

THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT

by

Dr. Catherine Millard

William Howard Taft, President, United States of America:
Laus Deo — “Praise be to God!”

...with its stately simplicity...it is fitting that the aluminum tip that caps it should bear the phrase “Laus Deo.”

On the aluminum cap atop the **Washington Monument** are inscribed the words *Laus Deo*, that is to say, “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. Made of marble and granite, it is the tallest stone structure in the world, and very stable, only swaying one-eighth of an inch in a 30-mile wind. It has settled a mere 2 inches in thirty years. Walls 18 inches in thickness at the top broaden to 15 feet at the bottom.

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 at Mount Vernon, 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 House 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.

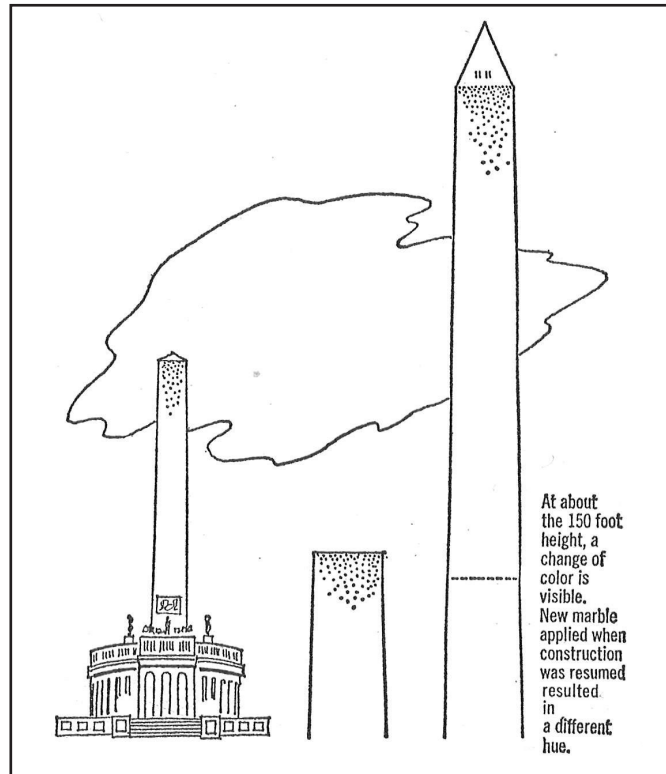
Martha Washington’s Letter

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 1852 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 the advertisements inviting designs for the Monument from American artists, it was recommended that they should “harmoniously blend durability, simplicity and grandeur.”



The Washington Monument’s three-stages of Construction. © by Catherine Millard.

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; circular in form, and with a shaft 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 many items and documents of value. Among these are: 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 25 years ensued before the completion of the obelisk, 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 20 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 50 United States flags proudly encircling the base, each one representing of the 50 states in the Union.

Dedication of Washington Monument

On February 21, 1885, the **Washington Monument** was dedicated. Senator Sherman in the course of his oration, said:

The Monument speaks for itself, - simple in form, admirable in proportions, composed of enduring marble and granite, resting upon foundations broad and deep, it rises into the skies higher than any work of human art. It is the most imposing, costly, and appropriate monument ever to be erected in the honor of one man.

Prayer was offered by the **Reverend Henderson Suter**, Rector of Christ Episcopal Church, Alexandria, Virginia, where Washington worshipped Almighty God. This beautiful prayer of dedication is hereunder reprinted in its entirety:

P R A Y E R

AT THE DEDICATION OF THE

WASHINGTON MONUMENT

-By-

Rev. Henderson Suter, Rector of Christ Church,

ALEXANDRIA, VA., FEB. 21, 1885.

Almighty God, Ruler of nations and of men, by whose providence our fathers were led to this goodly land – and by whom they were guided and sustained in their efforts to secure their liberties, accept, this day, the grateful homage of us, the inheritors of their well-earned rights.

Them and their leaders Thou didst choose. With courage and patriotism Thou didst inspire all; but, we today, while unmindful of none, are specially called to acknowledge as Thy gift, George Washington.

