On May 14, 1800, the Congress of the United States met for the last time in Philadelphia. The second session of the Sixth Congress, scheduled to begin on the third Monday of November, would be held in the city of Washington. At long last the move to the permanent seat of government was underway. A small collection of documents comprising the young republic’s archives was subsequently packed aboard the chartered sloops that made their way from the Delaware to the Potomac, depositing their cargo at Lear’s Wharf in the new Federal District.

Among those documents lay the original engrossed copy of the Declaration of Independence. A century and a half later, on December 13, 1952, the Declaration made what would be its final move. Transported by a Marine Corps armored personnel carrier from the Library of Congress, led by an Army light tank and four servicemen carrying submachine guns, it was deposited in the Great Hall of the National Archives, where its faded script remains on public view today.¹

Between these moves, the Declaration was shuffled around the city of Washington with surprising frequency, but on only three occasions has the document left the nation’s capital. Two of these

were for purposes of security during wartime. The third was amid considerably more favorable circumstances—the celebration of the Nation’s 100th birthday. Permission to transfer the fading parchment on this occasion was secured through the combined efforts of several prominent Pennsylvanians, including Colonel Frank M. Etting, Chairman of the Committee on the Restoration of Independence Hall, and publisher George W. Childs, a close personal friend of President Ulysses S. Grant. The actual transfer was accomplished in a manner suited to that simpler time, by a lone civil servant riding in a day coach. In 1876, the concern of the federal government was not centered on whether the Declaration should be shipped to Philadelphia, but where it should be displayed in the “City of Brotherly Love.” The question of security in transit does not seem to have been of concern to anyone in Washington. More recently, during America’s Bicentennial, the signatures of 700,000 Philadelphians and an elaborate security plan aimed at returning the Declaration to the city of its birth proved insufficient persuasion for officials in Washington.

Negotiations to return the Declaration to Philadelphia in 1876 were begun on February 1, when the Committee on the Restoration of Independence Hall, “respectfully but earnestly,” requested Zachariah Chandler, Secretary of the Interior, to allow the original engrossed copy of the Declaration in his custody to be exhibited during the Centennial Exposition in the “very chamber where the document was originally discussed and signed.” The Committee’s Chairman, Colonel Etting, prefaced the proposal with a brief summary of the recently completed three-year project of “restoring Independence Chamber to its appearance in July, 1776.” In support of his request, Etting told Chandler that a prominent Philadelphia

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2 For a period of several weeks in the fall of 1814, when the British attacked Washington, the Declaration was stored at the Rokeby House in Leesburg, Va. At the height of World War II it was transferred to the Bullion Depository at Fort Knox, Ky., for nearly three years.

locksmith, Farrell and Company, had contributed “a first class fire-proof safe” which would serve as a suitable depository for the Declaration.

In Etting’s words, the Committee had taken “every precaution that the most experienced insurance inspector could point out to secure” Independence Hall against fire and it was “ready & willing to adopt whatever move [Secretary Chandler might] point out to ensure the perfect safety of this inestimable document.” The Declaration would be displayed behind the heavy glass inner door of the safe, the key of which would be placed in Chandler’s “hands if [he] so desired, so that the actual custody” of the document need not pass from the Interior Department. If this did not suffice, the Committee was willing to have the inner glass door screwed in place with a seal of the Interior Department placed over it. On February 15, while Etting anxiously awaited word from Washington, Joseph R. Hawley, President of the United States Centennial Commission, formally notified Chandler of his own desire to see the request granted.

Several days later, after the matter had been considered by the President’s Cabinet, Secretary Chandler replied to the Committee, informing Colonel Etting that “prior to the receipt of [his] letter, arrangements had already been perfected to place said Declaration on exhibition in the building erected for the government’s display at the Centennial Exposition. . . . Under these circumstances,” he did “not feel at liberty to comply” with the Committee’s request.

