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# PROCLAIM LIBERTY THROUGHOUT ALL THE LAND

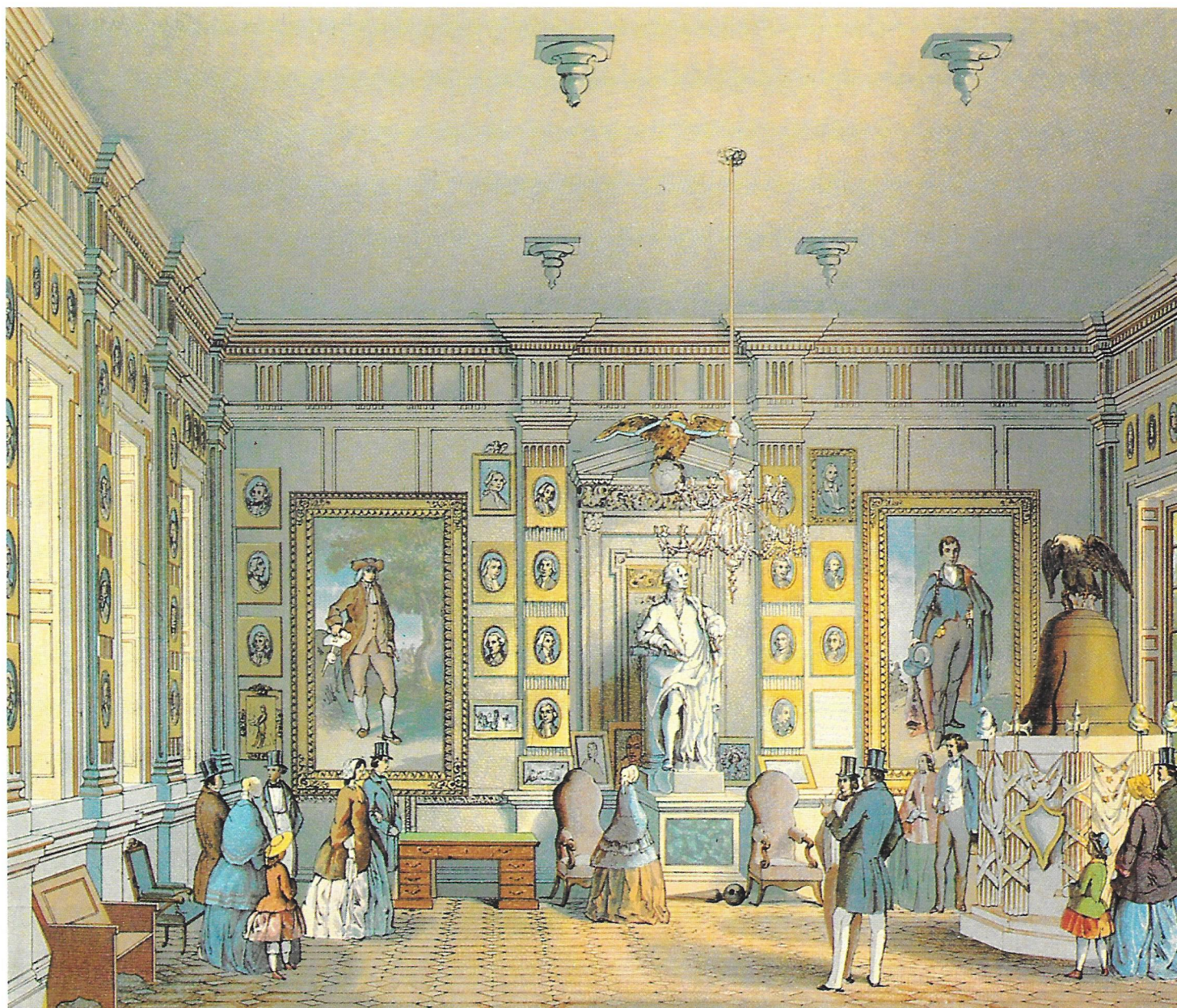
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by William C. Kashatus III

