



The Insider's Guide To

THE DIGITAL VAULTS

www.archives.gov/nae

By Suzanne Isaacs

More than 30,000 people came to our latest exhibit opening last April. There was no ribbon-cutting, no cocktail reception, no banners, so you could easily be forgiven for missing this launch.

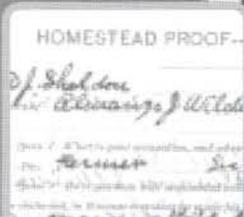
This latest exhibit at the National Archives, part of what is called the National Archives Experience, was not contained within its stone walls but in the bits and bytes of cyberspace. Unlike a typical online exhibit, the new Digital Vaults is more than the digitization of a physical display. It is an entirely new environment that allows visitors to create their own collections, games, posters, movies, and more based on the primary sources we hold.

When work began on this project two and a half years ago, our goals were fairly clear. Working with the Foundation for the National Archives, we had made a commitment to bring the new Public Vaults exhibition

in Washington, D.C., to the web.

The Public Vaults gives visitors the sensation of walking behind-the-scenes into the Archives' vaults and stacks. The exhibition combines interactive elements and original materials from the Archives to explore not only well-known people and historic turning points but also little-known events that provide surprising perspectives and insights. The Public Vaults were a great success, engaging visitors of all ages in a "hands-on" exploration of the way that National Archives records reflect and illuminate the experience of generations of Americans.

In imagining the transition to an online environment, we wanted to capture not only the content of the exhibition but also the spirit of visitor discovery. Thus, the Digital Vaults—an interactive exhibit that even "baby boomers" and school-age children will be able to easily navigate.



THE CONCEPT

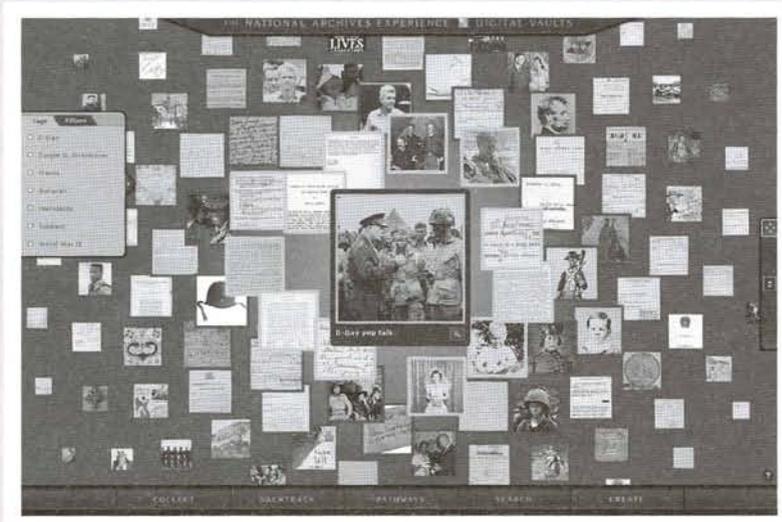
The development of the World Wide Web and web sites has come a long way, with innovations being introduced all the time. New web sites are now places where you can participate, be heard, and share ideas. The staff of the National Archives Experience wanted a web site that would embrace these new concepts. Together with Second Story Interactive Studios, we designed a new kind of an exhibit—one that could be different each time you visit, where you could be creative and you could share your creativity with others.

While you can search for records in the Digital Vaults, it is not a search engine. Rather, the web of records we've created is a serendipitous approach to an online exhibit. This new and different exhibit isn't complicated—it's fun!



A sampling of the 1,200 facsimiles of photographs and documents in Digital Vaults that can come together in unexpected ways to tell the story of our country. Explore connections in history through family photographs, immigration and naturalization records, patents, homestead records, government posters, presidential records, and much more.

THE WEB OF RECORDS



In the Digital Vaults you will find 1,200 documents, photographs, posters, artifacts, sound recordings, and moving images handpicked from the billions of records in the National Archives. This web site's interactive elements illustrate how these records can come together in unexpected ways to tell the story of our country. The subject tags attached to every record allow you to make connections between the records. You are in control of the exhibit—when you click on a record, it moves to the center, and the entire screen reloads. The screen now features records that connect to one in the center. For example, if your center docu-

ment is a photograph of Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower speaking to the troops before the D-day invasion began, the surrounding records will relate to generals, D-day, Presidents, soldiers, France, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and World War II, or a combination of those subjects. Each new record that you select opens up a new set of tags and connections.

