



Safeguarding A Revolutionary Resource

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According to the Act of Incorporation granted by the United States Congress in 1896, the National Society intended to undertake “the preservation of documents . . . and of the records of the individual services of Revolutionary soldiers and patriots.” But as the organization approached its 50th Anniversary, it still lacked a dedicated home for such documents.

In 1938, with the National Society preparing to celebrate its Golden Jubilee two years later, the DAR Executive Committee aimed to remedy the situation. The committee resolved to “provide a properly equipped library and document room in the basement of Memorial Continental Hall, in which to house valuable Revolutionary documents and records.” Such items were already scattered among the holdings of the DAR Museum and DAR Library, even though early American manuscripts and imprints did not fall within the purview of either collection.

Originally housed in a storage area dug out from beneath the South Portico of Memorial Continental Hall, what began as the Documents Room has evolved into the present-day Americana Collection. This repository includes more than 4,000 accessions, selections from which are displayed in the climate-controlled Americana Room at DAR Headquarters, which is open to the public.

In its 75 years of existence, the Americana Collection has assembled a significant treasury of original documents that help tell the story of the United States. Plans for the future of the collection involve digitizing its holdings not only to preserve the fragile, aging documents from the stress of repeated handling, but also to greatly increase access by enabling them to be shared online.

COLLECTING TRADITIONS

The Americana Collection is a manuscript collection managed by the National Society’s Office of the Historian General, which also oversees the NSDAR Archives. Whereas archives consist of business or government records that are collected



Clockwise from top left:

This original document signed by King George III of Great Britain is included in a leather-bound volume donated by Washington state member Flora A. Walker in 1921. • Along with a fellow Daughter, Historian General Eleanor W. Spicer, left, who later served as President General, studies a donation to the Americana Collection, circa 1968–1971. • In this letter from John Hancock to Captain Elisha Hinman, written in Boston and dated October 19, 1779, Hancock recommends a Captain Moore to serve on the ship under Hinman’s command and praises Moore’s good character.





Boston Oct 19, 1779

Dear Sir

I hope this will meet you well & happy. you will receive this under cover from Capt. Whinn Moore, who has some years been an Officer in the Regiment of Artillery of this State, and is now desirous of engaging him in the marine service as Captain of Marines on board the Ship under your Command. I take the freedom to Recommend this Gentleman to your Notice, & wish that if you have not already engaged him, that if you to you, that you would endeavor to gratify him, he is very desirous of sailing with you, he justifies an agreeable Character, & if you may depend on him as a Gentleman, & one who I think will not abuse the Confidence placed in him. I hope it will be in your power to oblige Mr. Moore, I shall return it a favor, and am with respects, Sir

Your most Obedt Servt
John Hancock

Capt. Winman

organically to provide a record of an institution's history, manuscript collections are composed of personal papers gathered based on their relevance to a particular subject, region or time period. These two parallel collecting traditions are rooted in the recordkeeping practices that Europeans brought to the New World.

In the years following the Revolution, members of the founding generation established historical societies to preserve the manuscripts that documented our young nation's history. One of the first such organizations was the Massachusetts Historical Society, founded in 1791. The emergence of historical societies at the end of the 18th century established the tradition of archives as storehouses of historical materials.

The increasing interest in preserving historical resources led to the formation of a distinct archival profession in the United States. The American Historical Association formed in 1884, Congress established the National Archives as an independent federal agency 50 years later, and the Society of American Archivists, a professional trade association for archivists, was founded in 1936.

Soon after, the DAR created the Americana Collection as part of the commemoration of its 50th anniversary. Prior to that time, the National Society had no formal collection of

such material. Some members had donated their ancestors' manuscripts to the DAR; these documents were dispersed among the holdings of the DAR Library and the DAR Museum.

THE RECORDS OF ORDINARY AMERICANS

Records in the NSDAR Archives show that the original intent of the DAR leaders who founded the Americana Collection was to collect diaries, letters and other items concerning the lives of ordinary Americans. Although the holdings span five centuries, the collections policy emphasizes the acquisition of original historical materials that reveal the political, economic, geographic, intellectual, familial or cultural development of the American people to 1830. The collection is also home to household inventories, samples



Clockwise from top left: Justice of the Peace John Baker signed this 1776 letter to certify that Jesse Story Sr. was the rightful heir to his son's property. The Revolutionary War cartridge box shown is now owned by the DAR Museum. • The documents in the Americana Collection's complete set of signatures of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence include a 1770 letter that Benjamin Franklin wrote to his wife, Deborah, and a ship's pass that John Adams signed for the schooner *Hornet of Baltimore*. • Letters from DAR member and suffrage leader Susan B. Anthony to her friend and colleague Ella Jones illustrate Anthony's determination and focus on matters concerning women's rights. In one she writes, "the only real pleasure in living is in the feeling that we are helping to lift the world along toward the brighter and better."

of Colonial-era currency, court records, birth and marriage records, land deeds and grants, and military papers.

