

- 00:00:02 [music]
- David Baldacci: Hi, I'm David Baldacci, and I'm the author of 25 novels, including my very latest, "The 39 Clues: Day of Doom." And today I'll be your guide on a virtual field trip to one of the most famous museums in the world: The Smithsonian's National Museums of American History, here in our national's capital, Washington, D.C.
- 00:00:31 Many of you already know that "The 39 Clues" is a story of the Cahill family, the most powerful family the world has ever known. The books chronicle the adventures of two siblings, Amy and Dan Cahill, in their worldwide quest for The 39 clues.
- 00:00:44 Although the story is fiction, it draws upon real history. In fact, the Cahill story takes place during some of history's greatest moments. One of the things we'll discover together today is that history shows us that the real people who came before us have a story to tell, and, like Amy and Dan, if we dig a little deeper, we may be surprised at what we find.
- 00:01:07 Museums like the Smithsonian's National Museums of American History are like large adventure novels, waiting to be opened for us to discover the messages that our ancestors left for us, both expected and unexpected. That's why our good friends here at the Smithsonian believe that history is seriously amazing.
- 00:01:24 So, today, just like Amy and Dan Cahill, we're on a seriously amazing mission to explore some of history's great stories. We're gonna go behind the scenes to meet museum curators who will

take us back in time, where we'll learn about some fascinating moments in our country's history.

- 00:01:39 And listen closely because at each stop along the way, I'm gonna ask a question about an important moment in history. Now, since we're about to go on a journey together through this museum, I thought this was a fitting place to start.
- 00:01:52 Behind me is the John Bull locomotive, which dates back to 1831. That makes it one of the very first steam locomotives in the United States. It was part of the steam revolution that thrust America into the Industrial Age. Steam locomotives were key to America's westward expansion.
- 00:02:11 But more than 25 years before the John Bull locomotive and train travel as we know it today even existed, a pair of explorers set out on one of the most important journeys in history. Those explorers were Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. In my book, "Day of Doom," Amy and Dan Cahill's journey takes them to this very same museum, in search of the compass used by Lewis and Clark.
- 00:02:34 And to tell us more about that compass, I wanna bring out our first curator, Harry Rubenstein, a curator in the division of political history. Harry.
- Harry: Hi.
- David Baldacci: How are you?
- 00:02:45

Harry: Oh, doing great. Thanks for coming.

David Baldacci: Thank you for having us. Harry, I'm not sure everyone watching knows exactly what a curator does. Can you enlighten us?

Harry: Sure. Curators here at the Smithsonian Institution are largely responsible for the collections. We oversee how they're stored. We study the individual objects. We add other material to the collections. And then, through our research and our study, we produce things like exhibitions and books that share this information with the public.

00:03:16

David Baldacci: Now, let's talk about Lewis and Clark. Lewis' first name, was it really Meriwether?

Harry: Yes. And he was Thomas Jefferson's secretary. And Jefferson assigned him the task of overseeing this project.

David Baldacci: Okay, everyone. Here's your first quiz of the day. Where did the Lewis and Clark expedition take them: A) From Missouri to Oregon, B) across the Great Plains, or C) to the North Pole? Harry and I will give you a few minutes to think it over before we reveal the answer.

00:03:49 Harry, I know you brought a replica of a Lewis and Clark compass, which is on display here at the museum. Could you tell us some of its unique features?

Harry: Sure. This is a pocket compass. It was one of the pieces that Lewis acquired when he first was gathering scientific instruments in Philadelphia for this expedition. But here is a replica of that compass.

00:04:11 It's a wooden box, so it's protected. And what you can do is you open it up and there is these sight lines, so that—

David Baldacci: Now, what is the sight line for? What does that do?

Harry: Well, what you can do is you can look through this and you can find the north and south and the direction.

David Baldacci: Now, can you tell us sorta how they might've used the compass on the expedition?

00:04:31

Harry: It's basically like compasses that you see today, where it points north, and you can use this to see which direction you're going in. This compass was used by the expedition to go from St. Louis all the way through the Northwest to Oregon and then back.

