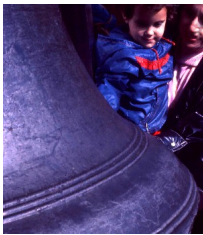


My personal acquaintance with the Liberty Bell goes back to when I was six, and our first-grade class was taken to Independence Hall, where the famed artifact was on display inside at the time. There were no guards then, so we kids could run around, try to make it clang, climb all over, get greasy fingerprints all over it, and generally make pests of ourselves.

Years later, during 1976's celebration of the Centennial, I took my own kids to see the Liberty Bell. It had been moved to its own little glass house across Independence Square, which seemed to be a large telephone booth. Now it is housed in a larger Liberty Bell Center, and surrounded by exhibits, as well as a bunch of guards in Smokey hats who make sure visitors keep their distance and their greasy fingers to themselves.



*"Proclaim Liberty throughout the land!"*

On weekends and holidays, there are long lines waiting to get into the building, and the Bell is admired by as many as a million tourists a year. The busiest day, of course, is Independence Day, July 4, when a dignitary taps the bell lightly for a quiet ring, while other bells throughout Philly and elsewhere ring out loudly in honor of the day.

How did the Liberty Bell come to be? As with ships and churches of Colonial days, bells were important communication instruments. In the city, it alerted firemen and police to emergencies, called people to church services and was rung for important events, including the death of prominent citizens and the beginnings and end of wars. The most well-know bell in England, the House of Parliament's Big Ben, has tolled out the hours for the past 500 years.

The Liberty Bell in Philadelphia was cast in 1751 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of William Penn's receiving the Charter of Pennsylvania from King George II of England. Penn had to flee England with his fellow Quakers to escape religious persecution. To get Charles to issue the Charter, Penn had to sign over all his real estate and home to the Crown.

The bell was hung 1753 in the steeple of what was to become Independence Hall, at 4th and Chestnut Streets in Philly. However, when it was given a test ring, the bell cracked. The cause was poor workmanship, with weak metals used in the casting. Local metalsmiths John Pass and John Stow, whose names you can see today on the bell, bid to recast it. They had to make the bell twice, melting the 2,000-pound bell down and start all over each time. Then, thinking it was

complete, they were told the tone wasn't right, and had to do it all over again.

As every schoolchild knows, the bell cracked again and was clumsily repaired with metal strips and bolts, and is that way today. Every picture of the bell used in stamps, logos, currency and other documents symbolically show the cracked side of the bell.

The bell hasn't always stayed in Philadelphia. When the British invaded America in 1812, it was wheeled 100 miles upstate to Allentown and hidden under the Zion Reform Church for two years, before it had a grand welcome home ceremony. On July 8, 1776, the bell, which was then hanging in the tower of what is now known as Independence Hall, rang out to summon the townsfolk to hear Colonel John Nixon make the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence.

This is possibly the single most well-known event associated with the bell's return to Independence Hall. It hasn't left since, except to be paraded down Philly's Broad Street during two World War I Liberty Bond drives. Later, it was moved a hundred yards across Independence Square to its current location in its glass-sided home.

If you're planning a visit to the Liberty Bell, take a moment to read the inscription. In addition to the identification of builders Pass and Stow, there are inspiring words from the Bible, in spite of the fact that Pennsylvania is spelled wrong. "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof- Lev. XXV, v.x. By order of the Assembly of the Province of Pennsylvania for the State House in Philada."

*Submitted by Ferdinand Hermano* □