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*In the mid-nineteenth century, the Liberty Bell – capped by an eagle  
from Peale's Museum – was enshrined in Independence Hall.*

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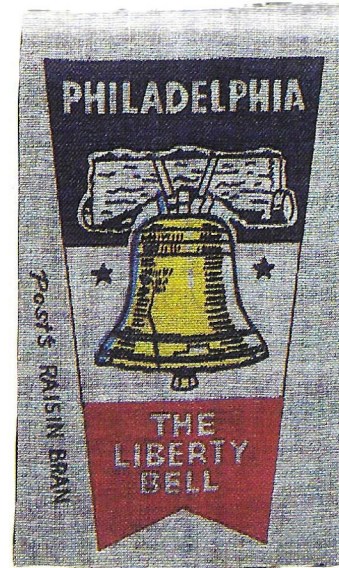


Each year thousands of Americans, as well as foreigners, travel to Philadelphia to visit the dozens of historic sites, structures and complexes associated with the nation's independence. For many, their first stop is a small glass pavilion across the street from Independence Hall. Housed inside is one of America's most cherished relics: the Liberty Bell. Although each individual brings with them their own, personal definition of liberty, this 2,080 pound bell has, for the last century and a half, given physical form to the

struggles and hopes of all who come to see it. Cast during the mid-eighteenth century, the bell did not become an emblem of liberty until 1839 when a group of Boston abolitionists adopted it as a symbol for their cause, christening it the *Liberty Bell*. This year Americans celebrated the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Liberty Bell, an object which has become, perhaps, the most powerful symbol of freedom around the world.

Originally, the bell's significance was limited to Pennsylvania. In 1751, Isaac Norris, the Speaker of the Assembly, ordered a bell cast at London's Whitechapel Foundry to serve the City of Philadelphia as a means of communication, gathering the citizens for celebration, mourning or for the news of the day. Norris also requested that "the Bell be cast with the following words well shaped in large letters round it: 'By order of the Assembly of the province of Pennsylvania [sic] for the Statehouse in the City of Philadelphia, 1752,'" and underneath, "'Proclaim Liberty thro' all the Land to all the Inhabitants Thereof - Levit. XXV 10.'" The biblical verse evoked the Israelites' jubilee celebration of their rebirth as a whole nation. The inscription would also be fitting for the Commonwealth as it not only embodied the principles that Norris and his fellow assemblymen cherished most, but it would remind Pennsylvanians of their unique heritage: fifty years of peace, prosperity and religious toleration as guaranteed by William Penn's 1701 Charter of Privileges, the final frame of government adopted by the province.

By September 1752, the Whitechapel bell had "come ashore" in the colony and appeared to be "in good order." However, after being transported to the Pennsylvania State House, where it was to be ceremonially placed in the tower, the bell was tested and a crack split the brim. Norris blamed the Whitecha-



Ever since its creation as a symbol for freedom and independence, the Liberty Bell has inspired manufacturers, advertisers, promoters, even the federal government, to reproduce its image on banners, posters and printed textiles, as well as replicated as toys, souvenirs and commemorative objects. Even today, the Liberty Bell enjoys great popularity with a variety of businesses and industries.



The first use of the Liberty Bell in a publication, this illustration appeared in an 1839 abolitionist pamphlet published in Boston by the Friends of Freedom.

pel Foundry, claiming that "our judges have generally agreed that [the metal] was too high and brittle." In desperate need of a communication device for the city, Norris decided to have the damaged bell repaired in Philadelphia by "two ingenious Work-Men," John Pass and John Stow.

