

Kennedy Library documents to make their debut on Internet

By Jon Swartz, USA TODAY



The library for the president who conceived the New Frontier is entering a new frontier of its own: It is the first presidential library to make all of its documents available online.

The John F. Kennedy Library Foundation is scheduled to make the announcement today, days before the 50th anniversary of Kennedy's inauguration.

"Our hope is to reach a new generation of people worldwide," JFK Library Director Tom Putnam says. "For a lot of young people, if something isn't on the Internet, it doesn't exist. This democratizes our holdings. You don't have to come here or (rely on) others — be it journalists or biographers — for their interpretations."

The launch culminates a four-year, \$10 million effort to digitally archive about 200,000 documents; 300 reels of audio tape, containing more than 1,245 telephone calls, speeches and meetings; 300 museum artifacts; 72 reels of film; and 1,500 photos. AT&T, EMC, Iron Mountain and Raytheon supplied hardware, software and technical expertise.

Caroline Kennedy, Kennedy's daughter and foundation president, and David Ferriero, chief archivist of the United States, are expected to appear at the National Archives in Washington.

The first digitized presidential library not only holds historical significance but should spread the 1,000-day Kennedy presidency to a new generation of people who spend most of their time on the Internet, library officials say.

"It facilitates exploration and understanding in ways that were previously only available to scholars and reporters, and that makes access democratic," says Ed Schlossberg, library board member and the husband of Caroline Kennedy. "Our contemporary historical narrative has changed to be made of many voices and many composers; and this supports the change."

Historians lauded the project and expect other presidential libraries to digitize all their documents. Robert Dallek, a presidential scholar and author of *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963*, says it is a "splendid" opportunity for "interested parties" to gain unfettered access to thousands of historical documents.

Catherine Allgor, a history professor at University of California-Riverside, says: "I would hope people become just as interested beyond the official papers, and look at the paperwork of the first lady, Cabinet members and staff." That documentation gives a more rounded view of the president, the people around him, and the political process, she says.