

# **Masonry And The Statue Of Liberty**

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Masons everywhere can take special pride in the part our great Fraternity played in the creation and erection, nearly 100 years ago, of the most unique symbol of freedom and opportunity, the Statue of Liberty.

In the summer of 1865, a group of Frenchmen were gathered together one evening at the home of the well-known author, Edouard Rene de Laboulaye, in the village of Glavingny, a suburb of Paris. Among those present were Oscar and Edmond de Lafayette, grandsons of the Marquis de Lafayette, Masonic brother of George Washington; Henri Martin, the noted historian and French Mason; and a young artist from Colmar in French (later German) Alsace by the name of Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, who at the time was engaged in making a bust of Laboulaye, called by one biographer "America's most ardent admirer in France."

Laboulaye told the group that it would be a splendid gesture on the part of all liberty-loving Frenchmen to acknowledge their friendship to America by presenting a fitting memorial. (Some have speculated that he had a second motive in mind – to call attention to the contrast between the American way of life with its freedoms and that of the French under the repressive Second Empire.)

The 31-year-old Bartholdi became imbued with the idea and also the challenge it presented to his artistic talent. But the proposal lay dormant during the autocratic rule of Napoleon III and throughout the destructive years of the Franco-Prussian War.

In 1871, Laboulaye, the Brothers Lafayette with their cousin, the Marquis de Noailles, and the Marquis de Rochambeau, along with Henri Martin, revived the plan for the as yet unnamed memorial. They suggested that Bartholdi visit America and make arrangements for the presentation of the monument on July 4, 1876, the Centenary of the Declaration of Independence.

Armed with letters of introduction and full of high hopes, Bartholdi sailed for America, although it is said that he did not have even a rough drawing of the proposed monument. Two weeks later, while standing on the deck of the ship Pereire steaming up Lower New York Bay,

he caught a vision of a magnificent goddess holding aloft a torch in one hand and welcoming all visitors to the land of freedom and opportunity.

Quickly obtaining paper and brush, Bartholdi sketched in water-color the idea of the Statue of Liberty substantially as it appears today. It was his thought to have this symbolic structure tower over the steeple of Trinity Church, then the tallest building on the New York skyline. He wrote to Laboulaye, "these outlines may well aim beyond the mere monument at a work of great moral value."

Bartholdi returned to France in 1874 and soon thereafter the Franco-American Union was established in Paris to raise funds for the Statue of "Liberty Enlightening the World." That same year, Bartholdi began his work at the Parisian firm of Gaget, Gauthier & Cie. His model for the face of the "Goddess of Liberty" was his mother, Charlotte Beysser Bartholdi. First, he made a four-foot clay miniature, then a nine-foot cast in plaster, and then proportionately enlarged each section four times, making as many as nine thousand measurements with each increase in size.

The main structural framework of four huge steel supports was specially designed by Gustave Eiffel, who later gained world-wide fame as a result of the 984-foot tower he created for the Paris Exposition in 1889.

Under the leadership of Henri Martin, and inspired perhaps by the fact that so many of the sponsors of the Franco-American Union were members of the Masonic Fraternity, a campaign netting one million francs was completed by 1880. Contributors included over 100,000 individuals, 181 villages, 10 Chambers of Commerce, and many school children. The pedestal, which was America's responsibility, had been plagued by inadequate financial support, and it took a last-minute effort by Joseph Pulitzer, the owner and editor of the New York World, to raise over \$100,000, most of it from school children. Together, American and French citizens contributed some \$500,000 to the project.

Although the Statue's completion was not in time for the original 1876 date, the right hand and torch were displayed at the Philadelphia World's Fair and later in New York, so America was given a "sneak preview" of what was to come.

On Washington's birthday in 1877, Congress accepted the statue, in the name of the United States, as a gift from the French people. President Hayes then authorized General William T. Sherman, Army Chief of Staff, to select a suitable site for the gift. Sherman, knowing Bartholdi's preference for Bedloe's (now Liberty) Island, wisely concurred.

