

## The Library of Congress Today

The Library of Congress is the world's largest repository of knowledge and creativity, with a growing collection of more than 150 million items, including books, print materials, sound recordings, photographs, maps, sheet music, motion pictures, and manuscripts.

Although books are the heart of the Library, from the volumes of American statesman Thomas Jefferson to the most current material that reflects contemporary culture, there is much more. The Library supports research in its Main Reading Room and in twenty-one specialty reading rooms; archives millions of priceless objects, including the papers of key figures from around the world; gives a stage to performances of all kinds; creates exhibitions that explore historic and cultural themes; produces a wide range of books and teaching materials; and is a global leader in the science of preservation and information management.

The Library is the home of the U.S. Copyright Office whose mission is to promote creativity by administering and sustaining an effective national copyright system; the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, which circulates braille and audio materials nationwide; the Congressional Research Service, which does original research for members of Congress; and the Law Library of Congress, with its vast international legal collections. The Library's website provides access to collections, webcasts, concerts, exhibitions, and other Library programs. [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

## A Brief History

The Library of Congress was established in 1800, when President John Adams signed a bill transferring the seat of the U.S. government to Washington. The legislation described a library of "such books as may be necessary for the use of Congress." The initial collection of 740 books and 3 maps was housed in the new Capitol Building until August 1814, when invading British troops burned the building, destroying the small library.

President Thomas Jefferson, then retired and living at Monticello, offered his personal library as a replacement. In January 1815, Congress appropriated \$23,950 to purchase Jefferson's collection of 6,487 books, and thereby laid the foundation for a great national library. The Jeffersonian belief that all subjects are important to the American legislature is the philosophy that inspires the comprehensive collecting policies of today's Library of Congress. The *Thomas Jefferson Library* exhibition is on view on the second floor.

Facing a shortage of space in the Capitol and concerned about the safety of the collection after two disastrous fires, Congress approved the construction of a separate building for its Library.

Opened on November 1, 1897, the new "Congressional Library" was hailed as a glorious national monument. In 1980, the building was named for Thomas Jefferson in honor of his role in the Library's history. Between 1984 and 1997, the building was restored to its original nineteenth-century splendor.

Ground Floor Restrooms Information Cloakroom

Young Readers Center

Coolidge Auditorium

Bob Hope Gallery

Gershwin Room

Visitor Tours

Passageway to Capitol

Carriage Entrance

Library Shop

Graphic Arts Galleries

A virtual tour is available on [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

Thomas Jefferson Building and Exhibitions  
Monday through Saturday  
8:30 am to 4:30 pm  
Closed New Year's, Thanksgiving and Christmas

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
10 First Street SE  
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[www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

6/12

ENGLISH

# THOMAS JEFFERSON BUILDING



TORCH OF LEARNING atop the Thomas Jefferson Building



## The Thomas Jefferson Building

The Thomas Jefferson Building, the centerpiece of the Library's three buildings on Capitol Hill, opened in 1897, and was built as a library. Its artistic decorations relate to learning, literature, knowledge, creativity, and intellectual achievement. Throughout, you will see symbols; for example, the Roman goddess Minerva is the protector of civilization and the goddess of universal knowledge. Look for depictions of books and scrolls and torches, which represent learning and achievement. The building was constructed at a time of scientific discovery. Notice the light bulbs; this was the first building in Washington, D.C., to be constructed with electricity installed.

### FIRST FLOOR ①

#### Great Hall

The Great Hall is the grand centerpiece of this Italian Renaissance-style building which was completed on time and under budget. The ceiling, seventy-five feet above the marble floor, is decorated with stained-glass skylights surrounded by aluminum-leaf decorations. The triangular vaults contain names of the world's leading writers and thinkers. In the marble floor is a large brass inlay of a compass rose, surrounded by the twelve signs of the zodiac.

Two marble staircases flank the Great Hall. The small children carved into the railings represent various occupations and hobbies, including the symbol of a trade: a hunter with a rabbit; an electrician holding a telephone receiver; and

an entomologist with a butterfly net. Halfway up the staircases are globes with figures representing Africa, America, Europe, and Asia.

To the east is a Commemorative Arch with two figures entitled *The Students*, a young man and an old one, who represent the importance of life-long learning.

Use the interactives on the mezzanine to study the Great Hall features more closely.

#### The Gutenberg and Mainz Bibles

Pass through the Commemorative Arch to reach two of the Library's greatest treasures: the handwritten (manuscript) Giant Bible of Mainz and the printed Gutenberg Bible. Both volumes were produced in Mainz, Germany, in the mid-1450s. The Gutenberg Bible is the first book printed with movable metal type in Europe.

