



Filed away

National Archives saves and provides access to our most important documents

The National Archives is America's filing cabinet. The U.S. government generates endless mountains of documents during the course of its daily business. From 1 percent to 3 percent of them are considered important enough to be filed in the archives for permanent historical preservation.

You can rifle through the drawers of the nation's filing cabinet at archives.gov, the website of the National Archives. In those drawers you'll find documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, along with historic photographs from Pearl Harbor and Iwo Jima.



KEVIN O'NEILL
InSites

In addition to holding enough paper documents to circle the earth 57 times, and tens of millions of photos, the National Archives also hold tens of thousands of motion pictures, hundreds of thousands of audio and video recordings, millions of maps, charts and architectural drawings, and billions of electronic records. In fact, the archives contain so much information that it's not all available on the website.

What are you looking for?

There are a variety of reasons why you might want to visit the archives online. If you are a veteran, or you just want to research the service records of your grandfather, there are extensive military records accessible through the website's Veterans' Service Records section. While not all records are available directly on the site, there are online forms for requesting records and replacing lost medals and awards. There's also lots of historical military documents and photographs, and links to other resources.

For those interested in tracing their family histories, the site has a Resources for Genealogists section. You can look up census, immigration and property records that can help you trace your roots. There are also tips, articles and events geared to help you in your search.

History lesson

If you're an educator the Teachers' Resources section has a lot of tools to help you inspire students. You can download lesson plans and activities or plan a class trip to the National Archives Museum in Washington, D.C. There are links to educational activities, videos and websites. There also are opportunities for professional development at summer workshops for teachers.

If you're a writer, or anyone else who needs to conduct research, there's a wealth of information available on or through archives.gov. The myriad offices of the federal government intersect with almost every type of activity that people engage in, so there's a good chance that there are records relat-

ed to your topic of interest in the archives.

There are links to information for federal employees, including members of congress, all of the presidential libraries and even the press. You also can plan trips to one of the many locations across the country where the National Archives have storage and research facilities. There are many publications, including the Federal Register and Prologue magazine, the archives' quarterly magazine, that you can order or download. Some also are available in electronic versions for e-readers, digital tablets and smart phones.

Just looking around

Of course, you don't have to be engaged in serious research to visit the site. It's interesting and fun just to poke around the drawers to see what's in them.

I spent a lot of time browsing through the online exhibits on the site. Picturing the Century is a collection of photos of the American experience from the likes of Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange and Lewis Hine. Designs for Democracy is a collection of historic design drawings of buildings, ships, monuments, parks and many other objects. Original plans for the Lincoln Memorial, the Pentagon, the USS Constellation and more can be viewed here. The Digital Vaults is an interactive collection of historic photos and documents covering many of the major events in American history.

The website's design manages to organize a tremendous amount of information into an attractive and manageable interface. Five broad, color-coded categories on the home page lead to increasingly specific interior pages. The color scheme and typography extends through most levels of the site providing a sense of visual unity. The navigation is intuitive even though there are thousands of links among the many pages. I didn't encounter any bad links or other technical issues. Archives.gov is a very useful and interesting site.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a graphic artist for The Times-Tribune. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.