On the Cover: This Mixtec warrior from the central Mexican highlands, ca. A.D. 1200-1500, greets visitors to the first exhibition in the new Library of Congress Experience, “Exploring the Early Americas.” Photo by Michaela McNichol.

Cover Story: In the first phase of reintroducing visitors to the Library and its remarkable collections, the Library showcases the artifacts of the Jay I. Kislak collection, highlighting the history and cultures of the Americas prior to the founding of the United States.

Library of Congress in the News

Hooray for Hollywood: The Librarian has named another 25 films to the National Film Registry. Also, the Library has published a new volume on the silent film era.

Lights, Camera, Library!: The Library provided part of the setting (and plotline) for the film, “National Treasure: Book of Secrets.” Also, the Library has played many roles in film and television.


Backdraft: In the wake of California wildfire disasters, the Library offers advice on collection recovery after fire.


Flying the Hump: The Veterans History Project highlights stories from World War II’s China-Burma-India theater.

‘Lamb’ of God: Stained-glass window giant J&R Lamb Studios was the subject of a recent Library symposium.

Landmark Legislation: Justice Sandra Day O’Connor spoke at the Law Library on the Strickland v. Washington decision.

Native Sovereignty: Rep. Tom Cole delivered the keynote address for the Library’s celebration of Native American Heritage Month.

Multicultural Exchange: The president of the American Library Association spoke at the Library on literacy and multiculturalism.

From Russia, with Books: News from the Russian Book Festival

News from the Center for the Book
“Exploring the Early Americas,” which opened in the Northwest Galleries of the Thomas Jefferson Building on Dec. 13, 2007, features selections from the more than 3,000 rare maps, documents, paintings, prints and artifacts that make up the Jay I. Kislak Collection at the Library of Congress. The opening of this exhibition is the first step in reintroducing visitors to the Library’s Thomas Jefferson Building and its unparalleled collections, using innovative and interactive technology.

The exhibition, which can be viewed online at www.loc.gov/exhibits/earlyamericas, is made possible through the generous support of Jay and Jean Kislak and John and Maria Kluge, with additional support from Microsoft Corp. and 3M.
In recent years visitors have been able to see brilliant color images of America taken by photographers of the Farm Security Administration, priceless woodcuts found in early printed books and samples of other unique American treasures from the Library’s collections.

They have learned about Winston Churchill’s special connections to the United States, the history of Jewish life in America and the opening of the West through the incredible journey of Lewis and Clark.

“Exploring the Early Americas: The Jay I Kislak Collection” offers a new and expanded experience beyond what has been possible in the past. It foreshadows a different way of looking at—and learning from—displayed materials that takes advantage of new technologies and provides the viewer with a more interactive adventure into historical knowledge.

With the opening of “Exploring the Early Americas,” the Library of Congress is taking its first steps into a new way of displaying its treasures that will offer the public a deeper, a more satisfying and ultimately a more meaningful experience that will stay with them when they return to their homes.

A New Interactive Experience for Visitors
Beginning in April 2008, other interactive exhibitions will open in the Library’s Thomas Jefferson Building, leading visitors to see and understand historic and rare documents, as well as the magnificent building itself, in new and creative ways.

For the first time in more than 25 years, visitors to the Library will be able to enter the building using the west front grand staircase leading up to the three sets of double doors and enter first-floor orientation galleries on either side of the north and south doors. In coming months, when the Capitol Visitor Center opens, more visitors will come directly from the Capitol through the underground tunnel that will link the two institutions more closely than ever before.

The interactive exhibitions that all of these new visitors will be able to experience at the Library will focus on four main themes: “Exploring the
Early Americas,” which has recently opened; “Creating the United States,” using innovative technology to bring to life the Library’s unique collection of founding documents; “The Great Hall,” which will locate a number of interactive kiosks around the Great Hall to provide a virtual exploration of the art and architecture of that gloriously decorated space, as well as interactive page-turning comparisons of the Gutenberg Bible and the Giant Bible of Mainz; and “Thomas Jefferson’s Library,” which will allow visitors to enter his recreated library and encounter most of the 6,487 volumes purchased by the Congress in 1815 to restart the Library of Congress after it was burned by the British. More than 2,000 surviving volumes from Jefferson’s original collection will be on display for study and exploration, along with editions identical to the originals which have been more recently acquired by the Library to replace those lost to a fire in 1851.

Recognizing that visitors have only a limited amount of time to spend at any one exhibition, the Library, in cooperation with Microsoft, is developing a totally new program called “Passport to Knowledge.”