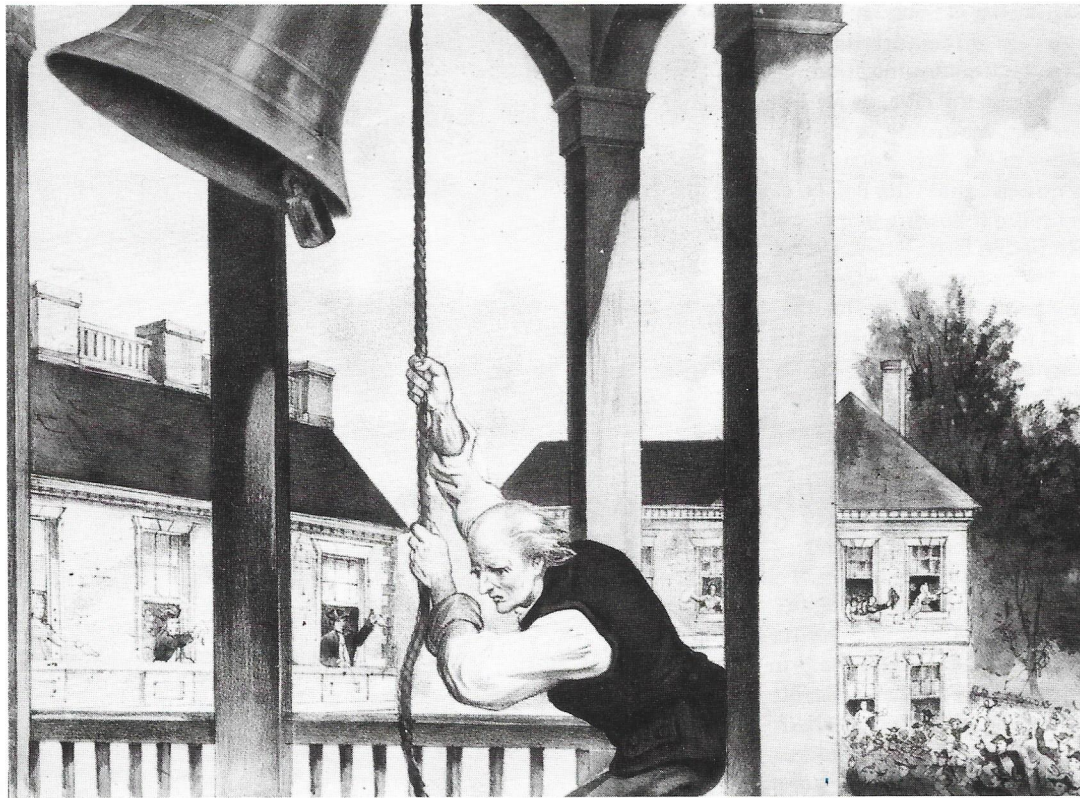
Stow was the only person in mid-eighteenth century Philadelphia to advertise the manufacture of brass products; the newspapers of the period do not reveal any bell founders in the entire colony. Apparently he must have had some experience with bell casting as

it is unlikely that the Assembly would permit a novice to recast so large a bell. The qualifications of John Pass are more uncertain but the appearance of his name, before Stow's, on the recasting has led some historians to believe that he was more adept at bell-founding than Stow.

Sometime after February 1753, Pass and Stow molded a core from the Whitechapel bell to insure that their casting would be a true replica of the first, and then proceeded to shatter the bell with a sledgehammer. By doing so, they fragmented the bell into small

pieces that would fit into the furnace and melt with reasonable speed. To strengthen their casting, Pass and Stow added "one ounce and a half [of copper] for each pound of the old bell." After two recastings, the bell—a composition of about seventy-seven percent copper and twenty-three percent tin—was completed. Like its predecessor, the Pass and Stow version also carried the inscription from Leviticus around its shoulder, although the wording was changed slightly to "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants Thereof." In June 1753, the bell was "raised in the Statehouse Steeple" where it would be used to call together members of the Assembly for morning and afternoon sessions, to announce the hour of the opening of the Courts of Justice and to gather the people for a host of proclamations, including the accession of England's King George III to the throne on February 21, 1761, and the ending of the French and Indian War on January 26, 1763.

During the late eighteenth century, the bell witnessed a host of significant political events, leading Americans of later era to associate it with political liberty. The British Parliament's levying of the Stamp Act in 1765 raised the issue of "taxation without representation" for the colonists—a tax which would set the revolutionary forces in motion. On September 9, 1765, the bell summoned the Assembly to the State House to consider the implications of and possible actions against the Stamp Act. A month later on October 5, the bell mournfully proclaimed the arrival of the first stamps to be used in the execution of the loathsome act. Subsequent measures by the British government would strike directly at the heart of the American economy, instigating widespread resistance by the colonies. The mounting turmoil resulted in war.