Etting was undaunted by Chandler’s refusal. On March 7, he received word from Philadelphia Congressman Charles O’Neill of his recent interview with the Secretary of the Interior where he had made known his personal interest in having the Declaration

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5 J. R. Hawley to Chandler, Feb. 15, 1876, Box 19, Frank M. Etting Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

6 Christopher C. Cox to Etting, Feb. 14, 1876, and Charles O’Neill to Etting, Mar. 1, 1876, ibid.

7 Chanter to Etting, Feb. 21, 1876, Declaration of Independence File, RG48, NA; Etting Collection.
placed in its birthplace during the Centennial and his intention to meet with the President to discuss the matter further. At approximately the same time Joseph M. Wilson, an obscure clerk in the Department of Agriculture, emerged as Etting's principal Washington lobbyist. Initially, Wilson was asked to find out the "secret history" of the decision to place the Declaration in the Government Building at the Centennial and determine "whether it is a project of someone who wants to exhibit his safe?" If Wilson discovered a specific personality was involved, Etting "would let him put his safe in Independence Hall." Soon thereafter Wilson reported that Edward H. Knight, a man he knew well and felt confident would accede to "our wishes . . . has charge of the Patent Office contributions [to the Centennial Exposition] and the matter of the Declaration." Wilson had also learned that the safe which would hold the Declaration was being made in Cincinnati. Although the identity of the Cincinnati safe maker remained a mystery, Wilson speculated it might well be Edward Knight's brother who lived in that city. Wilson was extremely confident that he would be able to continue negotiations with Knight until the matter was "favorably settled." Only if this course proved unsatisfactory would Etting have to take an appeal to the President.

Encouraged by Wilson's brief success and enthusiasm, Etting on March 24 outlined for his Washington confidant the various persuasive arguments which he might use to enhance his presentation. Three days later, however, Wilson in response suggested it probably best if Etting wrote directly to the President "asking him to request the Secretary of the Interior to have the 'Declaration' placed in Independence Hall." Since the matter had already been "considered by 'the Cabinet,' it will have to be reconsidered by them, so says Secy Chandler, and as there is no special feeling in opposition to

8 O'Neill to Etting, Mar. 7, 1876, Etting Collection.
9 Etting to Joseph M. Wilson, Mar. 11, 1876, ibid. An extensive search for information about Wilson revealed only that from 1873 through 1876 he was a $1,400 a year clerk with the Department of Agriculture. Register of Officers and Agents, Civil, Military and Naval, in the Service of the United States 1873, 1874, 1875, 1876 (Washington, 1873-1876).
10 Wilson to Etting, Mar. 22, 1876, Etting Collection.
11 Etting to Wilson, Mar. 24, 1876, ibid.
Wilson further recommended Etting tell the President Independence Hall would be "placed under government control just as it was in 1776," and also have George W. Childs "write a personal letter to the President making it as strong as he can." These letters, Wilson explained, should be "sent to me and I will see that they are considered in the Cabinet meeting next friday." During the interim Wilson would see Senator Simon Cameron and "get him to go with me to see the President, and such other of the Penn delegation that Genl Cameron may suggest." Wilson continued by suggesting that "if the disposition of the 'Declaration' had merely depended upon the decision of the Secy of the Interior—he could & I believe would have altered his decision." Also "Mr. Knight assured [him] that if he could he would comply with our request but he receives his orders from the Commissioner and he, from the Secretary, and he from the Cabinet—and it from any expressed preference of the President." Given these conditions, Wilson considered it necessary to send a letter to the President. Although the intrigue surrounding the decision to "get a safe made in Cincinnati when one could have been supplied in Philadelphia" continued to trouble Wilson, he did not "intend to interfere with the safe business" since "all we want is the 'Declaration' and that we must have."12

Trusting Wilson's instincts, Etting wrote President Grant the following day and asked him to sanction the transfer of the Declaration to Independence Hall. This correspondence, like the earlier letter sent to Secretary Chandler, explained in some detail the recently completed restoration of Independence Hall and the numerous precautions undertaken to ensure the safety of the century-old document if it were placed there. Following Knight's suggestion, Etting continued by explaining that the "councils of Philadelphia would no doubt take additional action if it should be so desired, and declare Independence Chamber subject to the United States Government during 1876, precisely in the same way as it was placed at the disposal of Congress during 1776."13

