



Why Digital Collections Matter

Libraries have always evolved to meet the changing needs of their communities while continuing to support learning, research, and civic engagement. Today, as new technology reshapes how information is created, shared, and consumed, libraries remain trusted places where people can find credible resources, thoughtful guidance, and reliable answers.

More than ever, libraries play an essential role in helping people do more than simply find information—they help people find *accurate* information. One of the most powerful ways libraries fulfill this mission is through digital collections, which provide free online access to authentic, authoritative resources that have been carefully preserved by libraries and other trusted institutions.

Digital Collections

Digital collections provide free access to primary sources, government publications, historical records, photographs, maps, oral histories, manuscripts, and other authoritative resources that enrich understanding and bring history and current events to life. By expanding access to these materials, libraries make it possible for anyone with an internet connection to explore trusted sources that were once available only by visiting an archive, library, or special collections reading room. For example, the [Library of Congress Digital Collections](#) provide access to millions of photographs, manuscripts, maps, newspapers, sound recordings, and historical documents that allow users to explore American history through authentic primary sources. Likewise, the [Digital Public Library of America \(DPLA\)](#) brings together materials from libraries, archives, and museums across the nation, making cultural heritage collections widely accessible through a single online portal.

Finding Truth in an Information-Rich World

Today, information is available through countless channels, including search engines, social media, and generative AI tools. While finding information has become easier than ever, determining its accuracy has become increasingly difficult. Libraries help bridge that gap by connecting users with digital collections that are carefully curated, professionally maintained, and built upon authoritative sources.

Digital collections provide access to authentic primary source materials that allow users to examine original documents, photographs, maps, correspondence, government records, and other historical evidence firsthand. Rather than relying solely on interpretations or summaries, users can explore original materials for themselves, evaluate evidence, and develop a more informed understanding of the topics they are researching.

One of the greatest strengths of digital collections is their ability to make these resources accessible anytime and from virtually anywhere. Whether users are exploring from a classroom, a library, or their own home, they can examine the U.S. Constitution, presidential papers, photographs, oral histories, maps, personal correspondence, and countless other historical resources. By making these materials widely available, libraries cultivate curiosity, encourage critical thinking, and deepen our understanding of our shared history.

Preserving Local Stories

Technology also enables libraries to preserve and share the stories of their own communities. Here in North Carolina, the [North Carolina Digital Collections](#) preserve and provide access to state government publications, historical photographs, military records, family



Figure 1: Using Digital Collections. Image generated using the prompt “person viewing a copy of the US Constitution on a computer screen, from the perspective over the person’s shoulder,” by Adobe Firefly, 2026 (<https://firefly.adobe.com>).

papers, and other materials that document the state’s rich history. Along with other collaborative digital initiatives, these collections support local history projects, genealogy research, classroom instruction, and community engagement while ensuring that North Carolina’s diverse voices and experiences remain accessible for future generations.

Local history reminds us that every community has stories worth preserving. Through digital collections, libraries make it possible to share those stories far beyond the walls of the library, connecting people with their heritage and inspiring new opportunities for research and discovery.

Technology That Serves

The newest technology is not always the most valuable, and the newest source is not necessarily the most accurate or trustworthy. Reliable information matters. Sometimes the greatest innovation is making trusted knowledge easier to discover, understand, and use.

Digital collections fulfill that purpose. Curated by librarians and supported by rigorous metadata, preservation practices, and institutional stewardship, they provide reliable access to authentic, authoritative information that researchers, students, educators, and the public can trust.

As library professionals, we have an opportunity to connect our communities with knowledge that is accurate, credible, and enduring. Digital collections open doors to resources many users may never have known existed. They connect learners with original historical documents, guide researchers to authoritative government information, preserve local history, and help every patron become a more informed consumer of information.

When technology expands access to trustworthy knowledge, strengthens civic understanding, preserves our shared history, and supports lifelong learning, it does far more than deliver information—it empowers people. The library’s most enduring promise is not adopting the newest technology—it’s ensuring that technology truly serves people. Whether through digital collections, online services, or emerging technologies, libraries continue to embrace innovation in ways that expand access, preserve knowledge, support learning, and meet the evolving needs of their communities.

Additional Examples of Digital Collections

- > [Hathi Trust Digital Library](#)
- > [Smithsonian Libraries](#)
- > [Internet Archive](#)
- > [Project Gutenberg](#)