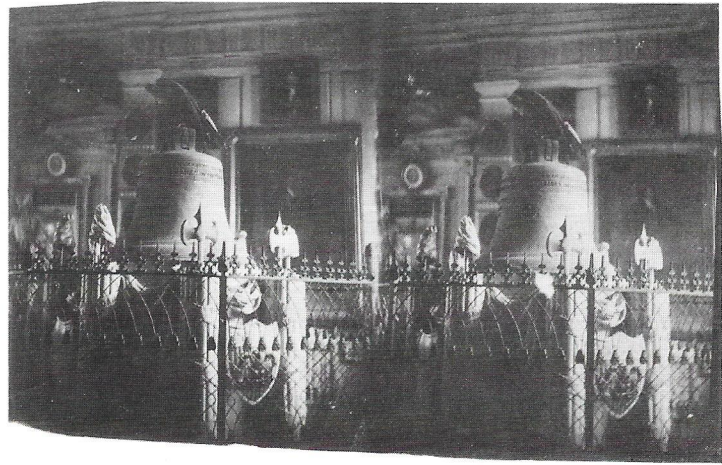
A devout member of the Society of Friends, Isaac Norris (right) became a member of the Provincial Assembly in 1736, and fourteen years later ascended to its speakership. As Speaker, Norris ordered the bell from England with the passage from Leviticus, which may have been originally inspired by Benjamin Franklin. John Nixon (far right) read the Declaration of Independence at the State House on July 8, 1776, to a throng summoned by the Liberty Bell. One hundred years later, the event was commemorated by Currier and Ives (above).



On April 25, 1775, the Statehouse Bell called Philadelphians to hear the news of the British attack at Lexington, Massachusetts. Nearly eight thousand people gathered in the courtyard that day, unanimously passing a resolution "to associate, for the purpose of defending with arms, their lives, liberty and property against all attempts to deprive them of them." Similar sentiments throughout the colonies brought a host of delegates to Philadelphia in May 1775 when the bell announced the convening of a Second Continental Congress to discuss the

proclaimed four days later on the eighth. At noon that day, the bell called the populace to the State House courtyard to hear a prominent Philadelphian, Col. John Nixon, proclaim: "that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is, and of right ought to be, totally dissolved."

When the British captured the City of Philadelphia on September 27, 1777, they would not find the Statehouse bell. By that time it—along

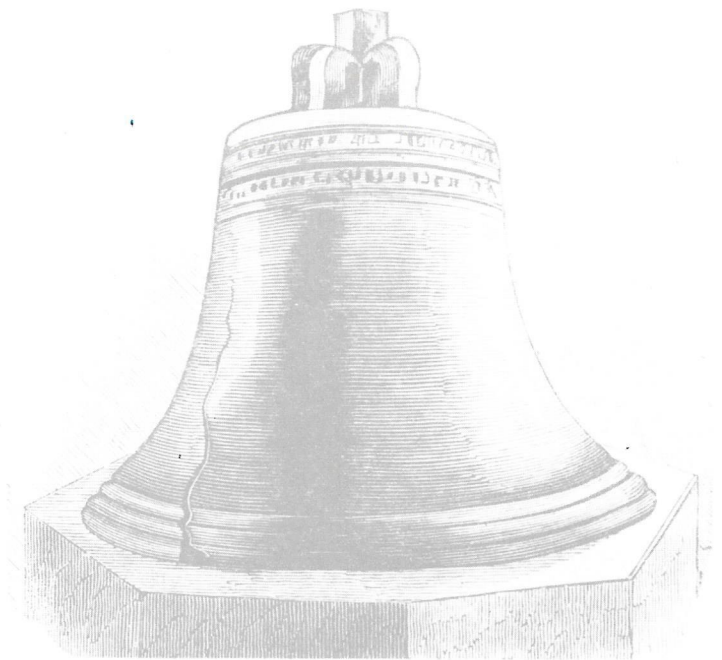


The first recorded term identifying the bell as the "Liberty Bell" appeared in the Friends of Freedom pamphlet (left). Photographer John Moran's 1865 stereoscope (above) shows the bell ceremonially ensconced in Independence Hall (top). A woodcut proclaiming the "bell which first announced Independence" was published in 1853 (below).



