

in Virginia, then at the home of the Littlejohn family in Leesburg, Virginia. Monroe's move was a wise one, because when the British entered Washington, D.C., they set fire to many buildings, including the White House. The documents were returned to Washington, D.C., after the war ended in 1814. In 1820, the documents were put into the new Department of State building.

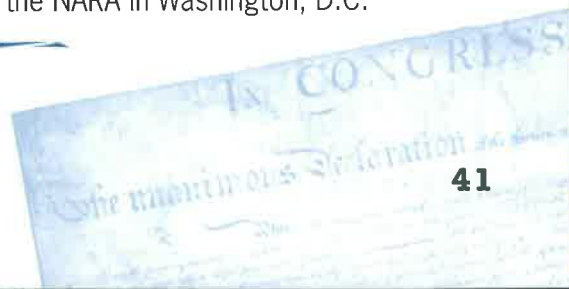
In 1841, the secretary of state decided to display the Declaration of Independence on the wall in the Patent Office Building. It was framed and hung on the wall for many years. Its location was, unfortunately, across from a window, and the sunlight that hit the document caused the ink to fade. By the nation's 100th birthday in 1876, the Declaration looked old and worn. Still, it hung on the wall until 1894, when it was locked in a safe.

Fort Knox

In the 1920s, **conservators** examined the document and decided it should be sealed between two plates of glass and kept away from light. In 1924, the Declaration was moved to the Library of Congress, where it remained—except during World War II—until 1944. In 1941 during the war, the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, was attacked. Government officials feared more attacks could come. To save important U.S. documents, they packed them into bronze containers and moved them to Fort Knox, Kentucky. They were returned to the Library of Congress in 1944, but were moved to the NARA in 1952.



On December 13, 1952, the Declaration of Independence was placed in a permanent display case at the NARA in Washington, D.C.



The Declaration on Display

Today, the Declaration of Independence is kept with the other Charters of Freedom—the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights—at the headquarters of the NARA in Washington, D.C. The documents are on display in the rotunda of the building, and the display is open to the public.

Keeping the Declaration safe

From 1952 to 1998, the Declaration of Independence was stored in a case made from two sheets of glass edged with copper. The document was laid against handmade paper and a glass spacer was inserted to make sure the glass did not rub the parchment. Oxygen was removed from the case and another gas, helium, was inserted. Helium was used because it does not damage documents the way oxygen does. Then the two sheets of glass were sealed with a lead ribbon. The bulletproof glass the document was stored behind had special filters so light would not damage it.

In 1987, a three million dollar camera and a computer—that together make up the Charters Monitoring System—were purchased to check the Charters of Freedom regularly and make sure they remain in good condition. The system looks for flaking and fading ink, and it can tell

The exhibit cases that were “state of the art” in 1952, were out-of-date by the time the exhibit closed in 1998.



See the Declaration of Independence

You can see the Declaration of Independence at the National Archives building in Washington, D.C. The rotunda where the Declaration is exhibited is on Constitution Avenue. Be prepared to wait in line if you go—more than 5,000 people visit the exhibit each day!

You can also view the Declaration of Independence online at http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/charters_of_freedom/images/us_declaration_preview.jpg.

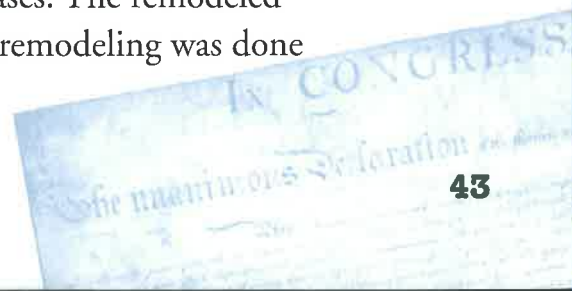
if ink is rubbing onto the glass in front of the document. It takes one-inch (2.5-centimeter) photographs of the document from time to time, then checks each photograph to see whether anything has changed.

