

CASE STUDY:
NATIONAL LIBRARY FOR
THE STUDY OF GEORGE
WASHINGTON

Mount Vernon, Virginia

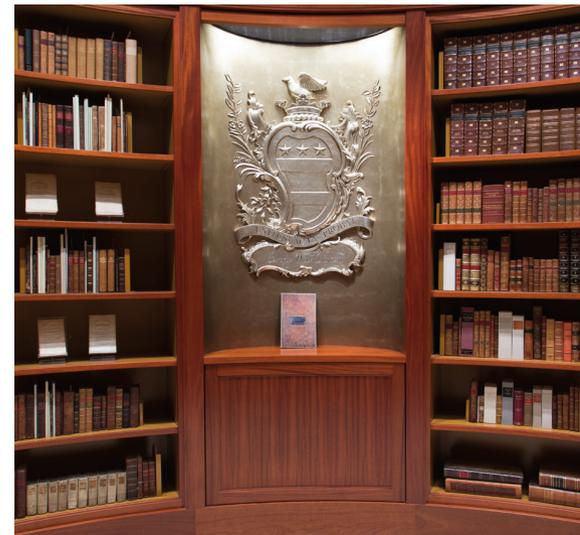


Storage Solved®

Fulfilling Washington's Vision

Near the end of George Washington's life, he wrote that he had achieved nearly all his goals regarding his estate at Mount Vernon — except building a library to store his papers for posterity. "I have not houses to build except one," he wrote, "which I must erect for the accommodation and security of my military, civil and private papers, which are voluminous and may be interesting."

More than 200 years later, his vision was finally realized: the Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington at Mount Vernon opened on a 15-acre portion of Washington's original farm. The library houses thousands of books, journals, analog AV materials, and electronic resources, including rare books and more than 6,000 historical manuscripts. The library continues to collect rare and important artifacts related to Washington's life and legacy.



A hallway with wood-paneled walls and large windows. The hallway is brightly lit, and the wood paneling is a warm, medium-brown color. The ceiling has recessed lighting. The floor is light-colored. A white bench is visible in the distance.

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—GEORGE WASHINGTON, 1797



“The library's first floor is paneled with 27,000 square feet of veneer that came from a single American sycamore tree. We know from counting the rings that it was alive during George Washington's lifetime.”

-Mark C. Santangelo,
Chief Librarian and Archivist



Open Stacks: Setting the Tone

The library's main level features meeting areas, a rare book collections space, and open stacks. The entrance opens onto an expansive reading room with large windows that offer a view of the grounds.

When the library was still in the early planning stages, the nearby Spacesaver representative worked with the architect and library staff to design shelving and storage systems

that would securely accommodate the library's collections while also blending in with the building's aesthetics. The design team took a number of considerations into account, including the nature of the materials being stored, the weight of the materials and the shelving, and layout options that would maximize space while promoting comfortable workflows.

Steel Spacesaver shelving was painted to match the sycamore veneer that covers wall surfaces throughout the first floor, and the end panels were fitted with custom wood panels to complement the first floor's open, airy feel.

Secure Stacks

The library's lower level is home to an extensive archival collection. At the time of the library's construction, the intent was to house books in the lower level, but Santangelo soon realized that archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association were located in various areas around the Mount Vernon estate. Wanting to consolidate the records and maintain them in a proper preservation environment, he worked with the local Spacesaver representative to configure the area appropriately.



“Although archives weren’t part of the original plans, we felt strongly that we needed to get these materials under one roof,” Santangelo said. “We saw enormous potential with the archival collection here.” The lower level features open shelving for boxed materials, a large Spacesaver compact mobile system for books and records, and counter-height cabinets that do double duty as a workspace.

The end result is a space that truly educates and inspires. “George Washington didn’t live in a vacuum, and our collection includes subjects on his family, his farm, military history, the founding era, the early republic, and the presidency.” Santangelo said. “We also carry the legacy piece. It’s an enormous task to try to collect and preserve all those legacy items from his lifetime even to today.”



Enduring solutions for libraries of all sizes

At Spacesaver, we know that planning for new construction or renovation can be a daunting experience. Your donors and your community are counting on you to make the most effective use of funds, and your decisions will have long-lasting impacts. But keep in mind that although this type of design project might come once in a career for many library professionals, we work on them every day.

As you think about designing a new or renovated collections space, contact your local Spacesaver consultant to request a free space assessment. Not only will you learn about how to optimize your space; you'll also be able to gain insight and inspiration from others who have undertaken similar challenges.

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