Everyday Americans can provide insight into important events. In a letter to Abraham Dodge, captain of the company to which a soldier named Jesse Story Jr. was attached, Jesse Story Sr. relays a list of articles owned and apparel worn by his son, who was killed in the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775. The Americana Collection also includes a letter signed by a justice of the peace to certify that Story Sr. was the rightful heir to his son's personal property.



Sometimes the ordinary people represented in the collection provide a glimpse of well-known historical figures. For example, on April 14, 1863, during the Civil War, Orderly Sergeant Stanley Gaines of Company K, 7th Regiment, New Jersey Volunteers, wrote in a letter to a friend: "I suppose you know President Lincoln and wife have been down here and reviewed us. I knew Old Abe was homely, but he took down all my former impressions this time. He was very thin and careworn . . . Mrs. Lincoln was a very pleasant looking lady, we are not competent to judge of a lady's beauty down here, as everything that wears crinoline looks splendid in our eyes."

BALANCING PRESERVATION AND ACCESS

From a professional standpoint, the goal of an archivist is to provide scholars with a significant amount of material, enabling them to conduct a beneficial amount of research within a single collection. The Americana Collection's holdings serve patrons interested in early American history.



Six recently acquired letters relating to Tory activities in New York state circa 1783 demonstrate the collection's benefit to researchers. Tories, also known as Loyalists or King's Men, were American colonists who remained loyal to Great Britain during and after the Revolutionary War. The letters reveal firsthand accounts of people who were ordered from their homes and, as a result, sought either legal or practical assistance.

One letter to William Bayard, a successful merchant in the area around New York City and Hoboken, N.J., asks him to relay any knowledge he may have of "outrages" committed against Crown sympathizers. Bayard found living in an America without British rule unacceptable. Eventually, he relocated to England.

Collections management professionals endeavor to strike a balance between preserving the historic documents in their care to make them last as long as possible and providing access to researchers, students and others for exhibits and other educational purposes. Often these two goals are at odds, as frequent handling and use of the manuscripts puts them at risk of damage.



Visit the
Americana
Room at DAR
Headquarters

www.dar.org/archives

Open Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–4 p.m.

In honor of the National Society's Quasiquintennial, the Americana Room presents "Collecting the History: Celebrating 125 Years of the DAR and 75 Years of the Americana Collection." The two-part exhibit both explores the practice of documenting DAR history through the NSDAR Archives and celebrates the 75th Anniversary of the Americana Collection.

Items on display include photographs dating to the early 20th century, programs and objects from the first Continental Congresses, early financial records, scrapbooks, DAR pins and ribbons, campaign materials, and a variety of Americana Collection accessions. A series of Archival Notes peppered throughout the exhibit provide information on the do's and don'ts of caring for archival materials.

"Collecting the History" will remain on display until spring 2017.

Also available are NSDAR Archives online exhibitions devoted to the DAR's Four Founders and the organization's Dazzling Daughters—extraordinary DAR members who achieved extraordinary goals.

Digitization carries another benefit, too. If a future disaster were to result in the loss of physical records, the presence of the digitized records would make the damage less catastrophic—though of course still highly unfortunate. Taking proper care of the collection includes being prepared for potential disaster or loss. The rising value of manuscripts makes it more important than ever to maintain updated information concerning the collection's replacement value. To that end, the National Society hired a professional manuscripts appraiser to undertake the multiyear project of updating the Americana Collection's appraisal values.

Guided by collections management professionals who help preserve the past while also preparing for the future, on its 75th Anniversary the Americana Collection stands poised to catalog our nation's formative years for generations of researchers to come. 🐾

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Membership is extended to ladies and gentlemen 18 years of age or older if they can prove their descent from a Monarch of Scotland. The first eligible Monarch is Kenneth MacAlpin and the last is James VI of Scotland.

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The Order's website, www.orderofalba.org, contains information of interest about our Order, an Eligible Ancestor List and a list of hereditary societies whose members are eligible for a fast track to membership.

For further information, please contact the Genealogist General:

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Digitizing archival collections serves both of these goals. Currently, the National Society is developing a plan to digitize the Americana Collection. This project will enable DAR to provide collection-wide access to users around the world via the Internet, while at the same time ensuring that the original materials are kept safe from handling, theft and overexposure to light. NSDAR archivists hope to make the catalogue for the collection available online as well, to help users locate materials more easily.

Portions of the collection are already accessible online at www.dar.org/archives/online-exhibitions. Virtual visitors can click through the DAR's complete collection of signatures of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence. Begun in 1919 and completed in 2002, the collection is one of approximately 30 complete sets of Declaration Signers' signatures held in public and semi-public repositories around the world.

Another online exhibition highlights a collection of 32 manuscript items pertaining to Revolutionary War General Henry Knox and his family. Acquired in 2007, the collection consists primarily of letters written by Knox women, thus providing insight into women's changing lives. Topics range from General Knox's personal experiences in the Revolutionary War to family matters, details of daily life and career goals.