At night, after the exhibit closes, a special machine lowers the Charters of Freedom into a vault that lies 22 feet (6.7 meters) below the exhibit hall. The vault weighs 55 tons (50 metric tons) and is made of steel and concrete. The vault is used to further protect the documents when the NARA is closed.

Improving the display

In 1998, the public exhibit at the National Archives closed so **conservators** could **restore** the documents. The Declaration of Independence was carefully removed from its case and closely checked for any damage. The document was restored and put into a new case that was made based on the most recent scientific findings. The case is made from a strong substance called titanium, and is filled with a gas called argon to protect the writing.

The Charters of Freedom remain behind bulletproof glass, and they are still lowered into a vault at the end of each day. The restored Charters of Freedom are now back on display in their new cases. The remodeled NARA rotunda reopened in September 2003. The remodeling was done to better display the documents to the public.



Working with the Declaration



↑ Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler carefully cleans a document so that people can read it more easily.

According to Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, who is the Chief of the Document Conservation Laboratory at the NARA, the Declaration of Independence is in fair condition today. Because it was exposed to light for so long while hanging in the U.S. Patent Office, the ink is faded in some spots. In particular, the signatures are faded, because different types of ink were used when different people signed. Also, the document was kept rolled up for many years, and ink smudged as it made contact with the rolled parchment.

Restoring the Declaration

Along with another **conservator**, Kitty Nicholson, Ms. Ritzenthaler worked on **restoring** the document when it was removed. She was honored to be one of the few people allowed to handle the document. In fact, she counts it as the most exciting experience she has had since joining the National Archives. Along with the other **Charters of Freedom**, Ms. Ritzenthaler and Ms. Nicholson examined the Declaration, wrote a report on its condition, and did some conservation work on it.



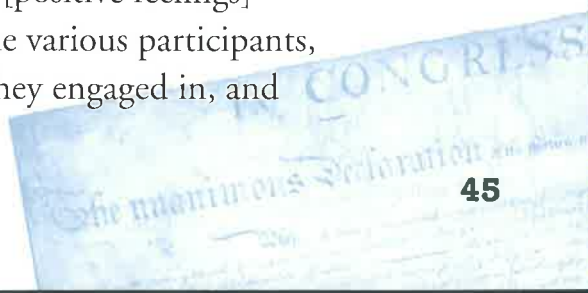
Conservators must be aware of what can harm an old document. This conservator wears gloves before handling a document from 1803.

Becoming an archivist

Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler encourages young people who are interested in history and science to consider becoming **archivists** or document conservators. Those who do this kind of work have to be good at working with their hands, because they do detailed work on old documents that must be carefully handled. Some knowledge of science is important, since archivists and conservators must be aware of how different chemicals interact in various environments. Besides working with papers and books, Ms. Ritzenthaler explained that people who do this kind of work could also work with photographs, **textiles**, furniture, and other **artifacts**.

The importance of the Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence is as important to Americans today as it was in 1776. It reminds us of how and why our forefathers fought for freedom. It also reminds us of the principles on which our freedom is based. As Ms. Ritzenthaler said, “Such documents tell the story of our nation . . . how decisions were made and how compromises were reached. They also reflect the ideals and optimism [positive feelings] of the founding citizens . . . they also document the various participants, the roles they played, the arguments and debates they engaged in, and the alliances that were forged.”



