Tagging for Access

This week, we’re talking tags! When the National Archives first introduced the concept of the “citizen archivist,” our goal was to embrace the principles of Open Government while creating an online experience that connects the public to the mission of the National Archives. We recognize that what researchers learn from the records is valuable, we want to create ways to capture and harness that knowledge and information.

To encourage contributions from the public, we implemented tagging in the National Archives Catalog in 2011 as a way for users to apply meaningful keywords or labels to records and make content more discoverable online. Tagging is designed to be open to all users; as tags are added to items and descriptions in the Catalog, users can more quickly and easily find, and re-find, the information they seek.
Here’s a sampling of some of the tags added to descriptions by catalog users in recent weeks.

As more records are digitized every day, more items are being added to the online Catalog. We are currently adding hundreds of thousands of digital objects to the Catalog each week! With all of that information available online, tagging is just one of the ways we can help Catalog users locate records at the National Archives. Tagging can even help researchers establish relationships between records that are not immediately obvious. The best tags add new keywords or concepts not already found in the title or description.

Looking at some examples of the various ways Catalog users leverage tags can be helpful to understand the purpose and philosophy behind tagging.

In the example below, details from the image are tagged: Singer Sewing Machine and smile. These keywords are not found anywhere in the description, but now they will appear when searched for. Additionally, manufacturing is
clearly illustrated in this image, but it is not represented in the description. The keyword tag helps identify it as a record about manufacturing.

You may also notice the unusual tag, `wmwr-tg1`. This tag was created by the Community Managers for the National Archives Catalog and added to records to create a tagging mission around women at war. Code-like tags are very useful because the search engine does not bring back other results that are not part of this very specific set.

Sometimes researchers use tags to collect a list of records. Did you know that by creating your own tags you can share a list of records with a colleague, use them in a presentation or for a special event?
The description above includes the tags: National History Day and learninglab. These tags are not words or even concepts that are found within the record itself, but by adding this tag it will be returned in a search result that is meaningful to our colleagues in the National Archives Education staff’s Learning Lab and history teachers participating in National History Day.

These are just a few examples of the different ways to use tags. How have you used tagging to help with your online research?

We recognize that users have different motivations for tagging. To encourage constructive conversations and contributions, we’ve created a Citizen Contribution Policy that outlines acceptable contributions to the Catalog.

New to Tagging? Learn how to get started. Are You Ready to Tag? Select a Tagging Mission and get tagging!

We’d love to hear from you!
- How have you used tagging to help your research?
- How would you like to contribute to the National Archives Catalog and increase access to our records?
- Do you have ideas about features and functionality you’d like to see in the Catalog?

Send us a message at catalog@nara.gov

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New and interesting records in the Catalog

**War Department:** [American Unofficial Collection of World War I Photographs, 1917-1918](#)

World War I photographs obtained from private sources, the U.S. Army Signal Corps, and other Federal and State government agencies. We have recently added more photographs to this series.

Contents of the files vary from inmate to inmate, but nearly all include a "Record Sheet" that gives the inmate's name; registration number; alias; crime; sentence in years, months, and days; court fines and costs; date received at the penitentiary; date of sentence; date sentence began; date maximum terms ends; good time allowed; occupation; age; date eligible to parole (after 1910); violations (date, description, number of days in solitary confinement); and loss of days toward reduction of sentence. Most files include a "mug shot" photograph of the inmate with front and profile views.
Constructing Justice: An Exhibit of Courthouse Photographs at the Federal Judicial Center

Throughout much of the history of the United States, federal courthouses have been one of the most common points of contact between citizens and their government. Since the earliest days of the judiciary, these buildings have presented in brick and mortar (or steel and glass) a tangible image of the federal courts. The history of the design and construction of these courthouses provides a perspective on the growing importance of the judiciary and the expansion of its role in public life. In an exhibit at the Federal Judicial Center, photographs selected from the collection of the Office of the Supervising Architect depict the variety of buildings serving the judiciary during an era of tremendous growth. From 1815 to 1939, the Office of the Supervising Architect at the U.S. Treasury designed and oversaw the construction of federal buildings throughout the nation. Often a combination of courtroom, courtroom, and post office, these structures betokened the authority of the federal government to every region of the country. Newly settled towns vied with larger cities for the placement of federal office that might make their communities administrative and commercial centers. The new buildings were a prestige to the federal courts, which previously had sat in an assessment of state offices and rented buildings.

Over nine decades, the architectural styles varied from the restrained classicism of the 1830s, to the budding Romanesque of the late-nine

enth century, to the clean-lined Art Deco of the New Deal era. Throughout these years, however, the form and vocabulary of classical architecture predominated. The supervising architect and staff designed most of the courthouses, but during a brief period in the early twentieth century Congress authorized the hiring of private architects. Some of the most prestigious firms in the county, such as commissions and created grants, Beaux Arts Style buildings that had at the appearance of a state capital.

Many buildings were of the latest engineering design as well as of the prevailing architectural fashion, and in early as the 1850s they featured cast iron and other fireproof materials. But the vitality of the federal courts threatened the long-term preservation of many of the buildings, in spite of their architectural distinction and advanced methods of construction. As cast iron increased and courts absorbed more and more rooms, even some of the most monumental and expensive courthouses faced the worker's bail, to provide space for larger federal buildings.

The twenty-eight buildings represented in the Federal Judicial Center exhibit reflect the varied history of courthouses built during this period. The small, virtually unchanged Windsor, Vermont, building of 1819 is the oldest continuously used courthouse and post office in the country. Others experienced a far more turbulent history. The courthouse of Galveston, Texas, fell into Contractor's hands. In Richmond, Virginia, the courthouse served as the presidential office of President John.

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Questions or comments? Email us at catalog@nara.gov.