In honor of him, Thy servant, the nation of Thy planting and of his thought and prayers, has built this monument, and we, today, in that nation's behalf, speak to his God and ours, in prayer and thanks.

As we stand beneath the lofty height of this memorial work, and mark the symmetry of its form, we would remember Washington's high character, and all the virtues which, in him, builded up the man.

A leader fearing God; a patriot unstained by self; a statesman wishing only the right, he has left us an example for whose following, we supplicate thy help, for ourselves and for all who are now, and shall hereafter be, the instruments of Thy providence to this land and nation.

In so far as he followed the inspirations of wisdom and of virtue, may we follow him and may his character be to the latest generation, a model for the soldier, for the civilian and for the man, - that, in our armies may be trust in God, in our civilians integrity, and among our people, that home life which exhorteth praise; and so, all those blessings which he coveted for his people and his kin, be the heritage of us and of our children, forever.

O God the high and mighty Ruler of the Universe, bless to-day, and henceforth, Thy servant the President of the United States and all others in authority.

To our Congress ever give wisdom. Direct and prosper all their consultations. May our judges be able men, such as fear God, men of truth – governed in judgment only by the laws. May our juries be incorruptible, ever mindful of the solemnity of the oath, and of the great interests depending on its keeping. May no magistrate, or officer, having rights to maintain or order to secure, ever “wrest the judgment of the poor,” or favor the rich man in his cause.

O God, throughout our land, let amity continually reign. Bind ever the one part, to the other part. Heal every wound, opened by human frailty, or by human wrong. Let the feeling of brotherhood have the mastery over all selfish ends, that with one mind and one heart, the North and the South and the East and the West, may seek the good of the common country, and work out that destiny, which has been allotted us among the nations of the earth.

Merciful Father, from whom “all good thoughts and good desires come,” let the principles of religion and virtue find firm root, and grow among our people. May they heed the words of their own Washington and never “indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion,” or forget that “to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.” Deepen in them reverence for Thy character. Impress a sense of Thy power. Create a desire for Thy favor, and let it be realized that man's highest honor, is to be a servant of God, and that to fear Him and keep his commandments, is our whole duty.

O God, in all our relations with the nations of the earth, let honor and justice rule us. May their wisdom be our guide and our good their choice. Emulative only in the high purpose of bettering the condition of man, may they and we dwell together in unity and concord.

Bless all efforts to widen the sphere of knowledge, that true wisdom may be garnered by our people and nature yield her secrets for man's good and Thy glory.

In all our seminaries of learning –our schools and colleges – may men arise, who shall be able to hand down to the generations following all that time has given.

And look upon our land. Give us the rain and the fruitful season. Let no blight fall upon the tree – no disease upon the cattle – no pestilence upon man.

To honor Thee, O God, we they day yield our homage and offer our praise. Our Fathers “cried unto Thee and were delivered.” “They trusted in Thee and were not confounded.” - and we, their children, gathered by this monument, to-day, the silent reminder of Thy gifts, ask Thy blessing, O ruler of nations and men, in the name of Him through whom Thou has taught us to pray, and, may no private or public sins cause Thee to hind thy face from us; but from them, turn Thou us, and in our repentance, forgive.

To our prayers, we add our thanks, our thanks for mercies many and manifold. Thou didst not set Thy love upon us, and choose us because we were more in number than any people, but because Thou wouldst raise us up to be an asylum for the oppressed, and for a light to those in darkness living. For this great honor, O God, we thank Thee.

Not for our righteousness hast Thou upheld us hitherto, and saved from those evils which wreck the nations; but, because Thou hadst a favor unto us. For this great mercy, O God, we thank Thee.

Not solely through man's wisdom have the great principles of human liberty been embodied for our government, and every man become the peer of his fellow man before the law; but, because Thou hast ordered it. For this great mercy, O God, we thank Thee.

And now our Father, let this assembly, the representatives of thousands whom thou hast blessed, go hence, to-day, their duty done, joyful and glad of heart, for all the goodness that the Lord hath done for this great nation.

