

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on March 18, 2024.

## Presidential Libraries

There are fifteen Presidential Libraries and Museums in an unbroken string, dating from Herbert Hoover's time of service (<https://www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries>).

"Presidential Libraries and Museums promote understanding of the presidency and the American experience. We preserve and provide access to historical materials, support research, and create interactive programs and exhibits that educate and inspire."

I have visited only one, namely The Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, and that one only because the business associate that I was visiting needed to park me somewhere touristy while he went off to consult with someone else about some other matter.

Two things only remain in my memory of that pre-digital visit, neither having to do with print books and records, which I assume are largely stored generally for more serious, scholarly browsers. One was the running cycle of Johnson in oration on an exhibit TV. The other was the 7/8<sup>th</sup> reproduction of the Oval Office laid out as it supposedly was in Johnson's time in the White House. Having never visited the Oval Office in the White House itself, I was in awe to be seeing even such a convincing replication right before me. That alone made the day in Austin worthwhile.

Groundbreaking for the Obama Presidential Center, the newest and soon to be open to the public, took place on September 28, 2021. Beyond archiving and exhibits, it may be unique in purpose. "We want this Center to be more than a static museum or a source of archival research. It won't just be an exercise in nostalgia or looking backwards. We want to look forward." So said President Obama at the groundbreaking ceremony.

Those remarks seem to go beyond the usual catchwords of a marketing pitch that is so common in our times. For one thing, there will be on the 19.3-acre South Side site a branch of the Chicago Public Library. Integrated into the purposes of the Center, it will serve as well as a hub for special projects of President Barack and Mrs. Michelle Obama, including: (1) the Girls Opportunity Alliance "to empower adolescent girls around the world through education"; (2) the My Brother's Keeper Alliance to mobilize mentors for boys; (3) the Obama Foundation Scholars Program to bring together "academic, skills-based and hands-on learning" to rising leaders; and (4) the Obama Foundation Leaders Program to engage community leaders in a six-month, "values-based leadership" program.

There is clearly a lot of who Barack Obama has always been in the bricks and mortar of this Presidential Center, and maybe that is true as well for other ex-President commemorative Libraries, even if only to be found as archival materials. Think, for example, in terms of personal papers to be found in archive.

You can go to the archives and exhibits yourself at the above web site, where to varying degrees of access you will be able these days to find digitized documents relating to governance of the times. Collectively, this is a treasure trove for American History

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on March 18, 2024.

information, which should be of interest not only to the academic researcher but as well to the casual reader and the just plain curious. So have at it and enjoy this one more way that Libraries serve you the public.

Charles B. Greenberg,  
Board Director, Murrysville Community Library Foundation