

## The Statue of Liberty

[Photo: Dr. Farmer.jpg] **9/15/19** — Frenchman Edouard de Laboulaye originally conceived the idea for the construction of the Statue of Liberty in 1865. The notion of the joint project between France and the United States was intended to both commemorate friendship between the two nations, and to celebrate the 1876 centennial year of the American Declaration of Independence. The construction partnership between France and the United States called for the copper statue to be funded and built in France, and for the granite pedestal to be funded and built by the United States. The completed statue would then be disassembled and shipped from France to the United States to be reconstructed on an island in New York Harbor that would later be named Liberty Island.

In France, the designer of the Eiffel Tower, Alexandre Gustave Eiffel, designed the iron frame of the statue while sculptor Frederic Auguste Bartholdi designed the copper exterior skin of the statue. Meanwhile, in the United States, architect Richard Morris Hunt designed the granite pedestal for the statue. The target installation and unveiling date of 1876 was delayed due to fundraising challenges in both countries, which resulted in further delays in the construction and transportation of the statue from France to America. Completed in France in 1884, the statue was then disassembled in 350 individual pieces, and shipped across the Atlantic arriving in New York in June of 1885. However, because the pedestal construction had not yet been completed, the statue was not dedicated until October 28, 1886 by United States President Grover Cleveland.

I recently had the privilege of traveling with a group of generous donors to New York City for the purpose of purchasing Steinway grand pianos to be donated to Weatherford College. On the first evening of the trip, we took the donor group on an evening cruise in New York Harbor. There we were, floating in New York Harbor at the foot of the Statue of Liberty. At dusk, we experienced first-hand the vantage point of Lady Liberty that wave after wave of immigrants saw as they entered America for the first time. Between 1892 and 1954, some 12 million immigrants came through New York Harbor seeking a better life for themselves and their families. I could only imagine how they must have felt inspired as they looked up at her. Many must have been filled with an optimism that all of their hopes and dreams for a better life could become reality in this great young country known as America. As our donor group floated there on the Hudson River looking up at Lady Liberty, the American Dream was alive...it was palpable! There, staring up at the illuminated Statue of Liberty at dusk, one could not help being permeated by the sense of hope that filled the air.

As I later reflected on the Statue of Liberty experience, I could not help but to draw parallels to Weatherford College. How many students and former students came to WC with the hope of making a better life for themselves and their families? In the past 150 years, how many WC students yearned to breathe free and realize the American Dream? Here we are, 150 years after the founding of WC, an institution older than the University of Texas at Austin, older than Texas A&M University, an institution conceived in liberty, birthed in turbulence, and reared in transition. Now, 150 years later, a mature institution stands poised on precipice of greatness. Liberty is her heartbeat, justice is her pulse, and opportunity is her gift. Like Lady Liberty, Weatherford College stands as a beacon of opportunity for all seeking to realize the American Dream.

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