

## This Day in History... October 19, 1847

# NYC's Lost Washington Monument

On October 19, 1847, a grand celebration proceeded the laying of the cornerstone of New York City's planned 425-foot Washington Monument. The monument was never completed and the cornerstone was lost to time.

In 1833, a group of New York City citizens founded the Washington Monument Association of the City of New York. They believed the city, which had once been the nation's capital and the site of Washington's first inauguration, should be home to a large memorial to America's first president.

It took several years, but they finally received public support and donations and began planning the monument. The design they selected was created by Calvin Pollard, who had previously helped design the Brooklyn Borough

Hall. His 425-foot monument would be the

tallest building in the city by more than 140 feet (the then-tallest building was the 284-foot Trinity Church). It was said it would be able to be seen from 50 miles away. Pollard's design was a Gothic tapered granite tower that would be placed on a hill in Hamilton Square. The base of the monument would include a library and art studios, while an observatory would be placed above.

On October 19, 1847, a massive crowd estimated at 250,000 (about half the city's population at the time) attended the ceremonial laying of the cornerstone of the monument. The date was significant – it was the 66th anniversary of George Washington accepting British General Charles Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown.

The day's celebrations began that morning at City Hall in Lower Manhattan. The large crowd then marched more than four miles to Hamilton Square on the Upper East Side. After the firing of a lone gun, a prayer was said and the governor of New York laid the cornerstone. Several local musical societies then sang a song written for the occasion by George P. Morris. Chief Justice Samuel Jones then delivered a speech, which was followed by another song a more speeches.

Opinions about the monument were mixed. *The New York Herald* said it would be "one of the most splendid Monumental Edifices ever." Meanwhile, the *New York Evening Express* said that "in order to make it a Washington Monument, there should be something whereby a stranger could be enabled to recognize it as such." Another publication, *The New York Sun*, wrote "New York will shame herself and the memory of Washington be desecrated by any tinselly Gothic structure and we pray in common with thousands that the corner stone now laid for a Gothic spire will be left to lie alone forever."

Despite the grand public ceremony, the monument failed to get enough money to move forward. Over time the monument was forgotten and the area where it was to be built, Hamilton Square, became home to buildings instead of a park. The fate of the cornerstone is uncertain. A *New York Herald* article from 1879 said that the cornerstone

was included in the foundation of Mount Sinai Hospital. However, that building was torn down when the hospital relocated in 1904. However, another publication claimed in 1890 that Terrence Farley had received a contract to level the old Hamilton Square in 1867 and may have taken the cornerstone for himself. The article went on to say, "no man knoweth of its location to this day... Is it not a ludicrous outcome for a great city enterprise? And slightly humiliating?"

While this monument was abandoned, New York City did eventually create monuments to Washington, most notably the equestrian statue in Union Square (1856) and the Washington Square arch (1891).



Stamp pictures Washington evacuating troops during the Battle of Brooklyn.



Stamp issued for the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Yorktown.



Washington's first inauguration was held in NY on April 30, 1789.



The cornerstone for the Washington monument in D.C. was laid less than a year later on July 4, 1848.



New York's George Washington Bridge connects two sites of former forts he used during the Revolutionary War.

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