Henry Seybert and the Centennial Clock and Bell at Independence Hall

Of the three tower clocks and their associated bells which have been used at Independence Hall, the combination which presently occupies the tower has the most unusual history. Its story, however, is less known than either of the others. When the present bell tolls, as it has for more than one hundred years, those who hear it merely think of the time of day. Few have ever heard of the eminent scientist, Adam Seybert, whose fortune made its purchase possible, or of his son, Henry, who, during the Centennial Year, 1876, presented it to the City of Philadelphia.

Adam Seybert received his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1793 when he was only twenty years old. During the next four years, he studied at London, Edinburgh, and Paris, and was the first American to study at Gottingen. At the École des Mines in Paris, he enrolled in mineralogy under Abbé René Just Haüy, the “father of crystallography,” a course which opened to him virtually a second career.

In 1797, Adam was admitted to membership in the American Philosophical Society, and on March 10 of that year read a paper before it on the subject “Experiments and Observations on Land and Sea Air.” Within a few years, he became one of the Society’s councilors. He also became an honorary member of New York’s Philosophical and Literary Society, a member of the American Medical Society, and of the Chemical Society of Philadelphia, as well as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Gottingen.¹

After his return from Europe, Adam lived at 191 North Second Street, Philadelphia. Just a short distance down that street, at No. 168, he operated a chemical laboratory where he manufactured the nation's first mercury compounds. In 1802 he bought the apothecary shop of Robert Bass at 114 High Street. The city directories listed him there as a "druggist" until 1811. Meanwhile he found time to accumulate the finest collection of minerals in America, one which he sold to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia in 1814. No other American at that time matched his competence as a mineralogist. The eminent Professor Benjamin Silliman of Yale confessed that in 1803 he packed the College's entire collection of minerals into a box and hauled it down to Philadelphia to get the lot identified by Seybert.

Adam married Maria Sarah Pepper in 1798. Her father, Henry Pepper, was a wealthy Philadelphia brewer and the progenitor of a family distinguished for its doctors and philanthropists. On December 23, 1801, Maria Seybert died giving birth to their son, Henry (named for his grandfather). Her death left Adam with the combined duties of father and mother. As Henry grew, Adam derived great satisfaction in sharing with him as much of his knowledge as the boy could absorb.

In 1809, Adam turned his attention to politics. Benjamin Say, a Philadelphia congressman, had resigned at the close of the first session of the eleventh Congress, and Adam Seybert was elected to replace him. Adam's official duties in Washington began on November 27, 1809. Presumably, he took Henry, then eight years old, to Washington with him.

Adam was re-elected to the twelfth and thirteenth Congresses. During this period the War of 1812 complicated his busy life. In addition to his duties at Congress, where he had been appointed Chairman of a House Committee for "inquiring about the enemy
flags taken by the United States Forces, and to submit a proposal as to what should be done about them," his chemical works demanded increased attention. He had been manufacturing mercury compounds, but when war became imminent he undertook the production of much of the nitre (potassium nitrate) needed for making gunpowder.

Although Adam was not elected to the next session of Congress, he was elected to the fifteenth. During that session, 1817-1819, he managed to find time to compile a monumental work: *Statistical Annals: Embracing Views of the Population, Commerce, Navigation, Fisheries . . . of the United States of America: Founded on Official Documents: Commencing on the Fourth of March Seventeen Hundred and Eighty-Nine and Ending on the Twentieth of April Eighteen Hundred and Eighteen* (Philadelphia, 1818).

Henry had reached the age of seventeen during the year in which Adam's classic was published. Like most American fathers, Adam wanted his son to have the best possible education, and soon after Congress adjourned on March 3, 1819, Henry was enrolled at Adam's Alma Mater, the École des Mines in Paris, with mineralogy as his major subject. His studies were completed, apparently, in 1821, because both men returned to Philadelphia that year.

