Preserving the Declaration of Independence

BY WALDON FAWCETT

WHEN, a few weeks ago, the newspaper dispatches from Washington made mention of the fact that a descendant of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence had applied to the president for permission to look at that famous document the public received its first hint of the extraordinary care exercised by Uncle Sam for the safe keeping of what is, in a way, the nation's most prized possession. Probably no relic in the world is more carefully guarded than this self-same piece of parchment with its roster of significant autograph signatures.

Every time an exposition is held anywhere in the United States the projectors conceive the idea of borrowing the Declaration of Independence as their chief drawing card in the way of an historical exhibit, but all hopes of this kind are doomed to disappointment. The Declaration was transferred to Philadelphia for the Centennial in 1876, but never before nor since has it been out of its depository at the national capital and it is pretty safe to predict that it will never in future be disturbed.

JOHN A. TONNER CUSTODIAN OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

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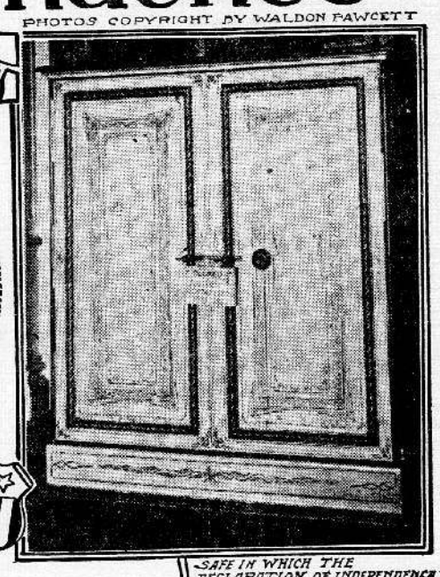
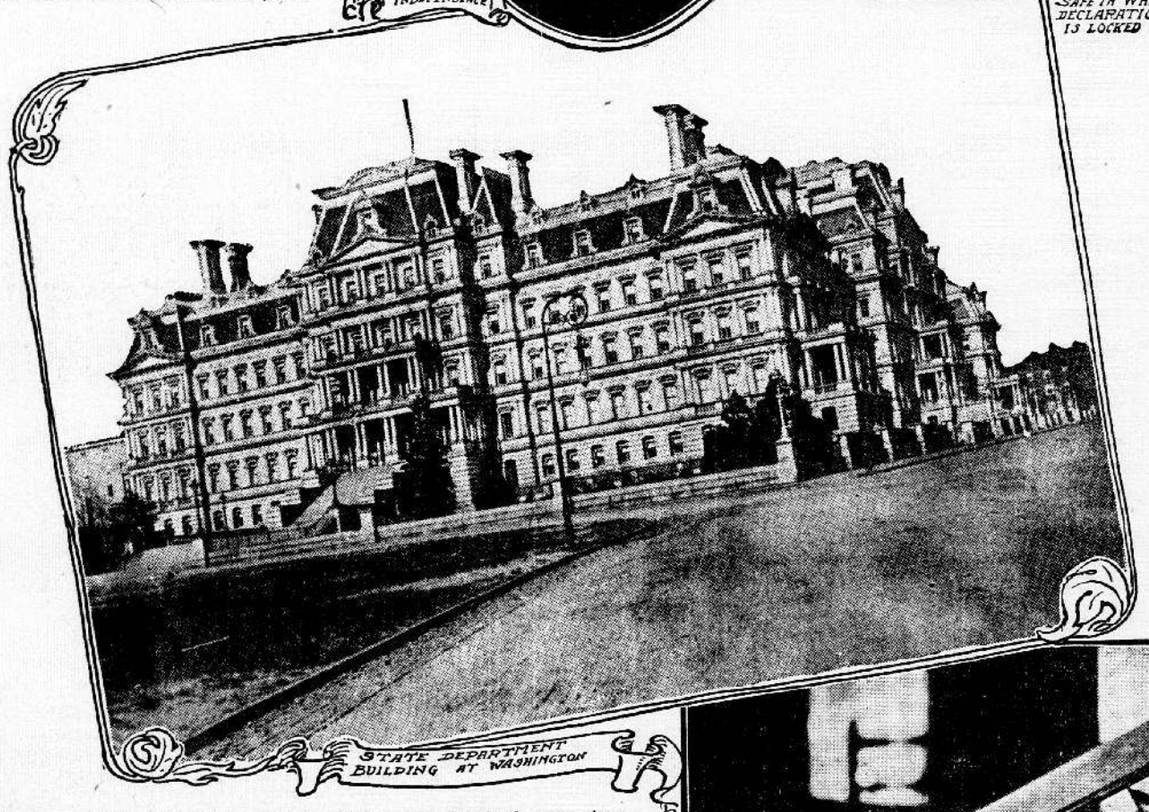
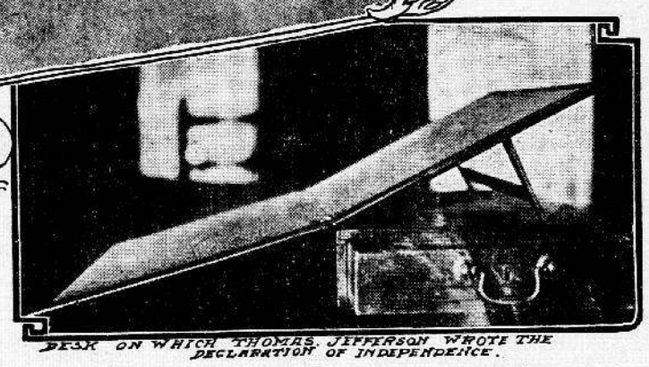


