

The Washington Monument

(Its inception, Design, Laying of the Cornerstone, Dedication, Inauguration and Memorial Stones)

On the aluminum cap atop the Washington Monument are inscribed the words *Laus Deo*, translated from Latin to mean, "Praise be to God!"

At a height of 555-feet, 5 and one-eighth inches, the monument to the father of this nation overlooks the 69 square miles which comprise the District of Columbia, capital of the United States of America.

Resolution of the Continental Congress

The Continental Congress, on the 7th day of August, A.D. 1783, unanimously resolved (ten States being represented): "That an equestrian statue of George Washington be erected at the place where the residence of Congress shall be established in honor of George Washington, the illustrious Commander-in-Chief of the armies of the United States of America, during the war which vindicated and secured their liberty, sovereignty and independence."

On December 19, 1799, the day after the mortal remains of George Washington had been committed to the tomb, a committee of both Houses of Congress was appointed "to report measures suitable to the occasion and expression of the profound sorrow with which Congress is penetrated on the loss of a citizen first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

In pursuance of the foregoing resolution, both Houses of Congress passed the following resolution on December 24, 1799: "That a marble monument be erected by the United States in the Capitol, at the City of Washington, and that the family of General Washington be requested to permit his body to be deposited under it, and that the monument be so designed as to commemorate the great events of his military and political life.

President John Adams was authorized to correspond with Mrs. Washington, asking her to consent to the removal and interment of her

husband's remains beneath a monument, to be erected by the government in the Capitol.

Martha Washington's Letter

Mrs. Washington consented in the following beautiful words:

“Taught by the great example I have so long had before me, never to oppose my private wishes to the public will, I must consent to the request of Congress which you had the goodness to transmit to me; and in doing this I need not – I cannot – say what a sacrifice of individual feeling I make to a sense of public duty.”

Congress again made an application in 1832 to the proprietors of Mount Vernon for the removal and deposit of the remains of Washington in the capitol, in conformity with the Resolution of 1799. The Legislature of Virginia protested against the movement, and John A. Washington declined the proposal.

In advertisements inviting designs for the Monument from American artists, it was recommended that they should *“harmoniously blend durability simplicity and grandeur.”*

Design of the Washington Monument

The design originally selected for the Monument was that submitted by Robert Mills, comprising, in its main features, a vast stylobate, surmounted by a tetrastyle pantheon; circular in form, and with an obelisk 600 feet high rising from the center.

Laying of the Cornerstone

When the cornerstone of the *Washington Monument* was laid on Independence Day, 1848, deposited within its recess were the following items and documents of value: a copy of the Holy Bible, presented by the American Bible Society, instituted in 1816; an American silk flag; the coat of arms of the Washington family; copies of the Declaration of Independence and U. S. Constitution; United States Presidents' messages

to date of cornerstone laying; likenesses of all Presidents and their inaugural addresses to same date; a portrait of Washington taken from Gilbert Stuart's famous painting; and daguerreotype likenesses of General and Mrs. Washington.

The inscription on the copper plate covering the deposit recess of the cornerstone reads:

4th July, 1776. Declaration of Independence of the United States of America. 4th July 1848. This cornerstone laid of a Monument by the people of the United States to the Memory of George Washington.

Construction began on July 4, 1848, with President James Knox Polk presiding at the laying of the cornerstone, in accordance with the decision of the National Monument Society. The event took place in the presence of the members of the legislative and judicial branches of the government, foreign ministers and officers, and a vast concourse of citizens from all sections of the Union.

An interval of almost twenty-five years ensued before the completion of the monument, which accounts for a slight change of color at a height of 150 feet. Stone continued to be quarried from the original site outside Baltimore, Maryland; but after a lapse of more than twenty years the level of stone had dropped, thus accounting for its change in hue. The monument is made up entirely of marble and granite with no steel shafts as interior support whatever. Its unique simplicity is enhanced by fifty United States flags proudly encircling the base, each one representing one of the fifty states in the Union.

Dedication of Washington Monument

On February 21, 1885, the *Washington Monument* was dedicated.

Prayer was offered by the Reverend Henderson Suter, Rector of Christ Church, Alexandria, Virginia, where Washington worshipped God – his pew being marked with a silver plaque bearing his signature. President Chester Arthur accepted the Monument, making a short dedicatory address, after which a

procession formed and moved to the U.S. Capitol. Here orations were delivered by Robert C. Winthrop of Massachusetts, and John W. Daniel, Senator of Virginia. After the benediction had been pronounced, the President of the United States and members of the Supreme Court, and the invited guests retired from the hall at 5 o'clock. A beautiful verse was composed for this auspicious occasion:

Yonder shaft,
Which States and peoples piled
the stones upon,
That from its top the very winds
might waft
To distant shores the name of
Washington.

