



NOTE: This is the third in a series of articles that were released monthly throughout 2017 as part of the celebration of the NH State Library's 300th anniversary. The State Library was founded in Jan. 25, 2017 and is the first state library in America.

Government Documents at the Library Are Informative, Fascinating—and Even Fun

March 20, 2017: What do federal tax form W-7, a transcript of a 1912 congressional hearing on women's suffrage and a National Park Service coloring book have in common? They are all government documents that can be found at the New Hampshire State Library.

The idea of government documents—"Gov. Docs.," for short—might sound stuffy, but they are valuable sources of all kinds of information. Federal, state and local governments create Gov. Docs., and their purpose is to keep the public informed and up to date on all aspects of government.

Gov. Docs. cover just about any topic you can imagine. In addition to books of laws from the national, state and municipal levels, you'll find reports from Congress, images from NASA, pamphlets from the Smithsonian Institution and more. Annual reports from federal agencies are great sources of statistics, state agencies' newsletters can let you know key information such as employment figures and the weekly wholesale price of eggs, and town reports chronicle everything from road maintenance budgets to marriages, births and deaths in a particular year.

Gov. Docs. have been part of the New Hampshire State Library's collection from the very beginning. In fact, the State Library was founded when a resolution was passed in 1717 requiring law books be made available to "ye Govr & Councill & house of representatives." Our collection has expanded in scope over the past 300 years to include a wide variety of more than 600,000 items, but Gov. Docs. are still a very important part of what we provide to the public, and we are proud to be both a Federal Depository Library and State Depository Library.

The Federal Depository Library program began in 1813—nearly 100 years after the New Hampshire State Library was founded – when a Congressional Joint Resolution was passed requiring that designated federal publications be distributed to FDLs throughout the country. As one of eight FDLs in New Hampshire, we receive materials from the Government Publishing Office at no cost and then provide free access to them for our patrons. New Hampshire's State Depository Library program works similarly: 22 designated libraries throughout the state receive copies of publications from state agencies, at no cost to the libraries. They're delivered to other SDLs via the State Library's van delivery service, and we also keep copies of each here for the public to use.

Gov. Docs. aren't always on paper; they can be distributed on microfilm, audio, video, braille and electronically. Today, virtually all materials printed are "born digital"—a fancy way of saying that they are created using computer technology—which makes them easier to access. The State Library's website, www.nh.gov/nhsl, has a special "N.H. Digital Library" section where you can find many Gov. Docs. created by State of New Hampshire agencies.

So, why are Gov. Docs. important? They are one of the very best ways to learn about what your government does. Whether you'd like the latest information on health care legislation, a map of fire towers in New Hampshire or an overview of poster art during World War II, there's likely to be a Gov. Doc. that will have what you need. In

addition, looking at Gov. Docs. from a historical perspective—whether from a decade or a century ago or more—can offer a snapshot in time, providing unique viewpoints that other materials simply don't offer.

If the thought of exploring Gov. Docs. seems intimidating, don't worry. Reference librarians are well-versed in using them and are available to help you locate specific documents, specialized indexes and access to government materials on the Internet.

The New Hampshire State Library is proud to have been a source of Gov. Docs. for 300 years. We invite you to visit us and learn more about how they can help keep you informed about the ways that our local, state and federal governments serve you.

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