

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES *of the* UNITED STATES



**A**nyone who has cleaned out a family attic knows the importance of keeping family records. You may have military records from relatives who served in one of the World Wars—or even the Civil War. Or pictures of your great-great grandparents on the day they became American citizens. Or the canceled check that paid for your first home.

Now imagine the task of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)—the nation's record keeper. Many people know the National Archives as the keeper of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. But we also hold in trust for the public the records of ordinary citizens—for example, military records of the brave men and women who have fought for our country, naturalization records of the immigrants whose dreams have shaped our nation, and even the canceled check from the purchase of Alaska.

In a democracy, records belong to the people, and for more than seven decades, NARA has preserved and provided access to the records of the United States of America.



*The National Archives Building in Washington, D.C., where the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights, are kept.*

Records help us claim our rights and entitlements, hold our elected officials accountable for their actions, and document our history as a nation. In short, NARA ensures continuing access to the essential documentation of the rights of American citizens and the actions of their Government.

The National Archives was established in 1934 by President Franklin Roosevelt, but its major holdings date back to 1775. They capture the sweep of the past: slave ship manifests and the Emancipation Procla-



Washington, DC, displays the Constitution (above), Bill of Rights. (Photo by Earl McDonald)

mation; captured German records and the Japanese surrender documents from World War II; journals of polar expeditions and photographs of Dust Bowl farmers; Indian treaties making transitory promises; and a richly bound document bearing the bold signature “Bonaparte”—the Louisiana Purchase Treaty that doubled the territory of the young republic.

NARA keeps only those Federal records that are judged to have continuing value—about 2 to 5 percent of those generated in any given year. By now,

they add up to a formidable number, diverse in form as well as in content. There are approximately 9 billion pages of textual records; 7.2 million maps, charts, and architectural drawings; more than 20 million still photographs; billions of machine-readable data sets; and more than 365,000 reels of film and 110,000 videotapes. All of these materials are preserved because they are important to the workings of Government, have long-term research worth, or provide information of value to citizens.

In addition, NARA must also manage the rapidly growing number of electronic Government records. Now being developed, the Electronic Records Archives (ERA) is our strategic response to the challenge of preserving, managing, and providing access to electronic records. ERA will keep essential electronic Federal records retrievable, readable, and authentic for as long as they remain valuable—whether that is a few years or a few hundred years.

The rich stores of material that make up the National Archives of the United States are available to all.



**C**oncern for the preservation of the records of the nation was expressed early. “Time and accident,” Thomas Jefferson warned in 1791, “are committing daily havoc on the originals deposited in our public offices.” But it was not until the early 1930s that historians and others concerned with the preservation of the nation’s records saw their hopes realized.

The task of designing an archives building was given to the distinguished architect John Russell Pope. He set out to create a structure that would be in harmony with other great Washington landmarks—the White House, Capitol, Treasury Building, and Lincoln Memorial—and at the same time express the significance, safety, and permanence of the records to be deposited inside.

Ground was broken in 1931, President Herbert Hoover laid the cornerstone in 1933, and the staff moved in to work in 1935. The building reached capacity in the late 1960s, and many records were moved to off-site storage and regional archives. After years of planning, in 1993 a new archives building was completed. The National Archives at College Park, MD, is a modern facility that has enabled NARA to consolidate its Washington-area records. The six-story building’s present records storage capacity is approximately 2 million cubic feet, and its research rooms can accommodate up to 390 researchers at a time.



*An archives aid pulls files in Dayton, OH. (Photo by David Cornelisse)*



*The National Archives at College Park, MD. (Photo by Richard Schneider)*



*A conservator examines ink on the Constitution. (Photo by Earl McDonald)*

NARA's mission, however, reaches far beyond these two buildings to cover the entire lifecycle of records from creation to their ultimate use. Archives locations in 14 cities, from coast-to-coast, protect and provide public access to millions of records. In addition to assisting Federal agencies and the public with research and reference services, we deliver educational programs and public workshops to help Americans learn how to use archived records. Further, 17 Federal records centers provide Federal agencies superior records storage, access, and disposition services through a national network of facilities.

