



Guidelines for Using **HISTORICAL RECORDS** *in the National Archives*

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is the guardian of the nation's institutional memory. The records in its custody cover three centuries, documenting the origins and evolution of the U.S. Government and the history of the American people. These records come in many forms, such as loose papers, bound volumes, motion picture films, videotapes, sound recordings, still pictures, maps, architectural drawings, and electronic records. Every record requires very careful handling and storage, both to prevent deterioration and to preserve it for future generations. When you visit NARA research rooms in Washington, DC, and College Park, MD, in the regional archives, or at the Presidential libraries, you have the opportunity to hold and study materials that are unique. Both you, as user, and NARA, as keeper, play essential roles in their preservation and security.



While not required, it is a good idea to contact the facility you intend to visit, either online at www.archives.gov/facilities/, by telephone, or by mail, to confirm local hours, procedures, and records availability.

GETTING STARTED

If you intend to use original documents, you need to obtain a researcher identification card. Cards are issued to all persons 14 years of age or older who fill out an application, show photo identification, and have a specific research project that can reasonably be pursued at NARA.

YOUR PERSONAL BELONGINGS

If lockers are provided in the facility where you are working, you must place your personal belongings in one before entering a research room where original documents are being used. You may carry a wallet or coin purse; you may wear a light coat or sweater, but, if you remove it, you may be asked to take it to your locker. You may use computers in all research rooms, although some research areas may have a limited number of power outlets. Please check with the staff of the facility you intend to visit about the use of cameras (film and digital), optical scanners, and recording equipment. Artificial lighting and hand-held scanners are prohibited in NARA research rooms.



PERSONAL NOTES

If you believe that it is absolutely essential that you use personal notes, books, or citations while examining the original records, the staff will ask you to explain your need for these items. They will tell you of any limitations on the amount of material you may take in and the manner in which the material must be controlled for use in the research room. If you have brought old family documents into NARA facilities, you will need a special property pass to take them out. Check with the staff for assistance.

TAKING NOTES IN THE RESEARCH ROOM

Ink poses a serious risk to original records, so you will need to use a pencil for taking notes. This means you will not be able to use any type of pen. The staff can provide you with pencils if you did not bring your own. When you visit research rooms in the Washington, DC, area, special paper and notecards, which you must use for taking notes, will be supplied to you. This will facilitate the inspection of your materials when you leave the building.

Take care to avoid accidental damage to the documents. As you are reading, place the documents flat on the table; do not hold them extended in midair or place them on your lap or on the floor. Never place your notepaper on top of any document you are studying or use your pencil as a pointer. Tracing documents is not permitted. Personal computers may be used for taking notes. With prior approval, optical scanners or digital cameras may be used in some research rooms. Please check with the staff of the facility you intend to visit for local procedures.



HANDLE WITH CARE

When you examine records, you must keep them in their original order, even if this order makes no sense to you. To prevent accidental misplacement or rearrangement of files, use records from only one box and one folder at a time. If the records are tri- or quarter-folded, open only one file at a time. Staff will provide special tabs to mark the place in the box where the file should be returned. Staff will also provide special paper tabs to mark items for copying. If the records in the box are flat but not in folders, you may remove all or a portion of them from the box. Loose records require careful handling to keep them in order and to prevent damage when placing them back in the box.

Staff will provide cotton gloves if you are handling motion picture film, aerial film, or photographs. You may also request these cotton gloves from the staff when handling old papers and leather bindings.

Whenever you leave your desk, or when not in use, place the documents back in their boxes and folders. This is especially important for blueprints and other light-sensitive records. Loose documents left unattended may be damaged or lost if they fall on the floor. When working with heavy bound volumes, be sure to use the special supports provided. This makes it easier for you to use the heavy volumes and helps to preserve their bindings.



RESEARCH ROOM EQUIPMENT

Many forms of records held by NARA cannot be used without specialized equipment, such as microfilm readers, videocassette players, audiocassette players, film viewers, and aerial film viewers, all of which are available on a first-come, first-served basis. (Please confirm equipment availability before visiting a regional facility.) Time limits on the use of this equipment may sometimes be imposed to provide service to those who are waiting. Staff members can also assist you in the use of specialized equipment, and guidelines are posted on or near the various machines. Proper care and use of each will extend its life and ensure its future availability to others.