The web allows the National Archives to share more information and details than you can find in a physical exhibit. The web allows us to provide links that enhance your visit. Links can take you to *Prologue* articles, online exhibits, lesson plans for teachers, government agencies, and even to NARA's

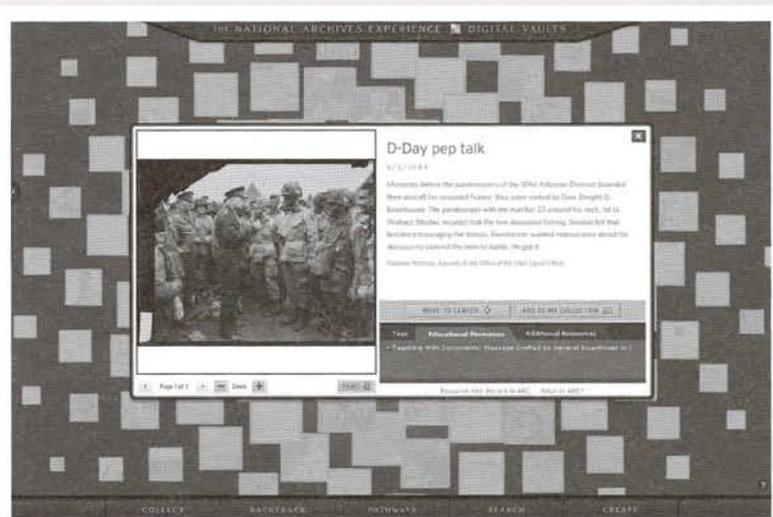
- ❑ When you roll your mouse over the subject tags on the left side of the screen, lines will appear to show you which records are related to that subject. Clicking on any of the tags will reduce the web of records to only that tag.
- ❑ We have so many records, they can't all fit on the screen. Use the arrows on the far right side of the screen to reel in the records from the outer edges.

The Digital Vaults web site allows access to 1,200 documents, photographs, posters, artifacts, sound recordings, and moving images from the billions of records in the National Archives. Clicking on a record moves it to the center and opens up a new set of tags and connections relating to that record.

regional archives and presidential libraries.

Sometimes a record can be so interesting that a visitor will want to do some additional research. What makes the Digital Vaults unique is its ability to bridge the worlds of visitor and researcher through a connection to the Archival Research Catalog (ARC). Every record has a direct connection to that record in ARC.

You can save your favorite Archives records for the next time you visit or to use in the "Create" section. If you see a record that you like, open the collect tab at the bottom of the screen and drag the image into it. Place as many records in there as you want.



Zooming in on an image allows a closer look at its detail. Learn more through additional resources such as *Prologue* articles, lesson plans, online exhibits, and references to related National Archives records in the Archival Research Catalog (ARC).

- ❑ When viewing the record detail, you can zoom in to examine it more closely. Once you zoom in, you can "grab" the image with your mouse to view other parts of the image.
- ❑ The Archival Research Catalog (ARC) is the online catalog of NARA's nationwide holdings in the Washington, D.C., area, regional archives, and presidential libraries.

CREATE

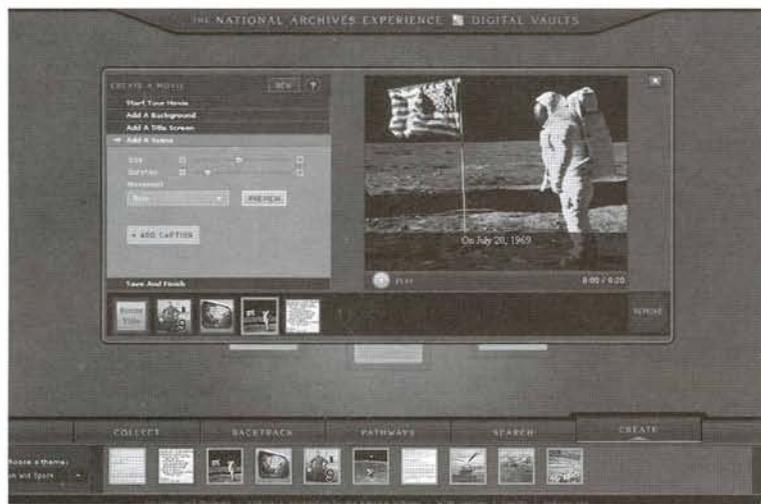


Create posters by dropping in images and adding color and text. The poster can then be saved or sent to friends.

