

The Library of Congress

September, 2008

WHAT VENERABLE INSTITUTION has 650 miles of bookshelves, 32 million books, 124 thousand telephone directories, and more than 5.3 million maps and cartographic items? Where can you find Thomas Jefferson's hand-written draft of the Declaration of Independence, his recipes for vanilla ice cream and french fries, and his plans for a macaroni machine? Where can you view the original sheet music for the "Star-Spangled Banner" or see one of only fifty surviving Bibles printed by Johannes Gutenberg?

The venerable institution housing all of these treasures is the Library of Congress, located in Washington, DC, across the street from our nation's Capitol, the home of the Congress of the United States. Created more than two hundred years ago with a modest collection of reference books intended for the use of the new nation's lawmakers, the library was first housed in the Capitol itself. Today the Library of Congress occupies three

buildings on Capitol Hill—the Thomas Jefferson Building, the John Adams Building, and the James Madison Memorial Building—where books and other materials can be used, without charge, by anyone sixteen years of age or older (with a reader's identification card obtainable from the library). In twenty separate reading rooms and resource centers—including the Jefferson Building's exquisite Main Reading room—researchers from all over the world have access to the library's vast holdings, which now exceed 138 million separate items in multiple media formats and 470 languages.

Beginnings to 1851

The library's beginnings, like the nation's, were modest. On April 24, 1800, John Adams, our second president, signed a bill transferring the seat of government from Philadelphia to the new capital city of Washington, DC. The bill included legislation authorizing the creation of a library of reference

books for the use of Congress and "a suitable apartment for containing them." Congress approved the sum of \$5,000, and the library was established in the north wing of the Capitol with fewer than a thousand books and three maps shipped from England.

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A law passed in 1802 entrusted the president with the appointment of a librarian of Congress and allowed the president and vice president to use the library. Eventually, other government officials, and on occasion, deserving members of the general public, were also granted use of the library.

The young library was destroyed a decade later, during the War of 1812. (American forces burned the Canadian Houses of Parliament, and the British retaliated, in August 1814 by burning the

US Capital.

When former President Thomas Jefferson heard of the loss, he offered to sell Congress his personal library, which was regarded as one of the best in the country. Jefferson had spent his adult life collecting books-books about philosophy, history, and the sciences, as well as works of literature, books about America, and books written in foreign languages. The offer bitterly divided Congress - a number of members considered certain volumes too controversial for their reference library. Jefferson disagreed. "I do not know that it contains any branch of science which Congress would wish to exclude from their collection," he wrote in a letter, "... (or any) subject to which a member of Congress may not have occasion to refer."

In 1815, after a good deal of partisan squabbling, Congress accepted Jefferson's offer of 6,487 books for the nominal sum of \$23,950. Acquisitions for the library continued over the next quarter century, and by 1851 the Library of Congress held 55,000 books. Unhappily, on Christmas Eve of that year, 60 percent of the volumes, including two-thirds of Jefferson's, were lost when the Capitol's candlelit holiday decorations burst into flame in the wake of a chimney fire.

Expansion and New Construction

In 1864, President Abraham Lincoln appointed Ainsworth Rand

Spofford as librarian of Congress. Passionate about books, Spofford ensured the library's acquisition of two copies of all recently published books, as part of a revised US copyright law. He also oversaw the transfer of 40,000 volumes from the Smithsonian. Soon, books, pamphlets, photographs, music, maps, and prints inundated the library. Books were piled on the floor of Spofford's office; they crowded the corridors and were stowed against public staircases and wherever else any space could be found.

Concerned that he would soon reign over the "greatest chaos in America," Spofford launched a campaign for the construction of a new building.

Finally, in 1886, after years of recommendations, proposals, and disputes, Congress approved \$6 million for the project. Eleven years later, on November 1, 1897, the new Italian Renaissance-styled Library of Congress, the largest library building in the world at the time, opened to the public. An impressive twenty-three-carat-gold-plated dome capped the building. Its interior work included sculpture, mosaics, and painted decorations by more than fifty American artists. Completed on time and under budget, the net cost was approximately \$150,000 less than the total appropriation.

