



The LIBRARY of CONGRESS

GAZETTE

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New Visitors Experience to Capture Lifelong Users

By Gail Fineberg

Ed. note: This article on the New Visitors Experience continues the Gazette's reporting of a Town Hall meeting in the Coolidge Auditorium on May 17. The next two articles will focus on a new communications effort to unify the Library's message and on a five-year strategic plan for the Library.

The Library is transforming its visitors' experience by engaging audiences on levels and in ways not possible before the use of interactive technologies and by sending them home with lifelong connections to the Library of Congress.

Visitors will become immersed in the world's greatest library, whose purpose is to further human understanding and wisdom by placing its resources at the fingertips of all people.

They will interact with exhibitions that feature not only the Library's original artifacts but also large-screen images and the technological capabilities to zoom in on a detail in a map or historic manuscript, to "turn" virtual pages of a rare book, and to listen and watch while the Library's curators draw on their in-depth knowledge of the items and their historical contexts to bring the collections to life.

Visitors will be issued a Passport to Knowledge, which is an electronic "library card" that will enable the user to continue the experience online after leaving the Library. Using the coded card, a visitor may bookmark items and experiences of interest to research further from home or school computers. Passport will connect to a new interactive Web site (www.myloc.gov) that will interface with the Library's main site at www.loc.gov. The Passport includes



Visitors to the Library next year and beyond will have an entirely new experience, including a visit to a new permanent gallery, The Early Americas, devoted to the Jay I. Kislak Collection and the Waldseemüller map. Throughout the new visitors' space, multimedia kiosks and stations such as those in this designers' rendering will engage viewers and enable them to interact with the collections, using futuristic technology.

way-finding maps of the Library.

As younger visitors tour the Library, they will use their personal library cards to play an interactive game of Knowledge Quest that will ask players to solve riddles and puzzles whose answers are in the collections, exhibition items or architectural details.

Chief Operating Officer Jo Ann Jenkins, who is responsible for the opening of the New Visitors Experience, and other staff members engaged in creating content for exhibitions and information kiosks and stations described these and other "dramatic changes" that visitors will encounter in 2008.

"We are making tremendous progress," Jenkins told a large staff audience seated in the Coolidge Auditorium for a May 17 Town Hall meeting. While she

verbally unfolded the New Visitors Experience, designers' renderings appeared on a large screen on the stage.

"The visitor's experience will be the first public-facing, Library-wide program that will be integrated across every organization within the Library using our new branding platform [to be explained in a future Gazette article]," she said.

Jenkins emphasized that the Library is planning and designing the New Visitors Experience only after doing some market research. "To learn more about our potential audiences, we have completed six focus study groups. The constructive feedback we gathered from these groups will help us develop a more fulfilling and educational experience for visitors, families and teachers," she said.

The visitors' experience at the Library

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will not end when they walk out the doors. The purpose of using interactive technology is to connect people to the Library and its collections and to keep them connected through the Internet, to nurture their curiosities and promote lifelong learning and use of this and other libraries.

“Our intent is to cultivate in visitors a lifelong relationship with the Library,” Jenkins said.

Congress Links to the Library

Congress has told the Library to prepare for an estimated 3.5 million visitors every year once the new Capitol Visitor Center is completed and open. A newly constructed tunnel “two football fields long” links the center directly to the Thomas Jefferson Building and, symbolically, connects the Congress more directly with its library, which members founded and funded in 1800. Staff walking past the orientation theater on the ground floor of the Jefferson Building will see construction barricades masking the tunnel opening.