David Baldacci: Did you hear that? There's the answer to the first quiz. The Lewis and Clark expedition took them from Missouri to the Oregon coast.

00:04:55 Now, is it true that there are numbers inscribed on the bottom of the compass? And are they part of a hidden message? And what does it tell us?

Harry: There is a number on the bottom of the compass. It was written by the Smithsonian. It's a catalog number to keep track of the object itself; it's not like the hidden message in your book.

00:05:13

David Baldacci: Now, can you tell us why it's so important for the museum to preserve a compass like this?

Harry: Having these objects really, I think, brings history to life. You know, unlike other forms of books and movies about historical events, these are the real objects. And I think it sorta turns the mythic into a tangible reality.

00:05:36

David Baldacci: Now, can I ask a favor?

Harry: Sure.

David Baldacci: Could I borrow the compass for the rest of my journey here?

Harry: Absolutely.

David Baldacci: I do not wanna get us lost.

Harry: Okay. [chuckles]

David Baldacci: This will come in handy on our adventure, especially as we head behind the scenes, where visitors rarely get to go.

00:05:50 [music]

00:06:00 We're in the museum's conservation lab, and this is Suzanne Thomassen-Krauss, Textile Conservator in Preservation Services at the museum. Hello, Suzanne.

Suzanne: Hi.

David Baldacci: Now, Suzanne, can you tell us more about this lab and what the role of a conservator is?

00:06:15

Suzanne: Well, this is the main lab for doing textiles and consumes in the museum. And what a conservator does is ensure that the textiles and costumes remain for many generations so people can enjoy them. And some of the equipment that you see around here are special water systems that allow us to safely wash textiles.

00:06:31 We have solvent hoses that extract the solvent so we can safely use chemicals in the space. We have lots of large tables to hold our very large artifacts, such as this flag.

David Baldacci: What is this project?

00:06:42

Suzanne: This is actually the headquarters flag for William Tecumseh Sherman from the 1880s, and it came to us from his daughter. And at the time she said it was in rather bad shape. And I think that was an understatement. We probably have thousands of little, tiny pieces at this point. And we're putting it all back together again.

00:07:02

And I think you can see the embroidery on the flag is really magnificent, but light has taken a toll on all the silk behind it.

David Baldacci:

So you're the person who makes people wear those little white gloves when they touch historical objects?

00:07:15

Suzanne:

Oh, we do for metals especially, and sometimes we even have people wear plastic gloves. But for something like this, you really have to have the tactile sensation of your fingertips to be able to fit all the little pieces together.

00:07:26

David Baldacci:

Now, everyone knows about the Star-Spangled Banner, certainly the modern-day flag, but can you tell us a little bit more of its origins?

Suzanne:

The Star-Spangled Banner was actually the garrison flag that was used at Fort McHenry during the war of 1812. Fort McHenry had just become U.S. Army post, and George Armistead, who was the first commander, wanted a flag for the fort, his new fort. And he wanted a large flag.

00:07:49

The flag was so big that they actually, when they got to the final piecing stages, had to take it outside to the Claggett Brewery and piece it together in the hops drying room, because it was bigger than the footprint of their house.

- 00:08:02 Baltimore Harbor, the city is off the coast quite a bit, and he wanted a flag that could be seen at least eight miles away. And we've actually tested it, and you can see it eight miles away when they fly the big reproduction.
- 00:08:13
- David Baldacci: Which brings us to quiz number two. If you look closely at the flag, you will see an upside-down letter "V" on the flag. What do you think the "V" stands for: A) victory, B) valor, C) Vespers (the Cahills' greatest enemy)? You may be surprised when you find out the answer in just a short while.
- 00:08:34 Suzanne, why is conservation so important? And why is preserving the flag so important?
- Suzanne: Well, I think artifacts, physical artifacts, connect people to their history in ways that other methods do not. And it gives them a tangible reminder of their past, of how they came to be who they are. It gives us a tangible reminder of our country and all it's gone through to become the country it is today.
- 00:08:57
- David Baldacci: Now, I noticed the flag had a number of holes in it. Can you sorta tell us how they got there?
- Suzanne: Well, at the time, even though it sounds horrible in this modern era—at the time, pieces were actually cut out of the flag and they were presented to people. The first piece of the flag that was cut out was given to the widow of one of the soldiers that served at

Fort McHenry during the Battle of Baltimore in 1814. And when he died about four years later, his wife was given a piece to bury with her husband.