SAFE IN WHICH THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE IS LOCKED



STATE DEPARTMENT BUILDING AT WASHINGTON



DESK ON WHICH THOMAS JEFFERSON WROTE THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

During the past decade there has been a redoubling of protective measures looking to the safeguarding and preservation of the invaluable document. Some years ago the secretary of state issued an order that the Declaration should be hermetically sealed in a light-tight, fire-proof, burglar-proof safe, and that this safe should not be opened except upon his written order. How resolute is the determination of the officials to keep the document in that seclusion that is believed to be essential for its preservation may be surmised from the fact that never in the seven years since the "retirement order" was issued has any person been able to induce the secretary of state to issue the necessary order to obtain a peep at the important document.

The Declaration of Independence has had a most interesting history since it came into existence on that memorable fourth of July in Philadelphia one and one-third centuries ago. The penned document that now reposes in the library of the state department at Washington is the one and only official instrument. So far as known, there was no duplicate or extra copy of the declaration made for "printers' copy," as would now be done in the case of any important document the contents of which were to be perpetuated. It is believed that the copy in the hands of Secretary Thomson at the close of the session on that first Independence day went to the official printer, John Dunlap and was used by him as copy. The next day, in making up the journal of the continental congress, the secretary wafered in a blank space left for this purpose a copy of the broadside print.

Copies of the printed broadside were also sent out in compliance with the resolution of congress to "assemblies, conventions, councils of safety," etc. Other editions differing somewhat in style were printed by Dunlap to meet the demand for the Declaration and a few copies were printed on vellum. Meanwhile the original document was most carefully preserved. Under an act of congress approved July 27, 1789, the Declaration was deposited in what was then known as the department of foreign affairs. A few months later the name of this branch of the government was changed to department of state and the secretary of state was declared to have charge and custody of the Declaration.

The Declaration has virtually been in the custody of the state department continuously from that date to the present time. To be sure it reposed in the patent office at Washington from 1841 to 1877, but the patent office, it may be recalled, was for many years a part of the department of state and occupied what was believed to be a fireproof building, whereas that which then housed the department of state was not regarded as affording any surety against damage by fire. After the Centennial, however, the Declaration was transferred to the state department proper, that branch of the government having in the meantime acquired an up-to-date building. Here it has remained ever since in the library, which has spacious quarters on the fourth floor of the great granite building occupied by the state, war and navy departments.

The present solicitude for the preservation of the Declaration with all possible care dates from a period somewhat prior to the World's Columbian exposition in Chicago in 1893. It was proposed to transfer the Declaration to Chicago for exhibition and a steel safe or "packing case," as it was then termed, was specially constructed to serve as a repository for the document en route and during the period of the fair. While these preparations were in progress the officials of the state department turned the matter over in their minds and eventually came to the conclusion that it was risky business to have the nation's most honored relic carted about the country, even if the moving was done with all possible care. The president took this view of the matter also and so it was decided not to allow the Declaration to be transferred to Chicago.

