An introduction to archival research and writing forest history

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Looking Back, Looking Forward: The Ongoing History of Canada's Forests
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In this session we will learn

• to distinguish between primary and secondary sources
• the difference between an archive and a library
• how to navigate archival culture
• how to locate specific info in an archive
• how to craft compelling narrative
• **Primary sources** (often found in archives)
Originates from time under question, unique documents, independent, reliable.

• **Secondary sources** (often found in libraries)
Published books or articles by people who are interpreting primary sources or past events.
David Douglas (1799-1834)

- modest Scottish upbringing
- 1820 botanic garden Glasgow University
- recommended to Royal Horticultural Society, London
- mysterious death
General secondary sources:  
Wikipedia, Cdn Dictionary of biography  
Journal articles, books  

Primary sources:  
Douglas’ published journal  
The original journals and correspondence
• Librarians
  - decide what to include in their holdings
  - impose a universal(?) classification system
  - descriptions made at the item level

• Archivists
  - decide whether to keep or discard records
  - describe and attempt to bring order
  - descriptions made at the collection level
In the archives

- getting access
  - record groups,
  - record types,
  - finding aids
Turning Primary Sources into Narrative

• identify author, time/place, events and ideas

• context, under what circumstances was record created?

• what does this tell us about period in question?

• critical readings include
  - understanding of author’s motives, intended audience
  - relationship between author and event
  - what is missing or distorted
  - identify unspoken assumptions
Please get in touch!

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http://www.foresthistory.org/research/Canadian_archives_Fr.pdf
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