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Media only: Bob Kearns (202) 633-2240

Web site: <http://www.sil.si.edu/press>

Smithsonian Institution Libraries Fact Sheet

The Smithsonian Institution Libraries enjoys a unique and dual role within the Institution itself. On one hand, the Libraries is an internal service provider, meeting the needs of the Institution's curators and researchers. On the other hand, it is a public educator in its own right because of its active exhibition program and its progressive Digital Library initiative, which brings important, rare and valuable works from the Libraries' collections to the widest audience possible through the World Wide Web.

The Smithsonian Libraries, though a plural noun, is consistently followed by a singular verb, because it is considered a 'system' of libraries, with individual locations operating under the aegis of a central administration and adhering to a common mission.

Collection Statistics

Total volumes owned by the Libraries exceed 1.5 million, of which more than 50,000 are rare books, complemented by 10,000 manuscripts. The nation's largest collection of commercial catalogs is housed by the Libraries and numbers 300,000, representing more than 30,000 companies dating from the 1850s. More than 180,000 microfilm and microfiche are also accessible for research in disciplines of science, history, art and technology.

Subject Specialties

The Libraries' collections reflect the scholarly interests and disciplines of the Institution's research and curatorial community. Holdings are especially strong in:

- African art
- African American history and culture
- Anthropology
- American art
- American history
- Asian and Middle Eastern art
- Aviation history and space flight
- Design and decorative arts
- Environmental management and ecology
- History of science and technology
- Latino history and culture
- Materials research
- Modern and contemporary art
- Museology

- Native American history and culture
- Natural history
- Postal history
- Tropical biology
- Trade literature
- World's Fair ephemera

The Libraries as Educator

The Libraries is committed to providing entertaining, educational materials and services to the widest audience possible. The key to success is a two-pronged approach with the Libraries' exhibition program and its Web site, Galaxy of Knowledge, both of which are described below. Beneficiaries include members of the international scholarly community, students from K-12 and those beyond post-graduate education, as well as serious and simply curious Web surfers.

Exhibition Program

Smithsonian Libraries' exhibitions are thematic, feature books and special collections from its extensive, multifaceted holdings and are organized by guest curators from around the Institution. The Smithsonian Libraries Gallery is located on the first floor of the National Museum of American History, Behring Center.

Digital Library Initiative

With each physical exhibition it mounts, the Libraries launches a corresponding digital exhibition. While conceptually true to their physical counterparts, digital exhibitions ultimately extend the depth, breadth and longevity of their physical counterparts and remain online after the physical versions have been deconstructed. Such online formats provide international, 24/7 access to the show and other related featured objects--particularly important for those who may be unable to travel to Washington. **Digital Exhibitions – [Online at www.sil.si.edu/Exhibitions](http://www.sil.si.edu/Exhibitions)**

The Libraries' digital editions are cover-to-cover, page-by-page, high-resolution digital replications of rare, valuable or out-of-print books and manuscripts. The digital editions program is a testament to the Smithsonian Libraries' strong commitment to providing a rich array of resources to the widest audience possible. These offerings keep the Libraries' doors open at all times to everyone. No appointment necessary. All digital editions contain prefatory essays by Smithsonian Institution or Smithsonian Libraries staff field specialists.

Digital Editions – [Online at www.sil.si.edu/digitalcollections/](http://www.sil.si.edu/digitalcollections/)

Locations

Washington, D.C.

- Director's office, Room 22 of the National Museum of Natural History
- Anacostia Museum & Center for African American History and Culture Library
- Anthropology Library
- Botany and Horticulture Library
- The Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology
- Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Library

- Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Library
- Joseph F. Cullman 3rd Library of Natural History
- Museum Studies & Reference Library
- National Air and Space Museum Library
- National Museum of American History Library
- National Museum of Natural History Library
- National Postal Museum Library
- National Zoological Park Library
- Smithsonian American Art Museum/National Portrait Gallery Library
- Warren M. Robbins Library, National Museum of African Art

Suitland, Md.

- Museum Support Center Library
- National Museum of the American Indian Library

Edgewater, Md.

- Smithsonian Environmental Research Center Library

New York City

- Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Library

Republic of Panama

- Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute Library

Online Catalog

The Libraries' online catalog, called the Smithsonian Institution Research Information System (SIRIS) is available 24 hours a day, internationally at <http://siris-libraries.si.edu/>.

Memberships

- Association of Research Libraries
- Chesapeake Information and Research Library Alliance
- Online Computer Library Center
- Research Libraries Group

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