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Researching Unit Histories Using Primary and Secondary Sources

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As with most historical topics, a good way to start research, especially for the uninitiated, is with secondary sources and then proceed to primary sources. For Iowa's volunteer regiments, two books published shortly after the end of the Civil War stand out. In 1866, Lurton Denham Ingersoll published *Iowa and the Rebellion* which was his account of the histories of each of Iowa's 40 infantry regiments, its Regiment of Colored Troops, 9 cavalry regiments, and 4 artillery batteries. Another excellent contemporary account is from Captain A.A. Stuart entitled *Iowa Colonels and Their Regiments*. This book is a collection of short biographies of every colonel in Iowa's infantry and cavalry regiments and is organized sequentially by regiment. Both of these publications are available on CD-ROM.

Two comprehensive primary sources are absolutely necessary for serious researchers on the topic of Iowa volunteer regiments. The first is the *Roster and Record of Iowa Troops in the Rebellion* originally published by Guy E. Logan in 1911 and now available on CD-ROM. The roster goes methodically through each regiment, company by company listing alphabetically every volunteer who ever served in that regiment. Typical information shows the volunteer's entire name, city of residence, state or nation of birth, date of enlistment, date of muster, battle wounds received and/or death, promotions/demotions, awards and medals, movement to other regiments, mustering out date, and other details. This troop roster also lists every officer that ever served in the regiment.

A second comprehensive primary source is the monumental publication by the United States government entitled *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. This publication was originally in 128 volumes and was published over a period of 21 years, from 1880 to 1901. Both of these documents are also available on CD-ROM and are much easier to use for research purposes than the originally printed volumes.

Other secondary sources include memoirs, stories, and histories written by veterans in the years after the war. Also county histories that date from the 1880's to the 1910's include much information on veterans who were living in local communities in each respective county during that period. Many of these sources are located in the State Historical Library in the State Historical Building in Des Moines.

A vast amount of other primary sources are also available. There were many newspapers in Iowa in the 1860's covering every imaginable aspect of the war. Some of the better newspaper coverage is to be found in the newspapers in eastern Iowa perhaps because settlement, transportation, and communications were concentrated much more in eastern Iowa at that time and also because regiments were organized and mustered mostly in eastern Iowa cities. Also many items are to be found such as government documents, political

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and military correspondence, and manuscripts donated by veterans. The manuscripts include many diaries and letters to and from veterans with friends and family. Most of these primary source items can be found in the Iowa State Archives or the State Historical Library in the State Historical Building in Des Moines. The archivists and librarians are also very helpful resources for helping the researcher. An able and motivated researcher will find other primary and secondary sources than those mentioned here, but the items mentioned here will take the researcher a considerable distance.

-- Dave Holmgren --

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