issue of independence from Great Britain. That Congress would adopt Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. In order "that the people may be universally informed of it," independence would be publicly

with the other bells of the city—was on its way north to Northampton Town, now present-day Allentown. Evacuated in order to deprive the British of metal stores, the State House bell made its journey on a horse-drawn





wagon, hidden from view by a load of stable refuse. After several days of travel, the wagon reached Bethlehem where, under the great weight of the bell, it "broke down in the street." The bell was transferred to another wagon and carted to Allentown where it was stored in the basement of the Zion High German Reformed Church until the British evacuated Philadelphia. A Philadelphia newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Packet*, recorded on August 22, 1778, that "the bells of this City are all returned safe and hung again." No reliable information

exists explaining when exactly the bell cracked, but as with any patriotic relic, a host of legends and conflicting reminiscences have evolved over the years. Some of these attempt to associate the crack with a single event but, having been written years or even decades after the fact, their accuracy is dubious at best.

The most popular tradition holds that the State House bell cracked on July 8, 1835, as it tolled to mourn the death of Chief Justice John Marshall. Little evidence exists to support this claim. It is more probable that a hairline fracture

"by direction of the Mayor," it was ordered that "the fracture in old Independence Bell be drilled out for the purpose of ringing it on Washington's Birthday." The crack was purposefully widened and two bolts were placed at either end to prevent the two sides from vibrating together when the bell was rung. This repair, known "stop drilling," extended from the lip of the bell into its shoulder and is frequently mistaken by visitors as the crack itself. Having been repaired, the State House bell rang in honor of the birthday of Washington on February 22,

The Liberty Bell emblazoned a seemingly endless array of commemorative and souvenir items during the last century and a half, including (from top, clockwise): political campaign buttons, programs for the Sesqui-Centennial held in Philadelphia in 1926, boxes, mirrors, bottles, fraternal and club badges – even postal stamps issued by Monaco!



occurred sometime during the early nineteenth century, extended gradually and reached a "proportion during the July 8, 1835, tolling sufficient to kill its tone and prompt inspection." The bell was used

1846. Hours later, though, it hung "in the great city steeple irreparably cracked and forever dumb," according to the February 26, 1846, edition of the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*. At about the same time that

importance to a relic and a symbol associated the Declaration of Independence burgeoned. During the 1830s, abolitionist groups grew politically aggressive and found a new meaning in the bell's biblical inscription, "Proclaim Liberty Throughout all the land unto all the Inhabitants thereof." In 1839, one of these groups from Boston, known as the "Friends of Freedom," distributed a pamphlet entitled *The Liberty Bell*—the first time that the term "Liberty Bell" was used and the first time it was graphically portrayed. The bell was shown suspended from the branch of a tree and the ground beneath it is strewn with broken shackles. A sonnet, inspired by the bell, appeared in the abolitionist pamphlet.

