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Bob DeMartino is used to dealing with historic figures, and historic materials.

His Historic Pen Company says it's turned original wood from Philadelphia's Independence Hall — wood removed in an 1897 renovation — into items “that once felt the footsteps ... of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson” and more American legends. He's also made memorabilia from wood that came anywhere from Abraham Lincoln's birthplace to Atlantic City's Boardwalk, as planks ripped up in Hurricane Sandy.

And now DeMartino is dealing with a whole different sort of historic humanity: He created a pen out of that Independence Hall wood for Pope Francis, to honor the pope's visit to Philadelphia this weekend. The company actually made a pair of “sister” pens for the occasion out of wood documented to be recovered from the building where America was born. One is for the celebrated visitor from Rome; the other is for his host city to keep, probably in the Philadelphia History Museum. And although many businesses are working to capitalize on this papal visit, DeMartino won't make a penny from his pens, which combine silver hardware with their precisely engraved, highly polished, history-soaked wood. They are his gifts to the Vatican and the city.

DeMartino, who runs his company from his Manahawkin home, delivered them Thursday. He took the one personalized for the Pope to the Pennsylvania Convention Center, the sprawling headquarters of this week's World Meeting of Families, the event that drew the Pope to Philadelphia. DeMartino brought it to a room where officials are collecting gifts presented for the Pope; he hopes his offering will find its way to the Vatican's archives as a relic of this visit. But he's still not sure of that.

He came up with the idea to present the pope a piece of Philadelphia's past shortly after this visit was announced — which wasn't long after DeMartino got his hands on those ripped-out remnants of the home of the Declaration of Independence. The history buff and entrepreneur had learned about this wood in old newspaper stories, and had been trying for several years to buy some.

When he finally did, "I'm sitting here with this Independence Hall wood, and the pope is coming to Philadelphia," DeMartino remembers. But when he approached the city and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia about his plan, he got the same answer: The Vatican was actively discouraging gifts for the pope.

DeMartino, a Catholic who goes to church at St. Mary of the Pines in Manahawkin, persisted. When Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter's office first put him off, DeMartino went to City Councilman Mark Squilla — whose district includes Independence Hall.

"I figured he's Catholic, he's Italian. He got back to me in five minutes," DeMartino said.

"I thought it was a neat idea. It's part of Philadelphia, and part of history," said Squilla, who put DeMartino in touch with the right people in the administration to say the mayor could present a pen to the Pope. After some back-and-forth, they sounded interested, so DeMartino told one of his craftsmen to start creating and engraving. But last weekend, he got an email from Nutter's communications director, Desiree Peterkin-Bell, saying she had "just learned yesterday from the Vatican (that) there won't be an opportunity to present gifts to Pope Francis at all."

Then on Tuesday, DeMartino was on his way into Philadelphia, taking a neighbor to a hospital for surgery. He was on the Ben Franklin Bridge when he got a sudden call from the mayor's office — asking him if he could bring the pens to Philadelphia by 1 p.m., because the mayor could give a few gifts after all. But DeMartino didn't have the pens with him, and he couldn't get home and back to the city by that deadline.

So he made his delivery Thursday. He got an official receipt, and he hopes the Pope will at least see or hear about his pen — not that DeMartino ever had high hopes about it becoming some personal papal property.

“I don’t have any illusions about the Pope using that pen himself,” says DeMartino, who traces part of his fascination with history back to a grade-school visit to Cape May. More likely, “It’s going to end up in the Vatican archives, a literal piece of American history with all the manuscripts. ... And 500 years from now, somebody is going to open a box and there’s going to be this pen — a piece of Independence Hall.” DeMartino can document the history, or provenance, of the wood for his papal pen back to Samuel Reeves, Independence Hall’s superintendent during a renovation and expansion project in 1897. And he gives the detailed story of that “Witness Wood®,” in his copyrighted name, on his web site, [historicpencompany.com/](http://historicpencompany.com/). (He also has copies of the officially sealed, notarized documents to prove authenticity.)

Some of the discarded floorboards and handrails were churned out into into souvenirs for major American anniversaries, such as 1876 and 1976. And the latest owner had the leftover wood stored in a barn on New York’s Long Island. But both the owner and that lumber, which dates back to Independence Hall’s 1732 construction, were aging. “It took two years of me calling regularly, talking to him, trying to convince the family to give some up. It was a process,” DeMartino said. “The wood has been sitting around for more than two hundred years, and the family was worried about it disintegrating.” Then as soon as he got the historic wood, he heard about a bit of modern history hitting Philadelphia, right down the highway from his home — and just down the street from Independence Hall.

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