

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Declaration of Independence comes to Altoona

A rare print of the Declaration of Independence will be displayed at the Altoona 150 celebration in July

ALTOONA, Iowa -- A print of one of the of the most important documents in U.S. history is set to go on display at the Altoona Area Historical Museum this summer.

This rare print of the Declaration of Independence was donated to the State Historical Society of Iowa in 1947, by Altoona resident, Rev. Mary Thronton Davenport. Her great-grandfather, Matthew Thornton, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

The document will be included in a limited time exhibit for the Altoona 150 celebration, in partnership with the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs. The exhibit, called "Celebrate Community" showcases city celebrations, and the documents that have helped shape the community into what it is today.

"As we began planning for Altoona's sesquicentennial, we wanted to do something big." Altoona 150 Co-Chair Alex Payne said. "We wanted to have something with a focus on history, and a connection to Altoona. However, we also wanted something that people not from Altoona could appreciate."

Also included in the display are Altoona's Articles of Incorporation, and letters from state and federal dignitaries. The exhibit also features the history of Fourth of July celebrations, Altoona's Centennial, Altoona Balloona Fest, Adventureland, Prairie Meadows and much more.

The Altoona museum will be open to the public during the Altoona 150 celebration July 26-29, 2018. A special preview night, July 25, will allow members of the Altoona Area Historical Society to view the exhibit early. Memberships for the Altoona Area Historical Society start at \$15.

Altoona Area Historical Museum Hours

Wednesday, July 25 -- 5-8 p.m. (HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS EVENT)

Thursday, July 26 -- 5-8 p.m.

Friday, July 27 -- 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Saturday, July 28 -- 12-8 p.m.

Sunday, July 29 -- 12-5 p.m.

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BACKGROUND

In 1823, printer William J. Stone of Washington, D.C., completed a copperplate engraving of the Declaration of Independence. The copperplate – commissioned by John Quincy Adams – was the first perfect reproduction of the original and was used to print copies of the Declaration for distribution to surviving signers of the original document, and to government officials and other dignitaries.

Congress later commissioned the printing of an additional 1,500 copies from Stone's copperplate for the nine-volume series *American Archives*, which was published at intervals between 1837 and 1853. It has been estimated that there were considerably fewer than 1,000 of these documents actually produced, and after their creation the original printing plate was retired and placed in the National Archives.

The document to be displayed in Altoona is one from the American Archives edition. It was donated to the State Historical Society of Iowa on September 26, 1947, by Altoona resident, Rev. Mary Thornton Davenport. She was a descendant of Matthew Thornton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Matthew Thornton was a delegate to the Continental Congress from New Hampshire.

Dennis Black, a former state senator from Lynnville, helped rediscover the document while researching and writing a book based on 257 letters written by an Iowa couple during the American Civil War.

After receiving the letters, Black discovered among them a receipt issued Sept. 26, 1947, by the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa to Rev. Mary Thornton Davenport for the donation of an original print copy of the Declaration of Independence.

Black visited the State Historical Building in 2010 to match the receipt to the document. With Special Collections Archivist Becki Plunkett, the document was located in its rightful place nearly 63 years after the receipt was issued.

On Thursday, July 1, 2010, the document was put on public display for the first time.

In 2017, Altoona 150 Co-Chair Alex Payne found a collection of information about the Thornton Family's print of the Declaration of Independence at the Altoona Area Historical Museum. Working with State Curator Leo Landis, Special Collections Archivist Becki Plunkett, the City of Altoona and Altoona Police, Payne was able to help organize a plan to bring the Declaration of Independence back to Altoona.

About the Altoona Area Historical Society

On May 5, 2003, the Altoona City Council recognized the Altoona Area Historical Society as the City's official organization to collect, secure, and preserve the artifacts and records of the City of Altoona and surrounding areas. The Altoona Area Historical Society's purpose is to promote history, preserve historic landmarks and sites, and display articles of historical value.

About Altoona 150

Altoona 150 is a special celebration presented by the Altoona Area Historical Society to commemorate Altoona's Sesquicentennial. The cornerstone of the celebration will be four-day festival the weekend of July 26-29, 2018. Numerous events and activities are scheduled to honor the City's history and culture as well as focus on Altoona's promising future.

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