

## Declaration House Closure Independence National Historical Park ("INHP") Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Declaration House: Closed Entire July 4th Weekend, 2006** - Tourists wanting to visit the Declaration House where Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence were greeted with locked gates to the Declaration House courtyard and a very unfriendly note posted on the gate from the National Park Service that said "Closed due to equipment failure." Huh?

This disappointing visitor experience left a lot of visitors to America's Birthplace wondering why the site on which Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence would ironically be closed on the date(s) that America celebrates Independence Day, for such a prolonged period, and done so in such an unfriendly manner. Additionally, the closure notice was placed on top of the primary outside site marker and sign which provides historical background about the Declaration House.

The National Park Service is the steward for this important historical site, but there was no apology and there was no date posted when the facility might reopen. The National Park Service should have staffed a Park Ranger on-site to greet visitors, provide some historical interpretation and at least have left the courtyard gates open so that visitors could explore the courtyard and take a commemorative photo if desired. Additionally, the National Park Service should have posted a letter with a little more explanation about this unfortunate building closure at such an inopportune time. This is just another example of the poor visitor experience that the National Park Service condones.

Note: Declaration House is also known as the Graff House, and it is a reconstruction of the home of Jacob Graff who rented 2 rooms to Thomas Jefferson. It was here that Thomas Jefferson wrote The Declaration of Independence in June of 1776.

**This longstanding failure of the National Park Service in its stewardship of this American landmark is an ongoing problem and is illustrated in the very limited accessibility to this important historic landmark.** By way of example and not limitation, the National Park Service has opened the Declaration House for a total of just 5 (five) hours per week during March and April 2008 (Wednesday through Sunday, 11AM-12PM). In July 2007, during the peak Summer season, the National Park Service only opened the Declaration House to the public for a whopping 2 hours per day from 9AM-11AM for a total of just 14 (fourteen) hours per week.



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