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Architect of the Capitol to Conserve and Relocate Magna Carta Display

WASHINGTON — In mid-August, the Office of the Architect of the Capitol (AOC) will move the Magna Carta display case from the U.S. Capitol Rotunda to begin preservation work on the piece, which will include the conservation of the gilded presentation case and the cleaning of the sandstone pedestal.

A gift from the Parliament of the United Kingdom, the display was presented to Congress as part of the U.S. Bicentennial celebrations at a ceremony held in the Capitol in June 1976. The display included an original copy of the Magna Carta (one of only four that survive). After being on display for one year, the original document was returned.



The Magna Carta is the English document whose principles underlie much of the U.S. Constitution. Freedom from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, the rights to a fair trial, and to secure property, and the guarantee that all persons are subject to the same laws, are all found for the first time in this charter that King John swore to uphold in 1215. The Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were influenced by the Magna Carta's principles.

Conservation of the presentation case, as authorized by the Joint Committee on the Library, will take approximately six weeks. As part of the preservation effort, the display case will be moved to the Crypt. Doing so, places the display in more appropriate historic context, as six of the 13 statues in the Crypt (part of the National Statuary Hall Collection) represent people associated with the Declaration of Independence. Roger Sherman (Connecticut) and Robert L. Livingston (New York) were members of the committee that drafted the Declaration. Richard Stockton (New Jersey), Caesar Rodney (Delaware), Samuel Adams (Massachusetts), and Charles Carroll (Maryland) were among its signers.

The display is comprised of several parts, each of which will be conserved and cleaned. The presentation case, which holds the replica of the Magna Carta, is clad in gold and white enamel tiles. The gold panel is inscribed with the text of Magna Carta and holds replicas of King John's seal. On a glass panel insert, an English translation of the Magna Carta is displayed.

The gold plate in the upper section of the presentation case is engraved with the sun and moon, Adam and Eve, symbolic animals and plants, and the Royal Coat of Arms with the lion and unicorn. The presentation case rests upon a slab of pegmatite, a volcanic stone. The pedestal of the display case is made of Yorkshire sandstone.

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