Meanwhile, in France Bartholdi and his fifty workmen finished the head, which was to go on display at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1878. In 1880, the final stage was in preparation. The copper sheets were ready to be riveted in place, and Levi P. Morton, American Minister to France, later Vice President of the United States and Governor of New York, was invited to "drive the rivet in the first part to be mounted, the big toe of the left foot. "

The giant lady literally grew out of the Paris pavement. When completed, she stood 151 feet high and remained in place for two years, awaiting the building of a pedestal.

The statue was finished on May 21, 1884, and formally presented to Ambassador Morton by Ferdinand de Lesseps, head of the Franco-American Union and builder of the Suez Canal, at a friendship dinner on July 4, 1884.

Around this time, Bartholdi, who was a member of Lodge Alsace Lorraine in Paris, which was composed of intellectuals, writers and government representatives, invited his brothers to view his masterpiece prior to its leaving their native land for America. It is also reported that in November of that year, he delivered a lecture and gave the Lodge a report on the history and various methods used in the creation of the statue. In 1887, after the statue was dedicated at its final resting place, Bartholdi told his Lodge brothers of the ardent welcome he had received in New York and of the wide enthusiasm created by his work.

Meanwhile, in America plans were being made for the laying of the cornerstone of the pedestal. Chairman William M. Evarts of the American Committee contacted the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of New York, and requested a Masonic ceremony "appropriate to the occasion."

It had been a tradition in America to have the cornerstone of major public and private buildings and monuments consecrated with full Masonic rites, ever since President George Washington, on September 18, 1793, had personally laid the cornerstone of the United States Capitol, with the assistance of the Grand Lodge of Maryland. Similarly, the cornerstone of the Washington Monument was laid in a Masonic ceremony.

The Evart's invitation, however, was more than a local manifestation of the influence of the Craft or the continuance of a national practice. The presentation and erection of the Statue of Liberty was an occasion of worldwide significance, and delegating the laying of the cornerstone to the Masonic Fraternity was a fitting tribute rendered to free men of high principles and recognized international reputations throughout the world.

The date set for the ceremony was August 5, 1884. The American Committee sent invitations to all the leading state and municipal leaders across the Nation. The ceremony was scheduled to begin at two o'clock. Everything humanly possible was carefully planned. But one factor could not be controlled – the weather. On August 5, 1884, it did more than just rain – it poured!

However, the ceremony went off as scheduled. The gaily decorated vessel Bay Ridge, draped with the Tricolor of France and the Stars and Stripes, ferried approximately 100 members of the Grand Lodge of New York and visiting Masonic Grand Officers, along with many civic officials, to Bedloe's Island. Because of limited space, the traditional Masonic parade was omitted and the program was begun immediately.

A United States Army band played "La Marseillaise," the French National Anthem, following with the very popular "Hail Columbia." Then began, on the raised northeast corner of the pedestal, the formal cornerstone ceremony.

Brother Richard M. Hunt, principal architect of the pedestal, presented the Working Tools to M. W. William A. Brodie, Grand Master, who in turn distributed them to the Grand Lodge officers: R. W. Frank R. Lawrence, Deputy Grand Master; R. W. John W. Vrooman, Senior Grand Warden; and R. W. James Ten Eyck, Junior Grand Warden.

R. W. Edward M.L. Ehlers, Grand Secretary and a member of Continental Lodge 287, read the list of items to be included in the copper box within the cornerstone: A copy of the United States Constitution; George Washington's Farewell Address; 20 bronze medals of Presidents up through Chester A. Arthur (including Washington, Monroe, Jackson, Polk, Buchanan, Johnson, and Garfield who were proven Freemasons); copies of New York City newspapers; a portrait of Bartholdi; a copy of Poem on Liberty by E.R. Johnes; and a list on parchment of the Grand Lodge officers.

