



## Episode 2, Liberty Bell Pin, Philadelphia and Atlanta

Elyse: Our final story investigates how a powerful symbol of freedom may have played a key role in the aftermath of the Civil War. Few images from American history have the powerful symbolism of the Liberty Bell. While this relic from the country's revolutionary past is now cracked and mute, its message of freedom has resonated for over 200 years. Today, on display in its Philadelphia home, millions come to view the bell each year. But few realize that in the late 1800s this icon of patriotism may have been used as a pawn in a political maneuver that would impact the country for generations. Now, a woman from Charlotte, North Carolina has an artifact from that period, with an outlandish claim.

Sandy: Supposedly this is an actual little piece from the Liberty Bell itself. I've always really wondered if the family story is true.

Elyse: I'm Elyse Luray and I've come to meet Sandy Fisher to find out more about this small pin and its big claim to fame. So what is this I hear? You have a pin that was made from the Liberty Bell?

Sandy: Liberty Bell. That's the family story.

Elyse: Alright, let's check it out. So tell me, how did your family come to own this pin?

Sandy: Supposedly it was owned by my great grandfather. John Murphy Stratton. There he is.

Elyse: Oh, nice! Nice mustache.

Sandy: [Laughs] Yes, I love the mustache.

Elyse: What do you know about him?

Sandy: Lived in Philadelphia, not much else. Maybe some type of city official.

Elyse: Sandy's only clue about why her great grandfather may have gotten the pin comes from family legend.

Sandy: There's been talk about a Cotton States Expo.

Elyse: Cotton States Expo? That sounds very Southern to me. What would cotton have to do with the Liberty Bell? Now, do you know how they got metal from the Liberty to make the pin?



Sandy: No. That really is a mystery. I mean, was a piece of the Liberty Bell itself actually chipped away to make this pin?

Elyse: What can I tell you?

Sandy: Well, my question really to you is: why did my great grandfather get this pin? And is it in fact really a piece of the Liberty Bell?

Elyse: Could a piece of one of the country's most revered symbols really have been melted down to make what is apparently a mere memento? Alright, my first impression is that it seems to be some type of souvenir or maybe mass produced. This looks like the seal of Philadelphia. Let's turn it over. Oh! His name's engraved on the back. Oh, well, maybe it's a little bit more special. Oh, and there's a maker's mark. It says I. Bedichimer, Philadelphia. I wonder what I can find on this metalsmith? Here he is. Bedichimer, I. Masonic marks, Society Emblems and Jewelry, Philadelphia, 1890. As an appraiser, I investigate items like this all the time. Let me check some of the databases I use. Ah! There is one account of a Bedichimer medal selling at Christies in 2001. So this tells me that his work has value. Bedichimer was obviously a well established maker in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So whoever ordered this pin went to one of the very best. If this is a piece of the bell, it makes sense a top-notch metalsmith might have made it. It's clearly not a mass produced souvenir. But what is it? Sandy mentioned that this pin was somehow related to the Cotton States Expo. But it says on here Philadelphia Councils. So I'm thinking...I'd probably better go to Philadelphia. First stop, the City of Brotherly Love. And a visit to the icon at the center of this mystery. Here it is, with its famous inscription: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land and to all the inhabitants thereof." Well, I have to say, the bell itself is really inspirational and it's actually very powerful. It's very symbolic. It's clearly had some work done. And the bell is a little rough around the edges. Let me see if the Philadelphia Free Library has anything about the Cotton States Expo Sandy mentioned. There's no reference to it in these local histories. Of course, why would there be? Pennsylvania wasn't a cotton state. Let me see what I can find on the Internet. In 1895, there was a Cotton States Expo in Atlanta. This is a reputable website. And it makes perfect sense, George was known for cotton. But it doesn't mention Philadelphia at all. Hmm... Let me add Philadelphia to my search. The Liberty Bell comes up, so that's good. 1895. Bell traveled to Atlanta for a Cotton States Expo. Why would Philadelphia send its prize possession, the Liberty Bell, all the way down to Atlanta? And what did Sandy's great grandfather have to do with it? Census records should have more detailed information. Stratton, John M. Here he is. Okay, Philadelphia. Let's see what he does for a living. Caterer? That doesn't make any sense. Sandy said he was some kind of city official. The census is only taken every ten years. Let me look at government records for 1895. Ah, here he is. John Stratton. And in 1895 he was part of the Common Council. There was the Common Council and the Select Council that made up Philadelphia's government. Now it's starting to make sense, because the pin says Philadelphia Councils. The City government was probably involved in the bell's trip. I'm going to check the local newspapers. "Bound for Dixieland. The old Liberty Bell starts upon its journey south, given a glorious farewell. Immense crowds viewed the old Liberty Bell as it was drawn through the streets on a



