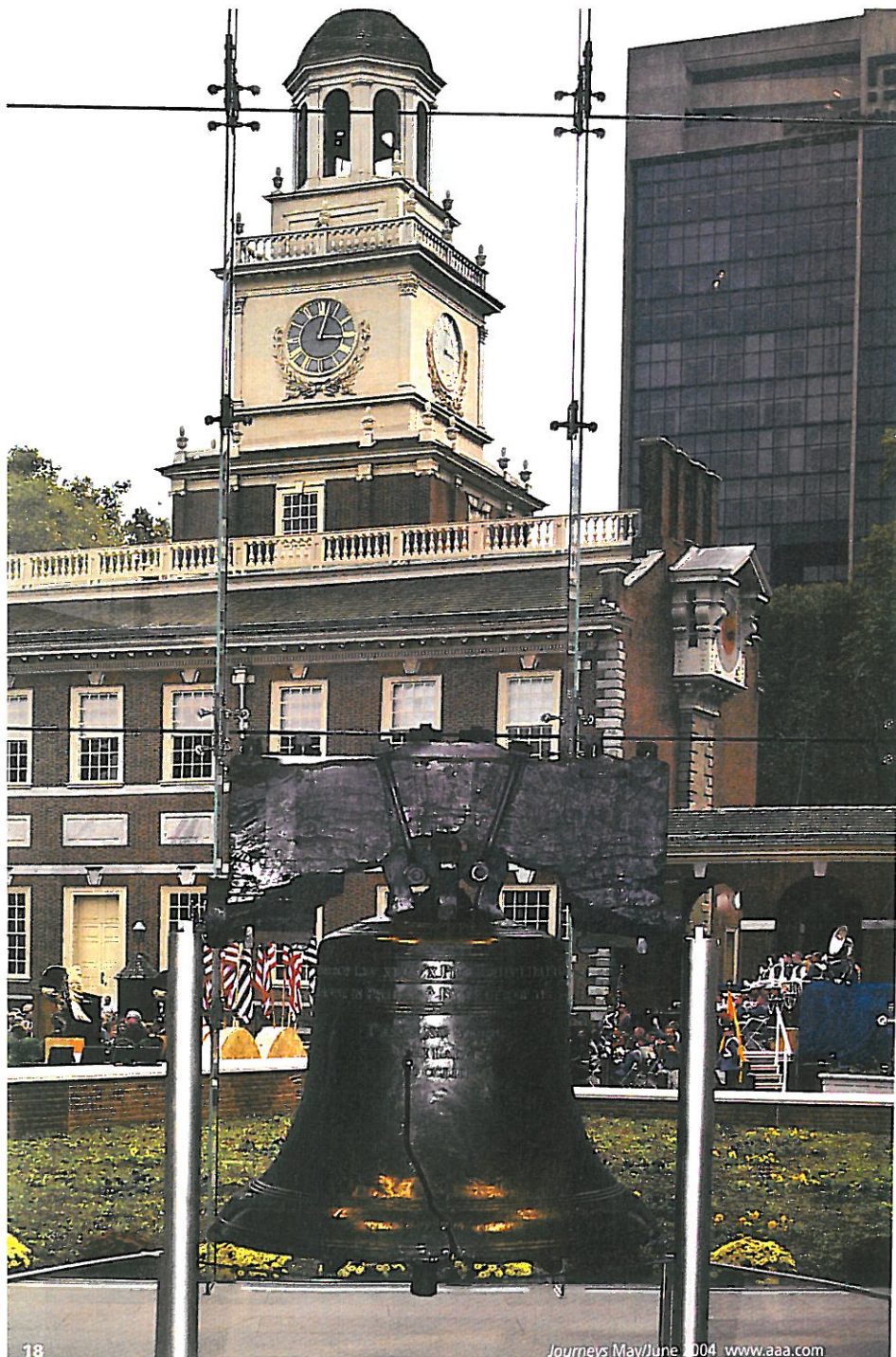


# Historic Philadelphia

*The City of Brotherly Love extends a warm welcome to visitors looking for the past in the present.*

By Debbie Harmsen



Once the cultural center of the new world, the nation's capital and the biggest city this side of the Atlantic, Philadelphia was called America's Athens for good reason. It's where many of our country's institutions began, and still flourish.

Though Philly has had many firsts: hospital, medical school, zoo and U.S. mint, it's probably most known for being where the first – and second – Continental Congress met, setting the course for our nation's independence and establishing our bedrock principles.

The past lives on in this Cradle of Liberty, but not as a relic of a bygone era. Rather, there's a sense of the past's continued effect on the present.

## We the People

This continuity especially plays out at the new National Constitution Center, which opened last summer. The center aims to instill in visitors a greater understanding of our nation's foundational document and an awareness that democracy didn't just happen 228 years ago but requires continued participation.

"It shows you how these four little pieces of dried-up parchment affect your life today," notes Mark Beyerle with the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau.