USING MICROFILM

Most of our facilities hold microfilm. The National Archives Building in Washington, DC, and the National Archives at College Park have dedicated microfilm research rooms. If your research takes you to one of our regional archives, you should contact the region you are going to visit to ascertain whether or not an appointment is needed.

When working with microfilm, pull and use only one roll at a time; this ensures that the roll is refiled in the correct box. You are asked to pull, rewind, and refile your own microfilm when the microfilm is located in the research room. The staff can help you locate the microfilm publication you want to use, or you can consult the location register.



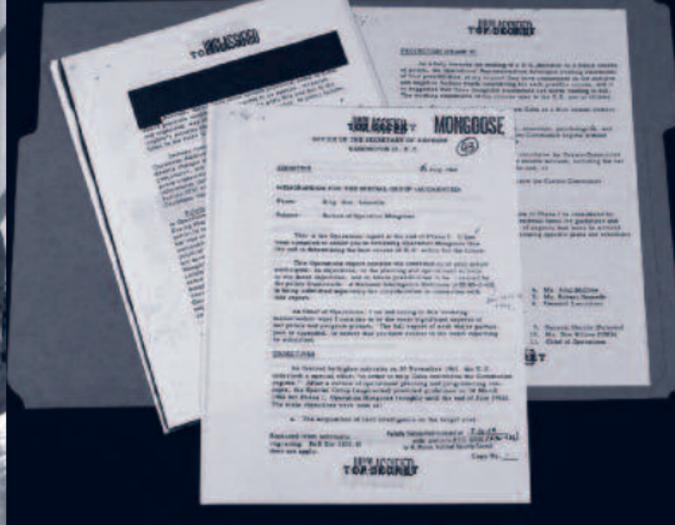
CHILDREN UNDER 14 YEARS OLD

Young children and babies are not admitted to any NARA research rooms, so please make other arrangements for your children when you visit NARA facilities. Consult with the staff about rules regarding the admittance of older children to do research on special projects for school or family history.

MAKING REPRODUCTIONS

Many, but not all, NARA research rooms permit self-service photocopying. Due to preservation concerns, some permit only staff photocopying. In those that do allow self-service, ask the staff to review anything you would like to photocopy. Use the special paper tabs provided by staff to mark the papers you would like to copy. Fasteners and staples may never be removed without staff permission. You may generally copy loose pages when damage will not result from the copying process. You will not be allowed to copy bound volumes and oversize documents unless special equipment has been provided in the research room. Additional instructions for self-service copying, use of optical scanners and digital cameras, and ordering reproductions are available in the research room or by contacting staff in advance of your visit.

Be considerate of other researchers wanting to use the copier. If you have a great deal of copying to do, consult the staff about making special arrangements. Some research rooms make copiers available by appointment. Even though there may be time limits on the use of copiers, care must still be taken to handle documents properly. Do not rush; you will have another opportunity to use the copier.



MAKING REPRODUCTIONS OF FORMERLY CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS

When making copies of formerly classified documents, you must make sure that the copies indicate the declassification authority. If the classification markings have not been properly cancelled, you will not be allowed to leave the building with any copies you have made. If the classification markings have not been cancelled, bring the box and folder to the staff. The staff person will then stamp the documents with the appropriate declassification authority or provide you with a coded declassification strip to place on the copier so that it reproduces on the documents you copy. Return the strip to the staff when you are finished. Different documents require different declassification strips.

MAKING COPIES OF FILMS, VIDEOS, SOUND RECORDINGS, AND STILL PICTURES

In the special media research areas, you are permitted to make your own copies of unrestricted films, videotapes, sound recordings, and still pictures, using your own or NARA equipment. At some facilities, your personal equipment must be approved and tagged before it may be brought into a research room. Audiovisual carts are provided for researcher use at the College Park, MD, facility. Please check with the staff of the facility you intend to visit for local procedures.



We want your NARA visit to be successful and will be pleased to advise you where records are located and which of our facilities you should visit. Our reference staffs can provide further information about NARA policies, services, or holdings. There are also many guides and catalogs that you may use or purchase that will help you plan your research. More information about research room procedures and records availability in NARA's facilities across the United States are available at:

www.archives.gov/facilities/

www.archives.gov/presidential_libraries/index.html

www.archives.gov/research_room/index.html

For details about exhibition and research hours in NARA facilities across the United States, see our web site at *www.archives.gov* or call toll free at 1-86-NARA-NARA.