



Press Release

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U.Va. Offers a Modern Declaration of Independence Experience on July 4th

June 26, 2009 — While John Hancock was involved in many important events in the founding years of the United States, he is perhaps best known for his big, bold signature on the Declaration of Independence.

This Fourth of July, the University of Virginia invites the Charlottesville community to celebrate the patriotic holiday by using a new computing device to closely examine the signature of the president of the 2nd Continental Congress and other details of the Declaration of Independence.

The U.Va. Library's permanent exhibit, "Declaring Independence: Creating and Recreating America's Document," which will be open to the public on July 4, features a new Microsoft Surface computing platform that responds to human touch.

The 30-inch display, which exhibits the documents on a tabletop, allows users to zoom in and compare facsimiles of the declaration and letters from a few of the 56 signers, and also gives visitors the opportunity to view documents in the permanent collection that are not currently on display.

Library computer support engineer Rick Reifenstein said children enjoy exploring the historical documents on the computer, which debuted in February.

"Instead of having it just hanging on the wall, stationary, it gives them the ability to experience it in a new and fresh way," he said, adding that the screen has become a good teaching tool.

The large screen and zoom function allow for an easier experience than reading original documents under glass.

The machine's 360-degree interface can respond to 52 touch points, allowing access to up to six users at a time.

When U.Va. alumnus Albert H. Small created the collection, he hoped to make it interactive and engaging for visitors, as if they were going through his collection and handling the documents virtually.

"This is just phase one," Reifenstein said, adding that the library hopes to add transcripts, interactive maps and more information about the documents to the computer before the start of the fall semester.

For example, visitors could trace Caesar Rodney's ride from his home in Delaware to Philadelphia to cast his vote for independence through an interactive map.

The exhibit features one of only 25 surviving copies printed on the night of July 4, 1776, and also includes a 13-minute documentary showing the story of the events that led to the founding of the United States.

The exhibit will be open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on July 4. Admission is free. Docents will be available to give guided tours. The museum's regular summer hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Saturday. When school is not in session, the Saturday hours are 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Visitors can also explore other library exhibits open on July 4. "From Out That Shadow: The Life and Legacy of Edgar Allan Poe" features more than 100 Poe-related items, including records of his student days at U.Va., manuscripts of landmark works such as "The Raven," first editions, original artwork and personal effects such as his writing desk and portraits of Poe and his mother. "The Flowerdew Hundred: Unearthing Virginia's History" displays archaeological finds from a historic Virginia estate.

The exhibits are located at the U.Va. Library's Mary and David Harrison Institute for American History, Literature and Culture, and the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library. The building is on U.Va.'s Central Grounds, adjacent to Alderman and Clemons libraries and facing McCormick Road.

– By Laura Hoffman

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Declaration of Independence Exhibition
<http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/declaration/>

For hours and other information about the Harrison Institute:
<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/harrison/>