



Declaration of Independence

This document was drafted by Thomas Jefferson in 1776. It summarized ideals of self-evident truths and listed grievance against the King. This was done to show the world that the colonies were independent from England. This document is kept in Washington D.C. in the National Archives.



To learn more visit: <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration.html>

The Star-Spangled Banner

In the summer of 1813, Mary Pickersgill was contracted to sew two flags for Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Maryland. The one that became the Star-Spangled Banner was a 30 x 42-foot garrison flag.

Francis Scott Key watched the twenty-five hour bombardment of Fort McHenry from a British troopship anchored four miles away. On September 14, 1814, the first light of dawn revealed a flag still flying over the fort. British ships were withdrawing from Baltimore, and Key realized that the United States had survived the battle and stopped the enemy advance. Moved by the sight, he wrote a song celebrating "that star-spangled banner" as a symbol of America's triumph and endurance. The song became our national anthem.

The flag is displayed at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C.



To learn more visit:

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/preservation-project.aspx>

The Flag and its Colors

In May of 1776, Betsy Ross reported that she sewed the first American flag, also known as "Old Glory." It had thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation. The flag underwent several transformations as more states were added.

Today the flag consists of thirteen horizontal stripes, seven red alternating with 6 white. The stripes represent the original 13 colonies, and the stars represent the 50 states of the Union. The colors of the flag are symbolic as well: Red symbolizes Hardiness and Valor; White symbolizes Purity and Innocence and Blue represents Vigilance, Perseverance and Justice.

Nobody knows what happened to the original flag sewn by Betsy Ross but several replicas exist.



To learn more visit: <http://www.usa-flag-site.org/history.shtml>

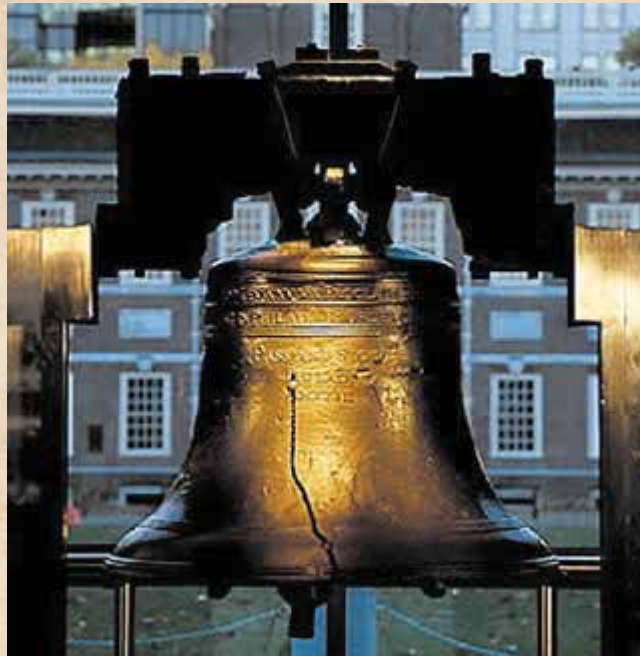
The Liberty Bell

The Liberty Bell was ordered by the Pennsylvania Assembly of 1751 to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of William Penn's 1701 Charter of Privileges. It was cast in London, England and brought to America shortly thereafter.

Even though the bell is made of copper and tin, and weighs an astonishing 2,000 pounds it was cracked and repaired two times, unsuccessfully. The bell remains cracked to this day.

Another significant feature that appears on the Liberty Bell is this inscription: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof - Lev. XXV, v. x. By order of the Assembly of the Province of Pennsylvania [sic] for the State House in Philada."

Today, the Liberty Bell hangs in Philadelphia at the Liberty Bell Pavilion on Market Street and is still rung each July 4th.



To learn more visit: <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/symbols/libertybell.html>

National Motto: "In God We Trust"

The original motto of the United States was, "E Pluribus Unum." Which translated from the original Latin means, "One from many" or "One from many parts." Congress being predominantly Federalist, chose the motto for its inclusion of all states, equal in submission under one Federal government.

Secretary of Congress, Charles Thomson, was appointed to design the National Seal. On June 10, 1782 Congress approved the official design we use today, depicting an eagle with a heart-shaped shield, holding arrows and an olive branch in its claws. The motto "E Pluribus Unum" appeared on a scroll held in its beak. The seal was first used on September 16, 1782 and first engraved on federal coins in 1795.