12 Wilson to Etting, Mar. 27, 1876, ibid.
13 Etting to Ulysses S. Grant, Mar. 28, 1876, Declaration of Independence File, RG48, NA; Etting Collection.
Equally important was the accompanying cover letter written by President Grant's friend George W. Childs, publisher of the Philadelphia Public Ledger. Childs urged that "if the Declaration is to be exhibited in Philadelphia it should be in the very Hall where it was considered, consummated and signed, that nothing can be added by argument to the weight of that single reason. Indeed it seems to me there would be palpable unfitness in showing it anywhere else." The significance of Childs' plea, as subsequent events revealed, would be most important.

Despite several minor difficulties, including Senator Cameron's unwillingness to assist in their scheme, Wilson was finally able to tell Etting on April 4 that he had met with Ulysses S. Grant, Jr., the President's son and private secretary, the previous afternoon and conveyed to him the feeling "that every man, woman, & child in Philadelphia [was] interested in having the Declaration in Independence Hall." He had also seen the President long enough "to have him say, he would bring the matter before the Cabinet." That same afternoon, following the Cabinet meeting, Wilson "learned from the President, that all the Cabinet [after considering the question] felt that Independence Hall was the proper place" for the Declaration "if there was no law to prevent it." After leaving the White House, Wilson went to the Patent Office and met with Commissioner of Patents Robert H. Duell and Edward H. Knight. Subsequently, the Commissioner, Secretary Chandler, and Knight

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14 In his *Recollections*, Childs wrote that he first met Grant "in 1863, after the victory of Vicksburg," and "from that time until his death [their] intimacy grew." Childs considered Grant to be "one of the truest and most congenial friends [he] ever had." It was while staying at Childs's home that Grant wrote his "Centennial Address, at the opening of the Exposition in 1876." George W. Childs, *Recollections* (Philadelphia, 1890), 70-71, 95, 128-129. See also Ulysses S. Grant 3rd., *Ulysses S. Grant: Warrior and Statesman* (New York, 1969), 325-342; Richard Goldhurst, *Many Are the Hearts: The Agony and the Triumph of Ulysses S. Grant* (New York, 1975), 108-109, 168-171; Ben Perley Poore and O. H. Tiffany, *Life of U. S. Grant* (Philadelphia, 1885), 224. After Grant left the White House, Childs raised $100,000 from twenty millionaires which was used to purchase the brownstone home the former President lived in on East 66th Street in New York during the final years of his life. Goldhurst, *The Agony and Triumph*, 12-13. The most complete biography of Childs is found in Madeleine B. Stern, *Imprints on History: Book Publishers on American Frontiers* (Bloomington, Ind., 1956), 156-177, 432-438.

15 George W. Childs to Ulysses S. Grant, Mar. 30, 1876, Declaration of Independence File, RG48, NA; Etting Collection.

16 Wilson to Etting, Mar. 30, 31, 1876, Etting Collection.
consulted on the matter while Wilson waited in the latter’s office. “About ¾ of an hour” later Knight returned and announced that the Commissioner would look at the law on the subject and have a decision ready within a few days.  

On April 6, Congressman William D. Kelley of Pennsylvania, a prominent member of the House Select Committee on the Centennial Celebration, called on Chandler’s deputy, Assistant Secretary Charles T. Gorham, regarding the Committee’s request. Following this meeting Gorham penned a short memorandum informing Secretary Chandler of Kelley’s solicitation “in behalf of parties at Phila. wishing to have the ‘Declaration’ exposed in Independence Hall,” and the congressman’s claim that he had seen President Grant and “obtained his consent to such disposition of it.” Gorham suggested it might be well for his superior “to refer to the matter while you are with the [President] this morning.”

