



Using the information you gather on the web site, answer the following questions about the unit.

1. Records for the Board of Health were kept for a number of reasons. Why do you think keeping these records was important at the time?

Doctors needed to know what diseases were appearing in Minnesota and what treatments were being used. Having reports that include the symptoms of a disease could help other doctors know how to diagnose and treat it.

What can they teach us now?

Today, these documents can teach us about the way illnesses were treated, who was most likely to get certain illnesses, and what mistakes might have been made when doctors were just learning about the disease and its effects.

Why is it important today that your doctors keep a record of your visits?

By keeping a record of your visits and ailments, doctors can use that information at a later date to treat you. They can't possibly remember all of the details of your allergies or illnesses, so keeping records helps them determine the best form of treatment for you when you are sick.

2. Articles about issues important to the community are often found in newspapers and serve to motivate people to action. The article about unvaccinated residents is one example. What articles have you seen in your local newspaper that might motivate readers to take action?

Answers will vary, but they might include articles about a local tragedy, a local political issue, a health or safety concern for the community, or an upcoming event for which volunteers are needed.

How effective do you think these articles are?

An article's effectiveness can depend upon a number of things: where it is in the newspaper (how visible), how the article is written, and the person reading it.

As a historian, how would you evaluate these articles as sources?

They could be evaluated in the same manner as other newspaper articles, but their effectiveness might be judged on how many people responded to the article, either in letters to the editor or in civic action for a cause.

3. The report from the Board of Preventable Diseases shows how the state government was asked for help by a local doctor. What information might a state board member have that a local doctor might not?

The board member may have greater knowledge of diseases or outbreaks in other areas of the state, as well as having faster access to new information about treating a disease.

Beyond the Sources • Public Health

What might be an advantage to having someone from “outside” the community come in to evaluate a situation like the smallpox epidemic in Red Wing?

Someone who is “outside” of the community may have new information that a local doctor doesn’t have time or resources to obtain. They may also have seen other doctors trying new methods of treatment that have been successful.

Why might having an “outside source” provide his or her opinion NOT be a good thing?

Someone from outside of the community may not know or understand the particular needs of the community and its citizens.

4. How can the birth and death certificates of a person be useful sources for us as historians?

These tell us the dates of a person’s life, how they died, the names of their parents, and where they were born and died. This is basic information that is helpful for the researcher who is studying a person or family.

How accurate can we assume them to be?

For the most part, government records like these are accurate, but some mistakes can be made. The coroner of Red Wing incorrectly spelled a name on one of the death certificates of a victim of the Sea Wing disaster, which might cause a researcher or a person studying family history to be unable to locate the person correctly.

What information could these provide that we might not be able to find anywhere else?

These documents are relatively fast ways to locate information about a person’s parents, their places and dates of birth and death, and the cause of their death. It can be difficult to find some of this information in other sources.