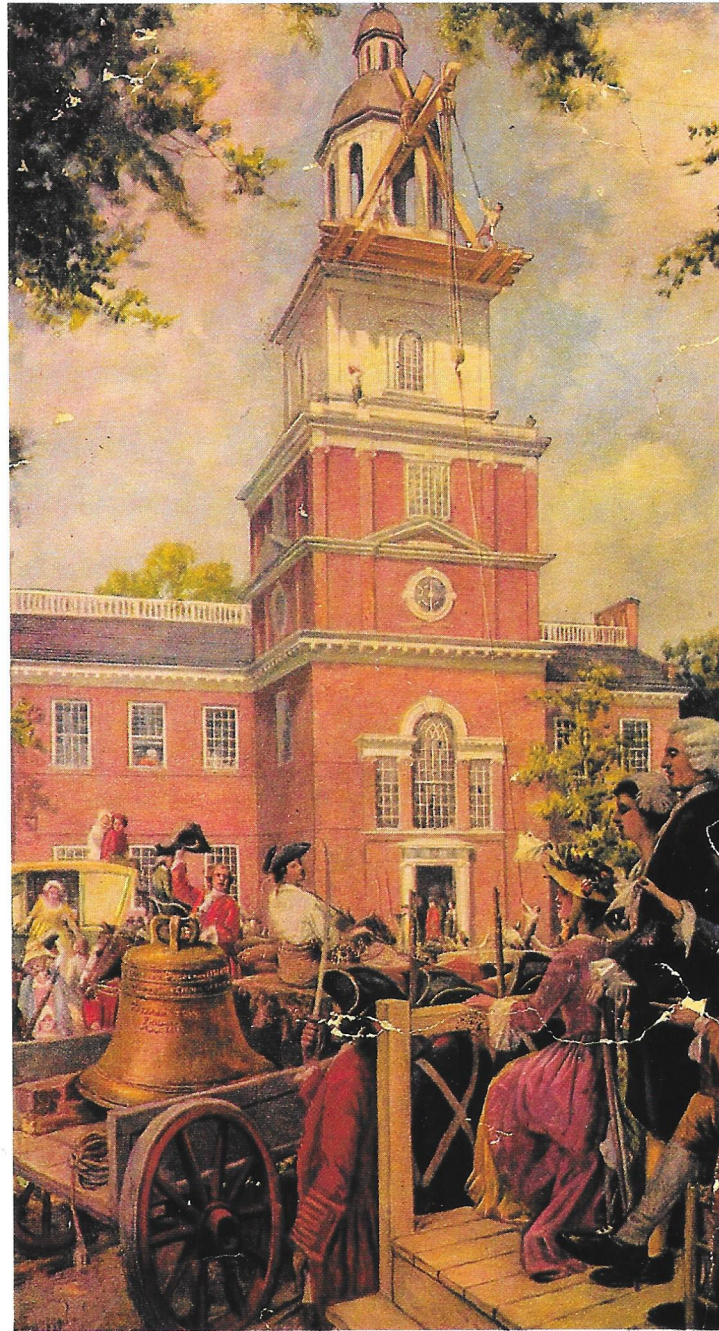
*It is no tocsin of affright we sound,  
Summoning nations to the conflict dire;—  
No fearful peal from cities wrapped in fire  
Echoes, at our behest, the land around;—  
Yet would we rouse our country's utmost bound.*

With this pamphlet, the friends of freedom inspired a host of other abolitionist groups to use the Liberty Bell as a symbol to further their mutual causes. In 1847, another anti-slavery group published a poem entitled, "The Liberty Bell," a verse of which anticipated the Civil War.

*Oh for a glorious peal at last  
Of the true bell of Liberty!  
To rend the air, and strike aghast  
The monster might of Slavery.*

By employing the Pennsylvania State House bell as a physical manifestation for their cause, the abolitionists inspired the use of the "Liberty Bell" throughout the country as a symbol of civil liberties for the next century and a half. Although removed from the State House tower in 1852 and placed on display inside the building, it continued to gather people together in the name of liberty.

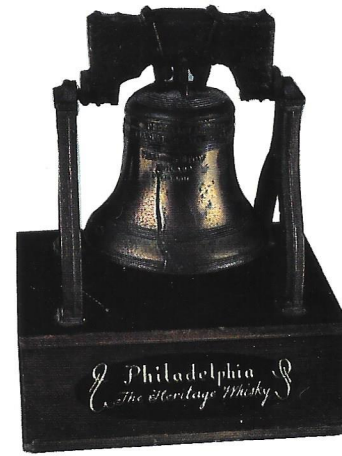
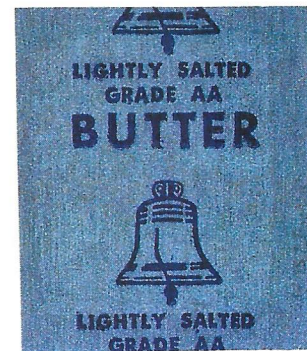
Between 1885 and 1919, the Liberty Bell was removed eleven times from Independence Hall and exhibited at expositions and in parades throughout the United States and into New England and across the Deep South. During this period, the bell traveled more than twenty-five thousand miles and was seen by millions of Americans who might otherwise never have become aware of its growing symbolism. Perhaps the most emotionally charged trip the bell made was in 1885 to New Orleans for the World's Industrial and Cotton Exposition.