Whether Chandler and Grant actually discussed the subject on April 6 is not known. Perhaps they agreed to wait for Patent Commissioner Duell’s report, which was submitted to Chandler five days later. Duell’s two-page memorandum, prepared in response to Chandler’s “verbal request” of the previous week, subtly argued against any transfer such as that proposed by “Col. Etting and Geo. W. Childs, of Philadelphia.” Although Duell explained that, to his knowledge, there were no laws “covering the matter, or consigning” the Declaration to Chandler’s custody, he personally felt the Declaration, and the Commission of General Washington, associated with it in the same frame, belonged to the Interior “Department as heirlooms, the right being prescriptive.” In Duell’s opinion the Declaration was the “one document around which cluster all the interests of the Centennial period, and as the government has concluded at a large expense to exhibit its own curiosities in its own building, [he could not] see why the great central feature of interest should be removed from its collection.”

Two days after reviewing Duell’s report, Chandler wrote President Grant that he recognized the “eminent fitness of the exhibition of

17 Wilson to Etting, Apr. 4, 1876, ibid.
18 Charles T. Gorham to Chandler, Apr. 6, 1876, Declaration of Independence File, RG48, NA.
19 Robert H. Duell to Chandler, Apr. 11, 1876, ibid.
the Declaration of Independence in the Chamber wherein it was adopted and signed," but did "not feel at liberty to permit it to pass from [his] custody unless authorized by Congress to do so."\footnote{Chandler to Grant, Apr. 13, 1876, \textit{ibid}.} Despite the unlikelihood of Congress reaching a decision on the matter prior to the opening of the Centennial Exposition a month hence, Chandler continued by suggesting the request should be referred "to Congress for such direction as that body may see fit to authorize." If the President chose to exercise this option, Chandler volunteered to "prepare the necessary letters and transmit them with the copies of correspondence already had in the matter, to Congress," unless the President preferred "to make the proposition for such a transfer the subject of an Executive communication to that body."\footnote{Ibid.}

Culver C. Sniffin, Assistant Private Secretary to the President, returned Chandler's letter to the Interior Department on April 29 with an endorsement on the envelope stating that the "request to have the original draft of the Declaration of Independence placed on exhibition at the Centennial may be granted under such regulations as the Secretary of the Interior may choose to make."\footnote{The endorsement is found on the back of the envelope containing Chandler's Apr. 13, 1876, letter to Grant. It is signed Culver C. Sniffin, Assistant Private Secretary to the President, Apr. 29, 1876, \textit{ibid}.} Grant's decision allowing Chandler to decide where and how the Declaration would be displayed was, however, only a momentary one. Several newspapers on May 6 reported that General James D. McBride of Philadelphia had the previous day called on the President and "succeeded in having the order changed that directed the exhibition of the original Declaration to be made in the Government Building on the Centennial grounds, so as to have the document placed on exhibition in old Independence Hall."\footnote{Washington \textit{Evening Star}, May 6, 1876. See also \textit{Boston Herald}, May 6, 1876; \textit{New York Herald}, May 6, 1876; Philadelphia \textit{Public Record}, May 6, 1876; Philadelphia \textit{Public Ledger}, May 8, 1876. The details of McBride's conversation with the President and exactly who he was remains largely obscured by a dearth of documentation. The mysterious intrigue surrounding McBride even prompted Joseph M. Wilson to ask Etting "who the General McBride is, who turned up so very opportunely." Wilson to Etting, Aug. 8, 1876, Etting Collection. Brief sketches of McBride's military career are found in F. B. Heitman, \textit{Historical Register of the United States Army From Its Organisation} (Washington, 1890), 425, and Wm. H. Powell, \textit{List of Officers of the Army of the United States From 1779 to 1900} (New York, 1900), 459.} The same day two members
of the Pennsylvania delegation in the House of Representatives, James H. Hopkins of Pittsburgh, Chairman of the Select Committee on the Centennial, and his committee colleague William D. Kelley of Philadelphia, also visited the President and expressed similar sentiments. Soon thereafter, Grant was quoted by the Baltimore Sun as saying the Declaration “should go to Independence Hall, as he thought it the proper place for it.” 24 Grant’s decision, in the words of the Sun, concluded a lengthy debate which had been a matter of considerable controversy and had even been considered in Cabinet meetings.” 25