Two years after the new building opened, President William McKinley appointed Herbert

Putnam as librarian. Known as a man who led with an iron fist, Putnam nevertheless attracted many people eager to work under his leadership. He advanced library science by using three-by-five-inch cards to catalog books, then selling the cards, at cost, to libraries throughout the country, a practice that led to the standardization of cataloging in American libraries. He introduced interlibrary loans and services for the blind, establishing programs to lend books in Braille and, later, to provide the first "talking books" on 331/3 rpm phonograph records, which were invented for the use of the visually handicapped. The library, Putnam believed, was "a collection universal in scope which has a duty to the country as a whole."

Insufficient space was a perpetual problem for the library, and in 1928 Putnam persuaded Congress to authorize the purchase of land for an annex. Opening on January 3, 1939, the Library of Congress Annex Building bore a classic exterior faced with white Georgia marble; sculpted figures on the bronze entrance doors represented the history of the written word.

A third library building, the nation's official memorial to President James Madison, opened on May 28, 1980. The fourth president of the United States, a member of the Continental Congress, and the "father" of the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights, Madison had suggested a list of books that would guide legislators. Today, the

Congressional Law Library resides here. The modernistic Madison Building joins the Pentagon and the FBI Building as one of the three largest public structures in Washington. Four quotations from Madison are on its walls. One reads, "Knowledge will forever govern ignorance and a people who mean to be their own governours, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."

After the opening of the Madison Building, the original Library of Congress Building was renamed in honor of the library's most famous benefactor-Thomas Jefferson. The Annex Building was renamed in honor of the president who authorized the library's creation-John Adams.

Inside the Jefferson Building

One hundred and sixty feet above the majestic, ring-shaped Main Reading Room in the Jefferson Building, at the apex of the room's domed ceiling, a dozen painted figures portray contributions to Western civilization through the ages. The room's eight semicircular windows feature the seals of forty-eight states illustrated in stained glass. Between the windows, statues of female figures representing Religion, Commerce, History, Art, Philosophy, Poetry, Law, and Science rest on eight marble columns. The room also may be viewed from the Visitor's Gallery located on the second level.

Two of the library's most

revered volumes are exhibited on the first level of the Jefferson Building's Great Hall: the Gutenberg Bible and the giant Bible of Mainz. Both Bibles originated in Mainz, Germany, in the mid-1450s. The Mainz Bible, illuminated and lettered by hand in four columns, on vellum (parchment made from calfskin), by a single scribe, took fifteen months to complete. The Bible's borders are adorned with flowers, birds, and trees; a close look will show pencil marks made by the scribe to keep his work in exact columns.

The office in the Jefferson Building was used by the librarians of Congress from 1897 to 1980. Among its occupants was Herbert Putnam, who introduced interlibrary loan programs and services for the blind.

The Gutenberg Bible, the first book printed in Europe with movable, metal type, and patterned after the Mainz Bible, will observe its 558th anniversary this year. Printed without title pages and page numbers, the Gutenberg Bible is meant to look like the work of a copyist. Before the invention of printing, manuscripts were hand copied by scribes. The laborious work took years to complete, and only the wealthy, royalty, and the clergy knew books. The invention of movable letters meant multiple copies of a work could be printed, and information thus became accessible to anyone hungry for knowledge. Two hundred copies of the Gutenberg Bible were printed-a

modest number on vellum-and sold at the 1456 Frankfurt Book Fair; fifty copies are thought to survive. In 1930, the library acquired one of three perfect vellum copies.

In the Jefferson Building's Main Reading Room, researchers and visitors have access to the library's vast collection of books. The spectacular domed ceiling rises to a height of 160 feet

American Treasures of the Library of Congress, a rotating exhibition in the Jefferson Building, features rare items and unique artifacts. One of the 'most visited displays is a case that holds a bronze life mask of Lincoln, made shortly before his assassination. To make the mask, the president's head was covered in plaster and two straws were placed in his nostrils so he could breathe. A playbill of *Our American Cousin*, the play performed at Ford's Theater on April 14, 1865, the night Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth, is part of the display, along with the contents of the president's pockets. That Friday night Lincoln carried two pairs of glasses, a pocketknife, a watch fob, a linen handkerchief, and a brown leather wallet holding a five-dollar Confederate note and nine newspaper clippings. The library received the items from Mary Lincoln Isham, the president's granddaughter, in 1937.