By traditional ceremony, the cornerstone was then tested and being found, square, level and plumb, the Deputy Grand Master completed the work by applying the mortar and by having the stone lowered firmly into place. The Grand Master then struck three blows with the gavel and declared the stone duly laid. The elements of consecration, corn, wine and oil, were next presented by R. W. Brothers Lawrence, Vrooman and Ten Eyck.

The most Worshipful Grand Master then gave a brief but pointed talk. He posed a question: "Why call upon the Masonic Fraternity to lay the cornerstone of such a structure as is here to be erected?" His answer, which is as true today as it was then, was: "No institution has done more to promote liberty and to free men from the trammels and chains of ignorance and tyranny than has Freemasonry."

The principal address was given by the Deputy Grand Master, R. W. Brother Lawrence, who said in part:

"Massive as this statue is, its physical proportions sink into comparative obscurity when contrasted with the nobility of its concept. Liberty Enlightening the World! How lofty the thought! To be free, is the first, the noblest aspiration of the human breast. And it is now a universally admitted truth that only in proportion as men become possessed of liberty, do they become civilized, enlightened, and useful ... As Masons, we cannot appropriate to ourselves alone the lessons which this monument will teach. Not only to us, but to all men will it appeal ... the gigantic figure which is here to stand in unapproachable grandeur while the centuries pass, will command: "Be noble, and the nobleness that lies In other men, sleeping, but never dead, Will rise in majesty to meet thine own. "

The remainder of the story concerning the Statue of Liberty and Freemasons is almost anti-climatic.

Upon completion, the pedestal stood 89 feet high from its foundation on old Fort Wood, an abandoned 12-acre site on Bedloe's Island, 2,950 yards southwest of Manhattan Island.

Liberty was dismantled in Paris, every copper plate and beam coded and packed into 214 cases, and the whole shipment transported on a 70-car train to the coast. After a month at sea on the Iser, she arrived at Bedloe's Island in June, 1885. It took 15 months to assemble the 225 tons of pure copper (applied in 1/8" thickness), steel and iron, but when she was in place, the result was as magnificent as the creator's dream.

Dedication Day, October 28, 1886, was declared a holiday in New York City. Charles P. Stone, Grand Marshal, led the 20,000 paraders, including many Masonic Lodges, from 57th Street past President Crover Cleveland's reviewing stand at Madison Square Park and on down to the Battery, where groups were taken by steamer to Bedloe's Island. Brother Henry C. Potter, Episcopal Bishop of New York, gave the Invocation and Comte Ferdinand de Lesseps presented the statue to Chairman Evarts in the name of the French people.

Both the Statue and the pedestal were then formally presented to President Cleveland, who received the monument with eloquent thanks in the name of the United States. Brother Bartholdi then pulled a silken cord releasing the Tricolor veil from the head and face of the Statue of "Liberty Enlightening the World."

The main speaker was Chauncey M. Depew, United States Senator, railroad president, one of the most famous orators in American history, and an active member of Kane Lodge 454, having been raised in 1885. The program was closed with a Benediction pronounced by Bishop Potter.

The Statue of Liberty is not just a colossal 225-ton pile of metal reaching some 300 feet in the air at the entrance of New York harbor, conspicuous by day and a guide to mariners by night. Magnificent in its conception, wonderful in design, and a masterpiece of engineering skill, this gigantic figure, holding aloft a torch of freedom in one hand and clasping a book of laws inscribed with the date "July 4, 1776" in the other, casts its light far beyond the horizon. The light which illumines the Statue of Liberty is a guiding symbol to the path of freedom for men of all nations.

Yes, Freemasons everywhere can well be proud of the key role played by the Craft in the inception and erection of this great memorial, and each of us should renew his vows and obligations to spread further the light of freedom, truth, tolerance, and justice which the Statue of Liberty so grandly symbolizes.

(On August 5, 1984, the Grand Lodge of New York observed the Centenary of the cornerstone laying in appropriate ceremonies at Liberty Island, which were attended by Masonic and governmental dignitaries. A bronze plaque commemorating the original event was dedicated and affixed to the pedestal.)

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