

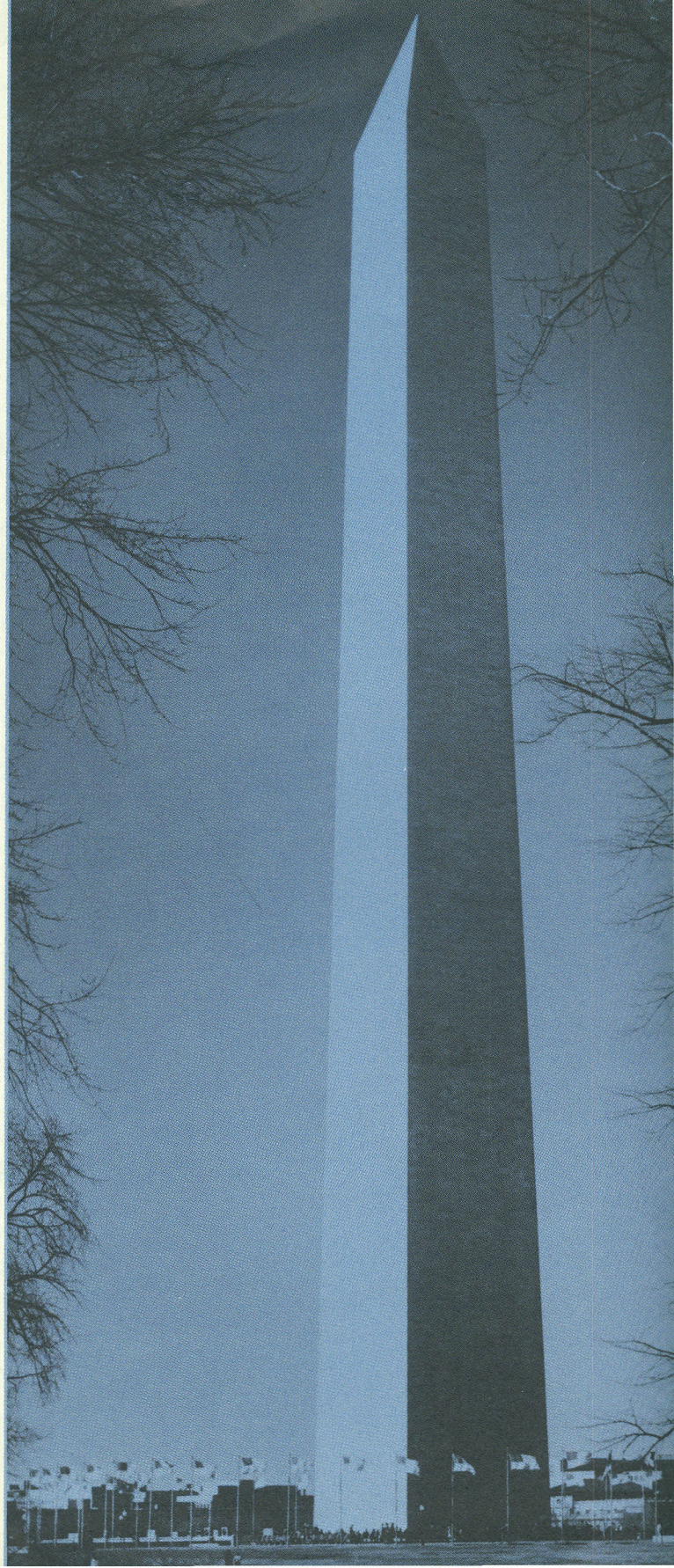
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# The Washington Monument

Washington DC

“integrity  
and firmness  
is all I can  
promise;  
these...  
shall never  
forsake me  
although  
I may be  
deserted by  
all men.”

—To the Acting Secretary of War, April 1, 1789



### **The Washington Monument**

The Washington Monument, built at intervals between 1848 and 1885 with funds from public subscriptions and Federal appropriations, memorializes George Washington's achievements and unselfish devotion to principle and to country. It shows the gratitude of the people of the United States to the father of their country and their living faith in the causes for which he stood.

### **Washington During the Revolutionary War**

George Washington's rise to enduring fame really began in July 1775, when he took command of the newly formed Continental Army. He was already an international figure because of the part he had played in the French and Indian War. However, the quarter of a century that loomed ahead of that July day was to place him high in the ranks of the world's great. The problems that confronted the new commander and his country were colossal. Thirteen small colonies, with potentially rich but yet undeveloped resources, had embarked on armed conflict with the richest and most powerful empire in the world. It was an empire whose far-flung commerce supplied an abundance of the weapons of war.

As commander of the small Continental Army seeking to win independence for the colonies, Washington was an inspiring leader. He showed a remarkable ability to secure the best results with the scanty material resources and untrained armed forces at his command. His persistence secured essential reinforcements and supplies from reluctant governors and assemblies and enabled him to strengthen the army and feed and clothe his frequently cold and hungry troops. He made of this Continental Army an easily maneuverable force which survived the worst blows of its foe and even won significant victories in the first 3 years of the war. He thus assured the important alliance with France which was to guarantee the achievement of American independence.

By the close of the Revolution the outstanding position of Washington in the minds of the American people was generally recognized. More than any other American, he symbolized the Revolution and its triumphant conclusion; he had been its military leader for more than 8 years. No figure in American military or civil life commanded the same general respect and admiration as were shown to him. At times, it was by his military ability that he had prevented the Revolution from collapsing. No other American military hero has possessed in equal measure so many outstanding qualities of leadership. It is not strange that he has come to be

regarded as the father of this country and that he has remained the preeminent figure in American history.

