Waiting for Miss Liberty

By Barbara D. Krasner

From the shores of Rouen, France, sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi watched the Isère steam toward the Atlantic Ocean. His 214 wooden crates were on board. "Goodbye, my daughter, Liberty," he said. "At last you are going home."

The waiting was over.
The idea for a statue as a gift of freedom and friendship from France to the United States had excited Bartholdi for 20 years. But it had frustrated him, too.

Designing the Statue
Things went fine at first. Bartholdi scouted America for the perfect location. He spotted a small island in New York Harbor.
"In this very place shall be raised the Statue of Liberty, as grand as the idea which it embodies, casting radiance upon the two worlds," he wrote. Then he got down to work. He designed the statue to look like his mother. He selected iron and steel for the frame and copper for the statue itself. He worked with the best engineers in the world to make her tall and proud.

Running into Problems
But soon a lack of money delayed his progress. He had wanted to complete his statue in time to help America celebrate its 100th birthday—the year of liberty—at the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition. But all he had to show was the statue's right arm and torch. Later, these stood in front of New York City's Madison Square Park.

The world kept waiting for Miss Liberty. There still wasn't enough money to build her or her pedestal.
France promised to pay for the statue. By 1880, France collected the money from more than 100 towns and cities and 100,000 people.

America promised to pay for the pedestal. It was a huge job. Some might even have said it was colossal.
Famous American artists, writers, and actors donated their works to an auction in 1883. More than 1,000 people received

The Statue of Liberty was shipped from France to America in crates, complete with instructions on how to put it together.

1876: The Statue of Liberty's right arm and torch on display at the Philadelphia Exposition.

Photos courtesy of the Library of Congress.
invitations to the auction and an exhibition. On the opening night, the head of the Pedestal Fund said, “Here is everything charming, ... elegant, ... beautiful, and ... splendid. It is such an exhibition as our country never saw before.”

But the exhibition and its auction failed to raise enough money.

The Statue Comes Together

Hungarian immigrant Joseph Pulitzer, owner of New York World newspaper, came up with an idea. He printed daily pleas for money. He wrote, “The statue, the noble gift of our young sister republic is ready for us . . . and we stand haggling and begging and scheming in order to raise enough money.”

Pulitzer’s plan worked.

Money poured in from all over America from rich and poor and children, too. Jane M. gave 50 cents and wrote, “I am only a sewing girl, but I am in full sympathy with your effort.” Another child scribbled, “I am a wee bit of a girl, yet I am ever so glad that I was born in a time to contribute. . . . When I am old enough, I will ask my Mama and Papa to take me to see the statue, and I will always be proud that I began my career by sending you one dollar to aid in so good a cause.” The World printed the name of each person who contributed, down to the last penny.

Finally, Miss Liberty could have her pedestal.

Now it was time to build.

Once in New York, Bartholdi’s crates traveled by barge to Bedloe’s Island. There, small railway cars carried them on makeshift tracks to the foot of the pedestal. It took workers several months to put Miss Liberty together, using a system of numbers, letters, and symbols that had been marked on each piece back in France.

At last, two sets of steel beams locked into the Statue of Liberty’s steel skeleton as it rose to its full height of 151 feet on top of its 89-foot pedestal. Nothing could shake the statue loose.

And on October 28, 1886, hundreds of thousands of people huddled under their umbrellas in the rain and wind for the statue’s dedication. And there was President Grover Cleveland accepting this gift from France—Liberty Enlightening the World—on behalf of the United States. She was well worth the wait.

1885: Bartholdi and his statue make headlines in America.

Liberty Facts
25 windows in the crown.
7 rays in the crown
(for 7 continents, 7 seas).
The date July IV, MDCCLXXVI
(July 4, 1776), is written on the tablet.
Torch (replaced in 1986) made of copper and covered in 24-karat gold leaf.
305 feet from ground to tip of torch.

1886: The invitation to the statue’s dedication on Bedloe’s Island, New York.

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