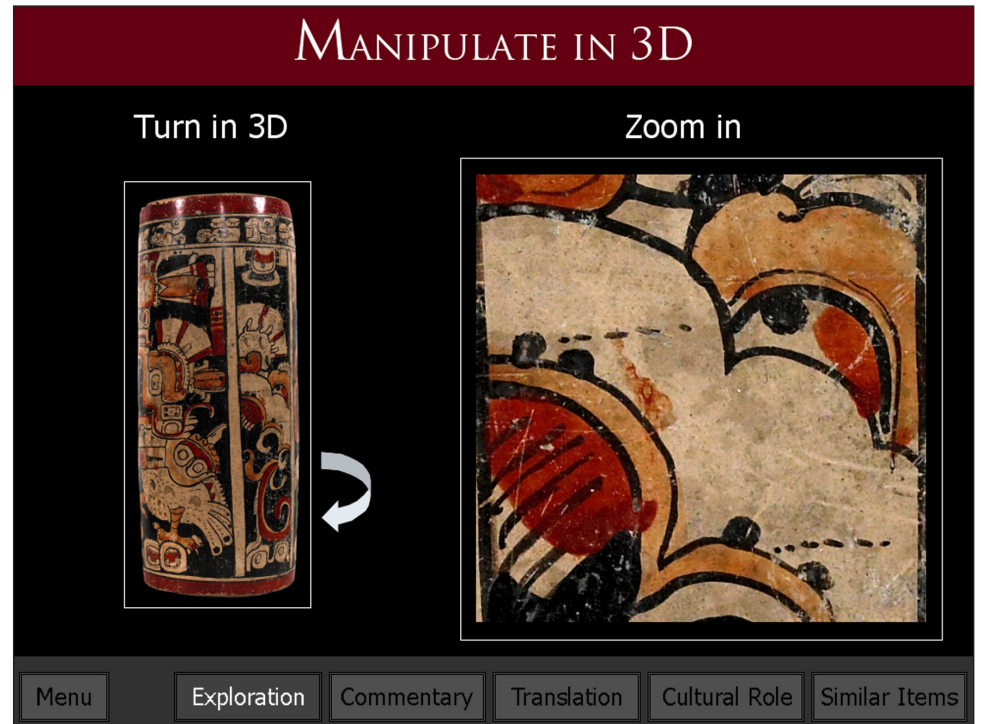
Visitors walking between Congress’s workplace and its library will see large graphic panels that alternately depict the history of the Capitol and the historic role the Library of Congress has played for more than 200 years in informing the lawmakers and the public.

“Our intent is that these visuals will inspire curiosity as the visitor walks between the Capitol Visitor Center and the Library,” Jenkins said.

She noted that, in addition to using the tunnel, Library visitors will be able to walk up the west front steps of the Jefferson Plaza and, for the first time in decades, walk through the double doors into the Great Hall.

Orientation Galleries

Jenkins said the visitors’ primary learning experience will begin in orientation galleries, where people will begin to fathom the breadth and depth of the collections, the variety of formats, and the universality of the Library’s materials that are gathered in 470 languages. In these galleries, visitors will learn that the Library exists not only to preserve a



Interactive technology will enable viewers to learn about exhibition objects they’re looking at, such as this Mayan vase. By manipulating the screen, a visitor can rotate an image of the vase, zoom in on a particular decoration and learn about its symbolism. Visitors also can read about the Mayan culture and history.

mint record of Americans’ creativity and to accumulate knowledge from all over the world, but to bring light and wisdom into the world by acquiring and preserving information in all formats and making it accessible to people everywhere.

“We are working with more than 16 Library curators and specialists as well as a nationally renowned media producer to define our grand introductory presentation,” Jenkins said.

“Animated information on overhead screens and hands-on assistance from knowledgeable Library staff and volunteers will guide visitors through a section called “Greatest Hits,” teach them how to use their Passports to Knowledge and play Knowledge Quest, schedule a tour, or attend an event,” she said.

Great Hall

Visitors to the Great Hall will be able to explore their surroundings using interactive kiosks that will tell the stories of the hall’s art and architecture and the Gutenberg and Great Mainz Bibles as well as the history of the Library. “For these kiosks, we have made the final content selections and are now working with an

interactive-design firm to develop the technology itself,” Jenkins said.

After her presentation, Jenkins called on Mark Dimunation, chief of the Rare Book and Special Collections Division, to make a Bibles presentation similar to the one visitors will experience.

The Early Americas

There was life and culture in the western hemisphere before the arrival of the Europeans, and the Library has been fortunate to acquire some international treasures that document the early history of the Americas. A permanent gallery for the first time will be devoted fully to the Jay I. Kislak Collection, which Kislak, a Madison Council member and Library benefactor, gave to the Library in 2004. Kislak’s collection consists of more than 4,000 rare books, maps, documents, paintings, prints and artifacts that focus on the early Americas from the time of the indigenous people of Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean through the period of European contact, exploration and settlement.

The gallery will be organized according to four themes: Precontact World,

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Explorations and Encounters, Competition for Empire and Documenting New Knowledge.