About this time John Hay, who was then acting as secretary of state, asked the National Academy of Sciences to carefully investigate the condition of the document and to make suggestions as to ways and means for its preservation. Accordingly President Agassiz of the National Academy appointed a special committee, consisting of John S. Billings, Ira Remsen and Charles F. Chandler, to confer with Secretary Hay on the subject. Eventually this special committee was given an opportunity to make a careful examination of the precious instrument with the assistance of Mr. A. H. Allen, then serving as the chief of the bureau of rolls and library of the state department and also with the aid of Dr. Wilbur M. Gray, of the Army Medical museum.

It was found that the document had suffered very seriously from the very harsh treatment to which it was exposed during the earlier years of the republic. Folding and rolling have creased and broken the parchment. The wet press-copying operation to which it was subjected about 1820 for the purpose of producing a fac-simile copy, removed a large portion of the ink. Subsequent exposure to the action of light for more than 30 years while the instrument was placed on exhibition has resulted in the fading of the ink, particularly in the signatures. The committee was pleased, however, to find that no evidence of mold or other disintegrating agents could be discovered upon the parchment by careful microscopic examination. They also reported against the proposition which had been advanced to apply chemicals with a view to restoring the original color of the ink. It was the opinion of the experts that such application could be but partially successful, inasmuch as a considerable portion of the original ink was removed in making the copy of 1820 and also because such application might result in serious discoloration of the parchment.

Finally the committee reported adversely upon the suggestion that any solution, such as collodion, paraffin, etc., be applied with a view to strengthening the parchment or making it moisture proof. But the committee did urge that the document be kept in the dark and as dry as possible, and never placed on exhibition. Accordingly, in 1894, it was hermetically sealed in a frame and placed in the steel case above mentioned, together with the original copy of the constitution of the United States. Then, in 1902, Secretary Hay issued the order in accordance with which the huge square steel box that holds the Declaration was locked and sealed. It has been opened once since that time in order that the officials might ascertain the condition of the document. It appeared to be in exactly the same state of preservation as when placed in the case half a dozen years ago and indeed Mr. John A. Tonner, chief of the division of rolls and library of the state department, the present custodian of the Declaration, is of the opinion that the deterioration or at least the fading of the Declaration has been almost completely arrested.

The interior of the steel safe which comprises the final resting place of the Declaration contains four drawers. In one of these reposes the Declaration—kept perfectly flat between two pieces of heavy plate glass. The other four drawers are given over to the original copy of the constitution, similarly protected. The constitution, it may be added, is in an excellent state of preservation and really does not need the extreme protective measures to which it is subjected because of being in company with the Declaration.

Present-day visitors to the state department, although they may not see the original Declaration of Independence, can inspect something almost as interesting—namely, the original draft of the Declaration in Jefferson's handwriting, with a few interlineations made by Franklin and Adams. This is displayed in a steel cabinet that stands adjacent to the safe containing the original Declaration. The steel exhibition cabinet also holds one of the fac-similes of the engrossed copy of the Declaration—one of those reproductions made by order of President Monroe in order to secure 200 copies for the signers of the Declaration and their heirs.

In a glass case in this same treasure house of historic mementoes is the small, plain, unpolished mahogany desk on which Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. This interesting relic came into possession of the government in 1880. The desk had been given by Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Coolidge, Jr., upon the occasion of the latter's marriage to Jefferson's granddaughter, Miss Randolph. On the death of Mr. Coolidge, whose wife had died a year or two previously, the desk became the property of their four children and was by them presented to the nation. It was the expressed wish of the donors "to offer it to the United States that it may have a place in the department of state with the immortal instrument which was written upon it in 1776."

The desk bears an inscription in Jefferson's handwriting as follows: "Thomas Jefferson gives this writing desk to Joseph Coolidge, Jr., as a memorial of his affection. It was made from a drawing of his own by Ben Randall, cabinet maker, of Philadelphia, with whom he first lodged on his arrival in that city in May, 1776, and is the identical one on which he wrote the Declaration of Independence. Politics as well as religion has its superstitions. These gaining gaining strength with time, may one day give imaginary value to this relic for its association with the birth of the great charter of our independence. Monticello, Nov. 18, 1825."