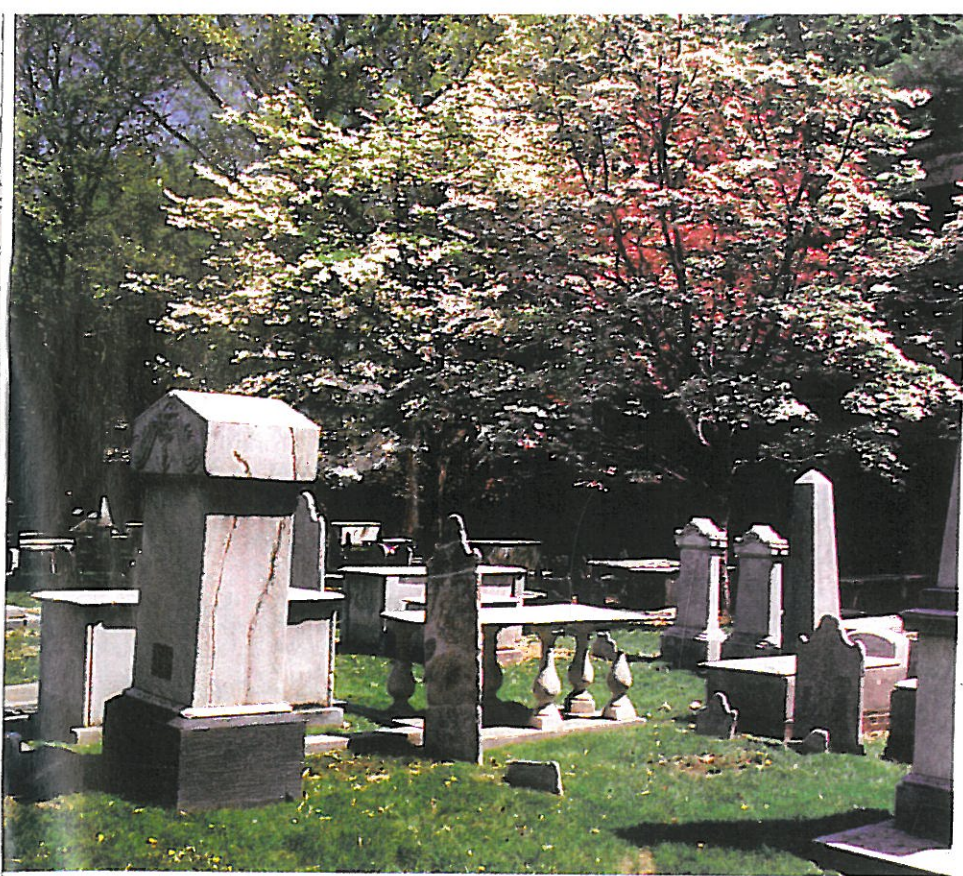
Hands-on exhibits invite visitors to take a participatory role: Vote for your favorite president, sit at a senator's desk, decide a case in court and walk among the lifesize statues of the Constitution's 39 signers and three dissenters. At the Counterpoints exhibits, be immersed in a discussion about the pros and cons of seceding from the Union in 1860.

In tandem with the 2004 election, a special exhibition this year focuses on voting rights.

## Let Freedom Ring

Just across the way from the NCC at Sixth and Market/Chestnut streets is the city's newest attraction, Liberty Bell Center, the latest home for the hallowed icon.

Cast in 1751 to mark the 50th anniversary of William Penn's Charter of Rights and Privileges, the bell was designed for the Pennsylvania State House. It rang to announce Assembly meetings and public gatherings.



**In Christ Church Cemetery, seven of the signers of the Declaration of Independence lay buried. The graveyard is a few blocks from Christ Church where George Washington, Andrew Hamilton and Betsy Ross are buried.**

“You didn’t have CNN News. If you had news to tell, you rang a bell,” quipped Beyerle.

Though originally referred to as merely the State House bell, in the 1830s its new moniker began to stick after anti-slavery groups used the bell as a symbol for their cause. The name was inspired from the bell’s inscription, “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof – Leviticus 25:10.”

The bell tolled until 1846, when it was rung for Washington’s birthday and a final crack rendered it silent lest it be split in two.

Through interactive exhibits and informative panels, the bell’s new center helps visitors understand its history and how it came to be considered a national symbol. National Park Service rangers are on hand to answer questions.

Outside, groups still rally around the bell’s theme of liberty.

“A day doesn’t go by when we don’t have some group protesting,” says Frank Eidmann of the National Park Service.

Across the street is the bell’s first home, the Philadelphia State House, better known as Independence Hall. Inside this

famous red-brick edifice both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were adopted and signed. The copy of the first publicly read Declaration, read in front of Independence Square on July 8, 1776, is on display in the west wing. (The actual signed document is in Washington, D.C.) Also exhibited here are a draft of the Articles of Confederation and Washington’s

working copy of the Constitution. The silver inkstand the signers dipped their quills into is also on display.