It was not until after 1864 that the motto, "In God We Trust" was adapted from the final stanza in the Star Spangled Banner, written by Francis Scott Key.

Today this motto is found on U.S. Coins, and serves as a reminder of the faith that united our nation.



National Bird: Bald Eagle

The bald eagle was made the national bird of the United States in 1782. The Founding Fathers wanted to choose an animal that was unique to the United States. The bald eagle was chosen because it symbolized strength, courage, freedom, and immortality.

In the 1600's an estimated 25,000 to 50,000 bald eagles inhabited North America but numbers dwindled and in 1967, the bald eagle was included on the Endangered Species List. Federal laws, such as the Bald Eagle Protection Act, protect the bald eagle and have led to the recovery of bald eagle populations. In 2007, the Bald Eagle population increased enough to be removed from the Endangered Species List.

The image of the bald eagle can be found on the U.S. Great Seal and the one-dollar bill.



To learn more visit: <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/symbols/eagle.html>

Founding Fathers

Delegates to the Constitutional Convention

In May of 1787, 55 delegates from all but one of the thirteen colonies met at Independence Hall in Philadelphia. The Constitutional Convention was called in order to revise the Articles of Confederation. They felt the articles did not give the federal government enough authority – especially where taxation and the U.S. Army was concerned – and thought it was expedient to draft a new proposal, later known as The U.S. Constitution.

Almost all of them were well-educated men of means who were dominant in their communities and states, and many were also prominent in national affairs. They came from diverse backgrounds and claimed different religious affiliations, but all had the same purpose of uniting America and granting equal protection to all states and citizens.

Of the 55 delegates only 39 actually signed the Constitution, but that was just enough to ratify the newly drafted document. After the convention, Washington and Madison each served as President of the United States; Hamilton, McHenry, Madison, and Randolph attained Cabinet posts; nineteen men became U.S. senators; thirteen served in the House of Representatives; four served as federal judges; four more as Associate Justices of the Supreme Court; and seven others were named to diplomatic missions for the nation.



To learn more visit:

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_founding_fathers.html

The White House

Irish-born architect, James Hoban, designed the White House and the structure was completed in 1800. Although George Washington played a key role in its development and design, he is the only President to never live in the White House because his presidential term ended in 1797. The first president to occupy the White House was his successor, John Adams.

The house was captured and burned down by the British in August 1814, during the War of 1812. It was later restored. In 1929 another fire broke out in the West Wing during President Herbert Hoover's Term. Despite perils, renovations and new residents almost every eight years, the White House exterior stone walls have remained intact for more than 200 years.

The White House has six floors--two basements, two public floors, and two floors for the First Family. The Oval Office, quite possibly the most well-known room in the White House, is occupied by the President and used for signing bills and sending out Executive Orders, as well as meetings with staff and guests.

The White House is located at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. and is partly open to the public for daily tours. Visitors are shown several rooms, primarily those used for entertaining foreign diplomats.



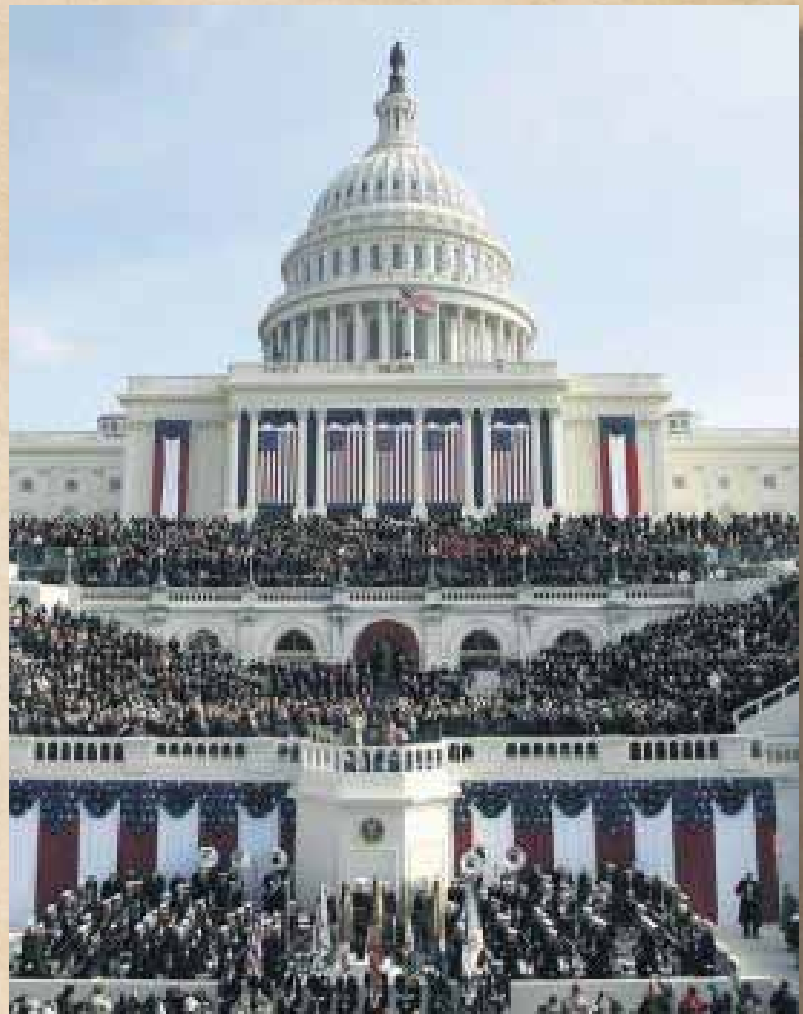
To learn more visit: <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/symbols/whitehouse.html>