Visitors will be issued an electronic library card with their own personal code, which will allow them to bookmark items they see that are of particular interest to them. When they return home, they will be able to pursue these bookmarked items in much greater depth on their personal computers, by connecting to a new interactive Library Website (www.myLOC.gov) that will be activated later this year.

This interactive kiosk in the exhibition allow viewers to zoom in on an object and learn about it in greater detail.

Counterclockwise from top left, artifacts in the exhibition include a Mayan vase with a hunting scene from the Guatemalan highlands, A.D. 600–900; a 1792 drawing by Antonio de Leon y Gama of the Sun Stone unearthed in Mexico City; and a detail from “The Conquest of Tenochtitlán,” one in a series of seven paintings, ca. 1660, depicting the encounter of Spanish and Aztec cultures during the conquest of Mexico.
“Exploring the Early Americas”

This exhibition provides a dramatic display of selections from the more than 3,000 rare maps, documents, paintings, prints and artifacts that make up the Jay I. Kislak Collection at the Library of Congress. Given to the Library by the Jay I. Kislak Foundation in 2004, the collection contains some of the earliest records of indigenous peoples in North America and superb objects from the discovery, contact and colonial periods, especially for Florida, the Caribbean and Mesoamerica.

James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress, expressed his profound gratitude to Jay Kislak and his wife Jean at the formal opening of the exhibition on Dec. 12, and explained that the exhibition is part of a yearlong effort to present a new kind of experience for visitors to the Library. “It will marry historic documents, curators’ knowledge and insight with the latest technologies in a new endeavor to bring knowledge into life.”

He added that the exhibition “Exploring the Early Americas” was not only a wonderful place to begin “the fun of discovering and arousing one’s curiosity,” but that it is also a reflection of an important part of our nation’s early history.

Donor Jay Kislak spoke about his life as a collector and his love of the books, documents and paintings that comprise the collection. His gift, he said, “was a way to put these things in a place where they belong, where they can be seen and studied. Even by us,” he added, since many of the collection’s items had been in storage in Florida. This included the eight very large Conquest of Mexico paintings, all of which are on view in the exhibition. “I am thrilled and delighted the collection is here in this great institution where they belong, where they can be seen and studied by everyone.”

“Exploring the Early Americas” is divided into four main sections: Precontact America; Explorations and Encounters; Aftermath of the Encounter; and Cartographic Treasures. The exhibition provides insight into early cultures such as the Aztecs and the Maya, examines the drama of the encounters between Native Americans and European explorers and settlers, and discusses the pivotal changes caused by the meeting of the American and European worlds.

Many of the items on display were previewed in a 2005 exhibit, “The Cultures and History of the Americas: The Jay I. Kislak Collection at the Library of Congress,” which was described in detail in an April 2005 article in the Library of Congress Information Bulletin.

The current exhibition is very different. Not only is it beautifully mounted in much larger galleries so that many more items from the collection can be seen, it also takes advantage of new technologies that allow visitors to see individual items in an “up-close-and-personal” way. It is the first example of four interactive installations that will be unveiled in the Library’s Thomas Jefferson Building during 2008—part of the new Library of Congress Experience—that will allow visitors to see and learn more about some of the rare and unique items housed at the Library.

There are seven interactive stations in the “Early Americas” exhibition that help explain the individual items that visitors can see in the nearby cases; they provide a much broader and deeper explanation of the specific items on view.

For the first time, a touch of a button on the screen activates a video of a curator—one of the Library’s “hidden treasures”—who discusses the context and importance of particular items that are on view.

Hit the “Explore” button and zoom in on a particular artifact on the screen. This provides a close-up view that allows one to see much more than is possible with the naked eye.

Look at the Maya Tortuguero box from Mexico, for example, a small piece that is barely six inches long and dated Oct. 14, 681. Listen to a narration by Arthur Dunkelman, longtime curator of the Kislak Collection, who explains its importance. Then, using the touchscreen, rotate the box so that the figures on its surface can be viewed from every angle; and read the translation of each of those images. Using the zoom, zero in on a particular image on the box, seeing it in a way that was never possible in the past. An interested viewer could thus spend several minutes completely engaged in learning deeply about one specific item that can also be seen “for real” in a nearby case.

The interactive screens also place the item on a map, so that the visitor can immediately determine its geographical source. Other options may lead the viewer to examine items in the Library’s collections from other cultures that complement those on display. Every screen
Geography and Map Division Chief John Hébert answers questions from the media as he presents Martin Waldseemüller’s 1507 map of the New World at a press preview of the exhibition. The map’s new home, a custom-made argon-gas-filled case, will safely preserve the rare document for years to come. Michaela McNichol

One of the vases depicts a sacrificial procession scene, complete with horrific creatures. The interactive screen allows a visitor to turn the vase all around and also to “stretch it out,” as if it were a flat drawing. That expanded image includes identifying details about all of the creatures, which are wonderfully drawn. They include, among others, a priest with cigars, a bat, a rodent, a jaguar and a skeleton.

