

1 **The Washington Monument - Reading**

2 The Washington Monument, built at intervals between 1848 and
3 1885 with funds from public subscriptions and Federal
4 appropriations, memorializes George Washington's achievements
5 and unselfish devotion to principle and to country. It shows the
6 gratitude of the people of the United States to the father of their
7 country and their living faith in the causes for which he stood.
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9 **Washington During the Revolutionary** 10 **War**

11 George Washington's rise to enduring fame really began in July
12 1775, when he took command of the newly formed Continental
13 Army. He was already an international figure because of the part he
14 had played in the French and Indian War. However, the quarter of a
15 century that loomed ahead of that July day was to place him high in
16 the ranks of the world's great. The problems that confronted the new
17 commander and his country were colossal. Thirteen small colonies,
18 with potentially rich but yet undeveloped resources, had embarked
19 on armed conflict with the richest and most powerful empire in the
20 world. It was an empire whose far-flung commerce supplied an
21 abundance of the weapons of war.

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

34 By the close of the Revolution the outstanding position of
35 Washington in the minds of the American people was generally
36 recognized. More than any other American, he symbolized the

37 Revolution and its triumphant conclusion; he had been its military
38 leader for more than 8 years. No figure in American military or civil
39 life commanded the same general respect and admiration as were
40 shown to him. At times, it was by his military ability that he had
41 prevented the Revolution from collapsing. No other American
42 military hero has possessed in equal measure so many outstanding
43 qualities of leadership. It is not strange that he has come to be
44 regarded as the father of this country and that he has remained the
45 preeminent figure in American history.

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47 **Washington, the First President**

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

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

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75 **Washington in Retirement**

76 When Washington retired to Mount Vernon in March 1797, he left
77 behind him a great work successfully completed. As the people had
78 looked to him for leadership in war, so they looked to him for
79 leadership in peace, and he did not disappoint them.
80 Steadily through the years that have passed since Washington's
81 death in 1799, his fame has burned brightly. All Americans have
82 recognized him as a truly great man. Abroad, the fame of
83 Washington grew as the French Revolution gave emphasis to the
84 republicanism and nationalism that he symbolized. The acceptance
85 of democratic principles increasingly became the fashion in 19th-
86 century Europe and South America, where liberals and nationalists
87 spread his fame. Chateaubriand, the celebrated French commentator
88 on America said: "The name of Washington will spread with liberty
89 from age to age."
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91 **History of the Washington Monument**

92 The construction of a monument to honor George Washington was
93 first considered by the Continental Congress in 1783. At the time of
94 his death, and during the next three decades, Congress neglected to
95 take definite action on many additional proposals for the erection of a
96 suitable memorial. In 1833, the Washington National Monument
97 Society was organized by influential citizens of the National Capital
98 who undertook the building of a "great National Monument to the
99 memory of Washington at the seat of the Federal Government."
100 The progress of the society was slow at first. By 1847, however,
101 \$87,000 (including interest) had been collected by popular
102 subscription. A design submitted by Robert Mills, a well-known
103 architect, was selected. It provided for a decorated obelisk 600 feet
104 high which was to rise from a circular colonnaded building 100 feet
105 high and 250 feet in diameter. This temple was to be an American
106 pantheon, a repository for statues of Presidents and national heroes,
107 containing a colossal statue of George Washington.
108 The original design, however, was greatly altered in the course of
109 construction and the present monument - a hollow shaft without
110 decoration or embellishment - has little in common with Mills'
111 elaborate plan. The proportions of Mills' shaft, which were at

112 variance with traditional dimensions of obelisks, were altered to
113 conform to the classical conception, thus producing an obelisk that
114 for grace and delicacy of outline is unexcelled by any in Egypt.
115 On July 4, 1848, the cornerstone was laid with elaborate Masonic
116 ceremonies. The trowel used by Washington at the laying of the
117 cornerstone of the Capitol in 1793 was used on this occasion.
118 Work progressed favorably until 1854, when the building of the
119 monument became involved in a political quarrel. Many citizens
120 became dissatisfied with the work and the collection of funds lagged.
121 This unfortunate affair and the growing antagonism between the
122 North and South, which resulted in the Civil War, brought
123 construction to a halt. For almost 25 years, the monument stood
124 incomplete at the height of about 150 feet. Finally on August 2,
125 1876, President Grant approved an act which provided that the
126 Federal Government should complete the erection of the monument.
127 The Corps of Engineers of the War Department was placed in charge
128 of the work.

129 In 1880, work was resumed on the shaft. The new Maryland marble
130 with which the remainder of the monument is faced was secured
131 from the same vein as the original stone used for the lower part. It
132 came from a different stratum, however, which explains the "ring"
133 noticeable on the shaft. The walls of the memorial reached 500 feet
134 on August 9, 1884, and the capstone was set in place on the
135 following December 6, marking the completion of the work. The
136 monument was dedicated on February 21, 1885, and opened to the
137 public on October 9, 1888.

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

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

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152 **The Monument in Statistics**

- 153 Total cost: \$1,187,710
- 154 Height of monument above floor: 555 feet 5 1/8 inches
- 155 Width at base of shaft: 55 feet 1 1/2 inches
- 156 Width at top of shaft: 34 feet 5 1/2 inches
- 157 Thickness of walls at base of shaft: 15 feet
- 158 Thickness of walls at top of shaft: 18 inches
- 159 Depth of foundation: 36 feet 10 inches
- 160 Weight of monument: 90,854 tons
- 161 Sway of monument in 30-mile-per-hour wind: 0.125 of an inch