Fresh from the most up-to-date courses in the subject, and aided by his father's fine reputation, Henry quickly became the leading mineralogist not only in Philadelphia, but in all of America. In 1822, he analyzed a "sulphuret of molybdenum" from Chester, Pennsylvania; some "chromate of iron" from Maryland and Pennsylvania; a "pyroxene" and a "colophonite" from Williamsborough, New York; a "magnesium garnet with chrysoberyl" from Haddam, Connecticut; and a "chondrodite" from New Jersey. In his analysis of this last mineral, Henry announced that fluorine was one of the essential elements of its composition. Believing it to be a new species of mineral, he proposed that it be named "Maclureite," in honor of William Maclure, noted geologist and president of Philadelphia's

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6 The 803 pages of this document were translated into French and published in Paris in 1820. *DAB*. The work has been republished as recently as 1969 as a part of *American Classics in History and Social Sciences*. 
Academy of Natural Sciences. One of Henry’s American competitors, Thomas Nuttal, objected to his having received sole credit for the fluorine discovery, and a considerable debate took place. However, Henry easily established his claim, although the controversy dragged on well into 1823.\textsuperscript{7}

An event which pleased Henry Seybert greatly occurred on January 16, 1824, when, following in his father’s footsteps, he was made a member of the American Philosophical Society. At the age of twenty-two years and three weeks, he was one of the youngest persons to have been so honored.\textsuperscript{8} His proud father accompanied him to his first Society meeting on February 6; it was the last one Adam ever attended. Probably because of ill health, he was unable to be present on March 5, 1824, when Henry read a paper on chrysoberyls. Sometime thereafter, father and son left for Paris, where Adam died on May 2, 1825, and was buried in Paris’ Père Lachaise cemetery.\textsuperscript{9}

After losing his father, Henry’s involvement with mineralogy dwindled rapidly. He undertook only one more scientific study: in early 1830 he analyzed the Tennessee meteorite first reported by Bowen.\textsuperscript{10} Aside from the bequests in his will, he made only one other contribution worthy of mention to the American Philosophical Society: he sent the Society a daguerreotype from Paris in 1839.\textsuperscript{11} His reputation as a mineralogist was destined to live on, however. In 1832, a fellow scientist, Thomas G. Clemson, analyzed a mineral specimen found in Amity, New Jersey. It, too, was a new species, and he proposed that it be called \textit{Seybertite}, in honor of Henry’s

\textsuperscript{7} Robinson, 245–247. William Maclure was president of the Academy of Natural Sciences from 1817 to 1840. \textit{DAB}.
\textsuperscript{8} Robinson, 242.
\textsuperscript{9} According to the \textit{Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society}, Adam Seybert is not listed as attending any meetings subsequent to Feb. 16, 1824. Robinson, 244, says that in Paris Henry was his father’s “constant companion and solace, during the critical disease which ended his father’s patriotic and useful life.”
\textsuperscript{10} Silliman, \textit{An Address . . .}, 74. Bowen was probably George Thomas Bowen (1803–1828), professor of chemistry at the University of Nashville, Tennessee, 1825–1828. \textit{Appleton’s Cyclopaedia of American Biography}.
\textsuperscript{11} On Jan. 3, 1840, “A specimen of the Daguerreotype was presented to the society, on the part of Mr. Henry Seybert now in Paris.” Minute Book (Sept. 20, 1839–Sept. 18, 1840), American Philosophical Society Library.
outstanding achievements. The Seybert name thus became immortalized. Seybertite may still be found in dictionaries and in numerous publications on minerals.

Honors meant nothing to twenty-four-year-old Henry in comparison with the loss of his father. The two had been inseparable since the day he was born, and he had constantly relied upon his father for companionship, advice, and financial assistance. Adam had been quite a wealthy man; his estate was estimated at close to $300,000—a considerable amount for that period. Although he bequeathed a few thousand dollars to charitable organizations in Philadelphia ($1,000 for the education of the deaf and dumb, and lesser amounts to such institutions as the Philadelphia Dispensary and the Orphan Asylum), the bulk of his estate went to Henry. This large inheritance, however, failed to afford Henry much comfort. He turned to the Bible for solace, and in the course of his reading came across the oft-repeated phrase, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Fearing that this passage applied particularly to his situation, Henry consulted high-ranking prelates of the church, including the Prince de Croy, Archbishop of Rouen, to see what he should do about it. In every instance, he was assured that the Scripture referred only to the sinful rich, not to those who gave liberally to the poor. He was further assured that he could become a truly good man if he would endeavor to increase his wealth so that he might contribute even more generously. Although he resolved to follow that advice, this passage in the Bible continued to disturb Henry Seybert for the rest of his life.

Henry never married, nor did he make many close friends. He became a "loner," one who seldom talked about himself. Perhaps the closest friendship he had was with Moncure Robinson, who, on October 5, 1883, presented an "Obituary Notice of Henry Seybert" before the American Philosophical Society. Robinson first met

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13 Robinson, 246.
14 DAB.
15 Robinson, 253-254.
Henry in Paris, soon after Adam Seybert's death. More than half a century later, he said of Henry that "His disposition was taciturn, and he preferred generally listening to the opinions and conversations of others to taking part in conversation himself, and but for the request of the Society to prepare this tribute to his memory, I should probably never have known how highly he was estimated at the time of our first meeting, by eminent chemists and mineralogists, of both Europe and America."  

