

History Samples

Rescuing Our Documents of Freedom



By Sharlene P. Nelson
Art by Matt Faulkner



household goods of people fleeing the city. The messenger hurried through the crowd, found Pleasonton, and gave him the note.

Pleasonton read Monroe's note. He ordered him to find a safe place for the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. "I proceeded to purchase coarse linen and cause it to be made into bags of convenient size," Pleasonton later wrote. He, with the other clerks, began placing department records, George Washington's letters, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution in the linen bags. As they worked, Secretary of War John Armstrong walked by on the way to his office.


His voice rising in anger, Armstrong told Pleasonton he was foolish. Armstrong still believed the British would not attack Washington. "I replied that we were under a different belief," wrote Pleasonton, "... it was the part of prudence to preserve the valuable papers of the Revolutionary Government." He finished packing, then loaded the valuable cargo onto carts.

Pleasonton and other clerks drove the horse-drawn carts across a Potomac River bridge and continued upriver a few miles to an abandoned mill. Pleasonton hid the linen bags in the mill. Then he changed his mind. He noticed that the mill was near a foundry where cannons were

made. He was afraid that the British might find the foundry and destroy it, the mill, and the valuable documents.

The next day, Pleasonton obtained wagons from nearby farmers. After loading the linen bags into the wagons, he and the men drove thirty-five miles to Leesburg, Virginia. They arrived on the evening of August 24. Pleasonton found an empty house, stored the documents, locked the doors, and gave the key to the sheriff. Exhausted, Pleasonton checked into a hotel. That night while he slept, Leesburg townspeople watched a distant, bright glow in the night sky. The British had set fire to Washington. Homes and government buildings were burned, including the State Department offices.

A month later, the United States defeated the British at Baltimore, Maryland. People began returning to Washington to rebuild the city. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were also returned to the capital.

In 1820, Stephen Pleasonton was appointed superintendent of the nation's lighthouse establishment, a position he held for thirty-two years. Many remember him as the superintendent who established more than 200 U.S. lighthouses. Few remember him as the clerk who rescued our documents of freedom. 

George Cockburn said that taking a country's capital is "always so great a blow to the government of a country."

Messages began arriving in Washington saying that the British were coming. James Monroe volunteered to scout their movement. He mounted his horse and rode nearly fifty miles southeast of the city. On Saturday, August 20, Monroe spied the British commanded by Admiral Cockburn. He watched their ships sailing up the Patuxent River in Maryland and their troops marching overland toward Washington.

Monroe quickly scribbled a note to Pleasonton and gave it to a messenger. As the messenger rode into Washington, dust clouds filled the hot, humid air. Horses and oxen pulled wagons filled with the

The thirteen American colonies wanted to be free and independent of Great Britain. In 1776, representatives from the colonies signed the Declaration of Independence declaring their freedom. After winning freedom in the American Revolution, representatives created and signed the U.S. Constitution. In 1789, the Constitution became the law for the new nation of the United States of America.



Every year more than a million people visit the National Archives in Washington, D.C. They come to see the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Signed more than two hundred years ago, the documents are sealed behind thick glass, where visitors can see the faded signatures of our Founding Fathers. After the documents were signed, the U.S. Congress placed them in the care of the State Department.

In the summer of 1814, Stephen Pleasonton served as a senior clerk for Secretary of State James Monroe. Pleasonton worked with other clerks in the State Department offices in Washington City, the nation's young capital. Eight thousand people lived in the city where new government buildings stood along dirt streets.

These were the final days of the War of 1812, when United States soldiers and sailors defended the nation against the British. Some people thought the British might attack Washington. Others thought the city was safe, including Secretary of War John Armstrong. He declared, "... they certainly will not come here! What the devil will they do here?" The British, however, intended to capture Washington. Admiral

Dipped in Chocolate

By K.J. Crocker Art by Mark Corcoran

A long time ago, Milton S. Hershey, the creator of the popular chocolate bars, was dipped in ooey, gooey chocolate. I know all about it. My grandfather was there!

Hershey was a talented candymaker. As a boy, he was apprenticed to a candymaker, where he developed not only the skills but also the passion for making candy. At nineteen, he struck out on his own, setting up a taffy business in Philadelphia. Although it failed, Hershey tried again in Denver, Chicago, and New York before returning to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and success with Crystal A Caramels.

But Hershey was not content. He began experimenting with chocolate. He developed a formula for milk chocolate and sold his first Hershey bars in 1900. They were an instant success.

As the demand for chocolate grew, so did the need for more machines to make the chocolate. In 1903, Hershey bought land in

south central Pennsylvania and built a factory and a town for its workers. In 1906 the town was named Hershey.

Hershey was usually pleasant and kind and enjoyed a good joke. However, in his chocolate factory, he held high standards for all the workers. He was both respected

and feared. His temper would flare when things didn't go as he'd expected, and workers were fired for mistakes.

Hershey was passionate about his chocolate and took an active role in the candy-making process. He was the company's best salesman. He delighted in escorting



Photo by Ken Karp.



By dipping things in chocolate, you can make easy, yummy treats. And it's fun to do. Ask an adult to help you. Buy dipping chocolate at the grocery store and follow the directions on the package. Try dipping dried apricots and cranberries, mini peanut-butter crackers, or orange sections. Experiment with all kinds of foods. You just might create the next chocolate taste sensation!



Peek into
The Recipe Box on
HighlightsGirls.com

groups of potential buyers through the factory—walking backward and waving his arms as he promoted the virtues of chocolate and explained the process.