The National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis manages the records of millions of military veterans of the 20th century as well as former civilian Federal employees. Published daily, the *Federal Register* is a record of Government proclamations, orders, and regulations, and Presidential and other public documents. The Presidential libraries house papers, records, and other historical materials relating to all Presidents from Herbert Hoover on, their families, and their administrations. Not strictly libraries, these institutions combine museum exhibits and educational programs with original records open for research.

*A selection of Federal Register publications.  
(Photo by Darryl Herring)*



NARA also runs a Government-wide records management program to identify records of permanent value, assure the timely disposal of temporary records, and provide agencies with guidance on managing their current records, and it assists non-Federal institutions through a grants program administered by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

## Visitors to the National Archives Building

in Washington, DC, are invited to begin their journey through the National Archives Experience at the William G. McGowan Theater. There, a film highlighting the role of the National Archives in preserving the nation's records is shown throughout the day. The theater is also a showplace for documentary film and informative lecture programs, featuring screenings of films from the Archives' extensive holdings and presentations by authors, historians, and other researchers who use our records.

Ascending from the McGowan Theater, visitors can enjoy the latest offerings in the Lawrence F. O'Brien Special Exhibition Gallery or enter the Public Vaults, the first permanent interactive exhibit hall at the National Archives. The Public Vaults give visitors the sensation of going back into the stacks and vaults where original records are held.



*An archivist at the George Bush Library assists a researcher. (Photo by Brian Blake)*



*Researchers at the College Park, MD, facility. (Photo by Carrie Goeringer)*

Once inside, visitors not only have the opportunity to look at fascinating letters, maps, and films that offer glimpses into the history of our country but will also have the chance to make their own discoveries about the stories found in records.

The Boeing Learning Center is a headquarters for the nationwide education programs of the National Archives. In the center's ReSource Room, educators, parents, and children are invited to explore documents in-depth. At the Learning Lab, scheduled groups of middle school students can work with primary sources related to the U.S. Constitution.