The two interactive stations that explain the eight large Conquest of Mexico paintings are particularly illuminating, because the paintings are difficult to see in the low light that is required for such rare and historic items. Painted in Mexico in the second half of the 17th century, they tell the story of the 1519-1521 conquest of the native Aztec people by the Spanish conquistadors. Using the touch-screens, visitors can learn much more about the struggles between the natives and the conquerors and explore narrative details included in each of the paintings that are magnified and explained.

Visitors to the other interactive stations can learn more about different cultures’ views of the heavens and earth by comparing items from the Library’s collections with those that can be found in the exhibition. They can examine the pages of “Historia Naturae,” an encyclopedic work that describes and categorizes the flora and fauna of North and South America. It incorporates, for the first time, the indigenous names and natural history of the plants and animals (Nahuatl and Quechua) translated into Latin. Visitors can also read a 17th-century book titled “Buccaneers of America,” one of the most significant books ever written on the exploits of pirates. Using new “Page by Page” technology, visitors can “virtually” turn the pages without touching the actual text.

**Cartographic Treasures**

A highlight of “Exploring the Early Americas” is the display of the only known copy of Martin Waldseemüller’s 1507 map of the New World, which was acquired by the Library in 2003. It is shown next to his 1516 map of the same size, the “Carta Marina,” from the Kislak Collection. The two maps of 12 sheets each were kept bound together in a portfolio, along with other cartographic items, for hundreds of years, which allowed them to remain in mint condition. Their original owner, Johann Schöner (1477-1547), was a German astronomer and geographer. The Schöner portfolio in which the two maps were held is also on display nearby.

The 1507 Waldseemüller map, which was first displayed at the Library in July 2003 as part of an exhibition about Lewis and Clark’s expedition, portrays the New World as a separate continent. It was the first map, printed or manuscript, to depict clearly a separate Western Hemisphere, with the Pacific as a separate ocean, and the first to use the name “America.” The map was long thought to be lost but was discovered in a castle in southern Germany in 1901. It was purchased by the Library from the family of Prince Johannes Waldburg-Wolfegg, who had owned it for more than 350 years, with special permission from the German government. (See Information Bulletin, September 2003.) It is now enclosed in a specially made argon-gas-filled case that will safely preserve it for years to come. (See story on page 9.) Interactive screens in this area provide the visitor with details about each of the maps, and Library curator John Hessler tells more about their importance and how they differ in a short video. Hessler is the author of a new book about 1507 Waldseemüller map titled “The Naming of America.” (See story on page 10.)
Library of Congress and NIST Build a Case for Waldseemüller Map Display

America’s birth certificate—the only known copy of cartographer Martin Waldseemüller’s 1507 world map depicting the continental landmasses in the Western Hemisphere and naming them “America”—survived out of sight in southwestern Germany for nearly five centuries. Through the combined efforts of Librarian of Congress James H. Billington; Margrit Krewson, the Library’s former German and Dutch area specialist, and other members of the Library’s staff over a 15-year-period, the map was able to leave Germany and come to the Library of Congress in April 2007. (See Information Bulletin, June 2007.)

To preserve and protect the map while millions view it in the “Exploring the Early Americas” exhibition, the Library is displaying it in a sealed oxygen-free encasement filled with argon, an inert gas.

The Library’s Preservation Directorate experts and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) engineers spent nearly a year designing the encasement. Although NIST developed the same technology for the National Archives to preserve and display the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and their transmittal letters, this will be “the largest encasement ever built for a single paper document,” according to Dianne L. van der Reyden, the Library’s director for preservation.

Printed from inked wood blocks onto 12 sheets of sturdy rag paper, the “America” map measures 4-by-8 feet when the sheets are assembled. According to van der Reyden, the Library’s preservationists supervised installation of the map within the encasement, which was assembled and tested at NIST in August and September and then transported to the Library and hoisted through a second-floor Jefferson Building window. Installation and final testing were completed the end of October.

The hermetically sealed encasement includes valves for the replacement of oxygen with argon gas. (Oxygen reacts with and degrades organic material such as the map’s paper and ink.) The encasement contains monitoring devices to measure internal environmental conditions. The seals are expected to last a minimum of 20 years.

