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8 Apr 2000 - 19 Oct 2017

▼ About this capture



The Internet Archive: Building an 'Internet Library'

[Home](#)
[News](#)
[Jobs](#)
[Contacts](#)

[In the Collections](#) [Using the Collections](#) [About the Archive](#)

▶ [Future Libraries](#) ▶ [Related Projects and Research](#) ▶ [People](#) ▶ [FAQs](#)

About the Archive

The Internet Archive is a 501(c)(3) public nonprofit that was founded to build an 'Internet library,' with the purpose of offering free access to historical digital collections for researchers, historians, and scholars. Founded in 1996 and [located in the Presidio of San Francisco](#), the Archive has been receiving data donations from [Alexa Internet](#) and others. In late 1999, the organization started to grow to build more well-rounded collections.

Why the Archive Is Building an 'Internet Library'

Libraries exist to preserve society's cultural artifacts and to provide access to them. If libraries are to continue to foster education and scholarship in this era of digital technology, it's essential for them to extend those functions into the digital world.

Many early movies were recycled to recover the silver in the film. The [Library of Alexandria](#) — an ancient center of learning containing a copy of every book in the world — was eventually burned to the ground. Even now, at the turn of the 21st century, no comprehensive archives of television or radio programs exist.

But without cultural artifacts, civilization has no memory and no mechanism to learn from its successes and failures. And paradoxically, with the explosion of the Internet, we live in what Danny Hillis has referred to as our "[digital dark age](#)."

The Internet Archive is working to prevent the Internet — a new medium with major historical significance — from disappearing into the past. Collaborating with institutions including the [Library of Congress](#) and the [Smithsonian](#), we are working to permanently preserve a record of public material.

Open and free access to literature and other writings has long been considered essential to education and to the maintenance of an open society. Public and philanthropic enterprises have supported it through the ages.

The Internet Archive is opening its collections to researchers, historians, and scholars to ensure that they have **free and permanent access** to public materials. The Archive has no vested interest in the discoveries of the users of its collections, nor is it a grant-making organization.

At present, using collections of this size requires [programming skills](#). However, we are hopeful about the development of tools and methods that will give the general public easy and meaningful access to our collective history. In addition to developing our own collections, we will be working to promote formation of other Internet libraries in the United States and elsewhere.

Find out

- How to [help fund the Archive](#)
- How to [donate a digital collection](#) to the Internet Archive
- How to [subscribe to Archivists](#), our discussion list on Internet libraries

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- About the [future of Internet libraries](#)
- About [projects and research](#) related to the Internet Archive and Internet librarianship
- About the Internet Archive's [board, advisors, donors, and staff](#)
- [Press coverage](#) of the Internet Archive

▲ Top

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