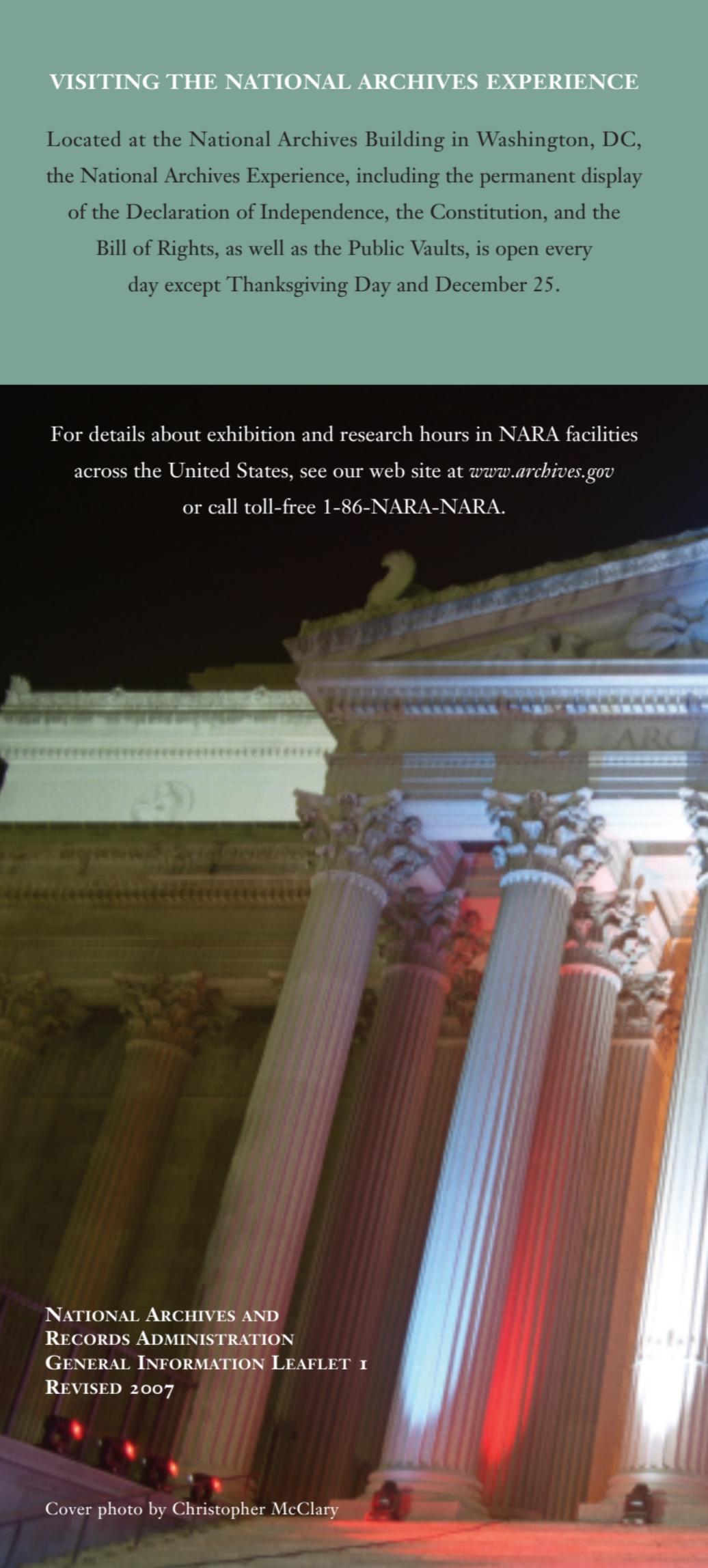
The highlight of any National Archives Experience visit is a stop at the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom, where our nation's founding documents are displayed. First installed in the National Archives in 1952, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights (collectively known as the Charters of Freedom) were re-encased in the renovated Rotunda in 2003. In the exhibit "A New World Is at Hand," these founding documents are flanked by 14 cases containing milestone documents that chronicle the development of the Charters and the impact they have had on the course of American history.

The National Archives Building has numerous sculptural decorations and inscriptions, but the words on the base of one statue have become identified with the institution itself. Cut into the stone are these words from Shakespeare's *Tempest*: "What is past is prologue." Certainly there is no better reason for preserving the documentary materials of the American experience.

## VISITING THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES EXPERIENCE

Located at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC, the National Archives Experience, including the permanent display of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, as well as the Public Vaults, is open every day except Thanksgiving Day and December 25.

For details about exhibition and research hours in NARA facilities across the United States, see our web site at [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov) or call toll-free 1-86-NARA-NARA.



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Cover photo by Christopher McClary

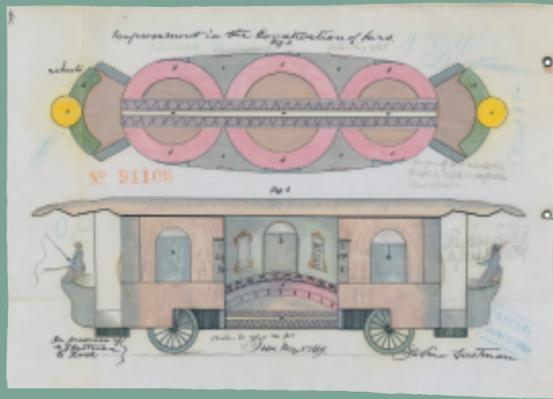
# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

of the UNITED STATES

The banding together of seaboard colonies into one nation, exploration, slavery, civil war, homesteading, commerce, politics, immigration, labor and industry, doughboys and GIs, booms and busts, international treaties, civil rights marches, conservation . . . it's all there, woven through holdings in National Archives facilities and Presidential libraries across the nation, documented in photographs, maps, recordings, motion picture film, and textual and electronic records.