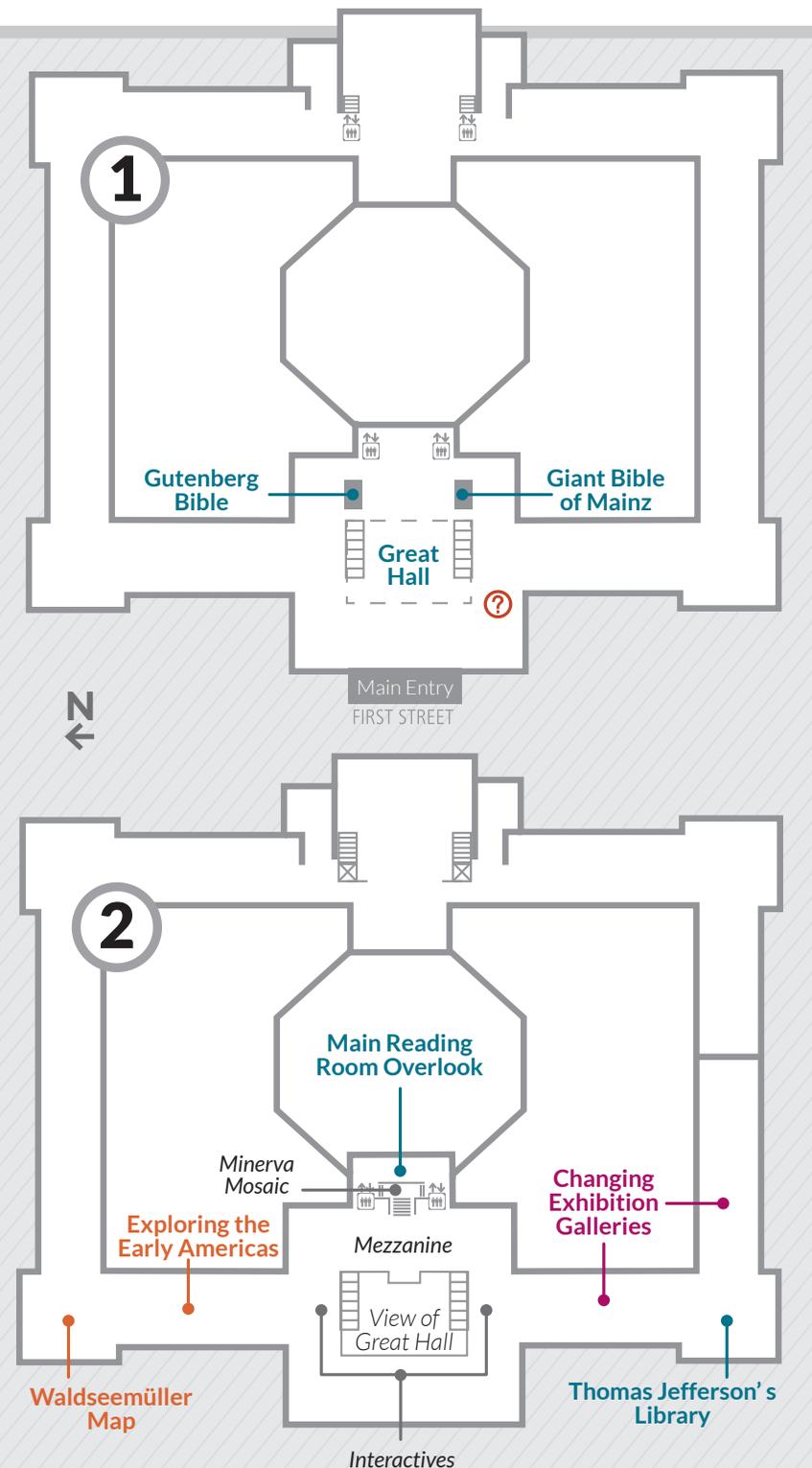
Continue to the alcoves near the elevators where you will find five lunette paintings by Elihu Vedder depicting *Government*; the ideal form is over the door with the effects of good and bad government on each side. On the left, the paintings show *Corrupt Legislation* and *Anarchy*; on the right are *Good Administration*, and *Peace and Prosperity*.

Interactive stations allow you to explore the Bibles and the nearby paintings in depth.

### SECOND FLOOR ②

#### Minerva Mosaic

On the east side of the second floor a staircase leads to a special gallery where visitors experience a view of the Main Reading Room.



Suggested itineraries are color coded:

15 to 30 mins. 30-60 mins. > 1 hour

① First Floor ② Second Floor G Ground Floor (on back panel) ? Information

From the base of the stairs, take a moment to look at Elihu Vedder's glass, gold-leaf, and marble mosaic of Minerva as she stands ready to defend the Main Reading Room. To the right is a statue of Victory; at left, an owl—the symbol of wisdom. Minerva is holding a scroll that lists various fields of study important to a civilization.

#### Main Reading Room Overlook

(May be available for walk through only.)

The Main Reading Room's domed ceiling soars 160 feet above the floor. In the circular mural at the apex of the dome, twelve figures, painted by Edwin Blashfield, represent the countries, cultures, and eras that contributed to the development of Western civilization as understood in 1897. The eight semi-circular stained-glass windows are decorated with the seals of forty-five states and three territories (excluding Alaska and Hawaii, which were not yet part of the nation in 1897).

Giant marble columns support eight symbolic figures that represent characteristic features of civilized life and thought. Sixteen bronze statues on the balustrades pay homage to men whose lives were devoted to the subject represented by the plaster statue above them.

From right to left are Moses and St. Paul (*Religion*); Robert Fulton and Columbus (*Commerce*); Edward

Gibbon and Herodotus (*History*); Beethoven and Michelangelo (*Art*); Francis Bacon and Plato (*Philosophy*); Homer and Shakespeare (*Poetry*); James Kent and Solon (*Law*); and Joseph Henry and Isaac Newton (*Science*). The circle of knowledge is continued below by the 236 desks where researchers use the Library's vast collections.

#### Mezzanine

At the corners of the mezzanine, *The Virtues* are painted on Pompeian red panels. Also, notice the fifty-six circular printers' marks that adorn the triangular ceiling vaults. In the ceiling of the north mezzanine, paintings represent *The Five Senses*, and the wall paintings show *Knowledge*, *Wisdom*, *Understanding*, and *Philosophy*.

From the west mezzanine windows is a beautiful view of the U.S. Capitol. The eight paintings in the arches above show *The Sciences*. At either end of the ceiling is a tablet bearing the names of distinguished scientists. The three medallions in the center depict the arts: *Sculpture*, *Architecture*, and *Painting*.

The south mezzanine paintings show *The Three Graces* in the center of the ceiling. At either end of the ceiling is a rectangular panel portraying baseball and football. The four circular wall paintings illustrate *The Four Seasons*.

Several exhibitions are on view throughout the building.