Henry seemed reluctant to leave the burial place of his father, and two or three years passed before he returned to Philadelphia. Even then, he continued to make frequent trips back to Paris. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, while Henry was faced with his difficult emotional experience, spiritualistic phenomena began attracting much public attention in France. The movement soon spread to America where it was hailed as "modern" spiritualism. In April 1855 an article in *The North American Review* claimed that there were at least two million spiritualists in America.  

They defined their belief as: the Science, Philosophy and Religion of continuous life, based upon the demonstrated fact of communication, by means of mediumship, with those who live in the Spirit World. Spiritualism is a science because it investigates, analyzes and classifies facts and manifestations, demonstrated from the spirit side of life. Spiritualism is a philosophy because it studies the laws of nature both on the seen and unseen sides of life and bases its conclusions upon present observed facts of past ages and conclusions drawn therefrom, when sustained by reason and by results of observed facts of the present day. Spiritualism is a religion because it strives to understand and to comply with the Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Laws of Nature which are the laws of God.

In short, spiritualists believe that one's personality and power of communication are not terminated by death, but can be activated with the help of a medium.

Because of the promise it offered to make it possible for him to communicate with his departed parents, Henry was irresistibly

16 Ibid., 245.
18 Ibid., 360.
drawn to this philosophy. Just how early he accepted it without mental reservation is not known, but the year 1851 has reasonable possibilities. During that year, there was an especially active drive for members among American spiritualists. During that year also, Henry purchased two lots (Nos. 39 and 40, Section D) at the Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia, and had the remains of several of his relatives reinterred in one of them.\textsuperscript{19} Spiritualist influences might well have caused him to take that action.

For all of twenty years after the death of his father, Henry never settled down at any one place. On some occasions he was reported as being in Philadelphia, at others in New York, or in Paris. No doubt he stayed mostly at boarding houses, a mode of living that could account for the absence of his name in the Philadelphia city directories prior to 1846. From that date forward, however, his name is listed. His residence for more than a decade was given as the southwest corner of 11th and Chestnut Streets. Beginning in 1860, the listing was changed to “Seybert, Henry, gentleman, h. 926 Walnut,” and remained so until his death on March 3, 1883.\textsuperscript{20}

Once having settled in Philadelphia, he began taking a rather unique part in civic affairs. For one thing, he established a soft drink business in an effort to reduce the amount of alcoholic beverages consumed in the city. On a later occasion, he established a bakery shop which was intended to improve the quality of bread.\textsuperscript{21}

That shop, run for him by a Mrs. Elizabeth Godber, was located at 1229 Locust Street. She became one of the many beneficiaries of his will, and a witness to his signature on it.\textsuperscript{22}

One of the major items in his will was aimed at securing indisputable evidence of the authenticity of spiritualism. The bequest read as follows:

\textsuperscript{19} The inscriptions on the Seybert monuments in Laurel Hill Cemetery indicate that the remains of Sebastian and Barbara Seybert (Henry's grandparents), Caroline Seybert (a sister) and Maria Sarah Seybert were transferred there Nov. 11, 1851.

\textsuperscript{20} Philadelphia City Directories, 1828–1883.

\textsuperscript{21} Robinson, 255.

\textsuperscript{22} Will of Henry Seybert, 4, 9–10, 18. References to the will will be made from the printed copy (n.p., n.d.) at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (the copy of Wm. B. Robins, a witness to the will), rather than to the original (No. 293, 1883) on file at the Register of Wills, Philadelphia.
To the University of Pennsylvania, Sixty thousand Dollars to establish a Chair of Moral Philosophy for the investigation and teaching of Religious, Moral, and Intellectual Truth, to be known as the “Adam Seybert Chair,” or “Adam Seybert Professorship.” Provided, however, that the principles and phenomena of what is known as “Spiritualism” shall be fully investigated by the Professor who occupies this Professorship.\textsuperscript{23}

The University’s report on spiritualism, published in 1887,\textsuperscript{24} rejected all of the claims set forth by its advocates. Fortunately, or unfortunately, it came too late to effect any changes in Henry’s own belief.

It is a matter of public record that in 1876 Henry Seybert gave to the City of Philadelphia the present clock and bell that occupy the steeple of Independence Hall. Most of the reports of the circumstances surrounding the gift, however, have been confusing. Much of the confusion has, in all probability, resulted from a failure to recognize that two efforts, ten years apart, were made by Seybert to accomplish his purpose.