Spanish land grant, 1798. (RG 49, Pacific Region)



Patent drawing for an "Improvement in the construction of cars," 1869. (RG 21, Mid Atlantic Region)



Papers of Robert E. Peary relating to polar regions are part of the National Archives collection of donated material. (306-NT-542-1, Washington, DC)



Clara Barton's concern for people caught in wars and disasters led her to found the American Red Cross. (111-B-1857, Washington, DC)



A family heading west in pursuit of a homestead poses with its wagon in Loup Valley, NE, 1886. (69-N-13606C, Washington, DC)



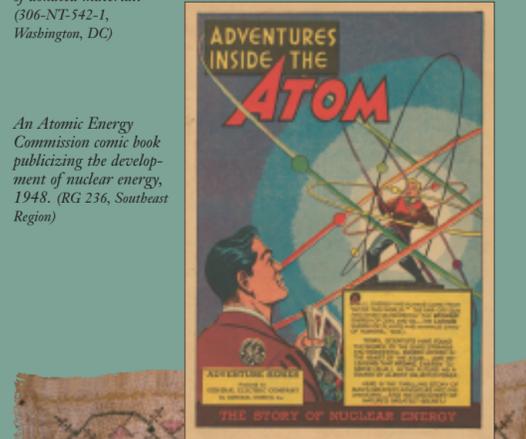
Louisiana Purchase Treaty of 1803, French exchange copy. (RG 11, Washington, DC)



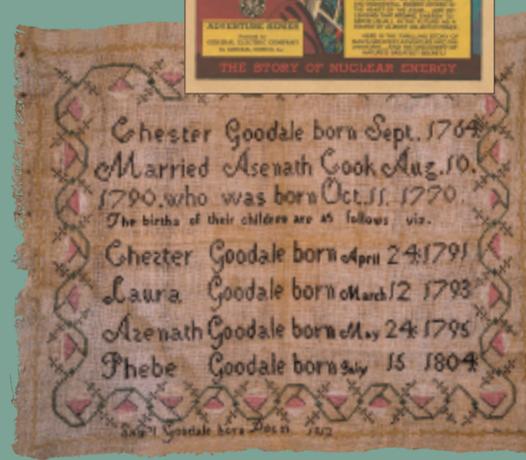
Chun Duck Chin and his son, Chun Jun Yut, 1899. (RG 85, Pacific Region)



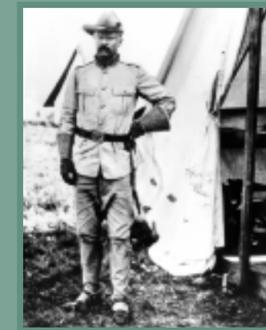
Al Jennings, a prisoner at Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary, KS, 1902. (RG 129, Central Plains Region)



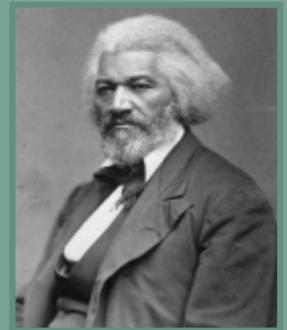
An Atomic Energy Commission book publicizing the development of nuclear energy, 1948. (RG 236, Southeast Region)



A needlework sampler submitted to the Pension Office in 1840 as proof of relationship to Revolutionary War veteran Chester Goodale. (RG 15, Washington, DC)



Theodore Roosevelt served as a lieutenant colonel in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. (306-NT-341Q-1, Washington, DC)



Frederick Douglass, a former slave, became a leader of the abolitionist movement. (DM-PL-22, Washington, DC)



