



## **Provincial Grand Lodge of East Lancashire**

### **The Statue of Liberty and Freemasonry**



For over 120 years, the Statue of Liberty has been well known all over the world & it is especially impressive to those who approach New York by ship. To many thousands of immigrants who were landed at the neighbouring Ellis Island, she was a symbol of freedom & new opportunity.

But many don't realise its Masonic origin & connection. Indeed, its full & proper title is "The Statue of Liberty & Freemasonry" but in non-masonic terms, "Liberty Enlightening the World". The idea began in Paris in about 1870, when a small group of French masons considered that it would be a splendid gesture on the part of liberty loving Frenchmen to acknowledge their friendship to America by presenting a suitable memorial. You see, America would probably not have won its freedom from the British during the American Revolution in 1776, without the help of the French. It was they, the French, who provided arms, ships, money & even men to the American colonies, resulting in the break from we Brits & America's independence - celebrated every year on the 4th July.

So at the small dinner party in Paris, when admiration was being expressed for America's success in establishing a democratic government, talk moved to the close historic ties & the love of liberty shared by both nations. Bro Edouard Rene Lefebvre de Laboulaye suggested to Bro Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, one of his guests, that, as an artist & sculptor, he might consider designing a great monument as a lasting memorial to independence and human liberty. So was the seed of inspiration that would become the Statue of Liberty.

The group suggested that Bro Bartholdi should go to America and try to make arrangements. Although he was a wealthy man, having inherited money from his land owning father, no serious thought had been given to the raising of any funding for a monument.

Thought had however, been given to a presentation date and the initial aim was 4th July 1876, only some six years away, but the date of America's centennial.

So, Bartholdi, who hadn't even a rough drawing of the proposed new monument, took up the Masonic challenge and set sail aboard the steam ship 'Periere'. Entering New York Bay, and staring at the skyline, he had a vision of a magnificent Goddess holding aloft a torch in her hand and welcoming all visitors to the land of freedom & opportunity. With paper & brush, he quickly sketched in watercolour the idea of his Statue, much as it appears today. He immediately aimed to make this symbolic structure the tallest on the New York skyline.

Soon after his return to France in early 1874, with 4 years wasted already, the Franco-American Union was formed to raise funds for the project. Because the statue would be prohibitively expensive to build, it had been decided that its cost should be shared. France would pay for the statue, and America would raise the money for its pedestal & foundations. The fund was launched in France in late 1875, in the newspapers; and elaborate fundraising events were staged, with banquets and gala performances at the Opera.

Money was slow in coming; however, enough was collected to begin work on the statue, but the goal of completing it in time for America's 100th anniversary was impossible.

However, Bartholdi had begun work on the statue at once, assisted by 50 men, working in shifts, he made a 4 foot cast in clay, then increasingly larger copies, finally up to 36', while the finished product was to be a towering 151' tall. His model for the face of the "Goddess of Liberty", was his mother. He chose Gaget, Gauthier & Co. in Paris, as his workshop. Their craftsmen were experts in the art of repousse, a technique for creating sculptural forms by hammering sheet metal inside moulds. Stone & bronze had been rejected as too heavy and too expensive. Lighter than cast metal, repousse was the only method available to allow such a monumental work to be shipped overseas.

The intricate skeleton for the statue was designed by another mason, Bro Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel, already well known for his brilliant iron railroad bridges and later; Yes, you guessed it, the Eiffel Tower finally erected some 10 years later in 1889.

Bartholdi decided that if the statue could not be completed in time for America's centennial, at least the raised arm and torch could be finished for display at the International Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. While 300,000 French people paid to watch the work, 20 men worked 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to meet the dead line. However, even with overtime, the arm and torch were not finished in time for the opening of the exhibition, but they did arrive just before the fair closed and were then moved to New York.

For 50 cents, visitors could climb a steel ladder leading to a balcony surrounding the torch. This unique experience created a good deal of enthusiasm for the project, since Liberty would be the first statue which you could climb inside.

On 4th July 1876, the day that the presentation of the completed work was planned, Bartholdi rather superstitiously went to Bedloe's Island, the site now chosen for his statue. While there he remarked that it would be nice if the name might be changed to Liberty Island. Fifty years later, in 1924, in fact the name was changed from Bedloe's to Liberty Island. This visit was also memorable to Bro Bartholdi in another way, because he took a trip to Montreal & there met a lady he already knew slightly. M'selle Jeanne-Emilie Baheux de Puysieux - what a mouthful - whom he married later in the same year. Was she glad to change her name?!!

