

The History of the Statue of Liberty by Dr. Michael Brantley

The sculptor who designed the Statue of Liberty, Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, was born in Colmar, France, on August 2, 1834. His mother, Charlotte Bartholdi (1801-1891) was the model for the statue.

A man of his time, Bartholdi wasn't alone in his passion for art on a grand scale. During the 19th century, large-scale public monuments were an especially popular art form. It was an age of ostentation, largely inspired by classical Greek and Roman civilizations. Most monuments reflected either the dress or architecture of these ancient times, however, it was a trip to Egypt that was to shift Bartholdi's artistic perspective from simply grand to colossal. The overwhelming size and mysterious majesty of the Pyramids and the Sphinx were awesome to the enthusiastic young sculptor.

In 1870, with the beginning of the Franco-Prussian War, Bartholdi temporarily changed careers; he became a major in the French army and was stationed in his home city of Colmar. When the Germans annexed the entire Alsace region, making its residents German citizens, the reality of the word "liberty" took on a new, personal meaning for Bartholdi. France's Third Republic, patterned somewhat after the democratic government of the United States, would emerge out of the ruins of the Franco-Prussian War. Meanwhile, partially as propaganda to advance the cause of those who were seeking the creation of a French republic, Laboulaye suggested that Bartholdi should travel to America.

Bartholdi sailed aboard the *Pereire* from Le Havre, France, for New York on June 8, 1871. He found the perfect spot for his monument to independence even before he landed on America's shores. Writing of his entrance into New York Harbor, he said: *"The picture that is presented to the view when one arrives in New York is marvelous, when, after some days of voyaging, in the pearly radiance of a beautiful morning is revealed the magnificent spectacle of those immense cities [Brooklyn and Manhattan], of those rivers extending as far as the eye can reach, festooned with masts and flags; when one awakes, so to speak, in the midst of that interior sea covered with vessels ... it is thrilling. It is, indeed, the New World, which appears in its majestic expanse, with the ardor of its glowing life."* New York was the perfect locale, he added, since it was "where people get their first view of the New World." Continuing, he said, "I've found an admirable spot. It is Bedloe's Island, in the middle of the bay.... The island belongs to the government; it's on national territory, belonging to all the states, just opposite the Narrows, which are, so to speak, the gateway to America."

His trip across America, like his trip to Egypt, filled him with amazement. He was stunned by the vastness of the prairies, the soaring spectacle of the Rockies, and the awesome sight of the Pacific Coast redwood forests. On his way home to France he wrote, "Everything in America is big... here, even the peas are big."

An appeal for funds to underwrite the cost of creating the statue was launched in French newspapers in September 1875. The committee's goal was to present the Statue of Liberty to the United States on July 4, 1876, in honor of America's centennial.

Bartholdi selected Caget, Gauthier and Company as his workshop. Its craftsmen were experts in the art of repoussé, a technique for creating sculptural forms by hammering sheet metal inside molds (Both stone and bronze had been discounted as materials due to their weight and expense). Lighter than cast metal, repoussé was the only method available that would allow such a monumental work to be shipped overseas. The intricate skeleton for the statue was to be designed by famed engineer Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel, already known for his brilliant iron railroad bridges, and later celebrated for the Eiffel Tower.

While construction of the statue was nearing completion in France, little was happening on the American side of the Atlantic. Many Americans outside of New York considered it New York's statue. "Let New York pay for it," they said, while America's newly rich self-made millionaires were saying and contributing nothing. The American half of the Franco-American Union, led by William M. Evarts, held the usual fund-raising events, but public apathy was almost as monumental as the statue itself. When Joseph Pulitzer heard that the Statue of Liberty was about to die from lack of funds, he saw his chance to take advantage of three distinct opportunities: to raise funds for the statue, to increase his newspaper's circulation, and to blast the rich for their selfishness.

Pulitzer set the fund-raising goal of the *World* at \$100,000. In its pages he taunted the rich (thereby increasing the paper's circulation among working-class people) and firmly planted the notion that the statue was a monument not just for New York City but, indeed, for all of America. Perhaps Pulitzer's cleverest ploy was the promise to publish the name of every single contributor in the pages of *The World*, no matter how small the contribution. The editorial that opened the fund-raising campaign set its tone. He wrote: "*The World* is the people's paper and it now appeals to the people to come forward and raise the money [for the statue's pedestal]." The statue, he said, was paid for by "the masses of the French people. Let us respond in like manner. Let us not wait for the millionaires to give this money. It is not a gift from the millionaires of France to the millionaires of America, but a gift of the whole people of France to the whole people of America."

Richard Morris Hunt, a highly respected designer of expensive homes, who was enormously popular with the wealthy set of New York and Newport, Rhode Island, submitted a number of drawings for the pedestal, and one was selected by the committee in 1884. The winning design was for an 89-foot-high pedestal that would sit upon a concrete foundation appearing to grow up from within the 11-pointed-star-shaped walls of Fort Wood. His fee for the project was \$1,000, which he promptly returned to the fund to reassemble the statue.

On August 5, 1884, the pedestal's cornerstone was laid with full Masonic honors. Most Worshipful Grand Master William A. Bodie presided at the ceremony. The Grand

Secretary first read a list of the contents of a box to be deposited with the cornerstone. The principal address was given by Deputy Grand Master Frank R. Lawrence: *"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..."*

On June 15, 1885, the Statue of Liberty - inside 214 wooden packing crates - arrived at Bedloe's Island.

On October 25, 1886, Bartholdi and his wife, accompanied by Count Ferdinand-Marie de Lesseps, chairman of the French Committee, arrived in America. They were greeted by the American Committee and Joseph Pulitzer. At Bedloe's Island, surrounded by newspaper reporters recording his words for posterity, Bartholdi simply said, "The dream of my life is accomplished."

The poem, *The New Colossus*, was written by Emma Lazarus to help raise funds for the construction of the statue's pedestal. Today, many people think of the Statue of Liberty and the poem as inseparable.

THE NEW COLOSSUS
Emma Lazarus, 1883

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here, at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"