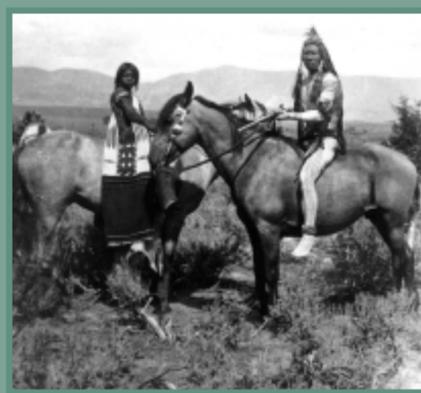
Suffragists march outside the White House in 1917 to call on the President to support women's right to vote. (165-WW-600A-2, Washington, DC)



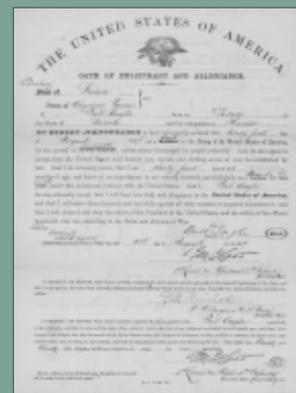
A workman on the Empire State Building in New York City, 1930, by Lewis Hine. (69-RH-4K-1, Washington, DC)



A WPA poster for a "Festival of American Dance," sponsored by the Federal Theatre Project, 1937. (69-TP-145, Washington, DC)



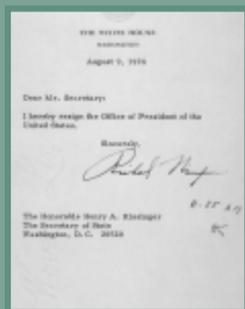
"Ute warrior and boy at the Uinta Agency," northeastern Utah, July 20-26, 1871, by E. O. Beaman. (57-PE-110, Washington, DC)



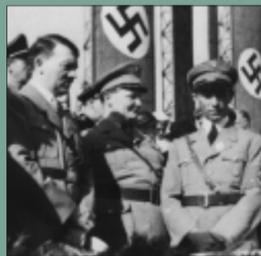
The oath of enlistment and allegiance for Bull Eagle, an Indian scout in the U.S. Army, 1874. (RG 94, Washington, DC)



President Abraham Lincoln met with Gen. George McClellan and Union officers at Antietam, MD, in October 1862. (165-SB-23, Washington, DC)



Richard M. Nixon's letter to the Secretary of State, resigning as President of the United States, August 9, 1974. (RG 59, Washington, DC)



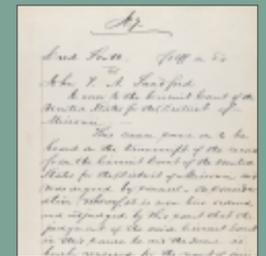
Adolf Hitler, Hermann Goering, and Josef Goebbels at Nuremberg, Germany, in the 1930s. (242-HH-BS-307-29, FDR Library)



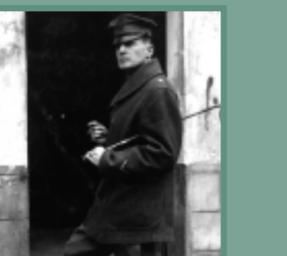
The Big Three—Stalin, FDR, and Churchill—at Teheran in 1943. (306-NT-2871V, Washington, DC)



A map, from William Clark's original drawings, of the Lewis and Clark exploratory expedition from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. (77-US-529, Washington, DC)



In the 1857 Dred Scott case, the Supreme Court ruled that slaves were not citizens of the United States. (RG 267, Washington, DC)



Brig. Gen. Douglas MacArthur in a French village in 1916. (111-SC-18904, Washington, DC)



A landing craft filled with U.S. troops near a New Guinea beach in the Pacific during World War II. (26-G-2218, Washington, DC)



A scene from Pare Lorentz's 1938 film for the Farm Security Administration, "The River." (RG 96, Washington, DC)



Prominent civil rights and union leaders head the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963. (306-SS-28B-35-2, Washington, DC)



An 1821 manifest from the schooner Gustavus lists names and descriptions of those to be sold as slaves. (RG 36, Washington, DC)



"The Tetons—Snake River," by Ansel Adams, taken in 1940 for a series of murals for the National Park Service. (79-AAG-1, Washington, DC)