On his return to France with his new wife, Bro Bartholdi set himself a new goal; to complete the statue's head for the opening of the Paris World Fair in May 1 878. Unfortunately, Liberty was to be a lady who was always late. The gleaming copper head was not finished until June, but even her late appearance at the fair was not enough to solve the increasing problem of raising enough finance to complete the statue. So various additional methods were started to boost the funds, the best was a lottery with substantial prizes, silver plate worth 20,000 francs, jewellery and gems worth 5,000 francs, statuary & paintings.

By the end of 1879, 250,000 francs had been raised and most thought it was enough to complete the work in France. In fact, they needed another 100,000 fr. which slowly came dribbling in.

In October 1881, the American ambassador drove in the first rivet & the statue began to be erected in Paris, with steel scaffolding inside and out. Bro Bartholdi wrote to America that "The statue is beginning to rise above the houses of Paris & by spring it will rise above the whole city". Sadly, in that winter the instigator of the idea, Bro Laboulaye, died. Never to see his dream come to existence.

Finally and completely built in the June of 1884, ten years after Bartholdi's return to France, until the spring of 1885, Liberty remained in Paris, when she began to be dismantled for the long voyage to America. All the while, Bro Bartholdi assumed that the statue's base was also nearing completion. He assumed too much.

In fact, little was happening in the USA. The American press were critical of the project, especially its cost. They couldn't understand why the pedestal for the statue should cost as much as the statue itself. Congress refused a grant of \$100,000 and another from New York for \$50,000, was vetoed by the Governor! Various money raising efforts were put forward but public apathy was almost as monumental as the statue itself. Even the rich & famous seemed disinterested and by 1884, just before Liberty was to leave for the USA, only \$182,500 had been raised and most of it had been already spent.

Enter Bro. Joseph Pulitzer, now of Pulitzer prize fame. He was a Hungarian immigrant who became a successful journalist, married a wealthy American lady and bought a US newspaper called "The World". When he heard that the Statue of Liberty was about to die from lack of funds, he saw a chance of three opportunities.

First to raise funds for the statue, second to increase his newspaper's sales and third, to blast the rich for their selfishness. Pulitzer set a target of \$100,000 for his newspaper and taunted the rich but also very cleverly offered to print the name of every contributor to the fund in the "World's" pages, no matter how small the amount. The statue, he said, was paid for by the masses of the French people, let America respond in like manner. Don't wait for the millionaires; this is not a gift from the French millionaires, he wrote, but from all the people of France.

His circulation increased by about 50,000 copies daily, & the money poured in, mainly single dollar donations from grandmothers and schoolchildren. By August 1885, the \$100,000 target had been achieved and from more than 120,000 individual contributions, and it kept coming.

Meanwhile, although at this point they only had the arm and torch, the statue was nominally but formally presented to the American ambassador on 4th July 1884, because the cornerstone of the pedestal was to be laid the following day. The presentation was made by Bro Ferdinand de Lesseps now head of the Union's committee who was famous for

the building of the Suez Canal some 20 years earlier. Next day, in pouring rain, the impressive ceremony went ahead with full Masonic rites. The massive pediment was built within the old walls of Fort Wood and is in the shape of an 11 pointed star. The foundation alone needed 24,000 tons of concrete, the largest single mass at that time ever poured. At the bottom the actual pediment is 91 feet square & tapers to 65 feet at the top. The whole base rises just short of 90 feet from the foundation.

Even without the statue, the base was spectacular and among the big crowds ferried out were 100 members of the Grand lodge of New York, and visiting Grand Officers. The US Army band played and then the working tools were presented to the Most Wor. Bro. William Brodie, Grand Master, who in turn, presented them to the Wardens.

A copper box was secreted under the cornerstone containing a list, on parchment, of the Grand Lodge masons of New York, 20 bronze medals of the American Presidents, all the current newspapers and a specially written poem entitled "Liberty". A newspaper report the next day said "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 having the stone firmly lowered into place. The Grand Master then struck three blows with the Gavel and declared the stone duly laid. The elements of consecration, corn, oil, salt and wine were then presented and scattered and addresses were given by various Senators, the Grand Master and the Governor.