Did you ever want to see more and do more when you viewed an exhibit? How about being creative or clever? In the "Create" section of the site, you can make your own poster or make a movie. To make your own poster, you can use the records you placed in your collect tray or you can use some of the records we've provided in several categories. We've made the process easy—just grab a record and drop it onto the poster screen. You can then change colors, alter the size, rotate the image, and add text to enhance your poster. We also created clip art that you can add to your poster. When you are done, you can save the poster, print it, or send it to a friend.



A Harlem street scene, 1917.



Creating a movie isn't much different from creating a poster. We use the same drag-and-drop technology in both, and you can use records in your collection or use the records we've provided. Begin by selecting a starting point from the list of topics. Work your way through the list of

additions to the movie maker, adding the background layers of sound and color and an opening title. Create movie scenes by dragging a record to the black bar at the bottom of the movie maker. Now you can become a filmmaker by using the tools to make the image come alive. Add

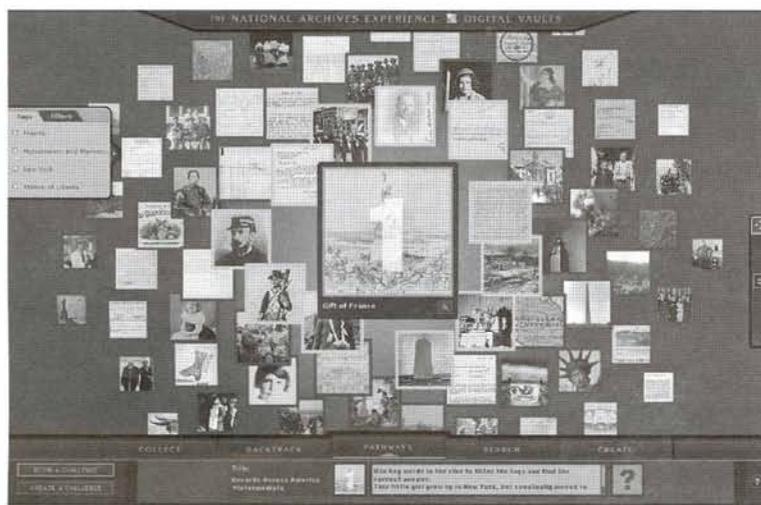
- If you want to save anything you have created or collected, you will be prompted to create an account at the Digital Vaults. On your next visit, sign in, and you will be able to retrieve everything you have saved.
- You can see how a particular zoom or pan looks as you are creating your movie by clicking on the "preview" button.

Produce movies by adding images, sound, and color, as well as captions. View the finished product or send it to others to view.

Opposite: Enlarged are images of an American pilot in France, ca March 1918, and the ascent stage of Apollo 11, July 21, 1969.

a zoom or a pan to the image to create movement on the screen. You can even add a caption to the bottom of every image to help tell your story. When you are finished, press "play" to see your masterpiece—then you can save it or send it to a friend.

PATHWAYS



Using the web of records, we created a different kind of trivia game. In Pathways Challenges, you search the web of records for the answers to a set of clues. Selecting the correct record leads you to the next

clue. With three levels of difficulty, the Pathways Challenges go from a fun romp to some real brainteasers. If you are up to the challenge, you can even make one of your own and test your friends.

- In some Pathways Challenges, turning off some of the tags will help you narrow down the choices and find the correct answer.

Pathways Challenges is a kind of trivia game based on searching web records for answers to a set of clues.

Now that your guided tour of the Digital Vaults is finished, you are ready to show off your skills. Maybe you can even show a child a thing or two. **P**



Author

Suzanne Isaacs is the digital projects coordinator for the National Archives Experience at the National Archives and Records Administration. She oversaw the redesign of the National Archives Experience web site (www.archives.gov/nae) and the development of the Digital Vaults. She holds a B.A. in American history and an M.L.S. in archives from the University of Maryland.