

From the observatory, there is a Fantastic view over all of Washington.



The Washington Monument is a 555ft tall obelisk built between 1848 and 1884 in honor of the first President of the United States, George Washington. It is the tallest free standing masonry structure in the world. It is surrounded by flagpoles, with each flag representing one state.

Washington National Monument Society

As early as 1783, when George Washington was still alive, plans by Pierre Charles L'Enfant for an equestrian statue of Washington were approved by Congress. The plan was never realized so in 1833, at the 100th anniversary of George Washington's birth, the Washington National Monument Society was created by James Madison and John Marshall. The purpose of the Society was to create a memorial for George Washington.

Design competition

The Society tried to collect funds for the monument, and in 1836 they held a competition for designs. The winning architect Robert Mills had already created a monument to Washington in Baltimore. He won the competition with a design which called for a topped-off 600ft obelisk surrounded by a circular, 100ft tall colonnade.

Start of Construction

The Society had only collected a fraction of the estimated cost of 1 million dollars so they decided to start construction of the obelisk. The colonnade would be built later. Finally on the Fourth of July 1848, the cornerstone was laid. The Monument was built on top of a hill on a 37 acre site donated by Congress.

Donations and Know Nothings

During construction, the Society invited states and private organizations to donate stones that could be used for the construction of the Washington Monument. Problems arose when a stone was donated by Pope Pius IX. An anti-catholic American party, the Know-Nothings, stole the stone and took over control of the Washington National Monument Society. Congress, which was to donate \$200,000 for the construction refused to fund the politicized Society. Public support for the monument started to dwindle and the Know Nothings were unable to collect the money to finish the obelisk. They returned the control of the project back in 1858 to the original supporters of the Society but due to the Civil War, construction of the monument was halted. Only 152 ft was completed.

Construction Resumes

In 1876, at the centennial of the Declaration of Independence, Congress approved a contribution of \$200,000. The design of the monument was simplified: it was decided the colonnade would not be built and the obelisk would keep the proportions of a standard Egyptian obelisk. In 1879 construction resumed under the supervision of Lt. Colonel Thomas L. Casey. Four years later the monument was completed. The rather flat top was changed into a pyramidal one. The tip of the pyramid top was made in aluminum, at the time a rare and precious metal.

The point at which construction was halted in 1858 is still visible as a different quarry was used after the resumption of the works. The stones above 152ft have a darker tone of color than the original ones.

Dedication

The monument was finally dedicated on February 21, 1885. It opened to the public more than 3 years later, in October 1888. The Washington Monument is located at the National Mall. Admission is free, but you have to reserve a ticket.