Factory workers learned to

expect Hershey and a group of dignitaries at any time of the day or night.

My grandfather began working in the factory as a young man. His job was to push the vats of warm

chocolate from the processing room to a storage area in the molding room. To do this, he had to push the heavy vats up a ramp and across the walkway.

One day, as luck would have it, Hershey was walking backward on the walkway while my grandfather was pushing a vat of chocolate up the ramp. *Bump. Clunk. Ker-plop!* Hershey fell backward into the vat. Everyone else gasped and scurried to pull him out. Grandfather froze in fear. Was he going to lose his job?

Hershey stood stiffly with his hands on his hips. Color rose in his face. He frowned and muttered something under his breath. Then he smiled. "It's not your fault, son," he said with a chuckle. "I need to watch where I'm going." He scooped up some chocolate and put it in his mouth. "Mmm, that's good," he said. Everyone laughed. The tour continued, with Hershey dripping chocolate as he went. And Grandfather kept his job.

Milton S. Hershey was dipped in chocolate accidentally. Today, at a spa in Hershey, Pennsylvania, you can be wrapped in warm "essence of cocoa"—on purpose. Looking and smelling like a Hershey bar makes you feel healthy and happy. Wouldn't Hershey be surprised? ☺



Stopping for Olympic Gold

By Angie Kay Dilmore Art by Tom Powers

The torch is lit and the summer Olympics begin.

The year is 1936, Berlin, Germany. Nazi leader Adolf Hitler watches from the stands.

John Woodruff and eight other runners crouch on the track, ready to race. Bang! The starting pistol fires and they're off. John runs behind the leader, waiting to make his move into first. But soon another runner comes up beside him. John is boxed in. If he pushes through the runners, he might be disqualified on a foul. So John does what one sports reporter later calls "the most daring move seen on a track." He comes to a complete stop. After all the other runners pass him, John moves two lanes toward the outside and races from last place toward the finish line. The crowd stands and gasps. Will John win Olympic gold?

The 1936 Olympic Games introduced the torch relay. Three thousand runners helped pass the eight-foot torch from Olympia, Greece, to Berlin, Germany.

The 1936 games were the first to be broadcast on television.

John Woodruff earned his "Long John" nickname for his 9-foot running stride.

Many young athletes dream of competing in the Olympics. They imagine being on the victory stand with a gold medallion around their necks. But not John Woodruff. "I never thought I had that much talent to win a gold medal," he said.

John Woodruff grew up in a poor family in the small town of Connellsville, Pennsylvania. Born in 1915, this grandson of former slaves was the eleventh of twelve children.

John had a gift. He ran faster than anyone in town. And it wouldn't take him long to prove it.

In high school, John joined the football team. At the end of each practice, the team ran sprints and laps around the track. The coaches noticed that John ran consistently ahead of the others. He had potential, but John's mother made him quit the team. Practice continued late into the evening, and John didn't have time to do his share of the work around the house. "I had to cut wood and bring in coal. So football had to go. My chores came first," said John.

For a short time, John quit school. "This was Depression times. There was very little money in our house," John remembered. "When I went looking for work, nobody was hiring. So I decided to go back to school."

It wasn't long before the coach asked John to join the track team. This time, his mother approved. Track practice ended early, allowing plenty of time for chores.

John broke school, county,

district, and state records on the track team. And as he ran, he traveled 9 feet with each step, earning him the nickname "Long John." In 1935, John broke the high-school national mile record with a time of 4:23.4 (four minutes, twenty-three point four seconds).

After his senior year, college seemed to be out of the question. John's family didn't have the money. But thanks to some local businessmen, he received an athletic scholarship to the University of Pittsburgh. With twenty-five cents in his pocket, John left his small town for the big city of Pittsburgh.

In the summer after John's freshman year of college, he tried out for the Olympic team. At the trials, John outran the best distance runners in the country.

The Olympic athletes sailed for Germany on July 15, 1936. They spent over a week crossing the Atlantic on the S.S. *Manhattan*. "I'd never been so far away from home," John recalled.

John was a beginner compared to the rest of the Olympic runners. Yet he easily won the 800-meter race by 20 yards in the semifinals. The other athletes had anticipated they'd have to pass John to win in the finals. These more experienced athletes boxed John in with a runner in front and another by his

side, blocking him from first place. But John ran faster than they knew. With strength, ability, and determination, he sprinted from last place and claimed the gold medal with a time of 1:52.9 (one minute, fifty-two point nine seconds).

Besides taking home a gold medal, each 1936 first-place winner received an oak sapling, a gift from the German government. John said he "proudly brought the tree home" and presented it to Connellsville. The town planted it beside his high-school stadium. According to John, the local newspaper placed "a plaque under the tree so the kids in the



The Olympic cauldron remains lit until the Closing Ceremony of the Games.



neighborhood would know what the tree represented." Seventy years later, the tree still towers over the track where John began his career.

John Woodruff lived to the age of ninety-two and was the last surviving gold medalist from the 1936 U.S. Olympic

team. In his room, Woodruff had a photo of himself crossing the finish line—a constant reminder that he had beat the odds and accomplished an amazing feat. John remembered, "I was very proud of that achievement and I was very happy—for myself as an individual, for my race, and for my country."



Hear an audio clip of John Woodruff telling his story on HighlightsKids.com.

Photos (top right) courtesy of the University of Pittsburgh, (center) IOC/Olympic Museum collections.