truck." Oh, and this is cute. It says, "Au Revoir, but not good bye" And it's a cartoon of the Liberty Bell going off to Atlanta. This was a huge event for the city, but how exactly was Sandy's great grandfather involved? And...here he is. He was on some sort of a committee that was in charge of taking the bell on the train down South. This must have been a big honor for Stratton. They probably could have had pins made for the guys that went down South. That makes sense.

So far Sandy's story is checking out. But I'm not seeing any mention of mementos being made from the bell. And why did Philadelphia send Stratton and the bell to a cotton expo anyway? I'm headed to Atlanta. It's a short flight. Certainly easier than Stratton's four day train ride. And in 1895, the distance between North and South was more than just physical. The Civil War had deeply scarred the South and its agricultural economy had never recovered. By the 1890s, while the industrial North was booming, the South remained the poorest region in the country. Today, Atlanta is a racially integrated and dynamic Southern city. But in the 1890s, when Stratton was here, racial violence against African Americans was at an all time high. So what on earth was he attempting to do bringing the bell here? To find out more, I'm meeting up with Harvey Newman, a professor at Georgia State University. Here is the pin I was telling you about.

Harvey Newman: Oh, the Liberty Bell.

Elyse: Well, that's why I'm here. I'm trying to figure out the connection between the Liberty Bell and the Cotton States Exposition. Harvey offers to show me where the expo was held. On the way, he fills me in on what Atlanta hoped to gain from the event.

Harvey: Major reason for the exposition was in order to showcase Atlanta as a place for Northern investment.

Elyse: We're in Piedmont Park, the site of the expo. In 1895, this area was full of exposition buildings, but this staircase is one of the only remaining structures.

Harvey: On opening day they had a crowd estimated at 25,000. And, again, for a city of only 75,000 people, that was a large crowd.

Elyse: More than 800,000 people came to the expo during its 15 week run. So, it was a big deal and a lot of people came. But what does the Liberty Bell have to do with all this?

Harvey: Well, the Liberty Bell was an important national symbol. And to bring that here showed, in a very tangible way, that Atlantans felt that the Civil War was over and that they were ready to reconcile and be a place where Northern capital could come and build factories.

Elyse: You know, this whole thing seems very political to me. Almost like a PR stunt.



Harvey: It definitely was a PR stunt.

Elyse: So I get why the South wanted the Liberty Bell. But why in the world would Philadelphia let this prized possession come all the way down South? Harvey tells me that Northern politicians, like Stratton, felt there was much to be gained by bringing the bell to Atlanta.

Harvey: This was an opportunity for Northern bankers to provide investment capital for this region that needed it very badly.

Elyse: Atlanta rolled out the red carpet for Stratton and the Philadelphians, even declaring a Liberty Bell Day.

Harvey: Look at some of the headlines. "Our Bell Now." And "Atlantans have captured the relic from Philadelphia."

Elyse: Oh, it says here, visitors say they never witnessed such an enthusiastic demonstration. Bringing the bell South had been a master stroke. So it worked.

Harvey: It worked. It helped to reconcile the North and the South.

Elyse: But Harvey tells me that reconciliation came at a cost. Unifying North and South ultimately helped cement segregation, a reality that seemed to be accepted in the expo's opening day speech by black leader, Booker T. Washington.

Harvey: That speech, the so-called Atlanta Compromise Speech, became one of the most defining moments in American race relations. Washington said, "Whites and Blacks should be as separate as the fingers on the hand and yet function as one hand."

Elyse: Ironically, the Liberty Bell played an unwitting role in this process that left Southern blacks far from free. But what about Stratton's claim that his pin was made from the bell? Did you ever hear about the bell maybe being damaged or some metal taken from it while it was here?