In spite of the pouring rain, the whole ceremony was colourful, memorable and impressive.

The Statue of Liberty was still to come. Dismantled in Paris, every copper plate, beam & section were numbered & coded, 350 huge separate sections were packed into 214 cases & the whole shipment carried on a special 70 car train to the coast. It was craned onto the ship "Isere" & after a month at sea, arrived at Bedloe's Island in June 1885. It took 15 months to assemble the 125 tons of internal steel support columns and to clad them with the 80 tons of copper sheeting, 3/32 of an inch thick, the whole structure being bolted & riveted together. 300,000 rivets were used and the whole external structure weighed just over 100 tons. The final piece of gleaming copper, the sole of the right foot, was hammered into place on 23rd October 1886 and there she stood, a towering 306' 8" tall, the largest structure in New York at the time and the tallest statue ever built. A huge tricolour veiled her face. Arriving in America, Bro Bartholdi announced that the dream of his life had been accomplished.

Unveiling day was 28th October 1886 - over 10 years late - a public holiday was granted but sadly, the weather was again rainy & foggy too! But the spirits of the more than 1 million people lining the streets and shores in the bunting and tricolour decorated area could not be dampened. A parade of more than 20,000 passed through New York, led by the Grand Marshall and including many Masonic Lodges. As the parade passed, the office boys in Wall Street, the only area of the city working that day, unreeled hundreds of spools of "ticker" tape from the windows. The very first New York ticker-tape parade.

Groups of people were taken by steamer to Bedloe's Island and dignitaries from both nations were in abundance. The French Ambassador was present and members of some of America's wealthiest families - the same families who had not contributed a single cent to the statue's pedestal - now jockeyed for position in the seats of prominence. New York, said the papers, was one vast cheering throng.

Out on the water, the fog rolled in and out and one moment the statue could be seen clearly, then the next she would be shrouded in fog. The harbour teemed with ships of all sizes - tugs, ferries, freighters and dinghies all vying for the best position and with many minor collisions in the gloom - none reported as serious.

Bro. Bartholdi stood alone in the head of the statue. It was to be his task to pull a cord that would drop the French tricolour veil from the face of the statue. For his cue, Bartholdi was to watch for a signal from a boy on the ground 300 feet below, who would wave a handkerchief. The signal would come when Senator William Evarts, considered one of the most long-winded speakers of the day, finished his presentation speech.

Evarts began his speech, paused for a moment to take a breath, and the boy, thinking the speech was over, gave Bartholdi the signal.

Bartholdi pulled the silken cord and the tricolour veil fell, revealing the face of the Statue of Liberty & Freemasonry to the world. Whistles screamed, canons roared, bands played & fireworks lit the sky..... and Senator Evarts sat down.

President Cleveland spoke movingly and said, "We will not forget that Liberty has made this her home, nor shall her chosen altar be neglected", and it never has been Brethren. Then came the main speaker, W. Bro Chauncey M. Depew, a Senator and Railroad President; one of the most famous orators in American history, a member of Kane Lodge No. 454. The ceremony closed with a benediction pronounced by the Grand Chaplain

The statue has been described as magnificent in its conception, wonderful in design, & a masterpiece of engineering skill.

The gigantic figure, holding aloft a Torch of Freedom in her right hand and a Book of Laws in the other is quite awe inspiring as you approach by ferry. It rears splendidly into the sky, casting its light far beyond New York harbour.

Freemasons everywhere can be humble in the knowledge of the part that our Fraternity had in the creation and erection of this remarkable structure, and each should recall his vows & obligations to further spread the light of Freedom, Truth, Tolerance, and, Justice, which the Statue of Liberty and Freemasonry so grandly symbolises.

As part of W. Bro. Depew's words say:

"If a task is once begun, never leave it till it's done; Be the labour great or small, do it well or not at all.

So there you have it, WM & Brethren.

The Statue of Liberty & Freemasonry.

A truly remarkable enterprise; conceived, created, organised and completed through the driving influences of our Masonic predecessors. Brethren, we should be proud of them. The only fly in the ointment? The originators were mainly French.

Prepared by:

**THE EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT  
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