00:09:23

David Baldacci: Now, let's dig a little bit deeper on that. If you look a little more closely at the flag, what are some of the unique features that a person may not notice on first glance?

00:09:31

Suzanne: Well, I think one of the things that you don't see unless you look very closely is that there's about 165 areas that were repaired. And if you look really closely, you can tell that different people did it, and they had different skill levels, and they had different attitudes to the repair.

00:09:48

One of the tools in our arsenal for preserving textiles is controlling the light levels. In this lab, we have it all zoned so we can turn down the lights. When we put things on exhibit, like the Star-Spangled Banner, you'll notice it's a very, very dark room. And what happens is there's a 75-foot-long corridor as you approach the room. And that allows your eyes to adjust, so when you turn the corner and you get your first view of the flag, it looks magnificent, but it's actually at less than one foot-candle, which is the level at which you can perceive color.

00:10:16

There are 37 different patches on it. And one of the most noticeable features is a bright red "A." Louisa Armistead, who was

the commander's wife, started to write his name on the flag in bright red letters.

00:10:30

David Baldacci: Okay, so we threw you guys a little curve. The "V" is, in fact, an "A," which means the Vespers, fortunately, did not leave their mark on the Star-Spangled Banner.

Suzanne: That's correct. [chuckles]

David Baldacci: Are there any other hidden messages in the flag?

00:10:43

Suzanne: There are some hidden messages. In one white stripe, there's an ink signature. George Armistead actually wrote his signature on the flag. And I think it's because he wanted to be so strongly associated with this flag and pass this history down through his family and to us today. And I think we find that in a lot of our artifacts, that there's a very personal connection between the person who made it and the people that preserve it.

00:11:05 And I think one of the most elegant ways of seeing this is in our Dave pottery. Dave Drake was a person who was always trying to do this, leave his mark and let people know he existed. And I think you're about to discover some of those for yourself.

David Baldacci: I think we are. This sounds really, really interesting. Thank you so much. We're on our way there next.

00:11:22

Suzanne: Nice to meet you.

David Baldacci: Bye.

[music]

00:11:34

David Baldacci: Bonnie?

Bonnie: Yes. Oh, David.

David Baldacci: Hi, how are you?

Bonnie: Great, great. How are you?

David Baldacci: I'm fine. We're in the right place. That's great.

Bonnie: You're in the right place.

David Baldacci: Okay. Everyone, meet Bonne Campbell Lilienfeld. Bonnie is the curator of ceramics and glass, and also the curator of the American Stories exhibition.

00:11:48 Now, Bonnie, where exactly are we?

Bonnie: Well, you're in one of the museum's many object storage areas. And this actually isn't an area that very many visitors to the museum get to see, so it's kind of a treat to be back here.

00:11:59 We have a lot of objects, obviously, in the museum, and only a small number of them are on display at any one time. And when they're not on display, we keep them in rooms like this, where we

can keep them safe from light damage and temperature fluctuations, because we wanna keep these, obviously, for future generations.

00:12:13

David Baldacci: Now, Suzanne mentioned a man named David Drake. Who was he and what was his story?

Bonnie: David was a fascinating man. He was enslaved most of his life. We think he was born around 1801. And he probably died sometime in the 1870s. And of course we don't know for certain because there weren't many written records about slaves and their life stories at that time.

00:12:34

There were actually over probably three millions slaves in the South in the 1800s, and the majority of them were obviously agricultural laborers. But it turns out there were actually quite a few who actually were artisans and skilled craftsmen, including potters, who made pieces like this. And these were used to store food back in the days before people had invented refrigerators or mechanical canning.

00:12:55

So this piece was made by Dave. And you can see that he actually signed his name. You can see here "Dave." Actually, what was really spectacular about Dave is that he was allowed to read and write. Of course, most slaves weren't allowed to read and write at the time. You know, owners were afraid of rebellion. And the more education you had, the more likely you were to rebel.