The inspiration for his first effort was described, without any reference to the source of the information, in the July, 1915, issue of \textit{New Business}, a house organ of Philadelphia’s United Gas Improvement Company. The following sentences have been selected from that account:

Mr. Seybert was a deep student of science. . . . He became interested in the question of spiritual mediums, and during the course of a reading in New York City, the medium promised to bring him into communication with his dead mother. . . . It was not until a number of years afterward that Seybert admitted that the spiritual meeting had caused him to make this splendid gift to the city. He claimed that during the conversation with his mother, she had begged him to buy a fine clock and bell as a

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}, 8. The Rev. George Stuart Fullerton (1859-1925), who became the first Adam Seybert Professor of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania, was secretary of the commission appointed to investigate the truth about spiritualism. Dr. William Pepper, Provost of the University and Seybert’s cousin, was chairman of the commission. Edward Potts Cheyney, \textit{History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1940} (Philadelphia, 1940), 319; \textit{Biographical Catalogue of the Matriculates of the College [University of Pennsylvania] . . . 1749-1893} (Philadelphia, 1894), xxiv.

\textsuperscript{24} This report was republished in Philadelphia in 1920 under the title \textit{Preliminary Report of the Commission Appointed by the University of Pennsylvania to Investigate Modern Spiritualism in Accord with the Request of the Late Henry Seybert, with a Foreword by H. H. Furness, Jr.}
Although this seance and its effect cannot be substantiated, they are consistent with Henry's interests and sympathies. Whatever his inspiration, he did initiate a subscription for a bell for Independence Hall early in the 1860s.

According to a historical note published by Charles S. Keyser in 1892, "It is a fact of great interest that the first subscriber to this bell was Abraham Lincoln, for the work was started by private subscription. . . ." The major biographies of Lincoln contain no references to his having made any contribution to this project, so the following evidence is presented to support Keyser's claim. In sworn testimony in a court action wherein this same Charles Keyser sued Seybert's estate for $3,000 for services he claimed to have performed for Seybert, Mrs. Elizabeth S. Blade testified:

He [Henry Seybert] said that . . . he was desiring to have these bells paid for by public contributions, by dollar subscriptions, which he said were started by Abraham Lincoln, and I think Mr. Seward; and he thought his fellow citizens would come forward spontaneously and make up these $15,000, or something of the kind. . . . He then mentioned that the people had not come forward spontaneously, in fact, I think Abraham Lincoln and Mr. Seward were the only persons who ever gave a dollar for these bells, and he had to pay the $15,000 himself.

The next and perhaps the best evidence appears in Seybert's last will and testament: "I give and bequeath to the City of Philadelphia . . . the signatures of President Lincoln and his Cabinet and of many Senators and Representatives, to the original project of the bell." Apparently, a number of Senators, Representatives, and Lincoln's Cabinet members had at least been approached to join.

27 This statement is included in a stenographer's transcript of hearings on the estate of Henry Seybert before Judge Clement B. Penrose on June 14, 1887, in the Orphan's Court of Philadelphia County. It could possibly be the source of Keyser's comment in his "State-House Bell."
28 Will of Henry Seybert, 9. The present whereabouts of these signatures is unknown.
Lincoln in contributing a dollar each to the project. For lack of public support, however, the original project collapsed.

About ten years later, Philadelphians were becoming excited over the approaching Centennial, and were planning an international exhibition. Encouraged by these circumstances and desirous of creating a memorial to his parents and a sister he never knew (perhaps sparked by a spiritualistic seance), Seybert revived his clock-and-bell project. His past experience, however, caused him to forsake his earlier plan of soliciting contributions. He decided to pay the entire cost himself. On April 5, 1875, he wrote the following letter to the Select and Common Councils of the City of Philadelphia:

Gentlemen:

Feeling considerable interest in the approaching Centennial Celebration of the Declaration of American Independence, and under the conviction that it is the duty of our fellow-citizens to contribute whatever lies in their power to make it a great national success, I beg leave respectfully, with that purpose in view, to make you the following offer, with the request that you will enact such ordinances as will enable the same to be carried into effect.