The Waldseemüller Support Fund, established by Virginia Gray and the Gray family in memory of Martin Gray, provided funding for the design and fabrication of the map encasement. The Alcoa Company, the world’s largest aluminum producer, donated the monolithic aluminum blocks from which the encasement base and frame were machined. The Alcoa Foundation provided funds to help fabricate the encasement and enable the Library to incorporate the needed environmental monitoring capabilities.
Jay Kislak the Collector

"Collecting, for me, has always been an adventure, a journey of exploration," says Jay Kislak in an introductory note to a new book that accompanies the "Exploring the Early Americas" exhibition. "Even after so many years," he wrote, "the excitement of new discovery remains strong." He goes on to explain how he got into collecting, the different paths he took along the way and why he thought the collection should ultimately be placed in the Library of Congress:

"Like the route of an explorer, the path of the collector is almost never a straight line. Rather, the collector’s path winds across boundaries—of geography, language, time, discipline and artistic medium. ... Collecting has revealed [to me] many different ways of perceiving the world. ..."

"When I first moved from New Jersey to South Florida in the early 1950s, I just wanted to learn more about my new home. I started reading about the history of Florida and the surrounding regions—the Caribbean, Latin America and what is now the southeastern United States. ..."

"The people and cultures of Florida and the circum-Caribbean region have remained the primary focus of this collection. Over the years, maps have always held a special role. Certainly one of the high points of our collecting was our acquisition of the 1516 Waldseemüller Carta Marina, the first printed nautical chart of the entire world. The opportunity to see this great map married to its partner—Waldseemüller’s famous 1507 map, called ‘America’s birth certificate’—is one of many rewarding experiences of donating our collection to the Library of Congress. ..."

"The collection is now at home in its ideal setting and context. We know that here, at the Library, the materials in the collection will be preserved as they should be for generations to come."

Jay I. Kislak was born in Hoboken, N.J., and received a degree in economics from the Wharton School of Finance at the University of Pennsylvania in 1942. After serving as a naval aviator in World War II, he joined the real estate brokerage and mortgage banking business started by his father in 1906. He began his collection some 50 years ago after moving from New Jersey to South Florida, where he formed the J. I. Kislak Mortgage Corporation in Miami. What began with books and maps to hang on his walls grew to some 3,000 items of historical importance. He and his wife, Jean, an art historian and consultant, continue to travel the world amassing items for their collections.

Titled "The Jay I. Kislak Collection at the Library of Congress," the book provides a broad introduction to Kislak’s gift to the Library. In 10 richly illustrated chapters, it examines in detail more than 900 items from the collection that show the extensive range of the collector’s vision. The 235-page hardcover book with 347 illustrations is available for $50 in the Library’s Sales Shop, Washington, D.C., 20540-4985. Credit card orders are taken at (888) 682-3557, or shop on the Internet at www.loc.gov/shop.

Helen Dalrymple is a retired Library employee and the former editor of the Library of Congress Information Bulletin.

"The Naming of America"

More than 500 years after its creation, Martin Waldseemüller’s 1507 World Map—the first map to display the name “America”—continues to fascinate cartographers, historians and those interested in the nation’s founding and the mapping of the globe. Acquired by the Library of Congress in 2003, the map is the subject of a new book, “The Naming of America” by John W. Hessler.

Published by the Library of Congress in association with London-based fine-art publisher D Giles Limited, “The Naming of America” tells the story behind the map’s creation in 16th-century France and rediscovery more than 300 years later in the library of Wolfegg Castle in Germany. Of the 1,000 originally printed, it is the only copy known to survive.

Produced in 12 sheets, the 1507 map represents the continents of North and South America separated from Asia by the Pacific Ocean. The book shows the composite view and features the first sheet-by-sheet color facsimile. The book also includes a completely new translation of and commentary by Hessler to the “Cosmographiae Introductio,” the seminal cartographic text by Waldseemüller and Matthias Ringmann that is thought to have originally accompanied the World Map. Together the 1507 map and the “Cosmographiae Introductio” occupy a crucial place in history, between the discovery of the New World by Columbus in 1492 and the birth of the scientific revolution with Copernicus in 1543.

Currently on display in the Library’s Thomas Jefferson Building in a sealed, oxygen-free encasement, the Waldseemüller map is the cornerstone of a new exhibition, “Exploring the Early Americas.” It allows visitors to interact virtually with the 1507 map and other artifacts.

Hessler is a member of the Collections Management Team in the Library’s Geography and Map Division. He has published extensively on the history of mathematical and planetary cartography and is the author of several articles on the Waldseemüller map.

"The Naming of America," a 128-page hardcover book with 40 color illustrations, is available for $24.95 in the Library’s Sales Shop, Washington, D.C., 20540-4985. Credit card orders are taken at (888) 682-3557, or shop on the Internet at www.loc.gov/shop. The publication can also be obtained in the U.S. from the Antique Collectors’ Club (800-252-5231, orders@antiquec.com).