



LIBRARY & ARCHIVES TREASURES

By David R. Grinnell, Chief Archivist

Preserving the Betsy Ross House

During the late 19th century, Americans became increasingly concerned about our nation's heritage, particularly those sites associated with the Revolutionary War. One such location was the Betsy Ross home on Arch Street in Philadelphia, where the first American flag was purportedly stitched together to create one of our most enduring national symbols. This site, preserved by the Betsy Ross Memorial Association, was called the American Flag House. Today, it is known as the Betsy Ross House, although scholars have not found proof that Ross sewed the first American flag.

Starting in 1898, the Betsy Ross Memorial Association sold memberships to the Flag House to raise money for the preservation effort. The colorful membership certificates, which carried a reproduction of Charles Weisgerber's painting, *Birth of Our Nation's Flag*, were receipts or "thank-yous" for contributions of 10 cents.¹ More than two million were issued, including this one issued in 1899 to Mrs. D. L. Patterson of Allegheny, Pa., which is found in the Katherine Marion Miller Collection.

Dunie Dean Patterson was one of those Americans concerned about our nation's legacy. Dunie, the daughter of a riverboat captain and a descendant of early Pennsylvania German immigrants, was educated at

a private Sewickley boarding school, The Edgeworth Seminary, before the Civil War. The Miller Collection at the History Center contains the certificate plus letters to Dunie from several male cousins and friends who went off to fight for the Union, some of whom did not return.

After the war, Dunie married David Leslie Patterson, a former Union soldier who owned and operated a large lumber business along the Ohio River in the Manchester neighborhood of today's North Side. Due to her early American ancestry and personal ties to those fighting to preserve the Union, it is not surprising to discover that Dunie

was one of many contributors to the Betsy Ross House preservation effort. Evidence of her efforts to preserve the Betsy Ross home are today preserved at the History Center for others to enjoy.

The Library & Archives collects materials related to the history and culture of Western Pennsylvania. The Reading Room, located on the sixth floor of the Heinz History Center, is open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Search the L&A Catalog at: <http://207.67.203.74/S92015Staff/OPAC/Index.asp>.

¹ Marc Leepson, *Flag: An American Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 46.



Dunie Patterson's membership certificate to the American Flag House and Betsy Ross Memorial Association.

HHC L&A, Katherine Marion Miller Collection, MSO# 496.

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