Inauguration of the Washington Monument

October 9, 1888, marked the official inauguration and opening of this monument to the public. An original steam elevator took fifteen minutes to reach the top, whereas the present electric one reaches the summit in a mere seventy seconds. A panoramic view of the city can be enjoyed at this elevation in height, with maps and sketches outlining each segment of the capital. Pierre Charles l'Enfant's original plan in operation is thus clearly seen. From this vantage point, a perfect cross can be traced over the Capital City, with the *White House* to the north; the *Jefferson Memorial* to the south; the *U.S. Capitol* to the east and the *Lincoln Memorial* to the west.

Memorial Stones of the Washington Monument

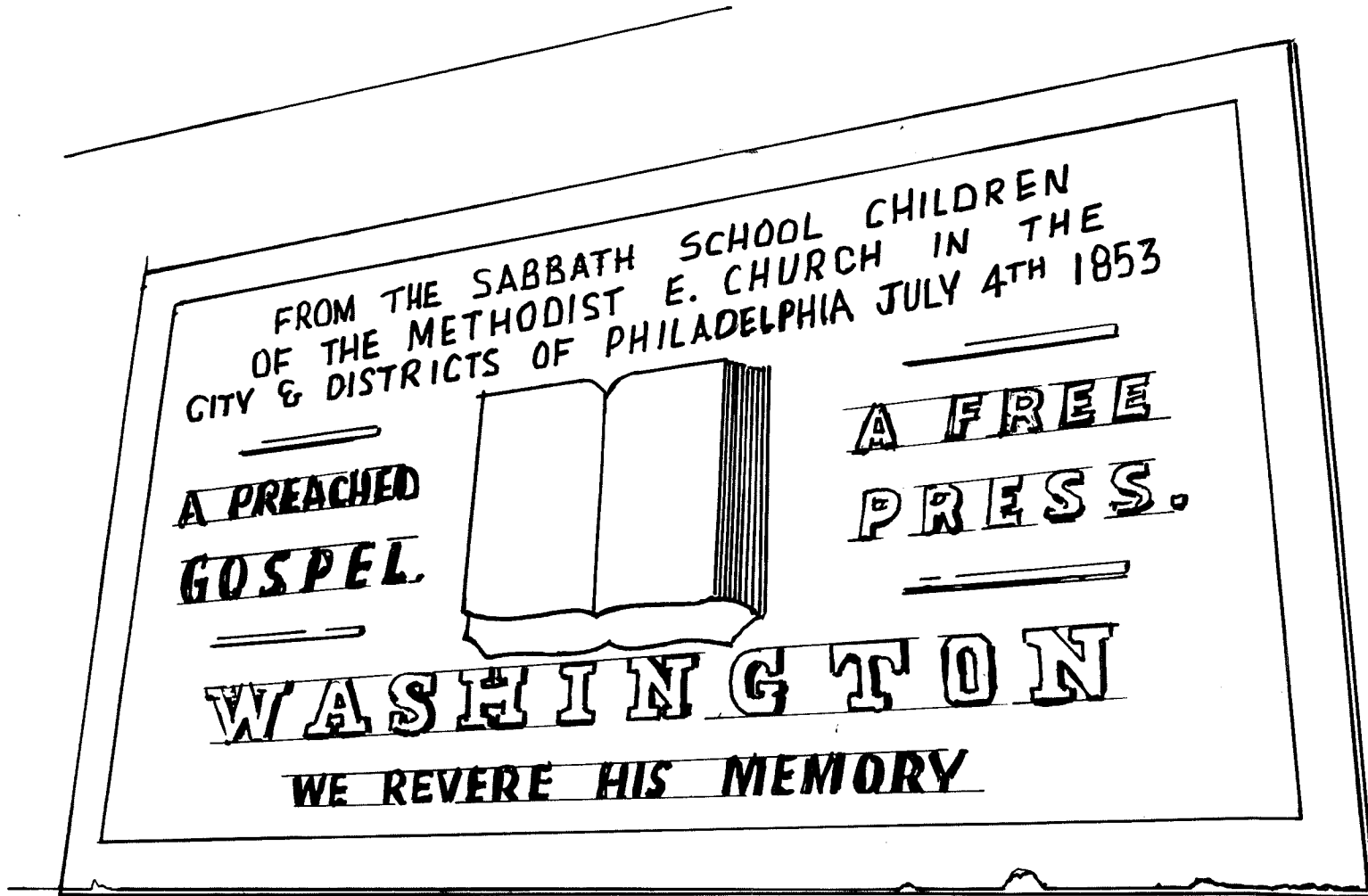
There are 898 steps and 50 landings within the *Washington Monument*. Of the 190 memorial stones inserted within its inner staircase walls, numerous glorify Almighty God in word and deed; many others extolling George Washington, the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. They are presented by: ***The States in the Union***; The Columbia Typographical Society; Sons of Temperance of Virginia; North Carolina; Illinois;

