

Let Freedom Ring



In the early 1700s, the colonies of North America were still developing their identities and civic infrastructures. In Pennsylvania, construction was underway for the erection of their State House in Philadelphia, under the supervision of Alexander Hamilton. The crowning touch was to be a beautiful bell of “such size that its voice could be heard not only in the city but all the countryside thereabouts.”

Great pride was taken that the State House was being built using native materials: wood from Delaware, bricks home-kilned in New Jersey... it was truly going to be a seat of American power fashioned by American hands. Which is why some felt uneasy that its bell would be commissioned to a British bell-maker. But Edward Warner and Thomas Leech, who served on the bell committee, argued that the British were renowned bell makers and that where it was made was not as important as how it was made... for the bell “should give out a clap like thunder.”

Finally the bell arrived and was installed in the completed state house. As an excited crowd gathered for the initial test, at the first strike of the clapper, the bell split and went dead. Instead of shipping the bell back to England for repair, it was decided to trust American workmen and the bell was given to Charles Stow and John Pass for recasting. They melted down the bell, added copper to the mixture and poured

it into a newly constructed mold.

A second test was scheduled. This time, the bell sounded... but the noise was nothing like the clarion peal people were expecting. So dreadful was the sound that the bell was again lowered and given back to Pass and Stow to recast for a third time. Upon completion, it was once more hoisted into the tower and as a now somber audience waited, the bell was struck. This time, people heard a deep and resonating sound that matched the quote etched onto the side of the crown. "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land and unto all the inhabitants thereof."

It, of course, became known as the Liberty Bell and Thomas Leech, who served on the committee charged with its installation, married one of my 6th great-grandaunts.

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