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# Liberty Bell<sup>1</sup>

The Liberty Bell is one of the most famous symbols of the American Revolution. Yet this symbol did not have a favorable start. It was made for another purpose than the Revolution. It was originally made in Britain, not the United States. It cracked the very first time it was rung. And its peal (or sound) was not pleasant to hear. How then did this bell become such an important U.S. symbol?

The bell was ordered for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the colony of Pennsylvania. In 1751, James Lester made the original bell in a metal-casting factory called the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in Britain. The bell weighed one ton, so it must have been difficult to haul it to a British port, ship it across the Atlantic Ocean and transport it by land to Philadelphia, the capital of Pennsylvania. The colonists had paid \$300 (in today's money) for the bell and waited a year for its delivery. They must have been very disappointed when the bell broke the first time it was rung! John Pass and Charles Stow in Pennsylvania had to melt the bell down, strengthen it with additional metals and recast it. Yet, the bell broke a second time when it was tested. Finally, the third casting made the bell strong enough to be used by the city. Many people, however, complained about the sound of the bell and how frequently it was rung.

When the colonists protested against the British and began to think about rebelling, they formed the First Continental Congress, which met in Philadelphia. That city later became the first capital of the newly formed United States. Four days after the delegates to the Congress had signed the Declaration of Independence, the document was read aloud in public. The Liberty Bell (although it was not yet called that) was rung to announce the reading of the declaration to the people of Philadelphia.<sup>2</sup> It was an appropriate coincidence that the words that had been inscribed on the bell more than 20 years earlier were, *Proclaim liberty throughout the land and unto all the inhabitants thereof*. This was a quotation from the Bible.

When the British captured Philadelphia in 1777, they discovered that the Patriots had taken the bell down and hidden it. The Americans were afraid that the British would destroy their historic symbol by melting it down to provide metal for cannons to fight against the Patriots. By the end of the war, the bell was in its place again, and it pealed out the news of the U.S. victory.

For more than 50 years, the people rang the bell on important occasions such as the date of the signing of the U.S. Constitution, the yearly anniversary of the Fourth of July, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the anniversaries of the birthdays of famous Americans and the deaths of important U.S. citizens. Then it cracked again when it tolled for the death of John Marshall, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The bell was patched so that it could be rung on February 22, 1846, to celebrate the anniversary of George Washington's birthday.<sup>3</sup> The patch did not hold; the bell broke again. Shortly after that, the bell was temporarily retired from service, taken down from the belfry and put into storage.

The name Liberty Bell was first given to Philadelphia's revered bell in the 1840s. Some abolitionists (people working for the end of slavery) wrote a poem about freedom and justice for the slaves. The poem, called "The Liberty Bell," was so powerful that its title became the name by which the old bell was known thereafter.

The Liberty Bell traveled around the country many times to be displayed on special occasions. It rang again on February 22, 1915, so that its sound could be heard over the first long-distance telephone call between Philadelphia and San Francisco. It tolled on the radio on June 6, 1944, to announce the D-Day invasion of Normandy during World War II. Today it is housed in a special building of its own called the Liberty Bell Pavilion in Philadelphia only a few yards from its long-time home, Independence Hall.

<sup>1</sup>*Our National Symbols* by Linda Carlson Johnson, Brookfield, Connecticut, The Millbrook Press, 1992.

<sup>2</sup>*The Story of the Liberty Bell* by Natalie Miller, Chicago, Children's Press, 1965.

<sup>3</sup>*The Liberty Bell: The Sounds of Freedom* by Jon Wilson, United States of America, The Child's World, Inc., 1999.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

# *Liberty Bell Questions*

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1. What are three reasons why the Liberty Bell began as an unlikely symbol for the independence of the United States? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. According to the text, how many times did the Liberty Bell break? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What was the event that forever associated the Liberty Bell with U.S. independence? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the Bible quotation on the bell that adds to its association with U.S. independence?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What are three special occasions on which the Liberty Bell was rung again after it broke following John Marshall's death? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. When and how did the Liberty Bell get its name? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Thought Question: Why might it have been dangerous to the Liberty Bell to send it all over the United States for celebrations on special occasions? (Do not use the kidnapping idea suggested in the short story assignment below.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Writing Assignment: Write a short story in which the Liberty Bell is kidnapped while on a trip away from Philadelphia and held for ransom to be paid by the U.S. government.
9. Mathematical Question: Research the current costs of shipping goods across the Atlantic Ocean from London, England, (a seaport) to Boston, Massachusetts, (another seaport) and over land from Boston to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. How much would it cost today to ship the one-ton bell from London to Philadelphia?

# The Original 13 Colonies Chart<sup>1</sup>

Below is a chart showing important information about the founding of the original 13 colonies. Use your textbook to fill in the blanks on the chart. Then answer the questions on the following page.

Name of Colony	Founder(s)	Date of Founding	Type of Government at Founding	Major Religion at Founding	Means of Making a Living
Jamestown, Virginia	London Company (later the Virginia Company)		Proprietary	Anglican (and others)	Growing tobacco, trading
Plymouth, Massachusetts	Pilgrims/Virginia Company	1620	Self-governing (Mayflower Compact)		Fishing, trading, farming
Massachusetts Bay, Massachusetts		1630	Self-governing	Puritan	Fishing, trading, farming
New Amsterdam/ New York	Dutch East India Company/Duke of York	1623/Taken over by British 1664		Not given	Trade, shipbuilding, farming, fishing, lumbering, manufacturing
	Roger Williams & Puritans	1636	Self-governing	Modified Puritan with religious toleration	Farming
Connecticut		1636 (Chartered as separate colony in 1662)	Self-governing (Fundamental Orders of Connecticut)	Puritan	Farming
Maryland	Lord Baltimore	1634	Proprietary		Tobacco farming, trading
Carolinas	Eight English noblemen	Land grant 1663; settlers in 1670		Not given (probably Anglican)	Naval supplies; later, rice farming
New Jersey		1664	Proprietary	Not given	Fishing, trading, farming
Pennsylvania	William Penn	1681		Quakers	Farming, trading
Delaware	Originally William Penn	Delaware separated from Pennsylvania 1701		Originally Quakers	Farming, trading
Georgia	Twenty-one men in England/James Oglethorpe in Georgia		Directors or trustees under the rule of the Crown ran the colony	Not given (probably Anglican)	Prison colony and buffer between British & Spanish colonies; farming
New Hampshire	Captain John Mason and Sir Ferdinando Gorges	Settlement progressed gradually; royal colony 1679	Proprietary in a sense, but mostly self-governing; royal colony in 1679	Not given (Many Puritans moved into the area.)	Farming
Maine	Land owned by Mason and Gorges	Settlement progressed gradually; absorbed by Massachusetts	Proprietary until absorbed by Massachusetts in 1688	Not given (Many Puritans moved into the area.)	Farming

<sup>1</sup>The American Republic, Vol. I, to 1865 by Richard Hofstadter, William Miller and Daniel Aaron, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1994.