

America's Story

from America's Library



Meet Amazing Americans



Jump Back in Time



Explore the States



Join America at Play

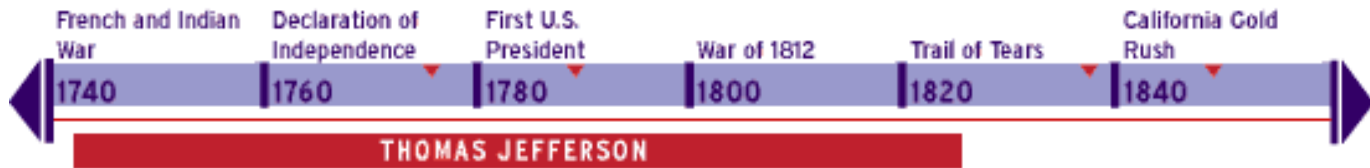


See, Hear and Sing

Meet Amazing Americans ▶

U.S. Presidents ▶

Thomas Jefferson



What a find! - - - ✕



A drawing of the "Capture and burning of Washington by the British, in 1814"

Jefferson and the Library of Congress

During the War of 1812 the British invaded Washington and burned the Capitol building in 1814. They also burned the 3,000 volumes in the Library of Congress, which was then housed in the Capitol. While Jefferson was president from 1801 until 1809, he took a strong interest in the Library of Congress and its collection, personally recommending books and appointing the first two Librarians of Congress. In fact, he said, "I cannot live without books." By the time the war happened, Jefferson was retired and living at his home in Monticello. There he had his own private library, known as the largest and finest in the country. What do you think Jefferson decided to do for Congress?

[Click for enlargement and credits](#)

page 1 of 3





Meet Amazing Americans



Jump Back in Time



Explore the States



Join America at Play



See, Hear and Sing

Meet Amazing Americans ▶

U.S. Presidents ▶ Thomas Jefferson



The Main Reading Room in the Library of Congress, 1997

 [Click for enlargement and credits](#)

Jefferson and the Library of Congress

Jefferson offered to sell Congress his private collection of 6,487 volumes for \$23,950 to help restart the Library. Jefferson's collection included many topics that the Library never had before. Until this time, the Library's collection had been devoted to legal, economic, and historical works. Jefferson's collection included works on architecture, the arts, science, literature, and geography. It also had books in French, Spanish, German, Latin, Greek, and Russian. Jefferson believed that all subjects could be of interest to members of Congress, and deserved to be in the collection. So now they had the books, where did they put them?



page 2 of 3



America's Story

from America's Library



Meet Amazing Americans



Jump Back in Time



Explore the States



Join America at Play



See, Hear and Sing

Meet Amazing Americans ▶

U.S. Presidents ▶ Thomas Jefferson



A view of the completed Jefferson Building

Jefferson and the Library of Congress

The Library collection was kept in the Congressional Reading Room in the Capitol, but in 1871 the Librarian of Congress at the time, Ainsworth Rand Spofford, suggested that they construct a separate building for the Library. In 1886, Congress approved the project. Spofford wanted a "domed reading room at the Library's center, surrounded by ample space for the Library's various departments." When it was finished, it was the largest and costliest library building in the world. In 1980, the building was renamed the Thomas Jefferson Building in honor of the man whose personal collection helped rebuild the Library. You can imagine that this would have made Jefferson very happy.

 [Click for enlargement and credits](#)



page 3 of 3