A centerpiece of this exhibition will be the original 1507 Waldseemüller map, which conceptualizes Amerigo Vespucci's 15th-century voyage to the Americas and, for the first time, names the continents.

Interactive stations will be placed throughout this space. Irene Chambers, chief of the Interpretive Programs Office, demonstrated how the new technologies will be used to explain the symbolism of the painted decorations on a Mayan vase, for example, and how at one station a visitor can dial in a date of birth and find a corresponding event on the Mayan calendar.

Another station will be a large touch-screen table that multiple visitors will be able to use simultaneously to examine maps and related materials.

Creating the United States

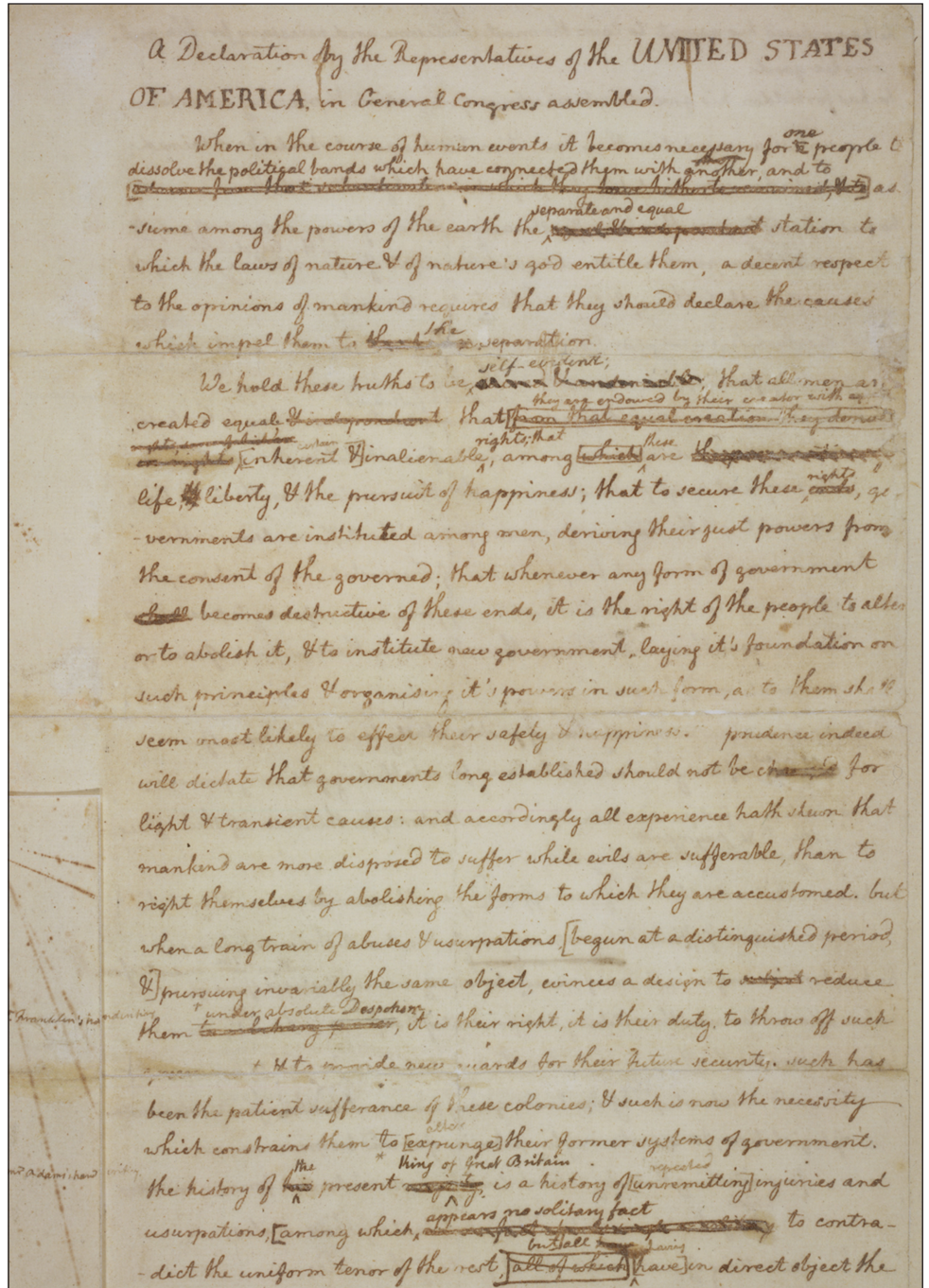
"The Library's collections are undoubtedly the world's best source for illuminating the creative process behind the founding of the American Republic," Jenkins said, introducing an exhibition that will offer "a remarkable opportunity to teach and learn in fresh new ways how the founding documents were courageously forged out of insight, invention, creativity, collaboration and compromise."

