

## Research Guide: Using Primary Sources to Understand Douglas County's 1965 Plum Creek Flood

In 1965, Douglas County experienced one of its worst floods on record when Plum Creek overflowed. During the event, bridges, cars, and homes washed away. For weeks afterward, helicopters flew food and grocery items into Douglas County while crews worked rapidly to repair bridges and roads. For a fuller story about the flood, follow [this link](#), click the purple arrows to expand the document, and scroll down to “June 16 & 17, 1965.”

Using the 1965 Plum Creek flood as a focal point, this guide introduces users to primary source research, pointing out digitized archival collections from the [Douglas County Libraries Archives & Local History website](#).

### What is a Primary Source?

Primary source material comes from people or organizations who were directly involved in an event. Or, the source was created at the same time as an event. A letter written by Clara Barton and a newspaper article announcing the results of a presidential election are both primary sources. Archives are great places to find primary sources. You can access primary sources about Douglas County's history at the Philip S. Miller Library in Castle Rock.

Some archival primary source material might be letters, photographs, reports, maps, or official records. Archives make sure that these materials can be accessed by the public for all kinds of uses – research, presentations, marketing, museum exhibitions, or simply so curious people can use them.

### **Primary Source Examples:**

***Oral histories:*** In an oral history, a person or group takes part in a recorded interview. They answer questions and tell stories about their life or about their experiences during historic events. This type of primary source is a good way to understand individual experiences.

**Photographs & artwork:** Photographs and artwork capture a moment in time or an image. This type of primary source is a good way to see what life was like in the past. They can tell you what was important to people at the time. An artist might try to tell a story or send a message with their artwork. A photograph might show you what was important to the photographer – like their family members, their pets, or special events.

**Letters & manuscripts:** Letters and manuscripts tell a written story. A letter might describe daily life to relatives, or a manuscript might show how an author drafted their book.

**Videos and film:** Videos and film are similar to photographs and artwork, but they can also preserve historical audio and sound. They can also capture a larger range of imagery, as compared to a photograph, which is one still image.

### **Flood Sources from the Archives:**

*Click on the links below to see items from Archives & Local History's website. Look at or listen to the items and read their descriptions. Then think about what you can learn from each type of primary source. Answer the questions below each item.*

1. **[1965 Flood Video](https://archives.dcl.org/digital/collection/photos/id/3365/rec/1), 2014.025, Bette Saunders Estate Materials**

<https://archives.dcl.org/digital/collection/photos/id/3365/rec/1>

*Bette Saunders recorded this video of Plum Creek's floodwaters near 2<sup>nd</sup> and Perry Streets in Castle Rock, Colorado. At the end of the video, there is also footage from Larkspur.*

What can you learn from this primary source that you can't learn from other primary sources? What kind of questions might a video answer?

2. **[Memories of the 1965 Flood, Oral History](https://archives.dcl.org/digital/collection/doh/id/166/rec/5), 2015.007, 1965 Plum Creek Flood Oral History**

<https://archives.dcl.org/digital/collection/doh/id/166/rec/5>

*Interviewees: Judy Penley, Mike Penley, Pat Hayden, Mildred Stewart, Velva (Wyatt) Bains, William (Bill) Duncan, Harry Thompson, Fred LaPerriere, Kirk Kimball, Terry Thompson, Jackie Allis, David A. Curtis, Bob Kuehster, and Elver Robbins*

In this oral history, fourteen people talk about their experiences during the 1965 flood. What do you notice about the recording? How might the memories be different if they were written down?

3. A) **Flood Damage in Castle Rock at Wolfensberger Road looking West, 1995.006, Morris Fleming Photographs**

<https://archives.dcl.org/digital/collection/photos/id/1831>

*This bridge is washed out.*

B) **Titan Road Bridge Debris Site with Bradford Meacham, 1994.001, Meacham 1965 Flood Photographs**

<https://archives.dcl.org/digital/collection/photos/id/136>

*A boy stands in front of a flood-damaged bridge.*

C) **Destroyed Automobile in Silt North of Castle Rock; 1993.006, Mary Cornish Papers**

<https://archives.dcl.org/digital/collection/photos/id/1798/rec/8>

*An automobile is buried in silt from the flood. Its driver escaped unharmed.*

Compare and contrast photographs A, B, and C. What is different about them? What is the same? How do they answer different questions about the flood? What kind of detail do they give?

### **Build Your Own Flood-Resistant City:**

For a fun way to learn about how cities can protect themselves from floods, play this game from PBS. [Don't Flood the Fidgits](#) explains all kinds of flood-resistant technologies, like culverts, canals, rain gardens, and more.

If you have questions about archives, need help with research, or are just curious about other resources Archives & Local History offers, reach out to [LocalHistory@dclibraries.org](mailto:LocalHistory@dclibraries.org).