

NATIONAL ARCHIVES MUSEUM

Constitution Avenue between
7th and 9th Streets, NW, Washington, DC

Daily, 10 A.M.–5:30 P.M.

[CLOSED THANKSGIVING DAY AND DECEMBER 25]

ADMISSION FREE

Visit www.archives.gov/naelvisit/ for
up-to-date hours and program information

Visit www.recreation.gov for advance reservations



CAFÉ

Monday–Friday, 10 A.M.–2:30 P.M.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES RESEARCH CENTERS

700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC
and 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD

Monday–Saturday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

Closed Sundays and Federal holidays

Call 202-357-5000 or visit our web site at
www.archives.gov for more information



THE FOUNDATION FOR THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

supports the work of the National Archives and
the National Archives Museum through
fund-raising, publications, online initiatives,
marketing, and creative support. To become a member,
visit www.archivesfoundation.org or call 202-357-5946.

General Information Leaflet Number 18

Revised 2013



VISITOR'S GUIDE

to the
National Archives
Museum

WASHINGTON, DC

GROUND LEVEL

The **ORIENTATION PLAZA** is a gathering place featuring a video orientation wall, touch screen mapping stations, and a short video introduction to the National Archives.

The **DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN GALLERY** houses “Records of Rights,” a permanent exhibition that explores Americans’ debates about the rights and freedoms embodied in our nation’s founding documents. Featuring an original 1297 Magna Carta, a document that inspired the Founding Fathers, the exhibition traces the evolution of constitutional rights in the United States.

The **MYARCHIVES STORE** offers an array of quality gifts and publications based on the holdings of the National Archives. Shop online at www.myarchivesstore.org. Proceeds support the exhibits and educational outreach of the National Archives.



1297 Magna Carta
Courtesy of David
M. Rubenstein

LOWER LEVEL

The **WILLIAM G. MCGOWAN THEATER** hosts special lectures and public programs highlighting the holdings of the National Archives. See *Calendar of Events for public program listings*.

The **CAFÉ** offers soups, salads, sandwiches, snacks, and beverages from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Monday–Friday.



McGowan Theater



UPPER LEVEL

The **ROTUNDA FOR THE CHARTERS OF FREEDOM** is a semicircular room designed specifically for the permanent public display of the *Charters of Freedom*—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights. In the exhibition flanking the Charters, learn about the origins and ongoing significance of America’s most treasured documents.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, 1776, announced the separation of the 13 colonies from Great Britain and the establishment of the United States of America. The Declaration articulates the highest ideals of the Revolution—liberty, equality, and the right to self-determination.

THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION, 1787, codified the spirit of the American Revolution in an ingenious, practical scheme of government to promote the welfare of all its citizens. Considered one of the most influential legal documents of all time, it has served as a model for over 100 countries.

THE BILL OF RIGHTS, 1789, spelled out the rights of individual citizens. The First Congress of the United States proposed 12 constitutional amendments. Of those, 10 were ratified and are known as the Bill of Rights.

THE FAULKNER MURALS gracing the curved walls of the Rotunda were painted by artist Barry Faulkner in 1935–36. They are among the largest single-piece oil-on-canvas murals in the United States.



Why is the Declaration so faded? This parchment has been proudly displayed over many decades, including 35 years of exposure to sunlight opposite a window in the Patent Office Building. Today, it is sealed in the most scientifically advanced housing that preservation technology can provide.

Where can I research my family history? The research entrance to the National Archives is on Pennsylvania Avenue. You may inquire there about starting your family history research.

Fun Facts

- The earliest sound recordings were made on wax cylinders. You can hear one of these rare recordings of a Theodore Roosevelt speech in the Public Vaults exhibition.
- The Declaration of Independence is housed in a specially sealed encasement containing the inert gas argon with a controlled amount of humidity to keep the parchment flexible.
- The U.S. Constitution was not America’s first constitution. The Articles of Confederation was the plan of government in effect from 1781 to 1787. It was based on the principles of the Declaration of Independence, but specified no central powers over taxation and trade, nor the ability to compel the states to fulfill national obligations.

DID YOU KNOW

On December 15, 1952, President Harry S. Truman presided over the unveiling of the Declaration of Independence, Constitution of the United States, and Bill of Rights in the Rotunda of the National Archives. For more than 60 years, visitors have come to this site to view the signed documents that have come to be known as “The Charters of Freedom.”

The National Archives and Records Administration is an independent Federal agency that preserves and shares with the public records that trace the story of our nation, government, and the American people. From the Declaration of Independence to accounts of ordinary Americans, the holdings of the National Archives directly touch the lives of

millions of people. The National Archives carries out its mission

through a nationwide network of archives, records centers, and Presidential libraries, and online at www.archives.gov.

The National Archives Building was designed by the renowned architect John Russell Pope (1874–1937) as a temple to history. Pope, who also designed the Jefferson Memorial, wanted the architecture of the National Archives to reflect the significance, security, and permanence of the records held therein. The majestic domed ceiling of the Rotunda, rising 70 feet above the floor, and the 40-foot-tall bronze doors contribute to the feelings of awe and reverence experienced by visitors to this magnificent space.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is it so cold and dark in the Rotunda?

Cooler temperatures prolong the life of documents. Light fades ink and destroys parchment and paper, so light levels in the Rotunda are deliberately kept low.

Why isn't photography allowed?

Photography is damaging to the documents and disruptive to the viewing experience.



The **PUBLIC VAULTS EXHIBITION** enables visitors to venture “into the stacks” at the National Archives. Encounter fascinating original records (including Abraham Lincoln’s telegrams to his generals and the 1823 copperplate of the Declaration of Independence) and interactives that allow you to edit your own documentary about the D-day invasion, design a new Great Seal of the United States, and eavesdrop on the President and his advisers discussing the Cuban Missile Crisis. Journey into the Public Vaults and learn why records matter to you, your family, and your country.

The **LAWRENCE F. O'BRIEN GALLERY** showcases changing exhibitions of extraordinary records from the National Archives.*

The **BOEING LEARNING CENTER** offers opportunities to learn from National Archives staff and computer and textual resources. **ReSource Room**—Obtain copies of documents featured in our exhibits, participate in hands-on Archival Adventures, and explore online resources. No reservations required. Hours: Monday–Saturday, 10 a.m.– 4 p.m. **Learning Lab**—Middle school students engage in problem-solving exercises that connect them to our nation’s history. Reservations are required. Contact: learninglab@nara.gov.

The **PRESIDENTIAL CONFERENCE CENTER** hosts special lectures and public programs.*

*See the monthly Calendar of Events for a schedule and descriptions of current exhibitions and programs.