Although Jefferson was nearly 83 years of age when he presented the desk, his donation inscription, above given, is written in the same bold, clear and strong handwriting in which he penned the Declaration of Independence almost half a century before, when a young man little more than 30.

The circumstances under which Jefferson was selected for the honorable task of writing the Declaration of Independence were at one time the subject of considerable controversy. The evidence on the subject is derived chiefly from the writings of John Adams and of Jefferson himself. These two distinguished statesmen disagree as to some important details.

Mr. Jefferson in his memoir written in 1821 states simply that the committee for drawing the Declaration desired him to do it: that he accordingly wrote it, and that, being approved by the committee, he reported it to congress on Friday, the twenty-eighth of June, when, after three days of debate, it was adopted on July 4.

In Mr. Adams' autobiography he says: "The committee of independence were Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, Robert R. Livingston. There were more reasons than one for the selection of Jefferson for such important work. He had the reputation of a masterly pen; he was a delegate from Virginia. Another reason was Richard Henry Lee was not beloved by most of his colleagues from Virginia, and Jefferson was set up to rival and supplant him. The committee had several meetings in which were proposed the articles of which the Declaration was to consist, and minutes made of them. The work of making the draft was left to Jefferson and me, but on my insistence Jefferson alone did the work.

Summed up, the substantial points of difference in the accounts of these two men regarding the same transaction relates to the action of the committee in designating the person or persons who were to prepare the draft of a Declaration. Mr. Adams states that Jefferson and himself were appointed a subcommittee to prepare it; Mr. Jefferson states that he alone was directed by the committee to write the Declaration. This question is not important, since Mr. Adams' version does not in the least impair Mr. Jefferson's claim to the authorship of the instrument.

It is proper to add that Mr. Jefferson's account is confirmed by the original manuscript draft of the Declaration, exhibiting the corrections and interlineations made by Dr. Franklin and Mr. Adams in their respective handwritings. These amendments were not important. The reasons assigned by Mr. Adams for the selection of Mr. Jefferson as the writer of the Declaration are so numerous that it is difficult to determine which of them he intended should be regarded as the principal or decisive one. In the autobiography he states that there were more reasons than one why Mr. Jefferson was appointed on a committee of such importance. He assigns two reasons: one, Mr. Jefferson's reputation as a writer, and the other the desire of his Virginia colleagues to have Mr. Jefferson supplant Mr. Richard Henry Lee. In a letter to Mr. Pickering Mr. Adams gives as the reason why Mr. Jefferson was placed at the head of the committee that it was "the Frankfort advice to place Virginia at the head of everything;" but he also adds that Mr. Jefferson brought with him to congress "a reputation for literature, science and a happy talent of composition," and that this reputation had been sustained by writings "remarkable for their peculiar felicity of expression." As in the case of Washington, therefore, it would seem that there were reasons of eminent fitness and qualification for the duty assigned; and certainly the Declaration of Independence itself fully justifies the selection. Few state papers have ever been written with more skill, or greater adaptation to the purposes in view. Whether its sentiments were purely original with its author, or were gathered from the political philosophy which had become familiar to the American mind, through the great discussions of the time, it must forever remain an imperishable monument of his power of expression and his ability to touch the passions, as well as to address the reason of mankind.

With regard to the passage concerning slavery, which was stricken out of Jefferson's draft, we may well conceive that both northern and southern men might have felt the injustice of the terrible denunciation with which he charged upon the king all the horrors, crimes and consequences of the African slave trade, and in which he accused him of exciting the slaves to insurrection, and "to purchase the liberty of which he had deprived them by murdering the people upon whom he had obtruded them." Mr. Jefferson, in drawing up the list of our national accusations against the king, obviously intended to refer to him as the representative of the public policy and acts of the mother country; and it is true that the imperial government was, and must always remain, responsible for the existence of slavery in the colonies. But this was not one of the grievances to be redressed by the Revolution, it did not constitute one of the reasons for aiming at independence, and there was not sufficient ground for the accusation that the government of Great Britain had knowingly sought to excite general insurrections among the slaves.