Even before these stories reached most newspaper vendors, Alonzo Bell, Chief Clerk of the Interior Department and the courier selected by Secretary Chandler to carry the historic parchment to Philadelphia, departed from the Nation’s Capital aboard the Baltimore and Ohio’s 9:23 A.M. “limited express.” 26 In accordance with Chandler’s instructions, the Declaration was “securely packed in such a manner” as would allow it to “be conveyed to Philadelphia without injury.” 27 Bell arrived in Philadelphia “at about 1 o’clock” that afternoon. “He was met at [West Philadelphia Depot] by Colonel Etting, George A. Smith, President of the Select Council, W. H. Shelmire, United States Pension Office; and General McBride, and conveyed in a carriage to Independence Hall.” A “quiet and simple” ceremony followed, but, unpretentious as it was, the “placing of the venerated document once more in the old Hall was deeply impressive.” 28 Among those gathered to watch as the “wooden box containing the Declaration” was opened and turned over to Colonel Etting were:

Mayor Stokley, J. L. Craven, President of the Common Council; Judges Craig Biddle and W. B. Hanna, Rear-Admiral T. T. Turner U.S.N.;

24 Baltimore Sun, May 6, 1876. The New York Times of May 6, 1876, reported that Grant “in compliance with a request of the Centennial authorities directed that the original Declaration of Independence shall be deposited in Independence Hall.”
25 Sun, May 6, 1876.
26 Boston Herald, May 6, 1876; New York Herald, May 6, 1876; Public Ledger, May 10, 1876; Public Record, May 6, 1876; and Washington National Republican, May 6, 1876.
27 Chandler to Alonzo Bell, May 5, 1876, Records of the Patents and Miscellaneous Division 1849–1943, Vol. 17, Letters Sent, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, RG48, NA.
28 Public Ledger, May 8, 1876. See also Boston Evening Journal, May 8, 1876, and Richmond Enquirer, May 6, 1876.

Afterwards Bell told the audience: “On behalf of the Government of the United States and under the special instructions of the Secretary of the Interior, I have the high honor of returning to the city of Philadelphia and to the hall which gave it birth, the original Declaration of Independence.” The last century had brought about many changes. The advent of the Declaration was “amid strife and revolution. I bring it back today amid evidences of universal peace.” He wished the “signers of this sacred document were here to receive it, that they might behold the completeness of the work they inaugurated. But they cannot be with us. They have long since answered the summons that we in time must answer. Even their signatures have almost faded from sight and the parchment is beginning to crumble under the touch of a century.” He continued by exhorting those in attendance to be thankful that the spirit of freedom which found expression in this document still lives and finds reflection in the patriotism of the American people. . . .

Let us rejoice to-day that the Republic still lives; that this document which has been brought back to you has not been dishonored, but returns, like an aged parent, to look upon the glory of his children to breath out a prayer and a blessing for those who have proven worthy of his benediction.

Let us thank God for this Centennial year, so full of promise and hope; for the administration of justice under a just President, whose name and fame will brighten with advancing years; for the peace we enjoy at home and abroad; for the signs of returning prosperity; for the rekindling of loyalty and patriotism; for the presence of civil and religious liberty and for all the blessings of good government let us be devoutly thankful this Centennial year.