I will enter into an obligation, under a forfeiture of the value of $20,000 in United States bonds, to be deposited with the Pennsylvania Company for Insurance on Lives and Granting Annuities, to have manufactured in our country, and at my expense, a large bell made of the usual composition, to weigh 13,000 pounds, which is as heavy as the steeple will safely bear, and present the same in ample time before the Fourth of July, 1876, to the authorities of the City of Philadelphia, to be erected in the belfry of Independence Hall, with the following inscription upon it, viz.:

"July the Fourth, 1876."

And the arms of the United States of North America, with their motto "E Pluribus Unum," together with the two Scriptural verses: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth, good will toward men," Luke II, 14. "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof," Leviticus XXV, 10. And the following:

"Presented to the City of Philadelphia,

for the Belfry of Independence Hall in the names of

Adam and Maria Sarah Seybert, and Caroline, their daughter

By their son and brother."

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I will further agree to have manufactured in our own country a first class City clock of superior workmanship, and present the same in connection with the bell, with the same names inscribed upon it.

I beg leave to submit the following programme as part of the ceremonies connected with the observance of our Centennial Anniversary.
The bell to be rung for the first time on the Fourth of July, 1876, precisely at noon, by striking thirteen peals, one for each of the original states. Simultaneously with the first peal the Scriptural motto, Glory to God in the highest &c., to be telegraphed by the President through the Atlantic cables to foreign nations.
The usual ceremonies of prayer and thanksgiving, the reading of the Declaration of American Independence, and the Emancipation Proclamation, and the delivery of the oration to be followed by seventy-six peals of the bell in recognition of the day to be celebrated.
Should sufficient funds be collected to warrant the laying of the cornerstone of a Centennial monument for Independence Square, one hundred peals of the bell to be given on that occasion.
At the close of the day, precisely at midnight, one peal to be sounded for each State and Territory in the Union at that time.

Very respectfully

Henry Seybert,
926 Walnut Street.

Philadelphia, April 5th, 1875.

Henry's letter brought unexpected objections from local newspapers. The complaint was not with the gift itself, but rather with placing the Seybert names on both the clock and bell. There were also objections from those who contended that a 13,000-pound bell was too heavy, and ringing it might damage the belfry. The existing bell, cast by John Wilbank of Philadelphia in 1828, weighed only a little more than one-third as much, 4,600 pounds. These objections, however, were soon settled. City officials agreed to spend up to $1,000 for reinforcing the building, and Seybert agreed to delete the Seybert family names. As it finally turned out, the inscription was changed to read: "Presented to the city of Philadelphia July 4, 1876, for the belfry of Independence Hall, by a citizen."

Shortly after the agreement was reached, an ordinance was passed in City Councils accepting Seybert's gift as amended, and calling

31 Journal of the Select Council of Philadelphia (1875), I (Appendix 209), 860-864. The inscription is taken from the bell itself.
for the clock and bell to be in operating condition by the date Seybert had promised, July 4, 1876. Time to accomplish that goal was already becoming short, so it behooved Henry to take prompt action if he expected to meet this deadline.

Among those he consulted regarding the clock was a watch and chronometer maker, W. E. Harpur, 407 Chestnut Street, who was then the Philadelphia representative of the Seth Thomas Clock Company of Thomaston, Connecticut. Seth Thomas began building tower clocks in 1872, when it bought out the firm of H. S. Hotchkiss of New York and moved it to Plymouth Hollow. Their Tower Clock Division had already gained the reputation of building the best tower clocks in the country. A deal was accordingly closed with Harpur, and on June 11, 1875, Seybert’s order for “1 Lge. Mov’t Ext. Size,” costing $6,000 was entered in the books of the clock company. Seybert paid for it in three installments: $3,000 on November 20, 1875; $1,500 on the following July 29; and the remaining $1,500 on August 14, 1876. From these payments Harpur received a commission totaling $575.32

This gravity-escapement, 6,000-pound clock is still in operation. Its cast iron frame is about ten feet long and eight feet high. It is provided with a small dial, six inches in diameter, which registers the same time as that on the main dials. The fan which slows down the rate at which the bell is struck by the clapper is about five feet in diameter. The enormous pendulum is approximately fourteen feet long. It weighs 750 pounds and takes two seconds to swing in just one direction. In tests, it was found that when once set in motion, it would continue swinging for twelve hours without any pressure being applied from the works. The time works are run by a weight of 750 pounds, whereas the striking works are run by two weights of 1,750 pounds each. The total of the three weights thus amounts to 4,250 pounds. They are enclosed within boxes about twenty inches square and suspended on stout ropes or cables which run from the clock tower to the basement.