And for the generations to come – yet unborn – may this monument which we dedicate, today, to the memory of George Washington, stand as a witness for those virtues and that patriotism, which lived, shall secure for them Liberty and Union forever.

Amen.

President Chester Arthur, a member of St. John's Episcopal Church on Lafayette Square ("**the Church of the Presidents**"), accepted the Monument, making a short dedicatory address, after which a procession formed and moved to the Capitol. Here orations were delivered by Robert C. Winthrop of Massachusetts, and John W. Daniel, Senator of Virginia. After the benedictions had been pronounced, the President of the United States and member of the Supreme Court, and invited guests retired from the hall at 5 o'clock. A beautiful verse was composed for this auspicious occasion:

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

Inauguration of Washington Monument

October 9, 1888, marked the official inauguration and opening of this monument to the public. An original steam elevator took 15 minutes to reach the top, whereas the present electric one reaches the summit in a mere 70 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 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 God in word and deed; many others extolling the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution. These have, most unfortunately, been barred from public access since the early 1980's by the **Department of Interior, National Park Service** – to the detriment of millions of U.S. History students – lovers of their original history:

On the First Landing (30 feet high), is inscribed:

Stone no. 5: **Delaware.** First to adopt, will be the last to desert the Constitution.

The Second Landing (40 feet high) bears these words:

Stone no. 7: Presented by the Columbia Typographical Society, Instituted January, 1815, "As a memento of the veneration of its members for the father of his country."

Stone no. 10: **Alabama.** A Union of Equality as adjusted by the Constitution.

Stone no. 11: **The State of Louisiana.** Ever faithful to the Constitution and the Union.

The Third Landing (50 feet high):

Stone no. 18: **Indiana** knows no North, no South, nothing but the Union.

The Fifth Landing (70 feet high):

Stone no. 25: Presented by the Grand Division, Sons of Temperance, **State of Virginia.** 1850. Hand in Hand Union.

Stone no. 26: "God and our Native Land." United Sons of America. Instituted, 1845. **Pennsylvania.** "Usque ad Mortem" "Lente Cauter Firme."

Stone no. 27: Grand Division, Sons of Temperance, **North Carolina.** "Love, Purity, Fidelity."

The Sixth Landing (80 feet high):

Stone no. 34: **Maryland.** The Memorial of Her Regard for the Father of His Country and of her Cordial, Habitual and Immovable attachment to the American Union. "Crescite et Multiplicamini."

Stone no. 35: The City of Washington to its Founder.

Stone no. 36: **Virginia** who gave Washington to America gives this Granite for his Monument.

The Seventh Landing (90 feet high):

Stone no. 40: **The State of Mississippi** to the Father of his country. A.D. 1850.

Stone no. 42: The Tribute of **Missouri.** To the Memory of Washington and a Pledge of her fidelity to the Union of the States.

The Eighth Landing (100 feet high):

Stone no. 46: "Hope." **Rhode Island.**

Stone no. 47: **North Carolina.** Declaration of Independence. Mecklenburg, May, 1775.

Stone no. 48: **Wisconsin.** Admitted May 29, 1848.

The Ninth Landing (110 feet high):

Stone no. 53: **Iowa.** Her Affections, like the Rivers of her Borders, Flow to an inseparable Union.

The Tenth Landing (120 feet high):

Stone no. 59: **California.** Youngest sister of the Union brings her Golden Tribute to the Memory of its Father.

The Eleventh Landing (130 feet high):

Stone no. 67: From the Alumni of Washington College, at Lexington, **Virginia.** The only College endowed by the father of his Country.

Stone no. 68: From the Grand Division, Sons of Temperance, **State of Connecticut.** A Tribute to the Memory of Washington. "Love, Purity, Fidelity."

The Twelfth Landing (140 feet high):

Stone no. 80: Anno 1850. By the City of Baltimore. 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 Fourteenth Landing (160 feet high):

Stone no. 84: **New York.** "Excelsior."