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20 Public Ledger, May 8, 1876. A slightly different list of those in attendance is found in Jos. S. Longshore and Benjamin L. Knowles, The Centennial Liberty Bell: Independence Hall; Its Traditions and Associations the Declaration of Independence and Its Signers (Philadelphia, 1876), 62, and Philadelphia Sunday Dispatch, May 7, 1876. F. D. Stone was the Librarian of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

30 Public Ledger, May 8, 1876 (supplement).
And now, gentlemen, in obedience to my instructions, I transfer to your guardianship this precious document. Permit me to express the hope that a relic that has been protected by the love and veneration of the American people for a hundred years will suffer no injury while under your charge, but will be returned at the close of the Centennial season in as good a condition as you now receive it.31

Following Bell’s remarks, Colonel Etting became the focus of attention with his announcement that President Grant had agreed to allow the Declaration to return to its first home “through the intercession of the most generous hearted of our fellow-citizens, George W. Childs.” Having now accomplished this goal “let us cordially invite every citizen of the United States to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary by a visit to this the Alma Mater of liberty.” In addition to the original Declaration, Etting explained he had been authorized to place in this room the first printed announcement of independence made by Congress. It comes from the great-granddaughter of John Nixon, who, in the adjoining square, read for the first time the Declaration of Independence to the people. This valuable broadside was found among the papers of Mr. Nixon, and is believed to be the identical paper from which that reading was made.

Some misapprehension seems to exist in regard to the documentary history of the Declaration, and it was asserted there exists two originals signed. Such is not the fact; there are two drafts in the hand-writing of Mr. Jefferson—one of those is in the possession of the State Department, the other is now in our possession through the kindness of the American Philosophical Society, to whom it belongs, and in whose keeping it was placed by a descendant of Richard Lightfoot Lee, to whom Thomas Jefferson himself sent it.

The Declaration after alteration was ordered to be engrossed on parchment and to be signed. This document, the only one ever so signed, is the one before us, and constituted the final link in the exposition of our documentary history of the Declaration of Independence.32

Etting concluded his remarks by emphasizing the efforts of the Committee on the Restoration of Independence Hall to keep alive

31 Ibid. Interestingly, Bell subsequently had to write Etting on two occasions instructing him to see that seals were “placed on the safe containing the Declaration.” Bell to Etting, May 10, 31, 1876, Declaration of Independence File, RG48, NA.
32 Public Ledger, May 8, 1876 (supplement).
the memories of those men who debated and signed the resolution for independence.

Mayor Stokley then brought the proceedings to a close by alluding to "the sacred character of the time and place"; he assured Bell the Declaration would be "kept secure and well guarded. You may say to the President of the United States, for Philadelphia, that the [Declaration] is in safe hands, and that it will be returned to the Patent Office in as good condition as it is at the present."^33

With the conclusion of the ceremonies the Declaration was placed in the safe made for the express purpose for which it would now be used. Also deposited in the safe with the Declaration was the original commission of George Washington as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, dated June 19, 1775, and signed by John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress, which Bell had also carried with him to Philadelphia. That same afternoon, Etting, in an enthusiastic letter to historian George Bancroft, characterized President Grant's decision to place the Declaration in Independence Hall as "an act more significant than fifty international expositions."^34

Given the involvement of George W. Childs in bringing about the return of the Declaration, the tone of the editorial which subsequently appeared in the Public Ledger was understandable. "The thanks of the people of the whole country and of our visitors from all countries," the Ledger told its readers, "are due to those here and in Washington who have exerted their influence to have it placed in Independence Hall, instead of at the Exhibition Grounds. What will be displayed at the Exhibition proper," observed the Ledger:

will illustrate the vast material and intellectual progress made by the world in the last hundred years, and will be marvellous in its grandeur and proportions; but if all the millions of engines and implements and devices and products of that hundred years, and all of the literature to which the century has given birth, were combined in one concentrated influence, it would not surpass the impulse given to the world by that one document.

^33 Ibid.
^34 Etting to George Bancroft, May 5, 1876, Etting Collection.
The Declaration "is entitled to stand . . . in the most hallowed of human surroundings." Independence Hall was the "one entirely fit place in which to present it to the hundreds of thousands who will wish to see it this year." It was from there that "it went forth on its mission to mankind."  