Glossary

- abolish** put an end to
- abuse** improper or unfair treatment
- agriculture** study of various kinds of farming
- alkali** kind of salt that comes from the ashes of plants
- architect** person who designs buildings
- archivist** person who works to restore and preserve public records and historical papers
- artifact** object made and used by someone in the past
- auction** public sale in which things are sold to those who offer to pay the most
- Bill of Rights** document that lists the rights and privileges of all people in a nation
- boycott** refusal to do business with or engage in other activities with a person, business, organization, or government; usually done to focus attention on a disagreement with that party
- calligrapher** person who writes out important documents for a living using a large, fancy kind of handwriting
- chair** lead a meeting or discussion
- charter** official document granting, guaranteeing, or showing the limits of the rights and duties of the group to which it is given
- colonial agent** someone sent to another country to work out business affairs for persons who live in the colony
- colonist** person who lives in a colony
- colony** settlement in a new territory that is tied to an established nation
- commissioner** representative of a government sent to take care of matters in another country
- Congress** formal meeting of delegates for discussion and usually action on some question; lawmaking body of the U.S. government
- conservator** person who is responsible for the care, restoration, and repair of documents and other historical artifacts
- constitution** document that outlines the basic principles of a government
- council** elected group of people set up to give advice or pass laws
- court** seek the liking of
- debt** amount of money owed
- delegate** person sent as a representative to a meeting or conference
- denunciation** expression of strong dislike for something or the way something has been done
- deteriorate** become damaged in quality, condition, or value
- diplomat** person sent by one government to negotiate with another
- draft** prepare; unfinished form of a piece of writing
- emigration** leaving one region or country to live in another
- engross** prepare the final handwritten or printed text of an official document
- federal** one central government that oversees smaller units; the smaller units, such as states, also have their own governments
- found** start something, like a school
- French and Indian War** war fought between Great Britain and France in the American colonies from 1754 to 1763. Some Native Americans fought with the French, while others fought with the British.
- good** thing that can be bought or sold
- grievance** cause of uneasiness or annoyance; formal complaint
- humidity** amount of moisture, or water, in the air
- indictment** statement that shows strong disapproval
- injustice** unfair action
- interfere** become involved in the affairs of others
- legislature** group of elected individuals who make laws for those who elect them
- loyalist** person who remains loyal to a particular cause; during the American Revolution, a loyalist was someone who remained loyal to Great Britain

