

IV. NATIONAL ARCHIVES BUILDING RENOVATION

For years it has been recognized that the National Archives Building downtown needs major renovation work to modernize the building's environmental, electrical and mechanical systems, to provide improved access to the public areas of the building, and to eliminate fire and life safety deficiencies. Such renovation will greatly improve the environment, safety, and access to the records of Congress which are housed in the downtown building. An ambitious renovation study was prepared in 1985, but that plan was placed on hold because of the more urgent need for a new facility to consolidate archival holdings and staff in a number of buildings in the Washington area. Once the construction and move into the new National Archives building in College Park, Maryland, was completed, Heery International was commissioned to update the previous study and document the renovation needs of the downtown building.

While the first renovation proposal, which recommended demolishing and rebuilding all of the records holding areas, was deemed prohibitively expensive by the Office of Management and Budget and key members of Congress, they have supported an alternative that would address the most significant building problems. The goals of the modified renovation plan included replacing deteriorated building systems, meeting the Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility requirements, reencasing the Charters of Freedom, resolving fire-safety deficiencies, providing improved public outreach spaces, and providing appropriate storage conditions for paper records. In 1999, Hartman-Cox Architects were selected to design the renovation. Construction of new office swing space in the moat surrounding the National Archives Building and demolition of the lower tiers of stacks began in March 2000. Pending the final appropriation, renovation of the public areas of the building will be completed by July 2003 and the remaining parts of the building will be finished by the fall of 2004.

The building will undergo its most extensive renovation since it was completed in 1935. The electrical, plumbing, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems throughout the building will be replaced. New entrances will be constructed on the Constitution Avenue side of the building under the existing Grand Staircase to provide easy visitor access to public areas in the building and comply with laws on access for the disabled. Working with the National

Institute of Standards and Technology, the National Archives will reencase the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights to better protect these Charters of Freedom. The reencased Charters will be displayed in a renovated Rotunda that will ensure access by disabled visitors and will allow all pages of the Charters to be placed on display. The microfilm reading room, which serves genealogical researchers primarily, will be greatly expanded and relocated on the ground floor. The textual research room will remain in its present historic room, but the research facilities will be modernized to include access to electrical power and data hookups at new research tables. The expanded public areas will include new exhibit galleries, more classroom and training rooms, and a new theater. Funding for the theater, the permanent exhibit, restoration of the murals on the walls of the Rotunda, and a variety of educational programs focusing on the charters of Freedom will come from private donations.

To facilitate the planned renovation, the Center for Legislative Archives has temporarily moved the records of various legislative support agencies, such as the Government Printing Office, General Accounting Office, and others, to the National Archives building in College Park, Maryland. The Center's core holdings have been consolidated above the 6th tier in the Washington building. This process has facilitated a more efficient arrangement and retrieval of the congressional records, as well as the creation of new inventories and location registers.

Congress, researchers, and the public will all benefit greatly from the renovated National Archives Building. The records of Congress will be kept in an environmentally controlled records storage area with greatly improved fire and security systems. The modern technical infrastructure will mean much better elevator service at the most basic level and vastly improved electronic access to the world beyond the National Archives. The research and consultation rooms will be modernized, to enable researchers to utilize all the newest research resources available on the Internet. Opportunities for exhibits, workshops, and other outreach initiatives will be greatly expanded for members of Congress and their staffs, researchers, teachers, and other members of the American public who want to learn about the records and history of Congress in the heart of the nation's capital.