Shining New Light on American History
The National Museum of American History has resumed its central role in telling the story of America and providing a critical link between the past and the present.

Through dramatic architectural changes and innovative exhibitions and programs, the Museum is shining new light on American history.

The central atrium serves as a new national public square—a crossroads for ideas, information, entertainment, commerce and face-to-face human connection—where the Museum hosts educational programs, performances and naturalization ceremonies for new citizens.

A triumph of engineering and craftsmanship, a spectacular new gallery features the flag that inspired our national anthem—the Star-Spangled Banner—preserved and presented dramatically “by the dawn’s early light.”

The Museum’s Transformation

The 40 x 19-foot abstract flag is made of 960 reflective polycarbonate panels arranged in 15 ribbons.

This two-year renovation encompassed 120,000 square feet in the central core of the Museum.
The heart of the National Museum of American History is Flag Hall, which serves as our public square. In this space, we connect visitors with information and ideas and with each other. In this public square, we sponsor naturalization ceremonies, musical performances, living history programs, hands-on education activities and social events.

In the first year after reopening the Museum, there have been dozens of occasions that affirmed the special role the public square plays in the civic life of the Museum. The most memorable and inspiring events. In the first year after reopening the Museum, there have been dozens of occasions that affirmed the special role the public square plays in the civic life of the Museum. The most memorable and inspiring events.

There were many quieter but equally important moments of inspiration that occurred during this past year. I am personally grateful to the board members, Museum staff, docents and volunteers who have transformed the Museum and who are dedicated every day to “shining new light on American history.” The accomplishments and rewards of a remarkable first year will carry us forward as we accept new challenges and new opportunities to create an exciting future.

Our best days are still ahead of us!

Brent D. Glass
The Elizabeth MacMillan Director

In the past year and a half, we have marked the renovation and reopening of the National Museum of American History with ribbon-cuttings, ceremonies and public programs—celebrations certainly befitting the magnitude of the occasion and the great and tireless work of so many. But on a deeper level, we have opened a new chapter in the rich history of this institution, which first opened its doors in 1964 with a dedication by President Lyndon B. Johnson, citing the words of William Faulkner: “... here is recorded the agony and the sweat of the human spirit, the victory of the freedom and the genius of our country.”

With this renovation of the building’s core, the Museum is in a very real sense, a sanctuary for reflection, a place for gratitude and quiet awe. The objects here and the collective stories they tell remind us that adversity doesn’t pass. It is overcome. Innovation isn’t conjured from the empty air. It is bred of human creativity and human effort. Injustice doesn’t disappear. It is conquered. History does not just happen. People make it. We prepare the way for those generations yet to come.

The 18th-century political philosopher and parliamentarian Edmund Burke famously described society as a compact among generations. In one eloquent passage, he declared that society is “… a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal society.”

In the same way, this museum not only preserves the past, but explains the present and helps shape a future informed by the wisdom that only the recognition and appreciation of history can bring. It is, in its own right, a guarantor of that “great contract.”

And so we rededicate ourselves to this great Museum, to our nation’s rich history, to this glorious country of endless possibilities and boundless hope. But this National Museum cannot fulfill its mission alone. We depend, as we always have, upon public-spirited citizens. Citizens such as Ken Behring, Dolly Lemelson, Ralph Lauren, and the men and women of the Pew Charitable Trusts. Citizens like the thousands of others who have supported the Museum over the forty years of its existence. And citizens yet unknown, who will step forward and guide the Museum on its American journey.

In this moment of rededication, we have indeed a cause for celebration, for gratefulness and for the enduring optimism that has always been the hallmark of our great country.

John F. W. Rogers
Board Chair
Five million people have visited since the Museum’s reopening, with the three millionth visitor entering on July 4, 2009.

At the Gala Reception, 1,200 supporters celebrated the Museum’s metamorphosis.
On the first day, 25,760 visitors came to see the Museum’s transformation.
Exhibitions

During the reopening year, the Museum opened 40 permanent and temporary exhibitions.

May 2009
- The Star-Spangled Banner: The Flag that Inspired the National Anthem
- Picturing Words: The Power of Book Illustration in the Dibner Library Gallery
- On the Water: Stories from Maritime America
- Art of the Traditional Midwest, the Albert H. Small Documents Gallery
- Robots on the Road Gallery in Science in American Life

June 2009
- Stories on Money
- Earl Shaffer and the Appalachian Trail in the Albert H. Small Documents Gallery

July 2009
- Mobilizing Young American Minds, 1950–1970
- Civil War Field Printing
- Barriers to Bridges: Asian Immigration after the Exclusion

September 2009
- Thanksgiving Paintings, The Bracero Program 1942–1964
- National Treasures of Popular Culture (ongoing object rotations begin)

November 2009
- Holidays on Display
- Keeping History: Plans, Indian Ledger Drawings in the Albert H. Small Documents Gallery
- Gunboat Philadelphia

