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editorial

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The new State Archives

On April 25, New Jerseyans will give themselves a dazzling gift — a new State Archives center, where historic treasures will be on display in a state-of-the-art facility. And because the center is near the heart of Trenton, it will constitute another highly promotable reason for visitors with an appetite for history to come to the capital city.

For 35 years, the Archives have been crowded into the basement of the State Library, with the overflow in a building on Stuyvesant Avenue in Ewing Township. The new center will occupy two floors of the former Education Department building at West State and Calhoun streets. “For the first time, researchers will be able to find all of New Jersey’s colonial and state government records together under one roof,” Karl Niederer, archives director, told *The Star-Ledger*. Awaiting these researchers will be centuries’ worth of legislative records, birth, marriage and death certificates, and election results. And when the planned exhibit area is ready, visitors will have better access than ever before to the state’s most significant but rarely-seen documents.

These include an original parchment manuscript of the U.S. Bill of Rights; the original copy of New Jersey’s Constitution, signed two days before the Declaration of Independence; four original copies of New Jersey’s ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1789, and the appointment by King George III of William Franklin, the illegitimate son of Benjamin Franklin, as the last colonial governor of New Jersey in 1762. Also in the collection are a letter from President-elect Abraham Lincoln accepting an invitation to visit the State House in 1861; 17th century land deeds; Supreme Court records from 1704, and records and photos from the Lindbergh kidnapping trial in 1935. For years, New Jersey’s great collection of 141 national, regimental and captured Civil War flags, some of them bullet-torn and bloody, was inadequately displayed in the State House Annex, but now it will be properly shown off, in a set of five modern display cases.

The impending opening is great news for New Jersey and for Trenton.