Pennsylvania: "The Surest Safeguard of the Liberty of our Country – Total Abstinence from all that Intoxicates."; Ohio: "Love, Purity and Fidelity."; Fort Greene, Battle Ground of Long Island; the City of Baltimore, 1850: "May Heaven to this Union continue its Beneficence, May Brotherly affection with Union be perpetual, May the Free Constitution which is the work of our ancestors be sacredly maintained and its Administration be stamped with Wisdom and Virtue."; The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in session in Washington City, May, 1852; The Citizens of Stockton, California: "A tribute of respect to the father of our Country."; The Teachers of the Buffalo Public schools; The Young Men's Mercantile Library Association of Cincinnati: "Proud to Honor Washington. Contributes its Humble Quota to the swelling tide of National Gratitude."; The Children of the Sunday Schools of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in the City of New York, Feb. 22, 1855: "The Memory of the Just is Blessed. Proverbs 10:7."; The Sabbath School Children of the Methodist E. Church in the City and Districts of Philadelphia, 4th July, 1853: "A Preached Gospel. A Free Press. Washington. We revere his Memory. "Search the Scriptures." Suffer little children to come unto Me and forbid them not for such is the Kingdom of God. Luke XVIII: 16. Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it. Proverbs XX: 6."; and The Addison Literary Society of the Western Military Institute, Kentucky; ***as well as countries worldwide***, conveying words of honor and admiration for George Washington, to include: The Free Swiss Confederation MDCCCLII; Greece; Siam; Brazil; Germany: "To Washington, the Great, Good and Just, by friendly BREMEN."; China: "From a Company of Christians, engraved at Ningpu, China, the Reign of the Emperor Heen Fung, July 12th, 1853: (Chinese Inscription translated) 'Su-Ki-Yu, by imperial appointment, Lieut. Governor of the Province of Fuh Kun, in his universal geography says: It is evident that Washington was a remarkable man. In devising plans, he was more decided than Chin-Shing or Wu-Kwang, in winning a country, he was braver than Tsau-Tsau or Lin-Pi. Wielding his four-footed falchion, he extended the frontiers thousands of miles, and then refused to usurp the regal dignity, or transmit to his posterity, but first established rules for an elective administration. Where in the world can be found such

a public spirit? Truly, the sentiments of the three dynasties have all at once unexpectedly appeared in our day. In ruling the state, he promoted and fostered good customs, and did not depend on military merit. In this he differed from all other nations. I have seen his portrait, his air and form are grand and imposing in a remarkable degree. Ah, who would not call him a hero? The United States of America regard it promotive of national virtue generally and extensively neither to establish titles of nobility and royalty nor to conform to the age, as respects customs and public influence, but instead deliver over their own public deliberations and inventions so that the like of such a nation one so remarkable does not exist in ancient or modern times. Among the people of the great West, can any man, in ancient or modern times, fail to pronounce Washington peerless? ' ”

One of the stones contributed to the *Washington Monument* was a block of marble from the Temple of Concord at Rome, and was a gift of the Pope. It bore the inscription, “From Rome to America.” In March, 1854, the lapidarium, where the memorial blocks were kept, prior to being inserted within the inner staircase walls of the Monument, was forcibly entered, and this stone was taken and thrown into the Potomac River.

Source: The Annual Reports of Colonel Lincoln Casey, Corps of Engineers, Engineer in Charge, February 21, 1885. (Articles deposited in recess of the Cornerstone of Monument on July 4, 1848.) Library of Congress Rare Book Collection . Excerpted from, *The Christian Heritage of our Nation, Ten National Memorials*, © 1997 by Catherine Millard.



The Twenty-fourth Landing Memorial Stone