The ground level of the Jefferson Building hosts the Bob Hope Gallery of American Entertainment. This permanent

exhibit tracks Hope's career from his debut and early days in vaudeville, through his work in radio, television, and movies, to his famous live shows for American troops stationed around the world. The gallery includes photographs, recordings of broadcasts, film clips, and the comedian's digitally scanned, indexed joke file of 85,000 pages plus The George and Ira Gershwin Room, another permanent display on the ground level, features George's piano and desk and Ira's typewriter, along with music manuscripts, letters, paintings, and self-portraits by the composer and the lyricist, as well as posters and scrapbooks. An interactive audio-video kiosk entertains visitors with the songwriting brothers' words and music.

Also on the ground level is the 511-seat Coolidge Auditorium, established in 1925 by benefactor Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge. The auditorium is used for free chamber music concerts and special events, including jazz, theater, folk, ethnic, and pop music performances. Coolidge also provided funds for the commissioning of new works; Aaron Copland's "Appalachian Spring," written for dancer Martha Graham, premiered here in 1944. Another library benefactor, Gertrude Clarke Whitall, donated five stringed instruments fashioned by Antonio Stradivari to the library in 1935, on the condition that they be used in regular performances. The Julliard String Quartet is the foremost group to have played the three violins, a viola, and a cello,

with many of the concerts broadcast on radio.

Inside the Madison Building

The Madison Building holds some fourteen million prints, photographs, moving images, drawings, posters, and architectural records. The earliest daguerreotype of the US Capitol, Mathew Brady's Civil War photographs, and twentieth-century photographs by Alfred Stieglitz and Ansel Adams are found here. Many of these items are made available to researchers; others can be viewed digitally on computer monitors. The Swann Collection of political cartoons, illustrations, and comics is also found here. In addition to thousands of drawings from the nation's most beloved comic strips-including samples of Blondie and an original drawing of The Yellow Kid, a popular comic strip created in 1895-the collection also holds the original artwork from the first Spider-Man comic book story. (The Swann Gallery is located in the Jefferson Building.)

Many of the library's films are shown in the Madison Building's Mary Pickford Theater, named in honor of the silent film star known as "America's Sweetheart." The library's film archive includes the first experiments in motion pictures, early television broadcasts, and the latest films. Among its treasures is the first motion picture registered for copyright, Fred Off's Sneeze, dating from 1894. Ott worked with Thomas Edison on the

kinetoscope, a motion picture viewing projector developed by Edison's company.

The history of recorded sound may be traced in the nation's largest public collection of audio recordings, from early wax cylinders to LPs, tapes, and audio discs. At last count, there were three million items in the sound archive, including four hundred record discs donated in 1926 by Victor Records.

In 2007, the library opened its new Packard Campus for Audio-Visual Conservation, in Virginia, a state-of-the-art facility for research and preservation. With a few exceptions, the library's film, video, and sound collections are now stored here. Qualified researchers can still access these archives, by appointment, in the Motion Picture Reading Room and the Sound Recording Reference Center in the Madison Building.

The Geography and Map Division, located on the basement level of the Madison Building, holds maps, atlases, and globes from the Old and New worlds, fourteenth-century charts of the exploration of North America, military maps from the Revolution to the Civil War, maps of the American expansion from the Louisiana Purchase to the statehood of Alaska, as well as the latest digital and satellite imagery of the world's geography.

Although the Library of Congress no longer collects copies

of every published book, it is still the home of the US Copyright Office, located on the fourth floor of the Madison Building. Over thirty million copyright registrations and transfers have been cataloged since 1870, and more than half a million new copyright claims are registered each year. Among the copyrights on file are those for Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech and novelist Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone with the Wind*. Also here are copyrights for motion pictures, music and computer works, even the original Barbie doll.

America's Heritage

Among the countless treasures residing in the Library of Congress, many of the most historically significant are found in the Madison Building's Manuscript Division. Here are the papers of twenty-three US presidents; a printed letter, circa 1493, from Christopher Columbus; James Madison's notes on the 1787 Constitutional Convention; Abraham Lincoln's handwritten copies of his Gettysburg Address; Alexander Bell's first drawing of the telephone; works by Thurgood Marshall, the associate Supreme Court justice and civil rights leader, and by Susan B. Anthony, who organized the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Here, too, are architecture student Maya Lin's drawings of what would become the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, known to many simply as "the Wall."

Researchers, scholars, and visitors to all three buildings can discover a legacy of American enlightenment, inventiveness, and artistry by delving into the vast collections, touring the great rooms, and exploring the multimedia galleries that make up the Library of Congress—a library that Ainsworth Rand Spofford called "the Book Palace of the American People".