Four days after the transfer was effected, the center of public attention shifted to Fairmount Park, where the Centennial Exposition opened amidst great pomp and ceremony. The same day Bell reported to Chandler that he had, according to the Secretary's instructions, deposited the original copy of the Declaration in the "safe provided for its reception in Independence Hall." He described his reception in Philadelphia as "most gracious," and offered his opinion that the "favorable comments of the City press" regarding the decision as to where the Declaration should be exhibited was evidence "of a popular recognition of the wisdom shown by the President and yourself, in directing the return of the Declaration to its time honored home." For Bell, the honor conferred upon him as the "bearer of the sacred document" was one for which he was most thankful.  

The Centennial summer was celebrated in Philadelphia with unprecedented "enthusiasm and fervor." The high point of the numerous activities held by the United States Centennial Commission was the Fourth of July commemorative ceremony at Independence Square, site of the first public reading of the Declaration on July 8, 1776. There, surrounded by thousands of cheering citizens, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, whose grandfather had first proposed the resolution before the Continental Congress calling for a declaration of independence, read from the original engrossed copy of the "faded and crumbling manuscript held together by a simple frame" those words which a century earlier signaled the birth of America.

35 Public Ledger, May 8, 1876 (supplement).
36 Alonzo Bell to Chandler, May 10, 1876, Declaration of Independence File, RG48, NA.
37 Longshore and Knowles, The Centennial Bell, 156.
Despite the appeals of several prominent Philadelphians, a week after the festivities of the Fourth of July had subsided, Frank M. Etting, the incessant force behind the campaign to return the Declaration to its first home, was dismissed by the Councils of Philadelphia as Chairman of the Committee on the Restoration of Independence Hall. This action was necessary according to C. T. Jones, the principal spokesman for Etting’s firing in the Select Council, since he was “unfit to occupy the position [because of] the rude manner in which he invariably dealt with citizens who [had] business relations with him.” The *Philadelphia Inquirer* saw Etting’s departure as relieving the community of an “intolerable annoyance.” In similar language the Philadelphia *Item* suggested “Etting had made himself offensive to some of the gentlemen of the press, and in consequence they went for his scalp.”

Such opinions were not, however, universal. The *Penn Monthly* angrily noted that those who were interested in Pennsylvania viewed Etting’s removal with serious concern. “For years they have been trying amid many discouragements to develop among the people that sentiment of pride in her past achievements which is at once an indication of the strength of the State and a means of preserving it.” These people had watched with admiration as the “memories and traditions of other localities [were] carefully collected and treasured, and those of Pennsylvania to a great extent [were] neglected and forgotten.” As the Centennial year neared, however, attention was once again appropriately concentrated in Philadelphia. Amid this renewed interest, “Col. Etting, a gentleman whose life had been largely devoted to antiquarian pursuits, and whose acquaintance among historians and the descendants of the revolutionary patriots was extensive,” became the Chairman of the Committee on the Restoration of Independence Hall. “Etting proved himself the man for the occasion. Under his efficient management the “dross and rubbish were removed” and Independence Hall was “converted into a national shrine.”

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39 *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 14, 1876; Philadelphia *North American*, July 14, 1876; Philadelphia *Press*, July 14, 1876; *Public Ledger*, July 14, 1876; *Public Record*, July 14, 1876.
40 Quote is found in *Public Record*, Apr. 14, 1876.
41 *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 14, 1876.
42 Philadelphia *Item*, July 14, 1876.
these people “comes with a shock of pain because it means that the rough, coarse hand of politics is thrust into the bosom of aesthetics, and that there is nothing above its inclination, as there is nothing beyond its power to rifle and pollute. . . . If Independence Hall does not . . . relapse into its former condition, it will be because the good that Col. Etting has done will live after him.”

Etting’s accomplishments, though now largely forgotten, marked the beginning of a continuing concern over the preservation and restoration of Independence Hall. Ironically, the original engrossed copy of the Declaration, the centerpiece of his work and acquisitions, soon returned to Washington against the expressed wishes of those who only a few months earlier had ousted him.