Because of the slow motion of the pendulum, this clock’s design is much simpler than that of the ordinary mantel clock. Several of

32 Seth Thomas Clock Company Ledger (1875), 35; Seth Thomas Division, General Time Corporation, to author, Mar. 4, 1966.
its cogwheels are more than four feet in diameter. The clock's four main dials face in general toward the four cardinal points of the compass. They are about ten feet in diameter and were originally lit at night by five gas jets.\textsuperscript{33}

In September, 1876, Seybert wrote the Seth Thomas Clock Company that their Tower Clock in Independence Hall was giving "entire satisfaction."\textsuperscript{34} It was soon found, however, that the task of cranking up the more than two tons of weights from the basement to the clock's elevation every week was by no means an easy one. But no relief was afforded those who took care of the clock until the Sesquicentennial Exposition was about to take place in Philadelphia. Then, the city officials, fearful that the chore might be neglected and that the most celebrated clock in the country might run down during the festivities, called upon William A. Heine to install an electric winding facility.\textsuperscript{35} When that change was completed, a brass plate bearing the following statement was attached to the clock:

\textbf{AUTOMATIC WINDING UNIT}

Installed by Wm. A. Heine, clockmaker, Philadelphia. Put in operation May 31, 1926, opening date of the Sesquicentennial Exposition held in Philadelphia commemorating the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and 50 years, less one month, of the installation of the clock.

Wm. Freeland Kendrick,  
Mayor, City of Philadelphia  
By order of Charles W. Neeld,  
Chief, Bureau of City Property.

About a year before this facility was installed, William Heine had installed a synchronous motor for driving the Lukens-Saxton clock in the belfry of the Town Hall in Germantown. That was the clock that had been in operation in the steeple of Independence Hall for

\textsuperscript{33} Description of the clock is made partly from observation and partly from an account in the \textit{Philadelphia Times}, Dec. 31, 1893, included among testimonials for Tower Clocks in a Seth Thomas catalogue (n.d.), 55.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Seth Thomas Clock Company Catalogue} (1879), 82.

\textsuperscript{35} William A. Heine Clockmakers, Inc. (31-33 S. 40th St., Philadelphia), to author, Feb. 11, 1966.
the forty-seven years prior to its replacement by the Seth Thomas Centennial clock.\textsuperscript{36}

Seybert purchased the 13,000-pound bell for Independence Hall from the Meneely-Kimberly Foundry, 22 River Street, Troy, New York, founded in 1870. Just why he dealt with this foundry is not known, but a bell of that weight would then have been the largest cast in America. The number of American foundries with facilities for making such a large casting was probably so small that he would have had little, if any, choice in the matter.\textsuperscript{37}

Symbolism was incorporated into the bell in every possible way to express thoughts of peace and patriotism. Just as its 13,000-pound weight was intended to reflect the country’s gratitude toward the thirteen states for having created the new Nation, the very alloy which went into its composition was intended to reflect a desire for peace and unity. According to Charles S. Keyser, “The bell is composed of a mixture of seventy-eight percent Atlantic mine, Lake Superior copper, and twenty-two percent tin. With these was fused the metal of two cannon used in the War for Independence, one by the Americans and one by the British, at the battle of Saratoga; and two cannon used in the late Civil War, one by the army of the nation, and the other by the Confederates, at the battle of Gettysburg—one hundred pounds from each cannon. . . .”\textsuperscript{38}

The first time the Centennial Bell was rung in the steeple of Independence Hall was a memorable occasion. James D. McCabe in his \textit{Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition} gives a dramatic account of the event.

The celebration ushering in the 4th of July was begun on the night of the 3d. A grand civic and torchlight procession paraded the streets. The illumination was superb. Chestnut and Broad streets flashed resplendently in lines of fire and colored lanterns. The dense masses which thronged these streets stood out boldly in the clear light of the illumination, and the long,
slowly-moving line of the procession flowed through them like a vast river...

The movements of the procession were so timed that the head of the column arrived at the front of Independence Hall precisely at midnight. The crowd, which had been noisy but good-natured, was hushed into silence as the hands of the clock in the tower approached the midnight hour, and one hundred thousand people waited in breathless eagerness the strokes which were to usher in the glorious day. As the minute hand swept slowly past the hour there was a profound silence, and then came rolling out of the lofty steeple the deep, liquid tones of the new liberty bell, sounding wonderfully solemn and sweet as they floated down to the crowd below. Thirteen peals were struck, and the first tone had hardly died away when there went up from the crowd such a shout as had never been heard in Philadelphia before. It was caught up and re-echoed all over the city, and at the same time the musicians and singers in the square broke into the grand strains of the "Star Spangled Banner." All the bells and steam whistles in the city joined in the sounds of rejoicing, and fireworks and firearms made the noise tenfold louder... The festivities were kept up until after two o'clock, and it was not until the first streaks of dawn began to tinge the sky that the streets of the city resumed their wonted appearance.39