“This is the city’s stunning jewel,” says Eidmann. “It’s why people come – to see the bell and the hall.”

To tour the main hall, visitors need to pick up a free, timed ticket at the Independence National Historical Park Visitor Center (at its new location at Sixth and Market streets). Eidmann advises getting this ticket before noon.

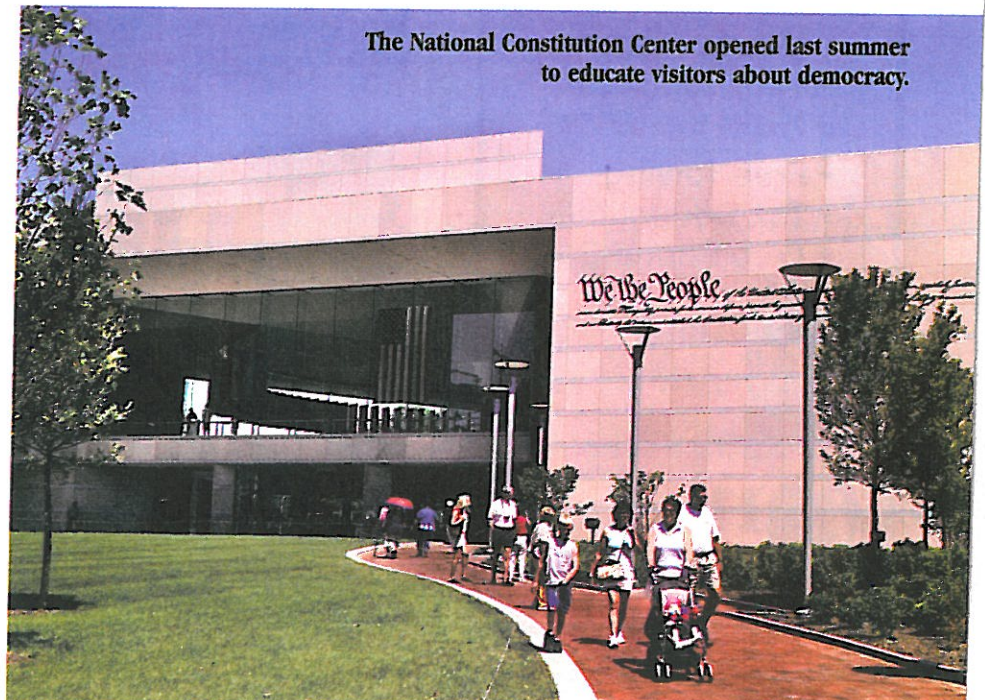
### **In God We Trust**

While in the neighborhood, visitors can step into the house of worship where many of our founding fathers attended services. Members of Christ Church included George Washington, Andrew Hamilton and Betsy Ross. The font used to baptize William Penn is in the back of the church (note the giant Hershey kiss-looking baptistry).

Benjamin Franklin helped raise money to fund the building of Christ Church’s steeple in part because he needed a very tall structure for his electrical experiments. In fact, the Georgian-style structure was “the tallest building in America for the better part of 100 years,” says Neil Ronk, the church historian and head guide. “This is the Empire State Building in the Colonial era.”

What visitors notice the most when they come are the grave markings of those buried under the aisles. To be buried as part of the church’s foundation was the highest honor a church could give some-

**The National Constitution Center opened last summer to educate visitors about democracy.**



one, Ronk explains. It signified that the person lived an exemplary life. William Penn's grandson is buried near the pulpit.

In the church graveyard a few blocks away, seven of the signers of the Declaration of Independence lay buried. Among them is Benjamin Franklin, whose grave is dotted with copper coins people have placed there for good luck. Ironically, the tradition began due to Franklin's adage, "A penny saved is a penny earned." (The pennies – which can add up to as much as \$3,000 a year--are saved, however, and go to charitable causes supported by the church.)

### A Colonial Toast

Not all of our Patriot gatherings were in formal settings. They often met at the local tavern, where they discussed politics and celebrated important milestones.

Today, City Tavern re-creates the era through period clothing worn by wait staff and menu selections that would have been popular in the 18th and early 19th century. Some of the dishes and drinks are prepared from the recipes of those early day's celebrities, such as Martha Washington's turkey pot pie and the homemade ales of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

It's a great place to end a day of walking through the present to step into the past. ♦

### Before You Go

AAA offers special hotel-attraction packages to Philly. AAA also can provide you with maps, a TripTik® and TourBook® guide. Contact your local AAA office for information.



To learn about current and upcoming events in the city, such as First Fridays in Old City, the Lights of Liberty show and the "Manet and the Sea" exhibition running through May 31 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, go online to [www.gophila.com](http://www.gophila.com) or call the Independence Visitors Center at 1-800-537-7676.