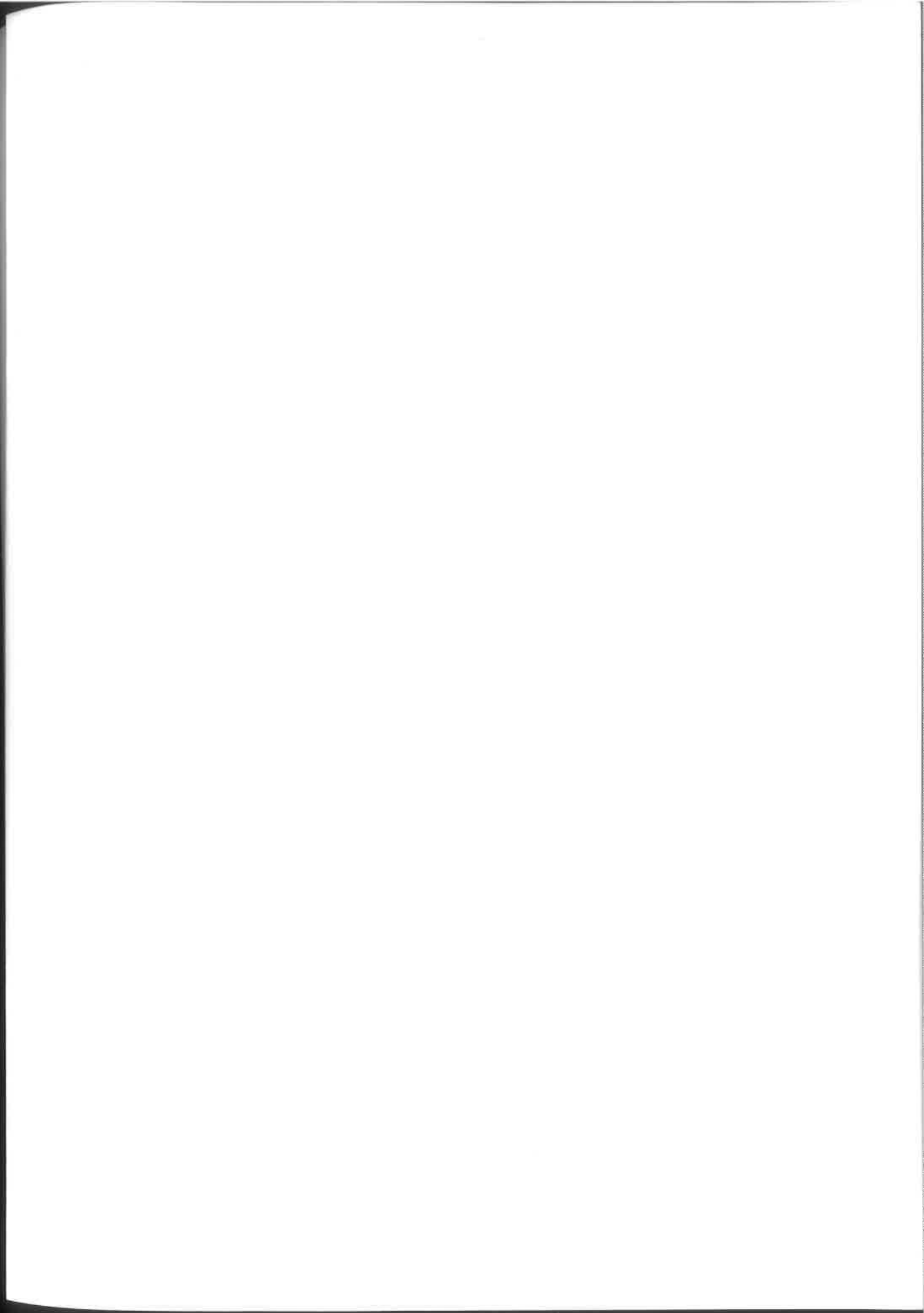
- merchant** store owner or trader
- militia** ordinary citizens with some military training banded together in a military unit
- musket** kind of gun used during the Revolutionary War
- pamphlet** booklet with no cover, usually made of paper folded into smaller parts
- Parliament** group of elected officials that forms the main ruling body of Great Britain
- parlor** room of a house used to entertain guests
- patriot** person who supports his or her country; during the American Revolution, those who fought for freedom from Great Britain
- plantation** large farm, usually in the South, often with slaves
- preamble** introductory statement
- primary source** original copy of a journal, letter, newspaper, document, or image
- privilege** benefit or favor
- Puritan** member of a religious group that settled in New England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; Puritans rejected the services of the Church of England as too formal
- Quaker** member of a religious group called Quakerism that began in the mid-seventeenth century; some Quakers traveled to North America on the *Mayflower* to practice their religion freely
- quest** journey in which something is sought
- rebellion** open fight against one's government; open opposition to authority
- reconciliation** settle, as in a dispute
- repeal** overrule or dismiss; in Congress, to say "no" to an idea, proposal, or amendment
- restore** put or bring back to an earlier or original state
- revolution** overthrow one government and replace with a new government created by those originally governed
- Revolutionary War** American fight for independence from British rule between 1775–1783
- rotunda** round building covered by a dome; or large round room
- secondary source** written account of an event by someone who studied a primary source or sources
- secretary of state** person in the U.S. government who is responsible for foreign affairs
- senator** member of the legislative branch in a government
- stack** structure of bookshelves for storing books, often used in libraries
- statesman** person who is active in government and who gives good advice in making policies
- subject** person under the authority or control of another; person who owes loyalty to a monarch or state
- surveyor** person who measures land to determine boundaries and geographical features
- term** period of time fixed by law
- textile** item made from woven cloth
- treason** crime of trying to overthrow the government of one's country
- tutor** private teacher; tutors often teach one student, or a small group of students
- tyranny** government in which one ruler has all the power
- unjust** unfair
- usurpation** take and hold unfairly by force

More Books to Read

- Burgan, Michael. *The Declaration of Independence*. Mankato, Minn.: Compass Point Books, 2000.
- Smolinski, Diane. *Important People of the Revolutionary War*. Chicago: Heinemann Library, 2002.
- Stein, R. Conrad. *The National Archives*. Danbury, Conn.: Franklin Watts, Inc., 2002.

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