

## **George Washington**

George Washington, known as the father of our country, was born February 22, 1789, to a Virginia planter family. He married Martha Custis and busied himself running his Virginia plantation at Mount Vernon where he became involved in politics. He later served as Commander-in-Chief of the continental Army in the war against England to win our freedom. When our new Constitution was ratified in 1787, the Electoral College chose Washington as our first president. He served two terms.

## **Washington Monument**

Washington Monument is a national memorial authorized in 1848. Located in Washington, D.C., at the western end of the National Mall, this four-sided stone structure honors George Washington, the first President of the United States (1789-1797).

The monument was modeled after a classic Egyptian obelisk. It is 169 m (555 ft) high and is one of the tallest masonry structures in the world. The structure is 17 m (55 ft) square at its base (making it ten times taller than it is wide) and tapers to less than 10 m (35 ft) square near its highest point. A small pyramid of solid aluminum caps the top of the monument. The walls of the monument are made of marble from Maryland and Massachusetts. A stairway of 897 steps and an elevator lead to an observation room near the top. Visitors who walk to the top can view 192 memorial stones that were donated by states, organizations, foreign countries, and individuals. A bronze replica of a statue of Washington by French sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon stands in the waiting area. Windows in the observation room offer views of the Lincoln Memorial, the White House, the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, and the Capitol building.

The idea of a memorial honoring Washington developed in the 1780s. In the absence of action by the federal government, a group of private citizens formed the Washington National Monument Society in 1833. American architect Robert Mills designed an obelisk surrounded by a series of columns at the base that featured statues of prominent Americans. His design was later altered and the columns were not built. The cornerstone was laid on July 4, 1848, with the same trowel Washington used in 1793 to lay the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol building. Construction continued slowly until the mid-1850s, when political disputes, lack of funds, and the American Civil War (1861-1865) halted work. President Ulysses S. Grant (1869-1877) authorized federal funding for the memorial in 1876, and in 1878, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers resumed work on the project. The monument was completed in 1884, dedicated on February 21, 1885, and opened to the public in 1888.