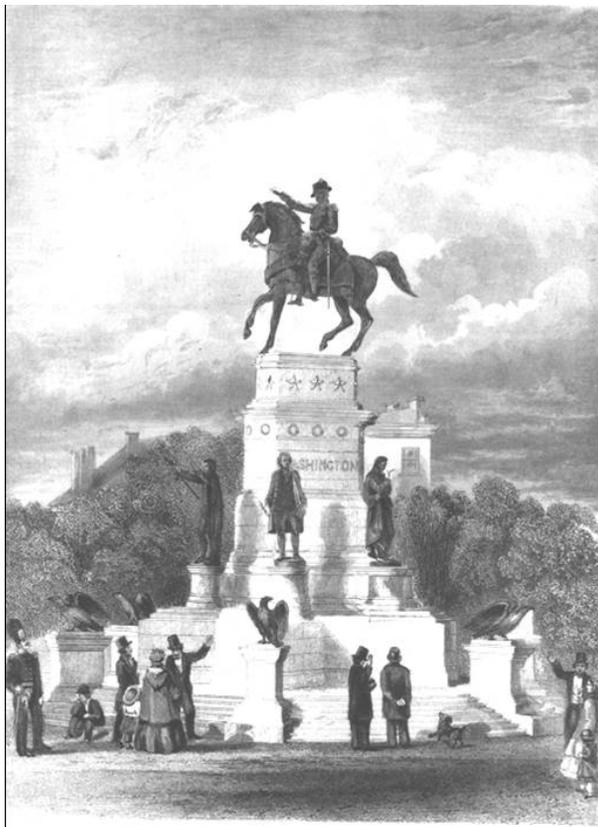


Even before his death in 1799, George Washington had come to symbolize the American spirit. In the early 1800s, both the Virginia General Assembly and the Federal government sought to have Washington's remains removed from Mount Vernon either to Richmond or to the new Federal city that bore Washington's name. After the Washington family refused to have Washington's body removed, Governor Thomas Mann Randolph wrote in 1822 that a *cenotaph* (a symbolic empty tomb) should be erected on Capitol Square.

Initial public interest was strong, and by 1828 donations to the Washington Monument Fund had reached more than \$13,000. Despite languishing for a few years, by 1848 the Fund totaled more than \$41,000, and on February 22, 1849, the General Assembly authorized a commission to oversee design and placement of a monument "at some suitable place on the capitol square in the City of Richmond."

After an extensive design competition, the plans of Thomas Crawford, an American sculptor living and working in Rome, were selected in early February 1850. Later that month, on February 22, the Washington Monument's granite cornerstone was laid on Capitol Square.



ABOVE: Crawford's original design included an equestrian statue of Washington, along with six other prominent Virginians, and a grouping of eagles at the base.

When Governor Henry A. Wise saw Crawford's design, he proclaimed that the eagles made Capitol Square look like "a buzzards roost." The eagles were soon replaced with six different allegorical figures.



ABOVE: The incomplete Washington Monument in late 1868, showing the placement of allegorical figures instead of eagles. Crawford died in 1857, and the Monument was completed by his American colleague Randolph Rogers.

One observer visited Crawford's Rome studio in 1853 and saw the model of Washington's horse. He later wrote that it was "full of strength and fire, but not rebellious—a steed fully worthy of his rider."



ABOVE: *The Washington Monument shortly after installation. Note that some of the wooden frame scaffolding is still in place.*

From the time it was first unveiled, the equestrian monument to George Washington has been both an object of admiration and a tribute to Washington and his Revolutionary contemporaries Patrick Henry, George Mason, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Nelson, Jr., John Marshall, and Andrew Lewis.

Washington's Birthday And the Washington Monument

- February 22, 1828—the General Assembly approves investing contributions to the Washington Monument Fund to earn interest.
- February 22, 1849—the General Assembly authorizes a commission for the Monument.
- February 22, 1850—representatives from Richmond's Masonic lodges lay the five-ton granite cornerstone.
- February 22, 1858—the equestrian statue of Washington is unveiled.
- February 22, 1862—Jefferson Davis gives his inaugural address on the Monument's east steps.
- February 22, 2008—the 150th anniversary of the unveiling is commemorated on Capitol Square.

All images courtesy of the Library of Virginia.

For more information, go to virginiacapitol.gov

02/08

“Full of Strength and Fire”: Virginia’s Washington Monument



A Commemoration of the Unveiling of the Equestrian Statue of George Washington February 22, 1858