### **Washington, the First President**

The years that followed the Revolution added further to the fame of Washington. This was a critical period in the life of the young republic, when its very existence was endangered by the weak central government established under the Articles of Confederation. The public debt remained unpaid, and public credit declined. The States levied their own customs duties and disputed among themselves over the regulation of interstate commerce and other vital matters. In this national crisis, Washington was again summoned to serve his country and chosen to preside over the Convention of 1787 that drew up the Federal Constitution. In 1789 his outstanding ability was recognized by his unanimous election as first President of the United States.

In his new office, Washington showed the same high administrative qualities that had marked his work as commander of the Continental Army. His choice of executive officers again proved his capacity to select men of high competence and to place them in positions where their ability could be used to the best advantage. During his administration, the public credit was restored, and irritating disputes among the States over domestic commerce disappeared with the Federal regulation of interstate commerce. The adoption of these measures was accompanied by bitter charges directed partly against Washington himself. Nevertheless, the laws which successfully launched the new government on its course have won the general approval of all succeeding generations of American citizens.

### **Washington in Retirement**

When Washington retired to Mount Vernon in March 1797, he left behind him a great work successfully completed. As the people had looked to him for leadership in war, so they looked to him for leadership in peace, and he did not disappoint them.

Steadily through the years that have passed since Washington's death in 1799, his fame has burned brightly. All Americans have recognized him as a truly great man. Abroad, the fame of Washington grew as the French Revolution gave emphasis to the republicanism and nationalism that he symbolized. The acceptance of democratic principles increasingly became the fashion in 19th-century Europe and South America, where liberals and nationalists spread his fame. Chateaubriand, the celebrated French commentator on America, said: "The name of Washington will spread with liberty from age to age."

### History of the Washington Monument

The construction of a monument to honor George Washington was first considered by the Continental Congress in 1783. At the time of his death, and during the next three decades, Congress neglected to take definite action on many additional proposals for the erection of a suitable memorial. In 1833, the Washington National Monument Society was organized by influential citizens of the National Capital who undertook the building of a "great National Monument to the memory of Washington at the seat of the Federal Government."

The progress of the society was slow at first. By 1847, however, \$87,000 (including interest) had been collected by popular subscription. A design submitted by Robert Mills, a well-known architect, was selected. It provided for a decorated obelisk 600 feet high which was to rise from a circular colonnaded building 100 feet high and 250 feet in diameter. This temple was to be an American pantheon, a repository for statues of Presidents and national heroes, containing a colossal statue of George Washington.

The original design, however, was greatly altered in the course of construction and the present monument—a hollow shaft without decoration or embellishment—has little in common with Mills' elaborate plan. The proportions of Mills' shaft, which were at variance with traditional dimensions of obelisks, were altered to conform to the classical conception, thus producing an obelisk that for grace and delicacy of outline is unexcelled by any in Egypt.

On July 4, 1848, the cornerstone was laid with elaborate Masonic ceremonies. The trowel used by Washington at the laying of the cornerstone of the Capitol in 1793 was used on this occasion.

Work progressed favorably until 1854, when the building of the monument became involved in a political quarrel. Many citizens became dissatisfied with the work and the collection of funds lagged. This unfortunate affair and the growing antagonism between the North and South, which resulted in the Civil War, brought construction to a halt. For almost 25 years, the monument stood incomplete at the height of about 150 feet. Finally, on August 2, 1876, President Grant approved an act which provided that the Federal Government should complete the erection of the monument. The Corps of Engineers of the War Department was placed in charge of the work.

In 1880, work was resumed on the shaft. The new Maryland marble with which the remainder of the monument

is faced was secured from the same vein as the original stone used for the lower part. It came from a different stratum, however, which explains the "ring" noticeable on the shaft. The walls of the memorial reached 500 feet on August 9, 1884, and the capstone was set in place on the following December 6, marking the completion of the work. The monument was dedicated on February 21, 1885, and opened to the public on October 9, 1888.

The top may be reached by elevator or by an iron stairway. The first elevator was a steam hoist, used until 1901 when the first electric elevator was installed. The present elevator, installed in 1959, makes the ascent in 70 seconds. The iron stairway consists of 50 landings and 897 steps.

Inserted into the interior walls are 188 carved stones presented by individuals, societies, cities, States, and nations of the world.

### The Monument in Statistics

Total cost: \$1,187,710

Height of monument above floor: 555 feet 5½ inches

Width at base of shaft: 55 feet 1½ inches

Width at top of shaft: 34 feet 5½ inches

Thickness of walls at base of shaft: 15 feet

Thickness of walls at top of shaft: 18 inches

Depth of foundation: 36 feet 10 inches

Weight of monument: 90,854 tons

Sway of monument in 30-mile-per-hour wind: 0.125 of an inch

### Tourmobile Service

The National Park Service has concessioner-operated, guided tourmobiles with unlimited reboarding privileges. Call 554-5100 for rate information.

*The Mall and West Potomac Park.* Tourmobiles stop at 11 points to discharge and pick up passengers from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., June through Labor Day; and from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., the rest of the year.

*Arlington National Cemetery.* Tourmobiles stop at Arlington House, President Kennedy's Gravesite, Tomb of the Unknowns, and the visitor center from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., April to October; and from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., November to March.

### **Administration**

The Washington Monument is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. It is open 7 days a week, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Extended summer hours are 8 a.m. to midnight. The monument is closed on December 25. Address all inquiries to the Mall Operations Office, 1100 Ohio Drive SW, Washington, DC 20242.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

**national park service**  
**u.s. department of the interior**