

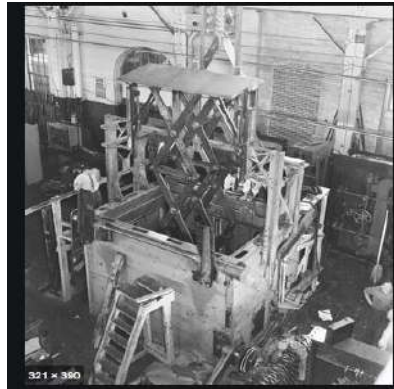
PROTECTING THE CHARTERS OF FREEDOM: THE MOSLER VAULT

In April 1952, Congress ordered the Library of Congress to transfer the **Declaration of Independence** and **Constitution** to the National Archives. The two **documents** were to go on public display in the National Archives Building along with the **Bill of Rights**, which was already at the Archives. These three documents are often referred to as the “Charters of Freedom”.

While the Archives Exhibition Hall had been specifically designed to display the documents, it did not have a safe place to store the documents when they weren’t on exhibit.



The National Archives contracted with the Mosler Safe Company to construct a vault beneath the exhibition hall’s floor. At that time, an estimated 70 percent of all banks in the United States used Mosler safes and vaults. National Archives officials announced they would unveil the documents on Bill of Rights day that year. This did not give the company much time. Working under the looming deadline, Mosler engineers, technicians, and machinists worked around the clock



to design and build a vault worthy of protecting the nation’s most valuable documents. The company constructed the vault in Hamilton, Ohio, then brought it to Washington, DC, for installation.

The vault was made of steel and reinforced concrete. It was located about 20 feet beneath the floor of the exhibition hall. Built during the Cold War era, the vault was designed to be fireproof, shockproof, and bomb proof.

During visiting hours, the three documents were displayed in then state-of-the-art cases. Every night, at the press of a button, the elevator gently lowered the documents in their cases through the floor into a 50-ton safe where they sat overnight. The next morning, the elevator would

again raise the documents for public viewing. The two center pages of the Constitution, which were not exhibited, were also stored in the vault.

During the dedication ceremony on December 15, 1952, President Harry Truman said America’s treasured documents are “as safe from destruction as anything that the wit of modern man could devise.” The Mosler Company also gave the National Archives a scale model of the vault, which was on display in the National Archives for many years.

The National Archives no longer uses the Mosler vault to protect the Charters of Freedom. The major renovation of the National Archives Building in the early 2000s included a complete overhaul of the security system safeguarding the Charters. Besides these important **founding** documents, others such as the **Magna Carta** and the **English Bill of Rights** have been on display at the Archives. Those documents helped in the writing of our Charters of Freedom.

So what is protecting the “Charters of Freedom” now you may ask? We posed this question to David Ferriero, who, as the chief archivist of the United States government. He oversees the National Archives, where the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights are displayed and stored. “We do have a plan, BUT I’d have to kill you if I told you,” Ferriero joked. Seriously, though, he added, “security arrangements for the Charters are not public.”

Think About It:

1. Why do you think it would be important to protect the “Charters of Freedom”?
2. What famous documents have we recently learned about that were used to help in writing the documents protected in the National Archives?
3. Explain which of the three documents that make up the “Charters of Freedom” you feel is the most important.
4. Why would it be important to keep the security arrangements for the Charters a secret?
5. How does this article connect with what we are learning in our civics class?

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Name _____

Connection: _____

(how does this article connect to the lesson)

SUMMARY: In the space provided, write a summary of the article identifying the people involved in the news story and describing key points related to the story. **Be sure to write at least 5 complete sentences. For full credit, complete sentences must be used.**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page or a sheet of stationery designed for writing.

Who: _____

What: _____

Where: _____

When _____

OPINION: In this section you are to address at least two of the “Think About It” items posted at the end of the article. **Be sure to write at least 5 complete sentences. For full credit, complete sentences must be used.**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.