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Episode 27 (formerly 1703): Statue of Liberty

Transcript:

The Statue of Liberty is one of the most famous landmarks in the world. Often, the statue is referred to as “Lady Liberty” and represents the ideals of freedom and democracy in the minds of many. She stands in New York Harbor at the tip of Manhattan on an island. Her skin is made of copper, which has turned green in the weather. She wears a crown and holds a torch in her right hand and a tablet in her left.

Her full name is “The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World”, and the sculpture was a gift to America from France. The idea of giving the US a monument from France was conceived by Eduard de Laboulaye in 1865. He and many French people admired the concepts of America’s freedom and democracy. He wanted to commemorate the friendship between the nations. His idea was to build the statue in time for the centennial of the Declaration of Independence in 1876.

So, the French people raised money for the sculpture, and American people raised money for the pedestal it would rest on. Sculptor Frederic Auguste Bartholdi designed the statue. As it was built, the designer of the Eiffel Tower was hired to design the inner structural part of the statue.

In the US, architect Richard Morris Hunt designed the pedestal. When the statue was finished in France, it was dismantled and shipped across the Atlantic Ocean, then reassembled in New York. The Statue of Liberty was dedicated on October 29, 1886, ten years after the centennial celebration.

The island on which the statue stands is called Liberty Island. Before that it was known as Bedloe’s Island, and there was an army fortress there called Fort Wood. Nowadays the whole island is part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument and is under the supervision of the National Park Service.

A famous poem by Emma Lazarus was written as part of the fundraising project for the pedestal. The poem is called “The New Colossus”. The most famous lines of the poem are as follows:

“Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free.

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

A bronze plaque of the poem now resides inside the pedestal in the museum there. Because of the liberty of America and this poem, the Statue became an important symbol of freedom to millions of immigrants who passed by the Statue on their way to make new lives in America.

Here are some more interesting facts about the Statue of Liberty:

- The pedestal is made of granite.
- During shipment, the Statue was dismantled into 350 pieces and packed into 214 crates.
- It took four months to reassemble the Statue in New York.
- Nearby Ellis Island, where millions of immigrants were processed into the country, is now also part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument.
- The Statue was restored beginning in 1982. An international team of architects, engineers and conservators directed the project of repairing holes in the copper, replacing rusted iron parts of the inner structure and completely replacing the torch, which is now covered in gold. The Statue reopened in 1986, in time for her own centennial celebration.
- The height of the pedestal plus the Statue is 305 feet, 6 inches; from her heel to the top of her head is 111 feet, 6 inches.
- She weighs 225 tons.
- The seven rays on her crown stand for each of the seven continents.
- Her face is over eight feet tall.
- The tablet in her left hand is 23 feet, 7 inches by 13 feet, 7 inches. The inscription is the date of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, in Roman numerals.

- At the Statue's feet lie broken chains representing freedom from oppression and tyranny.
- There are 154 steps from the pedestal to the head of the Statue.
- There are webcams in the torch and crown of Lady Liberty.

Tourists can visit the Statue of Liberty by ferry and tour the Liberty Island Museum in the pedestal. With a reservation and additional fee, tourists can climb the inside of the Statue to the crown and enjoy a wonderful view. For more information and photographs of the Statue of Liberty, try libertyellisfoundation.org.

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