



# LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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## NEWS

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Press contact: Donna Urschel (202) 707-1639, [durschel@loc.gov](mailto:durschel@loc.gov)  
Jane Caulton (202) 707-0521, [jcau@loc.gov](mailto:jcau@loc.gov)

### **New Exhibition “Louis Braille: His Legacy and Influence” Celebrates Bicentennial of Braille’s Birth**

*On Display at Library of Congress through Jan. 30, 2010*

Louis Braille’s invention of a tactile six-dot reading and writing system enabled blind and visually handicapped people throughout the world to read and write as well as sighted people.

Helen Keller, the renowned author, political activist and lecturer, once said, “We the blind are as indebted to Louis Braille as mankind is to Gutenberg. Without a dot system, what a chaotic, inadequate affair our education would be!”

The Library of Congress commemorates the 200th anniversary of Braille’s birth with “Louis Braille: His Legacy and Influence,” an exhibition in the foyer of the Mumford Room on the sixth floor of the James Madison Building, 101 Independence Ave. S.E., Washington, D.C. The exhibit, which is free and open to the public, runs **today through Jan. 30, 2010**. The exhibition can be viewed online at <http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/braille/Pages/default.aspx>.

The 25 exhibit items include description labels in braille as well as print. Some items on display are a 1951 Perkins Brailier, which is a braille typewriter; a 1954 braille edition of Scrabble; a tactile watch; a 1955 braille edition of “Good Morning, America” by Carl Sandburg; braille music transcription; a photo of the Library of Congress Reading Room for the Blind, circa 1902; and the commemorative 2009 Louis Braille Bicentennial Silver Dollar.

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For the Library of Congress “Gallery Talk” series, Judith Dixon, from the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), will lead a tour of the exhibition **at noon on Wednesday, Nov. 18**. Visitors should gather at the exhibit area. The talk is free and open to the public; no tickets or reservations are required.

Born Jan. 4, 1809, in Coupvray, France, Braille lost his sight at age three as a result of an injury. Educated at the Royal Institute for Blind Youth in Paris, Braille was recognized as highly intelligent and creative. By age 15, he had developed the initial version of a tactile system for reading and writing—later refined to a raised, six-dot cell with 64 possible combinations corresponding to the alphabet, punctuation and key symbols. He later devised braille systems for music and mathematics.

Braille, a talented cellist and organist, became a well-respected teacher at the Institute. He died at age 43 in 1852 from tuberculosis. His raised-dot reading system had not been taught at the Institute, and Braille died unaware of the success of his invention. The braille system started to be taught two years after his death, and in 1868 it spread worldwide. Today there are approximately 85 braille systems in the world based on Braille’s invention.

NLS, which curated the exhibition, administers the free program that loans materials to residents of the United States who are unable to read or use standard print materials because of visual or physical handicaps. These materials include braille and recorded books and magazines, music scores in braille and large print and specifically designed playback equipment. For more information about NLS at the Library of Congress, visit **[www.loc.gov/nls](http://www.loc.gov/nls)**.

Founded in 1800, the Library of Congress is the nation’s oldest federal cultural institution and the largest library in the world, with nearly 142 million items in various languages, disciplines and formats. The Library serves the U.S. Congress and the nation both on-site, in its reading rooms on Capitol Hill, and through its award-winning website at **[www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)**.

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