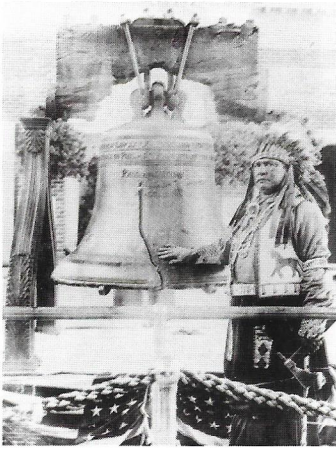


Loaded onto a train that steamed slowly southward, it would help to mend whatever differences still existed between North and South after the days of war and Reconstruction. Throngs pressed to see the bell, to touch it, to kiss it, wherever it stopped along its route. The ultimate tribute, however, was made by Jefferson Davis, the former president of the Confederacy, upon its arrival in Virginia. Struggling from his sick bed to see it, Davis pondered the bell and said, "I believe the time has come when reason should be substituted for passion and



*The Liberty Bell has been romanticized and idealized by generations of patriotic Americans, as well as by foreign admirers and well-wishers. Images of the Liberty Bell even pervaded the fine arts, such as Louis R. Dougherty's sentimental oil painting entitled Raising the Liberty Bell (left). Other depictions of the Liberty Bell include (from top to bottom): a key from the 1926 Sesquicentennial Exposition; a U. S. thirteen cent postage stamp; product advertising; and liquor packaging. All such objects are collectible today.*





when we should be able to do justice to each other. Glorious old Bell, the son of a revolutionary soldier bows in reverence before you." The bell's appearance in New Orleans was a great success and its return trip to Philadelphia was marked with as much ritual as had been the journey south. Pomp and parade would also accompany the bell on its ten subsequent journeys to, among other places, Chicago, Atlanta, Boston, St. Louis and San Francisco.

In this century a number of groups have looked to the Liberty Bell for inspiration.

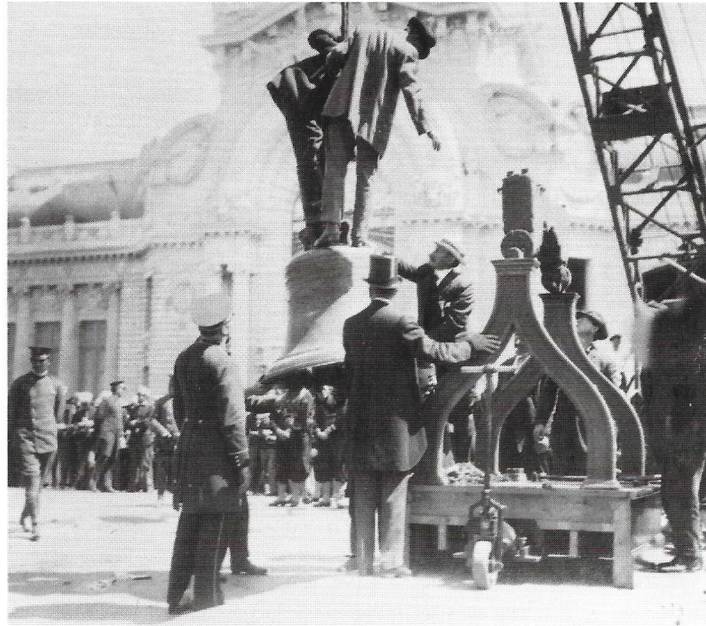
During the 1910s, the Women's Suffrage movement had a replica of the Bell cast and wrapped it in chains until they secured the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, giving women the right to vote. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s led Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Pres. John F. Kennedy to speak, on behalf of African-Americans, alongside the Liberty Bell. Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, in the continuing struggle for civil rights, also spoke near the bell during a recent visit to America. During the Vietnam conflict, many

conscientious objectors cited the Liberty Bell as a symbol of their freedom to choose between military compliance and peaceful resistance to war. Handily surprisingly, the Vietnam Veterans of Philadelphia have, more recently, used the bell as a symbol of the liberty they fought to preserve during wartime.