Sights & Sounds

The Library of Congress is not just a repository of printed materials. Its holdings of films and of sound recordings are among the largest in the world, and they document the history and culture of the United States since the invention of these media in the 1890s.

The library's motion picture, video, and television archive contains more than one million items. Some of the earliest films come from a company owned by the man who invented the motion picture camera, Thomas Edison. Lasting only a few seconds, these short films testify to the mesmerizing effect of seeing anything at all in a moving picture—a man sneezing, boxing cats, jugglers. Over the course of the 1890s, the range of subjects expanded to include forms we might recognize today: current events, moments of everyday life, and fictionalized scenes for amusement and entertainment. Many of these fascinating historical movies can be viewed online at the Library of Congress's Web site at: www.loc.gov/rr/mopic/ndlmps.html.

Seven thousand films a year are added to the library's collection, and in it one can find everything from silent movies to early sound films ("talkies") to newsreels to recent feature films. Another archive in the library, the National Film Registry, is dedicated to the preservation of "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant films" from the United States. Up to twenty-five films are added each year, including an 1893 blacksmith scene (the first film to use actors) and the 1957 movie *Oklahoma!*, which was added in 2007.

The archive of sound recordings contains three million examples of music and the spoken word. Every medium is represented, from the earliest wax cylinder records to the latest CDs, including some that never gained wide distribution (wires, dicta belts, and Memovox discs). Every era, type of music, and style of performer can be heard in the collection, such as Sergei Rachmaninoff playing his own piano music, or the complete recordings of jazz pioneer Jelly Roll Morton. (A list of recordings accessible online can be found at www.loc.gov/rr/record.)

Within the thousands of hours of spoken word recordings are three projects linked across time. In the 1930s, John and Ruby Lomax traveled across the southern United States to make field recordings of all kinds of folk music. This archive is now an irreplaceable document of songs and snatches of tunes that would otherwise have

been lost forever. Then, in the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Lomaxes' son, Alan, who was assistant in charge of his parents' Archive of American Folk Song, asked field researchers across the United States to conduct "man on the street" interviews to capture the reactions of ordinary citizens to the attack. The resulting twelve hours of tape provide a valuable record of American society on the eve of the country's entry into war.

Sixty years later, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress followed Alan Lomax's example and asked the nation's folklorists and ethnographers to conduct interviews and collect material relating to the attacks of September 11, 2001. The 170 audio and video interviews, together with drawings, photographs, and poems, were gathered from people who were in the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, as well as people in twenty-seven states across the country. This project is further proof of the old saying that a library is more than a collection of objects: it is the collective memory of an entire nation.

The Library Goes Interactive

In 2008, the Library of Congress opened several new interactive exhibits designed to showcase its historical treasures with the aid of cutting-edge technology. Dubbed the Library of Congress Experience, the new displays are intended to give visitors a deeper and more intimate encounter with

history.

Touch-screen monitors allow visitors to page through the library's rare Gutenberg Bible, or zoom in on the word "America" where it appears for the first time on a world map. A digital image of Thomas Jefferson's rough draft of the Declaration of Independence shows the author's handwritten changes and reveals the contributions made by John Adams and others to the composition of our nation's founding document.

In the re-created library of Thomas Jefferson, the original books sold by Jefferson to the Congress are displayed in a spiral-shaped arrangement of shelves. At interactive kiosks, visitors can view images of key books and explore Jefferson's unique subject classification system—a system that was used by the Library of Congress for nearly a century.

Yet another interactive tool allows visitors to bookmark their Library of Congress Experience on site and return to it through the library's new personalized Web site, my LOC.gov. Meanwhile, the library's main Web site, loc.gov, continues to burgeon as the digitalization of the library that began in 1995 proceeds. The books and other treasures in the Library of Congress can't be taken home, but their wisdom and beauty can be shared by anyone in the world with access to a computer—and a desire to know.

Things You Can Find In the Library of Congress:

A book measuring 1/25" by 1/25"—or about the size of the period at the end of a sentence.

A cuneiform tablet from 2040 BC.

The 1507 world map by Martin Waldseemuller, the first map on which the name "America" appears.

Drafts of the Declaration of Independence, and George Washington's copy of the Constitution.

3,000 negatives made by Civil War photographer Mathew Brady.

Recordings of speeches by President Theodore Roosevelt.

The first copyrighted motion picture in the United States. The world's most extensive newspaper collection.

100,000 comic books.

124,000 telephone directories.

1,000,000 PhD dissertations.