



Beyond the Sources • Eva McDonald Valesh

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

1. Primary sources like these about Eva Valesh can tell us much about a person's life, economic situation, family, work, and activities. If you were to write a biography of Valesh's life, what other information would you need that is not given in these sources?

Information about her childhood, her marriage, her work as a reporter, and her political life would all be necessary to have in more detail than is provided in these sources.

In what other sources do you think you could find that information?

Court records, other letters or diaries, more articles she wrote for the newspaper, photographs and family reminiscences would all be helpful.

2. Valesh was a woman who didn't fit into the role that many people of her time expected a woman to play. Which of the sources you viewed might suggest that this was true?

Her article about working women and the article written about her role in the Alliance party can suggest to us that she might have challenged the role of women at the time. Her mention of her husband and her travel for business in the letter also suggest this.

What kinds of things do these sources tell us about her own attitude about her role as a woman and what was expected of her?

She didn't seem to mind being seen as a challenge to traditional roles and insisted upon doing what she felt was most important, regardless of what society seemed to think.

3. Primary sources are not always factually reliable. In Valesh's letter to her friend (Letter 2) she lies about her age by incorrectly stating the year of her birth. How does this affect your confidence in what she wrote in the rest of the letter or in her diary?

If she would lie about her own birthdate, it is likely that other information she provided could also have been false.

If you can prove that a source is not completely accurate, do you think it is still useful?

Yes.

Why or why not?

The fact that she lied about her age tells us something about her as a person and what she considered important or how she wanted to be perceived to those who would read her biography.

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4. There are a number of things to consider when using a diary or reminiscence as a primary source in your research. Why might a diary or reminiscence not be completely accurate?

People remember things from their own perspective, so you are only getting one side of the story in a diary or reminiscence. Also, reminiscences are often written years after an event, so the accuracy of the reminiscence also becomes an issue.

Do you think other people could have remembered an event differently than Valesh did?

Yes.

Could she have a personal opinion about an event that might be different from someone else's?

Yes.

What other sources could help you determine how accurate her description of an event might be?

Reading other descriptions of an event from other diaries, newspaper articles, or letters can help us to get a clearer image of the accuracy of her account.