

Keeping the Torch Lit

*Celebrating the 25th anniversary of one of National Mutual Benefit's most notable accomplishments—
saving Lady Liberty*

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO THIS YEAR, the National Fraternal Congress of America (NFCFA) asked fraternal benefit societies to mobilize their members to raise funds for the restoration of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Many NMB members had a hand in contributing to this special project. On this landmark anniversary, we acknowledge their notable achievements in helping bring Lady Liberty back to her original splendor.

The Statue of Liberty was gifted to the United States from France as a symbol of the friendship formed between the nations during the American Revolution. The statue represents Libertas, the Roman goddess of freedom, and bears a torch and a *tabula ansata* (a tablet evoking the law), upon which the date of American independence is inscribed.

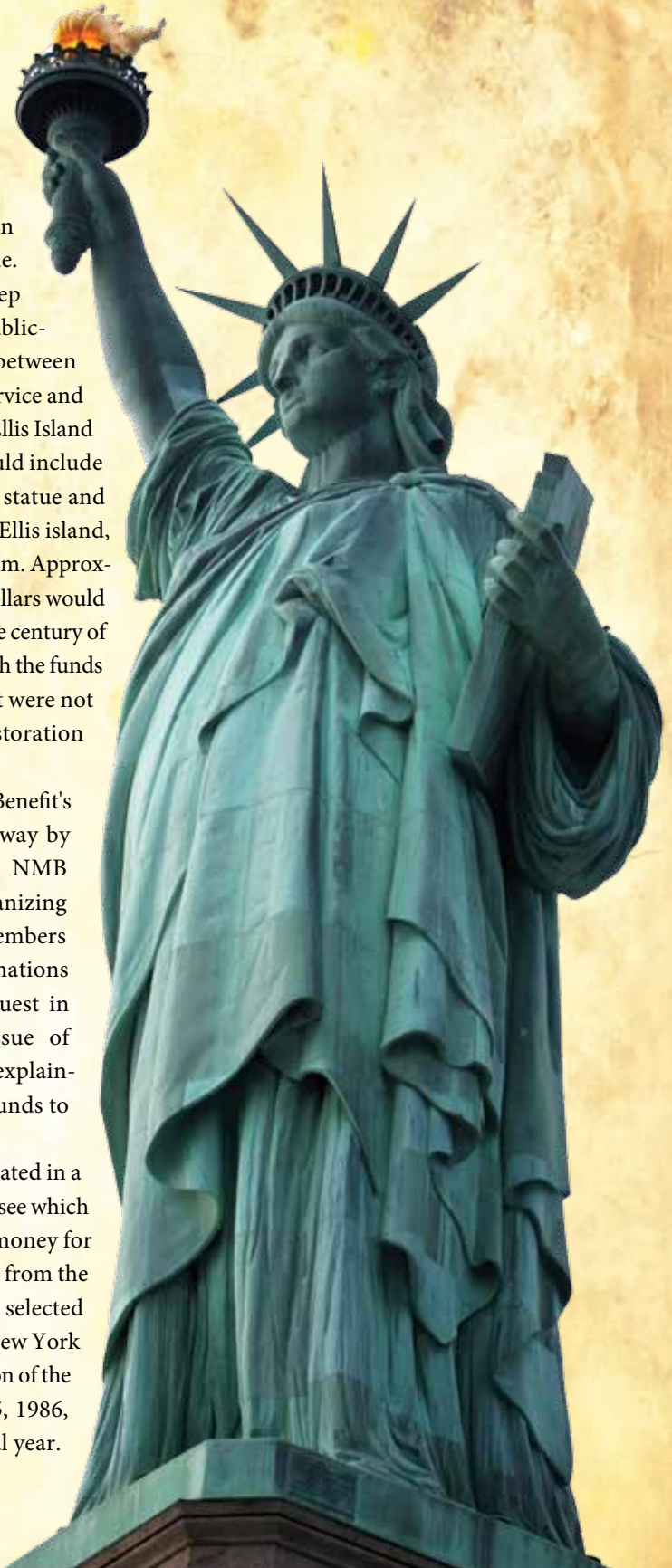
Sculptor Frederic Auguste Bartholdi was commissioned to design the sculpture. The anticipated completion date was 1876, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. While the statue was being built in France, America was to raise the funds necessary to construct a pedestal for the statue to sit upon. Due to lack of funding for both the Americans and the French, the statue was not dedicated until October of 1886. The dedication of the Statue of Liberty took place on Ellis Island, a place where the ancestors of nearly half of all Americans first stepped foot on American soil.