Tennyson and the Ladies

Mrs. Thackeray Ritchie was at Aldworth the next time I was there and we were all entertained—I for the second time—by the phonograph, into which, as the poet remarked, "they make me spout things!" Mrs. Ritchie was trying to listen, I think, to the bugle song from "The Princess" and was consequently impervious to his reiterated request to make room for him beside her on the sofa, when he remarked with the most comical gesture of mock impatience, "the woman's written so many books, she can't understand common English." Decidedly he enjoyed testing the capacity of his lady friends in the matter of "taking chaff." Presently his baby grandson, the little ten-month old Lionel Hallam, was brought in—a bright lovely boy. I had him in my arms, when his grandfather bade me turn him to the light that Mrs. Ritchie might see him better, adding, "I always feel of a baby like that that it will be the father of a finer race."—E. R. Chapman in Putnam's

Too Loud.

Jack—Say, Tom, will you do me a favor?

Tom—Anything in reason, old man.

Jack—Then kindly leave your trousers out in the hall to-night.

Tom—The idea! What do you want me to do that for?

Jack—The pattern is so loud they will keep me awake.

Love's Privilege

A woman should be able to tell by glancing at her husband if things have gone well or ill with him. His voice, his walk, his bearing, all tell his secrets to the woman who loves him and by virtue of the special study she has made of him she should be able to go straight into the secret chambers of his heart and find there the sorrow he has hidden from her, and give him the sympathy he craves.

It was more than beauty, more than youth and charm that made Djemil the Azra say to his beloved:

"While I live my heart will love thee, and when I shall be no more, still will my shadow follow thy shadow athwart the tombs."

Women are much more given to the use of verbal endearments than are men; and they often overdo it. They should try to learn the wisdom of economizing in terms of endearment, lest they become commonplace.—

NOT LOOKING FOR TROUBLE

Young Man Unnecessarily Alarmed Over Question Put to Him by Old Gentleman.

A quiet, bashful sort of a young fellow was making a call on a Capitol hill girl one evening not so very long ago, when her father came into the parlor with his watch in his hand. It was about half past nine o'clock. At the moment the young man was standing on a chair, straightening a picture over the piano. The girl had asked him to fix it. As he turned the old gentleman, a gruff, stout fellow, said:

"Young man, do you know what time it is?"

The bashful youth got off the chair nervously. "Yes, sir," he replied. "I was just going."

He went into the hall without any delay and took his hat and coat. The girl's father followed him. As the caller reached for the doorknob the old gentleman again asked him if he knew what time it was.

"Yes, sir," was the youth's reply. "Good-night!" And he left without waiting to put his coat on.

After the door had closed the old gentleman turned to the girl.

"What's the matter with that fellow?" he asked. "My watch ran down this afternoon and I wanted him to tell me the time so that I could set it."—Denver Post.

IN HOSPITAL FOR NINE MONTHS.

Awful Tale of Suffering From Kidney Trouble.

Alfred J. O'Brien, Second St., Sterling, Colo., says: "I was in the Baltimore Marine Hospital for nine months. I had a dull pain in the small of my back that completely wore me out. The urine was in a terrible state, and some days I would pass half a gallon of blood. I left the hospital because they wanted to operate on me. I went to St. Joseph's Hospital at Omaha and put in three months there without any gain. I was pretty well discouraged when I was advised to use Doan's Kidney Pills. I did so and by the time I had taken one box, the pain in the back left me. I kept right on and a perfect cure was the result."

Remember the name—Doan's.

For sale by all dealers. 50 cents a box. Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo., N. Y.

An Efficient Mistress.

Mrs. A., who had a shiftless colored maid, was hurrying through her morning's work in order to go out with a friend in the afternoon. As she flew about from room to room she heard the colored woman chuckling to herself as if very much enjoying something. Impatiently she said:

"What in the world is it that amuses you so, Isabel?"

"Well, Mis' Bessie, when I heard you gallopin' aroun' upstairs I jes' t'ought if you'd been de Lawd it wouldn't 'a' took you no six days to make de hebbens an' de yearth!"—S. A. Rice, in Woman's Home Companion.

In the Gloaming.

"You were a long time getting me, John, dear!"

"And you were a long time waiting, pet!"—The Circle.

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