Henry Seybert was gratified. On the Centennial Day, July 4, 1876, he wrote to Wm. S. Stokley, Mayor of Philadelphia, "It affords me great pleasure to be able to inform you that the said bell and clock, in complete order, are in place in the steeple, and I now hand them over to your custody as the property of the City."40 Scattered amid the glowing accounts of his gift, however, were a few complaints regarding the tonal quality of the bell. The Philadelphia Press on July 5, for example, carried an article suggesting that a heavier clapper would provide a louder and clearer sound. Seybert, too, was disappointed with the tone, so in September, 1876, the bell was returned to the foundry to be recast. Some two months later, the new bell was placed in the steeple, where it has hung ever since.

It seems probable that an incident mentioned in a letter written

39 James D. McCabe, The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition... (Philadelphia, Chicago and St. Louis, [1876]), 666-667.
40 Journal of the Select Council of Philadelphia (1876), II (Appendix 2), 5. City Councils passed a resolution of thanks to their "townsman" Henry Seybert, a copy of which was sent him "duly engrossed, attested, and framed." Ibid., II (Appendix 19), 33.
by the founder's grandson, Clinton Meneely, may have occurred after the bell had been cast the second time, because it was then that Seybert would have been so especially concerned about its loudness and tone. Meneely wrote:

My uncle once told me that after the bell was cast, Mr. Seybert came to Troy to hear it. He then said that he was on his way to Saratoga, and at exactly 10:00 the next morning would step out on the porch of his hotel. The bell, still at our foundry, was to be struck, and his party would listen for it. There is no record of what he said when he learned the simple rule of physics that it would be the force applied, and not the size of the bell that determined the carrying power—and two or three miles, under favorable conditions would be the most that could be expected. [Saratoga is all of twenty-five miles from Troy.]

Meneely also commented on the bell's tone: "At one time we read an article in which Leopold Stokowski was quoted as saying that the Independence Hall bell produced the most musical tone in the world. I wrote to him and received his confirmation of this. . . ."

The cordial reception given to the new clock and bell unquestionably pleased the aging Henry Seybert, but in spite of his success and his large fortune, he continued to live an exceptionally quiet, frugal life. Never, during all the years since his father's death, had he forgotten the advice of the French prelates that he could enhance his chances of Heaven by increasing his fortune so that he might give more liberally to the poor. His fortune had indeed increased, and he was now at that stage of his life where arrangements, through his will, should be made to distribute his wealth in accordance with this philosophy.

In about 1880, something happened which caused him to advance the timing of his plan. At a dinner party some twenty miles from Philadelphia, he wore a new pair of boots, one of which pressed so tightly upon a bunion that his entire foot became badly swollen. Complications set in which undoubtedly contributed to his death some three years later. When it became evident to him that his life was drawing to a close, he began to concentrate on his last two

41 Meneely to Smart, Mar. 25, 1966.
42 Robinson, 258-259.
major problems—the preparation of his will and the final disposition of his body.

Concerning Henry's burial arrangements, Moncure Robinson wrote in his obituary notice:

Whilst he had perhaps determined on cremation for himself . . . he was planning the transfer of the remains of his father from Paris . . . and those of his mother from her supposed last resting place many years earlier in Philadelphia, to the older portion of the Laurel Hill Cemetery in our city, where he wished their remains to be interred side by side, and where he expressed to me many years ago the desire that any ashes which might remain from the cremation of his own body should be used in sprinkling their graves, and causing the flowers and turf thus to grow fuller and more perfectly over them.43

Laurel Hill Cemetery was a natural choice for Henry, as it was patterned after the Père Lachaise, where his father had been buried.44 Inscriptions on the present Seybert monuments indicate that both his parents were indeed reinterred there. Henry's desire that his own body be cremated was also carried out, but contrary to the wish expressed above, his ashes were placed in an urn at the top of a large central monument, rather than sprinkled over his parents' graves.45

Henry Seybert's will constitutes the focal point toward which most of his energies had been directed since the death of his father some fifty-eight years earlier. It was dated December 25, 1882, less than three months before his death, and consisted of thirty-one pages of exceptionally clear long-hand script written on legal-sized paper by someone obviously employed for that purpose.