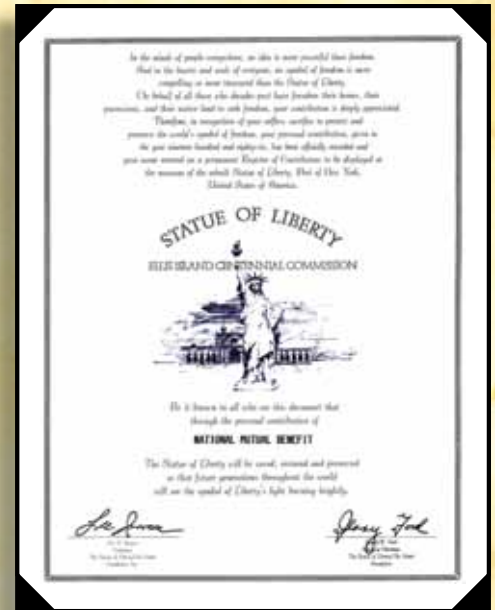
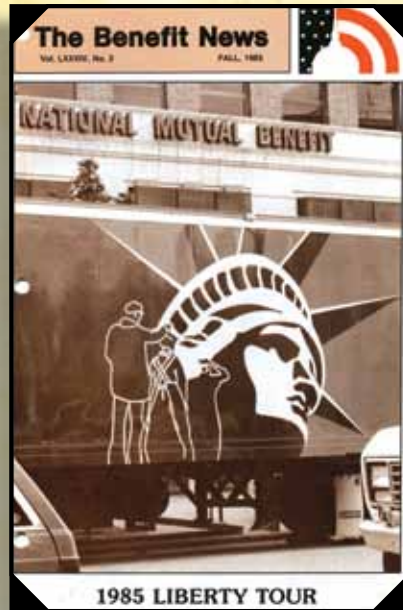
In May of 1982, President Ronald Reagan appointed Lee Iacocca to lead a

fundraising campaign to restore the statue. The campaign to “Keep the Torch Lit,” a public-private partnership between the National Parks Service and the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, Inc., would include the restoration of the statue and the main building on Ellis Island, as well as a new museum. Approximately 230 million dollars would be necessary to stop the century of deterioration. Although the funds needed for the project were not yet available, the restoration began in 1984.

National Mutual Benefit's campaign was underway by the spring of 1985. NMB branches began organizing fundraisers and members sent personal donations in response to a request in the Winter 1984 issue of *The Benefit News* explaining the dire need of funds to restore the statue.

Branches participated in a fundraising contest to see which could raise the most money for the cause. Two people from the winning branch were selected and sent on a trip to New York City for the rededication of the monument on July 5, 1986, the statue's centennial year.





Clockwise from top left: The main building at Ellis Island in 1910. • The main building at Ellis Island today, which now includes a museum. • NMB received this commemorative plaque acknowledging the contributions made by our members to the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation. • The cover of the Fall 1985 issue of *The Benefit News* magazine featured a photo of the traveling museum semi in front of NMB's former Home Office site in downtown Madison. • This article from the Winter 1984 issue of *The Benefit News* explained the dire need for funds to restore the statue and urged NMB members to contribute to the cause.

From a benefit dance to a bike-a-thon, NMB branches came up with unique ways to raise funds for the project. Employees from the Home Office in Madison, Wisconsin, also got involved, holding a candy-selling contest that raised over \$1,700 in only a month's time.

As another part of the campaign, a traveling museum, sponsored by Allied Van Lines, had been traveling all across the country encouraging Americans to support the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation. On June 12, 1985, the semi was set up outside of the main entrance of NMB's Home Office in downtown Madison. Visitors to the exhibit were treated to a display of the fascinating history of

both Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. They also had the opportunity to study an actual piece of the statue.

By the end of 1985, NMB members had raised over ten thousand dollars from grassroots and individual efforts. Former NMB President William Wenger expressed his gratitude to the membership in a letter in the Winter 1986 issue of *The Benefit News*. "Thanks to each and every one of you for helping to add a piece of history to National Mutual Benefit's records, and promote the true meaning of 'Liberty.'"

National Mutual Benefit also received a commemorative plaque and thank you letter from Donald Kent, director of the National Organizations Campaign of the

Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, Inc. In the letter, he states, "You and your members, together with our other major grassroots supports and school kids, raised more money and volunteered more time than for any other project in history."

In 1986, the fundraising campaign came to an end. The fraternal benefit system collectively raised over 2.42 million dollars to help restore Lady Liberty to her original glory.

Next year will mark the 125th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty. She still stands tall as she welcomes visitors to our country. She remains an iconic symbol of the freedom that we all enjoy as Americans. ♦