She said the Library has developed the exhibition's preliminary object list and defined how the space's technology will interact with the visitor.

Speaking with animation to the staff audience about the Library's precious holographic manuscripts of the Founding Fathers, Manuscript Division Chief James Hutson discussed some of the treats in store for Library visitors in this exhibition.

"The Manuscript Division, the oldest . . . division in the Library, holds 43 great documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and a whole chain of documents that illustrate the evolution of the creative process" that produced these cornerstones of American self-governance, Hutson said.

In and of themselves, digital images



In an exhibition of the nation's founding documents, visitors will be able to view this image of Thomas Jefferson's "original Rough draught" of the Declaration of Independence, and more important, listen to a history specialist explain the significance of the edits, which show how the founders' thinking and the document evolved.

of brown parchments are not necessarily that exciting, even if they are the nation's birth certificates in the original hands of the nation's founders. But historian Hutson brings them to life.

Showing an image of Thomas Jefferson's "original Rough draught" of the Declaration of Independence, Hutson explained how the founders' thinking

evolved during the editing process.

On June 11, 1776, the Continental Congress appointed a committee (Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Ben Franklin, Roger Sherman and Robert Livingston) to draft a convincing argument for the separation of the colonists from their sovereign, King George III. Jefferson set forth a "fair" first draft, which then

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was marked up, first by Adams, then by Franklin, and finally by Sherman and Livingston. (According to historian Gary Wills in "American Treasures in the Library of Congress," this document changed 47 times before going to the Continental Congress on June 28, 1776. Congress made 39 additional changes during debates from July 1 to July 4, 1776, when it finally was adopted.)

In what Jenkins described as "a superb civics lesson," Hutson also discussed briefly the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and various earlier Virginia state documents that established the principles contained in the federal pillars of self-governance.

He also gave a fascinating discussion of the Electoral College, which grew out of Continental Convention fears that

Britain would "buy off Congress or their own candidates."

Jefferson's Library

The Library will take advantage of the New Visitors Experience to display prominently Thomas Jefferson's library, which forms the core of the Library's collections. Congress lost its original library in a Capitol fire set by the British in 1814 and purchased Jefferson's personal library of 6,487 volumes for \$23,950 in 1815.

A Christmas Eve fire in 1851 burned two-thirds of these volumes, but the Library has Jefferson's original catalog and has been able to recover many duplicates.

"One of the Library's most treasured collections, Thomas Jefferson's Library will provide insight into Jefferson's mind and the intellectual universe from which he drew his revolutionary ideas," Jenkins said.

Interactive kiosks in this space will explore the dialogue Jefferson carried on with his books — his ideas, the world that surrounded him and his interests," she said. The space will be organized according to Jefferson's organizational scheme for his books — Memory, Reason and Imagination.

Educational Outreach

Elizabeth Ridgway, director of educational outreach, closed the New Visitors Experience presentation with a brief overview of how her office will use the new technologies to stimulate critical thinking of young visitors.

In addition to Knowledge Quest, her office is preparing docent tours and Web-based educational packages and lesson plans that will lead teachers and young readers into the Library's collections.

"This is an opportunity to interact with young people at a young age and hook them on reading and the Library," Ridgway said. ♦



Visitors will begin their introduction to the Library in the Orientation Galleries, where they will learn the nature of the Library's services and depth and breadth of its collections. Staff will tell visitors where to go, how to use their Passports to Knowledge, play Knowledge Quest, schedule a tour or attend an event.



Thomas Jefferson's Library, which made a cameo appearance during the Library's bicentennial celebration after years of residing out of sight in the Library's stacks, will become a long-running exhibition. Interactive kiosks will guide viewers into Jefferson's mind, interests and his world.



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