Harvey: The bell was very carefully guarded during the entire trip to Atlanta. I don't know anything about metal from the Liberty Bell going into a pin.

Elyse: So I've answered Sandy's question about why Stratton got the pin, but was the pin made from the Liberty Bell? I'm headed back to Philadelphia. Karie Diethorn, Curator of Independence National Historic Park, has agreed to give History Detectives special access to the bell after hours.



Karie: Hi. Elyse, this is Jennifer.

Elyse: Hi, Jennifer. Jennifer Mass is a Senior Scientist at the Winterthur Museum and has offered to help us test Stratton's claim.

Jennifer: Okay, what we're going to do is elemental analysis of the bell and then elemental analysis of the pin as well.

Elyse: Okay. So if the metals match...it's a match.

Jennifer: Yes.

Elyse: Okay. And how do you do that?

Jennifer: We're going to use this technique, x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy, and this is the spectrometer here.

Elyse: This high tech gun is going to analyze one of the country's most historic artifacts.

Jennifer: The beam of x-rays is going to come out and hit this surface of the bell.

Elyse: By analyzing how the bell responds to x-rays, Jennifer can tell what metals are present and in what concentrations.

Elyse: Okay, so what's the final analysis?

Jennifer: Well, what we see here is about 70 percent copper and roughly 27 percent tin.

Elyse: Okay.

Elyse: Is the metal of the little bell on the pin the same as the Liberty Bell? So can we put it to the test?

Jennifer: So, we can give that a try. Okey-doke, shall we take a look at the results? Do you see this really tall peak right here? That actually corresponds to silver. We do have a very small copper peak here. But what that tells us is it's about 90 percent silver and ten percent copper. Not what we were expecting.

Elyse: So it's not a match.



Jennifer: It's not a match. Sorry.

Elyse: You know, I have to tell you, I think Sandy is going to be a bit disappointed about the pin.

Karie: Well, hold on. I have something really interesting to show you.

Elyse: Okay. Karie's got an idea. A little known story about the bell's famous crack could put Stratton's pin in a new light.

Karie: In 1846, they needed to repair the Liberty Bell. They wanted to ring it for George Washington's birthday. And they couldn't, because the bell had cracked. So they performed a technique called "stop drilling," where metal is actually removed from either side of the crack to make it wider. And that's the crack you see today, really. It's a repair, not an actual crack. And they removed that metal so that when the bell is struck, those edges don't rub together and make a buzzing sound.

Elyse: Karie shows me an article from 1846 that says the metal removed from the bell was considered sacred.

Elyse: So there was metal.

Karie: Yeah! A lot of it. I mean, if you look at the crack today, it's about three-quarters of an inch wide and 21 inches long. That's a lot of metal!

Elyse: And what did they do with it? And what Karie showed me next will be big news for Sandy.

Elyse: Sandy, I really learned a lot about the Liberty Bell. I tell Sandy how her great grandfather was presented the pin for bringing the bell down to Atlanta.

Sandy: I just didn't know anything about him. And to know that he did something like that is really special.

Elyse: But tests show that the metal from the pin and the bell didn't match.

Sandy: I'm very relieved to hear that.

Elyse: Why?

Sandy: Because the idea of desecrating something like the Liberty Bell has always bothered me.



Elyse: But there's another angle. Karie showed me a small bell made with leftover metal from the Liberty Bell's long-ago repair.

Karie: Here's an example of the city taking some of the metal from the stop drilling process and making an object out of it.

Elyse: Karie believes the same could be true for Sandy's pin.

Karie: What it means is that the copper in your pin could very well be the copper from the Liberty Bell.

Elyse: It's impossible to say for sure, but there's a good chance that your great grandfather's pin was made from some metal from the Liberty Bell.

Sandy: Oh, my gracious. I was always afraid of this idea of somebody in there chipping away. But if they kept it, that's wonderful.

Elyse: You know, it was a very complicated time in America. The Liberty Bell brought the North and the South together, and your grandfather was a part of that.

Sandy: Well, it makes me very proud of a part of my family. See, I'm going to get choked up. That I never knew that what he did. It makes me very proud that he was a part of this.