In early February 1877, Secretary Chandler asked Mayor Stokley for the document that had been in his custody since the previous May. What Stokley did not know was that immediately preceding Chandler’s request Secretary of State Hamilton Fish with the support of the President had succeeded in obtaining an agreement whereby the Declaration upon its return to Washington would be placed in the new fireproof building Fish’s department occupied with the War and Navy Departments. Subsequently, Chandler in a February 8 letter had assured his Cabinet colleague that arrangements would be promptly undertaken to bring back the Declaration to Washington so that it could be transferred to the State Department.

Although Stokley ultimately complied with Chandler’s request, he did so only after an abortive effort to keep the historic document at Independence Hall. A week after Stokley first learned of Chandler’s desire to secure the Declaration, he informed the Secretary of the Interior in a curt one sentence response that he was forwarding a certified copy of a “Resolution relative to the original Declaration

44 Ibid.
46 Hamilton Fish to Zachariah Chandler, Feb. 6, 1877; Chandler to Fish, Feb. 8, 1877, Declaration of Independence File, RG48, NA.
of Independence passed by the Councils of [Philadelphia], on the 15th day of February." The resolution "respectfully and earnestly" requested that the "National Authorities . . . take the necessary action, legislative or otherwise, by which [the Declaration] may be suffered to remain deposited hereafter on exhibition in Independence Hall under the care and custody of the Councils of the City of Philadelphia." In addition to this resolution, Stokley the following day sent a telegram to Representatives William D. Kelley and Charles O’Neill requesting them to "see the President forthwith and obtain his consent" to delay for a few days any order requiring the return of the Declaration to Washington. Within hours President Grant through his assistant private secretary Culver C. Sniffin directed Chandler to telegraph Stokley and inform him "that if the original of the Declaration is here some day in the latter part of next week, that will be in good time." Two weeks later, on March 2, Alonzo Bell returned to Philadelphia and took possession of the Declaration at Independence Hall.

The following day, Chandler informed Fish that, in compliance with the Secretary of State’s request of February 6, he was forwarding "herewith the original Declaration of Independence and the Commission of General George Washington as Commander-in-Chief." He had not complied with the request earlier Chandler explained, because of "an effort on the part of prominent citizens of Philadelphia to have them retained permanently in Independence Hall, where they were placed during the Centennial Exhibition." Later the same day, the Declaration was placed in a cabinet at the State Department Library, where it was exhibited for the next seventeen years.

The Declaration’s brief return to Philadelphia was not to be re-

47 William S. Stokley to Chandler, Feb. 15, 1877, ibid.
48 Resolution Relative to the Original Declaration of Independence, Clerks Office, Common Council, Philadelphia, Feb. 15, 1877, ibid. Interestingly, the Philadelphia press made no mention of the resolution other than including it in a summary of the proceedings of the Common and Select Councils.
50 Culver C. Sniffin to Chandler, Feb. 17, 1877, ibid.
51 Philadelphia Inquirer, Mar. 3, 1877; Public Ledger, Mar. 2, 3, 1877; Public Record, Mar. 3, 1877; and Evening Star, Mar. 1, 1877.
52 Chandler to Fish, Mar. 3, 1877, Declaration of Independence File, RG48, NA.
peated. Fifty years later, at the Sesquicentennial International Exposition, the "Declaration of Independence was represented by as perfect a photograph as it was possible to obtain; the exact size of the original." In 1976, on America's 200th birthday, the only facsimile reproduced directly from the original engrossed copy of the Declaration, a copper plate engraving made by William J. Stone in 1823, and a recent print made from the latter, were sent to Philadelphia where they were unveiled by First Lady Betty Ford on April 26. Today, governmental concern for the Declaration's deteriorated condition and for its security, as well as an increasing awareness of the significance of the nation's historic treasures, makes it unlikely that the fragile document will ever again be removed from its marble sarcophagus on Constitution Avenue.

Library of Congress

Stephen W. Stathis