

What Would the Librarian Do?

This handout outlines one approach to a research question similar in nature to the one currently assigned to you. It represents *one* approach—but not necessarily the *only* approach—to researching the question. In attempting to be fairly comprehensive, this example may include some resources and procedures that won't be useful for every research question—you will need to adapt the suggestions made here to your own specific question and circumstances.

QUESTION: What influenced the establishment of the New Harmony, Indiana, utopian community in 1825 by Robert Owen (1771-1858) and William Maclure (1763-1840)? Why did it succeed or fail? What can modern society learn from the success or failure of New Harmony?

1) The first thing I would do would be to make sure I understood the question and what was expected in terms of outcomes for the assignment. If I had questions, I would ask my instructor for help in clarifying the project. A few questions early can save lots of frustration and wasted effort later on!

2) Next, I would make sure that I had my RefWorks account set up and that I had created a folder within RefWorks to keep track of the sources I use during my research. Organization is key—and will save you a lot of time later!

3) Since I don't know much about Robert Owen, William Maclure or the community of New Harmony, I would look for a good overview to give me some background information and a sense of what directions my further research might take. One good way to do this is to consult an authoritative encyclopedia. I might choose the online version of the **Encyclopaedia Britannica** or the print version of the **Encyclopedia Americana**—or both! It never hurts to get more than one opinion on a subject. I would pay close attention to any references to further reading or sources cited by the articles, as these will form additional leads to investigate later.

NOTE: Encyclopedias are not considered primary or original sources—while you can use them to further your own background knowledge, you may not be able to cite them as sources in your final paper. Consult with your professor for guidance.

4) Once I have some background knowledge about Owen, Maclure and New Harmony, I would thoroughly search VIRGO to see what books and other materials the UVA libraries may have dealing with these subjects. I would look not only for Owen and Maclure as keywords (subjects) but also as authors—they may've written autobiographies, diaries, letters or other items about their utopian ideas and experiences that would be useful first-hand accounts. It is always good whenever I can study and cite such primary sources.

HINT: If I found a few good books on the subject of New Harmony, I would be sure to look over their bibliographies in order to try to discover other related books that my original searching may not have found—then I'd look for those books in VIRGO as well.

5) While the UVA libraries have millions of items in their collections, they don't own everything. You might want to research other sources to see whether there are books about Owen, Maclure or New Harmony that UVA doesn't own. Two ways you can do this are to check **Amazon.com** (quick and easy but won't usually show you older and/or out-of-print

books) and **WorldCat** (a little harder to search but very comprehensive—ask a librarian for help). If any of these books seemed potentially useful—and if you have time enough—you can ask the library to borrow the books from another university’s library. This is called **interlibrary loan (ILL)** and it is a free service to you as students. It does often take a week to ten days to obtain things on ILL, however, so it may not be an option for every paper or project. Ask a librarian for assistance about requesting ILL materials—or look under the “Requests” tab at the top of most VIRGO screens and click on the “Material Not In VIRGO” link.

6) Books are not the only—and sometimes not even the best or most up-to-date—research resources. So I would next mine the periodical (journal) literature for information on my topic. There are a lot of periodical indexes available—and which one(s) you should use will vary depending on your topic. If you are having trouble deciding which to use or can’t seem to find articles on your topic, ask for help at the library! For this particular topic I might find several of the following periodical indexes useful (all available from the Databases tab at the top of most VIRGO screens):

- America History and Life
- American Periodicals Series Online (contains the *New Harmony Gazette*)
- ATLA Religion Database
- Historical Abstracts
- History Resource Center
- InfoTrac Academic OneFile
- Lexis-Nexis (useful for current newspaper articles and news reports)
- Periodicals Archive Online
- Philosopher’s Index
- ProQuest Historical Newspapers
- Sociological Abstracts

I would pay close attention to the bibliographies of any articles I found from these resources, since those items may lead to others on the same or related topics. I would be diligently keeping track of all the resources I use in my RefWorks account! I would also note which articles are available online and which are only available in paper form at the library. And, since there may be a number of useful articles that UVA doesn’t own or have electronic access to, I would be requesting those needed articles using ILL, if time permits.

7) Next I would check various reference books in addition to the encyclopedias I looked at earlier. In particular I might check both the *American National Biography* (Alderman Reference CT213.A68 1999) and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Alderman Reference DA28.O95 and also online) for more biographical material and leads to further resources.

8) I might also check the *ProQuest Digital Dissertations* database to see if anyone has written a dissertation on my topic or related to my topic. This resource can be especially useful since many of the dissertations are available online in full text—and you can mine their bibliographies for additional resources you may’ve missed in your own research.

9) It occurs to me that I might be able to support or augment my research thesis with some statistical data about the New Harmony utopian movement—or about utopian communities in general. A good place to go for statistical data is the **Geospatial and Statistical Data Center** in

Alderman Library (<http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/>), now a part of the Scholar's Lab. So I would be sure to pay them a visit during the course of my research.

10) While I'm at the GeoStat Center in Alderman, it occurs to me that they may also be able to help me find some **maps** related to New Harmony or early history in Indiana. Using maps in my presentation or paper could be a useful way to correlate data and to help others visualize what was going on at New Harmony.

11) Although it's doubtful that there would be many, if any, government documents relating to New Harmony, there might be for other projects I'll be involved in later, so it's worth keeping in mind that a visit to the **Government Information Services** department in Alderman Library might also be useful while I'm there. (<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/govdocs/>)

12) Pictures and images help people understand concepts and relationships and generally make dull papers and presentations much more interesting. So I would be sure to try to find some images for my project by checking several of the resources listed on the Brown Science and Engineering Library's **Science and Engineering Images** subject guide page. This web page is located at <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/science/guides/s-images.htm>.

13) For help in considering the social, ethical and economic aspects of my topic, I would consult several of the resources listed on the Brown Science and Engineering Library's **Social, Ethical and Economic Aspects of Science and Engineering** subject guide page. This web page is located at <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/science/guides/s-ethics.htm>.

14) Finally, I would do some searching on the web to see if there were any good web pages on my topic. I would remember that no single search engine covers the entire content of the web, so I might search in several of these—and remember that there are still others in addition:

Ask.com
Google
Infomine
Science.gov
Scirus
Windows Live Search
Yahoo!

I would keep in mind, too, that although Google Scholar might lead me to some potentially useful resources, it also does not cover all possible scholarly resources and often cannot provide access to full text—so I will usually save time and find more resources by using indexes like those mentioned above in paragraphs 5 and 6.

15) I would also always keep in mind that if I had any questions about where to find the material I needed or what were the best places to look for information, I would consult with reference staff in the library for advice! You can reach us by phone at 924-3628 or by E-mail at sciref@virginia.edu or by coming to the Information Desk in any UVA library.