

The Washington Monument can be seen for miles around. It rises toward the sky like a giant needle. It is the tallest stone building in the world—more than 555 feet high. Yet, unbelievable as it seems, it was once stolen. It wasn't actually taken away, but it was kept out of the proper hands for almost two years.

In 1783, near the end of the Revolutionary War, Congress voted to put up a statue of George Washington. It would show him mounted on a fine horse. That was, Congress thought, a fitting honor for such a hero.

Washington, however, was a modest man. Also, he knew just how little money the new government had. He said he did not want a statue of himself. Instead he suggested a simple shaft. Congress agreed. A site was chosen, and Thomas Jefferson marked the exact spot with a small heap of stones.

But nothing more was done for years. Then, in 1799, Washington died. Once more Congress voted to build a monument in his honor. They decided to bury the hero's body there. However, that plan could not be carried out. Washington had stated in his will that he wanted to be buried at his Mount Vernon home.

Time and time again the matter of the monument came up. But the country was still short of money, and nothing much was done.

Then in 1833 a group of citizens formed the Washington National Monument Society. They invited artists to send in plans for the building. Finally they chose the one by Robert Mills. It was for a hollow marble shaft. In that first plan the shaft was to rest on a round base with many columns. On top

of this base would be a thirty-foot statue of Washington. It would show him as an ancient Roman, standing in a chariot and driving several horses. Luckily someone, somewhere, had better taste. In the end just the beautiful, simple shaft was decided upon.

Next came the job of raising the money. Americans everywhere were asked to give something. Women held fairs to raise money. Schoolchildren gave their pennies. Finally \$70,000 was raised, and building began on July 4, 1848.

Many colleges, churches, Indian tribes, states, and even foreign countries sent blocks of marble. One block, a gift of the Catholics in Rome, started a great deal of trouble.

There was a political group in America that was anti-Catholic and anti-foreign. It called itself the American party. It was, however, more often called the Know-Nothing party. The Know-Nothings fought against the use of the stone from Rome. One night some of them attacked the guard at the monument and stole the marble block. It is believed that they broke it into pieces and threw it into the river. Anyway, it was never seen again. This act angered people so much that they stopped giving money or blocks of stone.

But the Know-Nothings weren't through yet. They did an even more terrible thing. They took over the ground on which the monument stood. They announced that they were in charge of the work. The monument, they said, would be built "for Americans and by Americans." But they did no work and they raised no money. In fact, the whole group broke up in less than two years. The monument was then returned to the care of

the society. But before any of their plans could be put into action, the Civil War broke out. For years the monument stood unfinished, forgotten by everyone. It stood only 152 feet high.

After the war President Ulysses S. Grant

asked Congress to vote enough money to finish the monument. The army took charge of the work. At last, on October 9, 1888, the monument was formally opened to the public. It had been 105 years since Congress first voted to build a statue.

CHECK YOUR READING

- 1. The first statue Congress voted for was supposed to show Washington**
 - A by a cannon
 - B in a chariot
 - C on a horse
- 2. Washington did not want such a statue because it would**
 - A cost too much
 - B seem out of place
 - C make him look silly
- 3. When Washington suggested a simple shaft, Congress**
 - A paid no attention
 - B agreed with him
 - C offered another idea
- 4. Washington wanted to be buried**
 - A near the monument
 - B at Mount Vernon
 - C on a battlefield
- 5. Robert Mills's first plan for the monument showed Washington as**
 - A an ancient Roman
 - B an Indian chief
 - C a Greek god
- 6. The writer of the story thinks that this monument would have been**
 - A of great beauty
 - B low in cost
 - C in poor taste
- 7. The money with which the monument was started came from**
 - A the American people
 - B George Washington's estate
 - C the U.S. Congress
- 8. The American party was better known as the**
 - A Do-Nothing party
 - B Know-Nothing party
 - C Say-Nothing party
- 9. The stone sent by the Catholics in Rome was probably**
 - A broken up and thrown away
 - B chipped and covered with paint
 - C hidden away for two years
- 10. The monument was finished more than one hundred years after the**
 - A Revolutionary War
 - B Mexican War
 - C Civil War