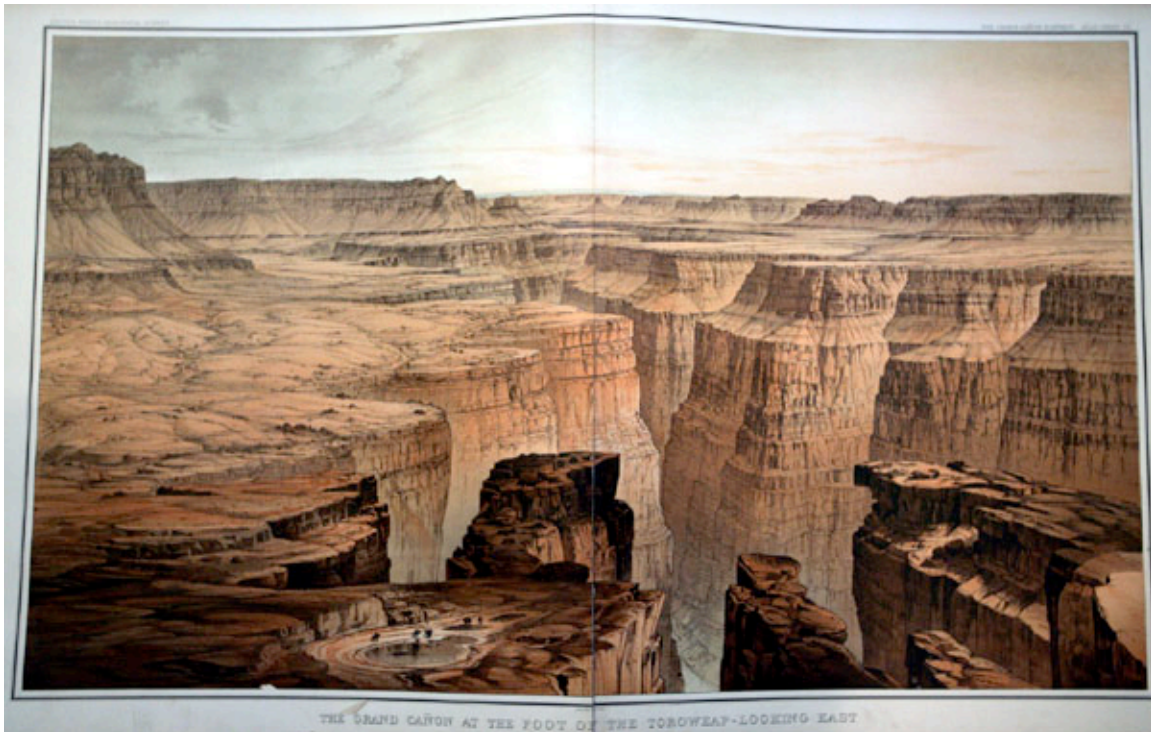


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Unexpected, Whimsical Finds in Government-Issued Works



A line drawing of the Grand Canyon in an 1882 publication that is part of an exhibition at the Newark Public Library.

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The last thing you expect to find tucked into an 1882 government-sponsored geological study is stunning artwork. But there it is, in the “Atlas to Accompany the Tertiary History of the Grand Canyon District,” a lovingly rendered illustration of that landmark of the American West. Stretching two and a half feet wide and 18 inches high, the drawing depicts a small band of horsemen, barely discernible against the canyon’s vast depths.

It is no coincidence that the work is currently enshrined in an

exhibition honoring the Newark Public Library's centennial as a depository of federal government documents. It happens to be a favorite of Laura Saur, the regional depository librarian and the exhibition's curator.

"It's just so spectacular — and unexpected," Ms. Saur said.

The free exhibition, arranged in a series of glass cases amid 15-foot-high marble columns, is full of government-issue surprises. Since 1906, the library has accumulated more than two million documents, which must be maintained in perpetuity. The burden of stewardship intensified in 1963, when the library became a regional federal depository — one of 52 nationwide and the only one in New Jersey — mandated to store every book, pamphlet, report, brochure and, more recently, every floppy disk and CD-ROM distributed through the depository program. (Up to half the documents produced by the government are not distributed for various reasons, Ms. Saur said.)

"A Window to Your Government: An Exhibition Celebrating the Centennial of the Federal Documents Depository," which runs through Jan. 13, just hints at the library's government holdings. Yet it presents a wide-ranging and occasionally whimsical history of the United States, with New Jersey well represented.

A 1942 text, "Winter Encampments of the Revolution," displays an article, "A Soldier's Christmas at Morristown in 1779," recalling the Continental Army's stay at Jockey Hollow in that brutal winter. A photo in a book about Thomas Edison, holder of 1,093 patents, shows him at his West Orange laboratory with

perhaps his most famous invention, the projecting kinoscope, also known as the movie projector.

The exhibition recalls developments both high-minded and, well, not. There is a pamphlet from the February 1882 memorial service for President James Garfield, an invitation to the dedication of the Washington Monument in February 1885, and a 1913 report containing plans for the Lincoln Memorial. On the other hand, a display case labeled “Just for Fun” includes the booklet “Gobbledygook Has Gotta Go” ([Interior Department](#), 1966), the “Military Publications Index of Blank Forms” (Department of the Army, 1971), and a printout of the cover of “Distinguishing Bolts from Screws” ([Department of Homeland Security](#), 2006).

Another case contains James V. Lafferty’s patent application for a giant wooden elephant that he built on the beach in Margate (“My invention consists of a building in the form of an animal”). Mr. Lafferty applied for and received his patent in 1882, a year after the elephant, Lucy, was built. The 65-foot-high pachyderm stands today, of course, an icon of the Jersey Shore whose invention once required the attention of the federal government.

“A Window to Your Government: An Exhibition Celebrating the Centennial of the Federal Documents Depository” runs through Jan. 13 at the Newark Public Library, 5 Washington Street; (973) 733-7784; www.npl.org.