him a question he could not answer. Lawler had just explained that Philadelphia was once the capital of our nation. He showed his cousin the buildings where Congress had met and where the Supreme Court had gathered. “Where did the president live?” his cousin asked. Lawler didn’t know.

Lawler set out to find the answer. He quickly discovered that no one was sure exactly where the first presidents had lived!

As a historian, Lawler knows how to do research. He’s curious, and he’s a good detective. So he got right to work to learn about the President’s House. He wanted to know where it was, what it looked like, who lived there, and what happened there.

Philadelphia was the capital of the United States from 1790 to 1800. Congress met in Congress Hall (left). The Supreme Court met in Old City Hall (right). But where did the president live?





This memorial at Independence Mall is an open-air footprint of the original President's House. You can see where the front door and windows would have been.

Asking Questions

Lawler began by reading many books. Historians agreed that Presidents George Washington and John Adams had lived in the President's House. They also agreed that the house was razed, or no longer stood.

The agreement stopped there. Historians said different things about where the house had been and how it looked. So Lawler started to ask some questions.

First, he wanted to know who owned the house. Lawler went to the **archives** of the city of Philadelphia. At the archives, he found the deed to the President's House that told who owned the house in the 1780s. After more searching, he found a newspaper advertisement that answered another question—where was the house? The ad gave the location on Market Street, one block north of Independence Hall.

But what did the house look like? At the Library of Congress, Lawler found another copy of the deed that included a drawing of the house's layout. Lawler figured that people in Philadelphia in the 1700s would have bought insurance for their homes. So he searched in a collection of old insurance records. Sure enough, there were papers describing the house. Lawler learned how large the rooms were and where the stairs were located. He found out how many fireplaces the house had and what the house looked like.

archives a collection of historical documents and records

Words Tell a Story

What went on inside the house? Lawler wanted to know, so he looked at other kinds of records. He read books, letters, and diaries. In them, he found many stories about life in the President's House.

Lawler read about fancy dinners that George and Martha Washington held on Thursdays. He also learned that every Tuesday President Washington had an open house when people could drop in and visit. One primary source explained, "Washington received his guests, standing between the windows in his back drawing room."

John Adams was the next president. He and his wife Abigail lived in the house until they moved to the new White House in Washington, D.C. Mrs. Adams is famous for the many letters she wrote. In one, she stated, "I feel more at home here [in the President's House] than I should any where else in the city."

The Adams' son, John Quincy Adams, also told stories about the house. In the room where Washington had his open houses, the Adams children once rolled up the rugs and held a dance for their friends.

As Lawler read these old documents, he could feel the President's House come alive. He could picture the Washingtons living there. He could almost hear the Adams family talking to him.

At parties like this one, people could meet President and Mrs. Washington. The President lived in Philadelphia during most of his presidency.



Other Voices

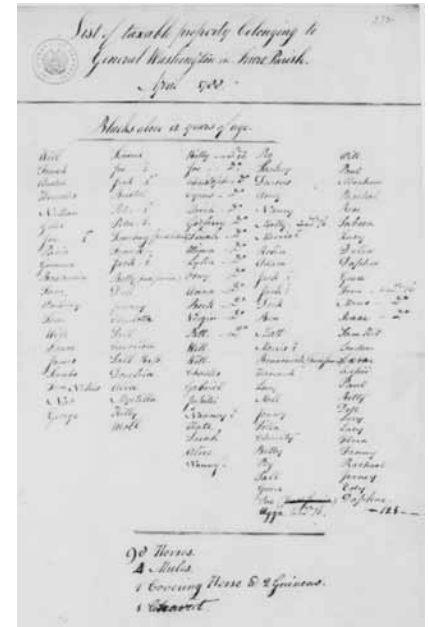
Lawler found other voices from the past, too. He realized that there was an untold story about the building. During President Washington's time, it was the home of nine enslaved African Americans.

What were the stories of these nine men and women? Lawler uncovered them. From the writings of Martha Washington's grandson, he learned about Hercules. This man was the chief cook for the house. Lawler read that "the whole household, treated the chief cook with such respect, as well for his valuable services as for his general good character and pleasing manners."

Lawler also found stories about a woman named Moll. She cared for the Washington children and grandchildren. He read about Oney Judge, who was Mrs. Washington's personal servant. Little by little, he learned about all the African Americans who lived and worked in the President's House.

For Lawler, it has been rewarding to learn about the lives of these African Americans. "In the past, they've been largely a list of names," he said. "I've tried to gather personal anecdotes and biographical information to help turn them back into real people."

Today, Lawler is still asking questions about history and finding answers. Because of his detective work with primary and secondary sources, historians can now tell the story of the President's House and the people who lived there. ♦



The names of Hercules and Moll appear on this 1788 list of Washington's property.

Visitors at the President's House can learn its history through colorful panels, timelines, and videos. One goal of the memorial is to tell the story of the slaves that served there during Washington's presidency.