- 00:13:12 But somehow or another, Dave learned. You know, we don't know for certain how. It may have been that—one of his owners was pretty religious and he may have taught him how to read the bible. Another owner owned a newspaper and may have taught him how to typeset. You know, we don't know for certain, unfortunately, because, of course, there are no written records.
- 00:13:26 But he did an amazing thing with his pots. So you can see here that he wrote his name on the pot, "Dave," but he also wrote another name on here, "Mark." And we think Mark was probably another slave who actually worked at the pottery and possibly helped him throw this pot.
- 00:13:40 And then on the other side you can see that he even put the date that he made the pot. In this case, this was March 10, 1859. And he put "LM," which were the initials of his owner at the time, Louis Miles. So this is really an amazing piece and has really taught us a lot about Dave and about slavery.
- 00:13:59 But, even more amazing is that Dave actually wrote original two-line poems on some of his pieces. There are about 27 or 28 of those surviving now, including one that we actually have here in the museums down in the American Stories exhibition. And that one really has a secret message from the past from Dave. It says, "This jar is made all of cross. If you don't repent, you will be lost."
- 00:14:20 And of course, don't know for certain what he meant by that, but I've always suspected that it probably says something about what it was like to be a slave, back when he made that piece in 1862.

00:14:28

David Baldacci: Time for quiz number three: David Drake lived as a slave during the Civil War. Which American president was in office at that time who was responsible for abolishing slavery? Was it: A) Grover Cleveland, B) George Washington, or C) Abraham Lincoln?

00:14:46

Now, Bonnie, you're the curator of the American Stories exhibit, so how did you uncover David's story? He wasn't famous during his time, so why is his story relevant and significant today?

00:14:54

Bonnie: Well, he wasn't famous at the time. And we can actually tell a lot about him from his pots. They're beautifully made. He was clearly a well-trained potter. But we wouldn't know very much about him as a person if he hadn't left us so many clues: the dates, the names, the initials. We can really learn a lot about him from this kinda thing.

00:15:11

You know, and most people certainly haven't left us pots that we can decode. And they don't show up in books and newspaper articles, or even necessarily legal records. Mostly we find out about important historical figures that way. But it's really important to this museum to understand and to be able to tell the story of all Americans.

00:15:28

I mean, just look at what we can learn from Dave. You know, we get a really complex understanding of the history of slavery and

what it was like for Dave to live in the 1800s. He lived to see the abolition of slavery. I mean, that's amazing.

00:15:43 And that was Lincoln's proudest achievement and probably one of the most controversial issues of his time.

00:15:49

David Baldacci: And there's your answer to quiz number three: President Abraham Lincoln, who we know accomplished so many great things during his presidency, including ending the Civil War and abolishing slavery.

00:15:59

Bonnie: So I know that Harry is waiting to meet you down in the American Stories exhibit, and I think he has something pretty interesting to show you. I think it used to belong to President Lincoln.

00:16:06

David Baldacci: Thanks, Bonnie.

Bonnie: It was so good to meet you. Thanks for coming in.

[music]

David Baldacci: Hey Harry.

Harry: Well, hi.

David Baldacci: It's so nice to see you again.

Harry: Yes. I hope the compass was useful. And what did you learn on your journeys through the museum?

00:16:27

David Baldacci: I guess, first and foremost, this museum brings history to life. And there are so many great artifacts, and the people behind the artifacts, it sorta tells us a story of those who have come before us. I guess that really I'm beginning to understand how history connects people together.

00:16:42

Harry: It's really interesting to see how these stories about David Drake or Abraham Lincoln and then more modern figures in our history, like Martin Luther King, are all tied together in this national narrative.

00:16:54

David Baldacci: And we're not done yet, because you have one last object to show us. I understand it has some mystery to it. Isn't that right?

Harry: Yes. And this is one of my favorite objects in the entire Smithsonian collection. It's Abraham Lincoln's pocket watch, which is just right over there.

00:17:08

David Baldacci: And now for our final quiz of the day: What document was President Lincoln instrumental in getting passed into law that

finally abolished slavery? Was it: A) the Gettysburg Address, B) the Emancipation Proclamation, or C) the 13th Amendment?

