



National Archives Washington, D.C.

Introduction and Instructions

Did you know that the National Archives consist of dozens of facilities spread across the country? But the headquarters, housed in the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C., contains some of the country's most precious documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Emancipation Proclamation. In addition to any prior knowledge you may have, use your research skills and the resources provided here to answer the questions below.



Learn about the history of the National Archives and the building it is housed in.

EXPLORE: <https://www.archives.gov/about/history>

1. When was the National Archives established? What is the purpose of this building?

Answer: It was established in 1934 to preserve and care for the records of the U.S. Government. Before this, records were kept in various basements, attics, abandoned buildings, and other storage places with little security.

2. Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon assembled a group of architects to design the building. What design features did Mellon want for all federal buildings?

Answer: Mellon wanted the buildings to share certain design elements—limestone facades, red tiled roofs, and classical colonnades. He also wanted the buildings to be neoclassical in design following the architecture style of many Federal government buildings that existed at that time.

3. What was symbolic about the location of the National Archives building?

Answer: It was symbolic in that the building would be halfway between the White House and Capitol, and the new Archives would hold records from those institutions.

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4. In 1930, Mellon selected New York architect John Russell Pope to design the National Archives Building. What did Pope propose?

Answer: He proposed a monumental structure with highly decorative architectural features, giant Corinthian columns, 40-foot bronze doors, and inscriptions representing the building's historical importance.

5. What documents were placed in the cornerstone of the National Archives by President Herbert Hoover?

Answer: A copy of the Declaration of Independence, a copy of the Constitution, an American flag, and copies of the Washington daily newspapers.

6. In 1934, American artist Barry Faulkner was commissioned to paint two murals for an exhibition hall, a space now known as the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom. What are those two murals?

Answer: The mural on the northwest wall depicts Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Roger Sherman, and Robert Livingston reporting the Declaration of Independence to John Hancock. The mural on the northeast wall shows James Madison submitting the Constitution to George Washington.

7. What are the "Charters of Freedom"?

Answer: The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK? *This is your chance to share your opinions, make connections, and apply what you've learned!*

1. On February 20, 1933, President Herbert Hoover dedicated the National Archives in the name of the people of the United States and said, "This temple of our history will appropriately be one of the most beautiful buildings in America, an expression of the American soul. It will be one of the most durable, an expression of the American character." What do you think President Hoover meant by this statement?

Answers will vary.

2. On pedestals near the Pennsylvania Avenue entrance are two large sculptures, representing the Future and the Past. Explain why it is important to represent the past and future at the National Archives.

Answers will vary.

3. Aside from the Charters of Freedom, what other documents do you think are important to house in the National Archives? Explain your choices and why you think they deserve to be preserved.

Answers will vary.