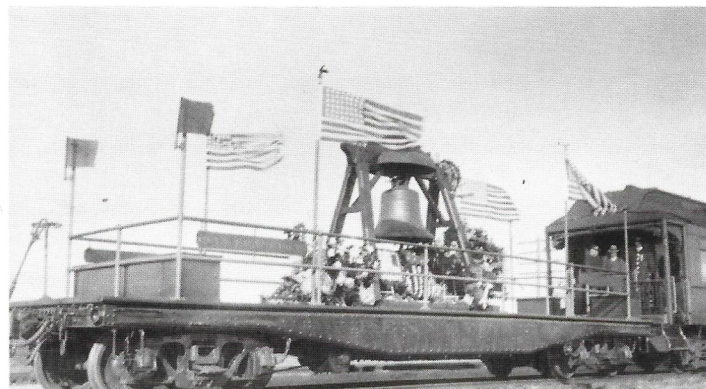
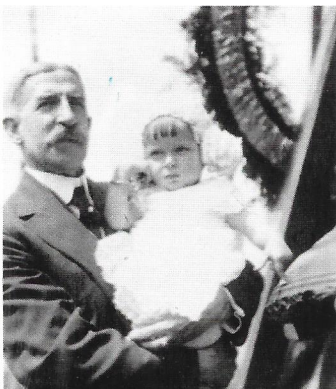
The diversity of these groups reminds all Americans that the Bell has served as a universal symbol of liberty for one hundred and fifty years. Its inscription does not limit the relic's symbolic freedom to a specific country or to a particular group of people, rather, it encourages mankind "Proclaim liberty throughout all and land unto all the inhabitants thereof." And so, while the Liberty Bell may appear to stand quietly in its little glass pavilion across the street from the birthplace of American Independence, it is assuring to know that its ring reverberates more clearly around the world today than at any other point in its history. ❖



Whether on view at Independence Hall or on one of its highly publicized and extremely popular journeys, the Liberty Bell was a sensation, drawing many visitors to see it firsthand. The Liberty Bell proved to immensely captivating for immigrants, who saw the United States as the land of opportunity. During its far-flung travels, the icon of liberty summoned disparate audiences, such as the Native American (top) and the father and child (bottom). It served as the focus for Lafayette's birthday in 1917 (center).



The Liberty Bell was sent — with much fanfare — to Chicago (above) for the 1893 Columbian Exposition. More than twenty million people saw it during both the trip and the World's Fair. For its journey to San Francisco, the Liberty Bell was loaded onto a Pennsylvania Railroad flatcar (below); it was displayed at the Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1915.



William C. Kashatus III of Philadelphia received his bachelor of arts degree from Earlham College and his master of arts degree from Brown University in 1984. A teacher at Episcopal Academy, he has been employed by the National Park Service at Independence National Historical Park and at Valley Forge National Historical Park. His articles have appeared in numerous publications, including *Quaker History*, *Valley Forge Historical Journal* and *The Indiana Military Historical Journal*. His most recent contribution to this magazine was "What Love Can Do: William Penn's Holy Experiment in Education," which appeared in the spring 1989 edition. He is a frequent contributor to *Pennsylvania Heritage*.

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#### FOR FURTHER READING

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If anything, the Liberty Bell inspired generations of Pennsylvanians — and Americans for that matter — to use it as a symbol in myriad ways. The huge Liberty Bell (below), which stood at the entrance of Philadelphia's Sesqui centennial grounds, was illumined by thousands of lights (right). A copy of the Liberty Bell, obviously much lighter than the two thousand pound original, served as the official emblem at the offices of the 1926 Sesquicentennial Exposition Association (bottom, left). The genuine Liberty Bell has been the focal point (bottom, right) of numerous pageants, celebrations and commemorations.

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