

Today's Document

<http://www.archives.gov/social-media/todays-doc-app.html>

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Today's Document a free mobile app surrogate for the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration's website of the same name. The website features a different document for every day of the year and allows the user to see what happened on this day in U.S. history. The Today's Document app, like the website, is a great casual discovery tool for the avid history buff, educators, and students who want to interact with primary documents and access the site when they are on the go. Today's Document can be downloaded from both the iOS and Android stores. This reviewer uses the android platform so there may be slight differences when using an iOS device.

The app is straightforward and easy to use with a clean design. The screen primarily shows the featured document and its description. There are icons in the upper right that allow the user to find out more information, share, favorite, and browse to other days' featured documents. The information icon reveals more data on the chosen document, links to other materials in the featured collection, and provides a citation to the exact location of the item in National Archives. The bottom of the screen features a convenient search option.

The Information icon in the app allows for significant outreach, leading the user to find additional resources in NARA's holdings. For example, the document featured on April 17th, 2014 is a photograph entitled "Photograph taken after midnight on April 17, 1912, G. St. near 14th" that shows three young boys selling newspapers. The information icon gives a little more descriptive information about the scene captured, and a link to other Lewis Hine photographs on the [Picturing the Century: 100 Years of Photography from the National Archives](#) website. Below that description, it gives an exact location citation with an embedded link to the ARC identifier number so the user can find other documents in the same record group.

There are a few disadvantages that were noticeable with more use of this product. If you want to increase the size of image, you have to download it to your device. Touching the image brings up a prompt that asks which picture-viewing app you want to use. This process is simple, and the quality of the image enlargement is quite good. However, I have two issues with the app bumping out to a picture viewer. First, there is another image taking up space on the phone or tablet. I realize this could be minor for most users, but if you are a space-conscious user, this might be annoying when it is time to clean up the device's photo gallery. Second, taking the

user out of the original app makes it easy for the user to be distracted by something else. The goal of the app is to engage the user and lead them to explore other featured documents. This may not happen if the app boots them into another app.

Another minor issue is with the sharing feature. Currently, the app allows sharing via Facebook, Twitter, and email. There is not an option for sharing through other social media sites such as Tumblr, Instagram, or other blogging platforms. If a user is dedicated, they can download the image and share in these other formats. However, all the descriptive metadata and links to collections in the National Archives are lost, and it is the responsibility of the user to share that information. An important part of a well-rounded app is the ability to seamlessly share across multiple social media platforms.

Today's Document is a great outreach tool for the National Archives. It gives anyone from teachers to the trivia geek a chance to see what happened on their birthday, or randomly pick up interesting facts regarding U.S. history. The app also acts as a gateway into the National Archives for further resource discovery. Some sharing and picture features could be better, but it's a solid application. It's a good foray into the app world for archives and special collections. It will be interesting to see if other institutions release apps similar to Today's Document. Will future apps be windows into archival collections or will they try to engage the user on a deeper level than cool stuff and trivial knowledge? There could be apps to crowd source metadata creation or apps built around the idea storytelling. The possibilities just like the depth of archival collections are endless.