

Billy, Historic Bronze Goat Statue, Retires to Library; Billy II, a Replica, Installed in Rittenhouse Square

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

On Friday morning, September 21, at a ceremony attended by local dignitaries, press photographers, and neighbors in Rittenhouse Square, a little boy unveiled a newly recast Billy the Goat bronze statue, installed in the same place where generations of children have played at the original, surrounded by their families, friends and nannies. Friends of Rittenhouse Square, an organization dedicated to preserving and beautifying the Square, arranged the replacement and retired the original bronze goat statue to the Children's Room on the lower level of the Philadelphia City Institute Library across the street from the Square, where the statue's artistic and historical value will be preserved.

At the ceremony, Mayor Kenney and Councilman Allan Domb spoke about their love and admiration for Rittenhouse Square, their appreciation for the work of Friends of Rittenhouse Square, and the diversity of people who enjoy it. Nancy Heinzen, author of *The Perfect Square: A History of Rittenhouse Square* and a member of Friends of Rittenhouse Square, discussed Billy the Goat's history.

In 1914 Albert Laessle created Billy—modeled after his family goat—a bronze statue on a granite base. Born in Philadelphia, the sculptor studied art at Drexel Institute and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and then in Paris. He made two other casts of the goat, one of which is in the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the other in Camden's Johnson Park. Installed in Rittenhouse Square in 1919, almost 100 years ago, Billy was a gift of Eli Kirke Price II to the City of Philadelphia through the Fairmount Park Art Association (now the Association for Public Art). Although at first Association board members and art critics did not like the goat statue, it became popular and beloved by the public. Because the bronze had worn thin, a new cast was made, funded by a private donor. *Antiques Road Show* fans may know the term *surmoulage*, meaning a bronze made from another bronze and not from the artist's master mold or model.



A young friend unveils the goat.

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The old goat is safely installed on a high shelf where children cannot climb on it. The Children's Librarian says children are happy to see it.

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Aficionados of Italian Renaissance sculpture and visitors to Florence will remember that in 1873 the original statue of David by Michelangelo was removed from the Piazza della Signoria to protect it from damage, and displayed in the Accademia Gallery. A replica was placed in the Piazza in 1910.

On Saturday, September 22, neighbors gathered in Rittenhouse Square at a



Mayor Kenney addresses the crowd.

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celebration sponsored by Friends of Rittenhouse Square that included a petting zoo, face painting, balloon twisters, and musical performances. The new goat, Billy II, waited patiently, knowing the children would soon be climbing all over him.