00:17:25

Now, Harry, one of the other cool things we've learned today is how objects hold hidden clues that tell us more about the person that owned them and the time they were living in. What does this watch tell us about this man?

00:17:37

Harry:

This pocket watch that belonged to Abraham Lincoln is a fine gold watch. He purchased it when he was successful lawyer in Springfield, Illinois. It's probably the most expensive thing that he ever purchased for himself personally. And it's a symbol of success. Every time he pulled out the pocket watch to show to his fellow attorneys or anyone else, they would look and say, "Oh, there's Abraham Lincoln. He's obviously a success. He has this great watch."

00:18:06

David Baldacci:

Now, is it true there's a secret message carved on Lincoln's pocket watch? And if so, what does that message tell us?

Harry:

I received a call from a gentleman in Wisconsin. He said there's this long family tradition that his great-great-grandfather left a secret message in Abraham Lincoln's watch. And the story was that his relative was working as a watchmaker in Washington when the owner of the shop runs into the workshop and he says, "Fort Sumter has been attacked. The Civil War has begun."

- 00:18:38 And at that moment, his relative was holding Lincoln's watch. He opens it up and he starts to carve in a message. And it says, "On this day, Fort Sumter was attacked. Thank God we have a government." And then he closes it up.
- 00:18:53 Many years later, when we heard the story, we had to find out if it was true, and so we opened up the watch. And actually there were three messages. There was that message. Along with that, another watchmaker had left his name in Lincoln's watch. And then a third person wrote the name "Jeff Davis," the president of the Confederacy.
- 00:19:14 Lincoln never knew about the messages in his pocket watch, carried them throughout his life, and we only discovered this many years later.
- 00:19:23
- David Baldacci: Now, are there any photographs of President Lincoln actually wearing the watch?
- Harry: Well, you don't see the watch. But we can see the chain in a number of images. And this was Lincoln's favorite watch. And he probably wore it when he went to Gettysburg to deliver the Gettysburg Address, when he signed the Emancipation Proclamation, and when he learned that Congress had passed the 13th Amendment, ending slavery.
- 00:19:48

David Baldacci: And there's our answer to today's final quiz. The 13th Amendment was adopted on December 6, 1865, officially ending the institution of slavery. For those of you who thought it might be the Emancipation Proclamation, that was an order issued by President Lincoln over 150 years ago, on January 1, 1863, during the Civil War, that proclaimed all slaves in the Confederate Territory to be free.

00:20:12 But it wasn't law until the 13th Amendment was passed, almost two years later.

Harry, I know this museum has so many more stories to tell, but unfortunately we're out of time. But I wanna thank you for spending your time with us today. And please thank Suzanne and Bonnie as well.

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Harry: I will. And thanks so much for coming. And please come back again.

David Baldacci: Definitely will. [music] Today's mission may be over, but there's always time to learn new things about history. There will always be new mysteries to solve. And there's so much to explore and discover.

00:20:43 Objects and artifacts can be clues to unlocking stories, but it takes a sense of curiosity and investigative work to uncover them. And a great place to start is in a book series like "The 39 Clues" or in a

museum like The Smithsonian's National Museums of American History.

00:20:59 Exploring the past isn't just something you can do in books and museums. Here's what I'd like you to do: I want you to use what you've learned here today to become your own historian. Participate in your own history. Investigate your family through old photos, letters, and family trees.

00:21:18 Dive into your local history by visiting the library and reading old newspapers, learning about important figures from your town's past. Pay attention to the impact these people from that past have made on your life today. And keep a journal with details of what you discover along the way. Who knows what hidden mysteries you'll discover?

00:21:37 You can visit this extraordinary museum and others in the Smithsonian family, in person, right here in our nation's capital, or online at americanhistory.si.edu. And you can dive into history with Amy and Dan Cahill, with the 39 Clues in my book "Day of Doom." For more about the 39 Clues, check out the39clues.com.

00:22:01 And remember, you're making history every day. What's the story you're leaving behind? This is David Baldacci signing out.

[music]