December 2009
- The Dolls’ House

Exhibition Openings

November 2008
- The Star-Spangled Banner: The Flag that Inspired the National Anthem
- Picturing Words: The Power of Book Illustration in the Dibner Library Gallery
- Thanks for the Memories: Music, Sports and Entertainment History
- The Gatsby Address in the Albert H. Small Documents Gallery
- Robots on the Road Gallery in Science in American Life

December 2008
- The First Ladies at the Smithsonian

January 2009
- Abraham, Lincoln: An Extraordinary Life
- The Scurlock Studio and Black Washington, Picturing the Promise in the National Museum of African American Culture and History Gallery
- America’s New Birth of Freedom: Documents from the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in the Albert H. Small Documents Gallery

April 2009
- I Do Solemnly Swear: Photographs of the 2009 Inauguration
- Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn: Jazz Composers and Their Signature Works in the Albert H. Small Documents Gallery

May 2009
- Jamestown, Québec, Santa Fe: Three North American Beginnings in the International Gallery
- On the Water: Stories from Maritime America

June 2009
- Stories on Money

July 2009
- Earl Shaffer and the Appalachian Trail in the Albert H. Small Documents Gallery

September 2009
- Mobilizing Young American Minds, 1950–1970
- Civil War Field Printing
- Barriers to Bridges: Asian Immigration after the Exclusion

November 2009
- Holidays on Display
- Keeping History: Plans, Indian Ledger Drawings in the Albert H. Small Documents Gallery

December 2009
- The Dolls’ House

At the Museum’s reopening, 4,784 objects were on display.
The Flag Day performance of Jordan Shelton, the winner of the Star-Spangled Banner Singing Contest, has been watched 9,824 times on YouTube.

The Museum held 2,500 performances of historical theater, short pieces performed by actors in period costumes, in various Museum settings.

Smithsonian’s History Explorer

The Museum, in partnership with Verizon’s Thinkfinity, launched Smithsonian’s History Explorer in fall 2008.

By using real stories and actual objects, the web site offers an exciting new way for the Museum to connect students, teachers, parents and caregivers across the globe to American history

Smithsonian’s History Explorer offers free, standards-based, innovative resources for teaching and learning American history. In the first year, 1,128,000 visits were made to the site.

historyexplorer.americanhistory.si.edu
In the Blu-Ray package of the film *Julie & Julia*, three Museum curators were interviewed as part of a special feature about Julia Child’s kitchen and the more than 1,200 objects it contains.

March 2009
- The secret message in Abraham Lincoln’s watch is revealed.

April 2009
- Chuck Mangione’s hat donation kicks off Jazz Appreciation Month.

America’s Funniest Videos donates materials from its first 20 years on TV.

June 2009
- Bobcat Company donates archival materials about the invention of the loader and company papers.
- The Red Sox present Jon Lester’s jersey from Game 4 of the 2007 World Series and the third base from the 2004 World Series.

July 2009
- In a special ceremony, Julia Child’s copper pots are presented to the Museum and Columbia Pictures donates Meryl Streep’s costume from the film *Julie & Julia*.

September 2009
- Disney Theatrical presents materials from The Lion King stage production.

December 2009
- Carol Burnett visits the Museum and her gown from the *Went with the Wind* comedy sketch.

Six landmark objects point the way to themes and stories in American history in each wing:

- Disney’s Dumbo ride car
- Clara Barton’s Red Cross 1898 ambulance
- Horatio Greenough’s statue of George Washington
- The Greensboro, North Carolina, Woolworth’s lunch counter from the Civil Rights era
- The 1865 Vassar Telescope used by America’s first woman astronomer, Maria Mitchell
- The 1831 John Bull, one of the nation’s earliest steam locomotives

The Museum unveiled a secret message inside Abraham Lincoln’s watch, hidden since the beginning of the Civil War.
Lemelson Center

When the Museum reopened, the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation debuted the new Jerome and Dorothy Lemelson Hall of Invention, a bright, open and flexible 3,500 square-foot exhibition gallery. The Hall's inaugural exhibition is the award-winning Invention at Play, which focuses on the similarities between the ways children and adults play and the creative processes used by innovators in science and technology.

Events & Programs

November 2008
• Sporting Invention special showcase

March 2009
• March Madness for the Mind

April 2009
• NameDays 2009

August 2009
• From Spark to Click: Celebrating National Inventors' Month in partnership with the LEGO Group

November 2009
• Hot Spots of Invention symposium and special showcase on hot spots, featuring the Draper Lab at MIT

The New Spark!Lab activity center features experiments, demonstrations and activities related to invention, science and technology.

Lemelson Center

Thank You to Our Supporters

The Smithsonian gratefully acknowledges the individuals and organizations whose leadership contributed to the transformation of the National Museum of American History through the Star-Spangled Banner Campaign.

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The Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation

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