The Fifteenth Landing (170 feet high):

Stone no. 89: **Vermont.** "Freedom and Unity."

The Sixteenth Landing (180 feet high):

Stone no. 95: Liberty, Independence, Virtue." **Pennsylvania.** (Founded 1681). By Deeds of Peace.

Stone no. 98: The Surest Safeguard of the Liberty of our Country – Total Abstinence from all that Intoxicates. Sons of Temperance of *Pennsylvania*.

The Seventeenth Landing (190 feet high):

Stone no. 100: To the Memory of Washington. *The Free Swiss Confederation* MDCCCLII.

Stone no. 101: *Greece*. (Greek inscription translated): “George Washington, the Hero, the Citizen of the New and Illustrious Liberty. The Land of Solon, Themistocles and Pericles – the Mother of Ancient Liberty – Sends this Ancient Stone as a Testimony of Honor and Admiration from the Parthenon.”

Stone no. 102: *Siam*.

Stone no. 103: *Brazil*, 1878.

Stone no. 104: (Translation) “To Washington, the Great, Good and Just, by friendly *BREMEN*.”

Stone no. 106: Presented by the Governor and Commune of the Islands of Paros and Noxos, *Grecian Archipelago*.

The Eighteenth Landing (200 feet high):

Stone no. 107: From the Templars of Honor and Temperance. Organized Dec. 5th 1845. “Truth, Love, Purity and Fidelity.” Our Pledge: “We will not make, buy, sell or use as a beverage, any spirituous or malt liquors, wine, cider, or any other alcoholic liquor, and we will discountenance their manufacture, traffic and use, and this pledge we will maintain unto the end of life.” Supreme Council of the Templars of Honor and Temperance. 1846.

The Nineteenth Landing (210 feet high):

Stone no. 116: Grand Division of *Ohio*, Sons of Temperance, “Love, Purity and Fidelity.”

Stone no. 117: Presented by the Grand Division on behalf of the Sons of Temperance of Illinois, January 1st, 1855. Grand Division, *State of Illinois*, Sons of Temperance. Inst. Jan. 8, 1847.

Stone no. 121: *Kansas*. Kansas Territory, organized May 20, 1851. State admitted January 29, 1861.

The Twentieth Landing (220 feet high):

Stone no. 122: All for our Country. *Nevada*, 1881.

Stone no. 123: *Nebraska's* Tribute “Equality before the Law.”

Stone no. 124: (Chinese inscription translated): *China*. “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? This Stone is

Presented by a Company of Christians and Engraved at Ningpu... *China*...the Reign of the Emperor Heen Fung.”...(July 12th, 1853.)

Stone no. 126: Tribute of *Wyoming Territory*. “To the Memory of him who by Universal consent was Chief among the Founders of the Republic.”

Stone no. 127: Holiness to the Lord.

Stone no. 131: *State of Oregon*. The Union.

The Twenty-first Landing (230 feet high):

Stone no. 133: Under the Auspices of Heaven and the Precepts of Washington, *Kentucky* will be the last to give up the Union. “United we stand, divided we fall.”

Stone no. 134: *Georgia* Convention 1850. “Wisdom, Justice, Moderation.”

Stone no. 137: *Tennessee*. “The Federal Union, it must be Preserved.”

The Twenty-second Landing (240 feet high):

Stone no. 139: The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in session in Washington City. May, 1859.

The Twenty-fourth Landing (260 feet high):

Stone no. 156: The Memory of the Just is Blessed. Proverbs 10:7. Presented by the Children of the Sunday Schools of Methodist Episcopal Church, in the City of New York, Feb. 22, '55.

Stone no. 158: From 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 of 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 XXII:6.

Stone no. 160: By the Pupils of the Public Schools of the City of Baltimore. A.D. MDCCCLI.

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 “Rome to America.” In March 1854, the lapidarium, where the memorial blocks were kept, was forcibly entered, and this stone was taken and thrown into the Potomac River.

(Excerpted from, *The Christian Heritage of our Nation – Ten National Memorials* © 1998; 2012 by Catherine Millard.)