The two largest cash bequests—$60,000 each—were made to the University of Pennsylvania. One, as previously mentioned, was to

43 Ibid., 261.
44 Joseph Jackson, Encyclopedia of Philadelphia (Harrisburg, 1932), III, 822; Guide to Laurel Hill Cemetery near Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1851), 13-14. Seybert is not listed as a lot holder in this guide, but is included in an 1852 guide. Isaiah Lukens, whose clock preceded the Seybert clock in Independence Hall, is buried in an unmarked grave (lot 7, section D) just a few rods north of the Seybert plot. Lukens died in 1846.
45 Will of Henry Seybert, 4, 17, stipulates that his body was to be cremated at Julius LeMoyne Crematory, Washington, Pa., and that R. R. Brinhurst of Philadelphia was to handle the arrangements. According to Laurel Hill Cemetery records, his ashes were placed in a memorial urn atop the largest of the Seybert monuments, Apr. 20, 1891.
establish a Chair of Moral Philosophy and to investigate the truth about spiritualism; the other was to maintain a new department or ward for the treatment of chronic diseases at the University Hospital. Seybert's cabinet of minerals was left to the American Philosophical Society; his oil paintings and other art objects, to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. The largest number of cash bequests were made to Philadelphia's charitable institutions, without regard to race, color, or creed. Seventeen such institutions were left $2,000 each; forty others, $1,000 each. The list was so long that it appeared as though he had looked up all of the charitable organizations in the Philadelphia city directory and copied their names into his will.46

Moderate cash bequests, ranging from $300 to $2,000 each, were left to a considerable number of relatives and friends, and annuities ranging from $50 to $800 per year (for the remaining years of their lives) were left to still another group.47 In all, there was a total of 161 specific bequests—82 to individuals, and 79 to established welfare agencies. Educational and scientific agencies shared his generosity with the Negro, the Indian, the prisoner, the immigrant, the aged and the sick.

To make possible the payment of the annuities over an indefinite period of time, Seybert placed the bulk of his real and personal estate under the continuing control of his executors. The income from that source was, for the first twenty-one years, to go toward paying those annuities, but thereafter it was to be applied to a far more important purpose—the establishment of an "Adam and Maria Seybert Institution for Poor Boys and Girls." More than ten pages of his will were devoted to explaining how the executors would become the Trustees of that Institution; how they would be empowered to expand and perpetuate the organization, and how they would be free to make any changes which they might find desirable as the result of changing times and changing conditions.48

The Trustees began taking action on the plan in 1906. By then the funds available from the trust were over $1,000,000 (by 1964 they had increased to nearly $3,000,000). A Childrens' Bureau in

46 Ibid., 4-9.
47 Ibid., 1-4.
48 Ibid., 12-16.
the City of Philadelphia, and a Childrens’ Village at Meadowbrook, a Philadelphia suburb, were established. From that beginning, the organization developed into a vital force in guiding and caring for needy children in all of Philadelphia. Thanks to the foresight of Henry Seybert in allowing the Trustees to exercise great flexibility in managing the project, they could frequently introduce innovations and, with equal facility, abandon procedures which failed to meet expectations. Most institutions established by a philanthropic individual are so bound by unalterable conditions laid down in the will, that the time comes when progress no longer becomes possible and the entire project falls into decay. Seybert’s will, on the other hand, encouraged changes and modernization.

In June, 1914, the fund was incorporated as “The Adam and Maria Seybert Institution for Poor Boys and Girls,” but it was later shortened to the “Seybert Institution.” Existing organizations like the Children’s Aid Society and the Society to Protect Children from Cruelty received co-operation and financial support from the Seybert Institution. A pamphlet entitled *A Living Hand*, which the Institution published in 1930, contained the following comment about its accomplishments: “Anyone familiar with the child welfare field in Philadelphia twenty-four years ago and with today’s like domain of endeavor must rub his eyes to realize he is in the same world.”

The Seybert name brings little recognition today. The scientific contributions of both Adam and Henry have been dimmed by the passing years. Their philanthropies, with the exception of the Seybert Institute, were unspectacular, but they did reveal the depth of human concern within each man. Henry Seybert left a special legacy. Out of his patriotism, his family devotion and wealth, his spiritual sensitivity (including spiritualism itself), he made a magnificent centennial gift to Philadelphia and the Nation—the clock and bell in the tower of Independence Hall which continue to mark the hours of a new century in our country’s history.

*Silver Spring, Md.*

**Arthur H. Frazier**

49 *A Living Hand, 9-14 passim.*