The U.S. Capitol

Our nation's capitol, commonly referred to as Capitol Hill, is located in Washington, DC. It has been the home of the House of Representatives and the Senate since 1800, since it was moved from its original location –Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

William Thornton, an amateur artist from the West Indies, submitted a design for the Capitol Hill design contest. 16 other applicants were rejected. His model was accepted in the fall of 1792. President Washington liked it because of its “grandeur, simplicity and convenience.”

American sculptor, Thomas Crawford made the statue of a woman, which represents freedom that sits on top of the white iron dome. The height of the Capitol from the baseline on the east front to the top of the statue is 287.5 ft (87.6 m).



To learn more visit: <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/symbols/capitol.html>

The Supreme Court

Located in Washington, DC near the Capitol, this building has housed the Supreme Court since 1935. Initially, the Court met in the Merchants Exchange Building in New York City, and then was moved to Philadelphia when it became the capitol in 1790. Finally, the Supreme Court was moved to its current location in Washington, DC, where the permanent structure was designed by Cass Gilbert and established for the Court.

Sixteen marble columns are situated at the main entrance of the Court. The phrase "Equal Justice Under Law" is situated above the main entrance to the Supreme Court Building. Above is a group of nine figures, sculpted by Robert Aitken. Each figure represents someone or an ideology contributing to and consequently framing the Supreme Court.

On either side of the main steps are seated marble figures. These large statues are the work of Sculptor James Earle Fraser made the two marble structures on both sides of the main steps. The one on the left is a female figure, the Contemplation of Justice. The one on the right is a male figure, the Guardian or Authority of Law.



To learn more visit: http://bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/symbols/supreme_court.html

The Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was first published in 1892 by Francis Bellamy, assistant editor of The Youth's Companion magazine in Boston, Massachusetts to celebrate the 400th anniversary of America's discovery. It was first used in public schools to celebrate Columbus Day on October 12, 1892, but the Pledge did not receive official recognition by Congress until June 22, 1942. The words "under God" were later added by a Congressional act approved on June 14, 1954.



To learn more visit: <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/symbols/pledgeallegiance.html>

Uncle Sam

Much obscurity remains surrounding the origin of the famous Uncle Sam. Although he is most commonly known for his role during World War I, the man who inspired a nation actually lived during the War of 1812.

In 1961 Congress resolved all disputes by declaring that Uncle Sam was named after Samuel Wilson, a business man from New York. Wilson supplied the U.S. Army with beef in barrels. The barrels were labeled "U.S." One of Wilson's workers claimed "U.S." stood for "Uncle Sam." From then on, Wilson became the embodiment of the Federal Government.

What most people don't know is that Sam Wilson looked nothing like the Uncle Sam cartoon depictions. The many artists who drew him used their "creative license" to design what they wanted. Thomas Nast was one of the most well-known of these cartoon artists, but the most famous picture of Uncle Sam was drawn by artist James Montgomery. His drawing appeared on the "I want you" Army recruiting poster. The poster was designed in World War I, and was used again in World War II. Over four million copies were printed between 1917 and 1918.



To learn more visit: <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/symbols/unclesam.html>