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## **Swiss independence document leaves home for Philadelphia exhibit**

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Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA - The 715-year-old federal charter of Switzerland will leave home for the first time next month to go on display at the National Constitution Center, just steps from the birthplace of the American freedom document it helped inspire.

The maiden voyage of the Schweizer Bundesbrief, considered to be the Swiss equivalent of the Declaration of Independence, comes amid a group's effort to get Americans with Swiss roots to trace their heritage to the small, neutral European country.

Swiss Ambassador Raymond Loretan, co-chair of the Swiss Roots campaign, said the loan of the historic document is a gesture of friendship to the United States and the 1 million Americans of Swiss heritage.

"Mutual friendship has guided us over 200 years, through good times and bad times," Loretan said at a news conference Wednesday. "No place in the United States has the historical significance" of Philadelphia.

The Bundesbrief will go on display June 10 as part of a three-week exhibit called "Sister Republics," which will highlight the historic connection between both nations' democracies. The document marks the foundation of the Swiss Confederation, in which three rural communities entered into an alliance to protect themselves from outside aggressors.

Along with the Magna Carta, which was issued in 1215, scholars say the Bundesbrief helped inspire the Declaration of Independence.

Americans are very familiar with Switzerland's watches, cheese and bank accounts, but few have heard of the Bundesbrief.

Steven Frank, the Constitution Center's vice president of education and exhibits, admitted, "I learned about the Bundesbrief when it was brought to us."

Swiss Roots, which uses the slogan "How Swiss Are You?", recently used a Pennsylvania celebrity as an emissary - Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger. His great-great-grandfather left for the United States in 1873 and the Super Bowl quarterback recently traveled to the Swiss town of Lauperswill.

Constitution Center officials would not say when the document would be arriving, citing security concerns. They said they would utilize security precautions such as the ones the three-year-old center has used when hosting a rare copy of the Declaration of Independence and a version of the United States' first governing charter, the Articles of Confederation.

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On the Net:

Swiss Roots: <http://www.swissroots.org/>

National Constitution Center: <http://www.constitutioncenter.org/>