



# Architecture

## United States Capitol Building

Washington, D.C., USA



*[ One country, one Constitution, one destiny ]*

*Daniel Webster*



## The United States Capitol Building

The United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. is a symbol of American democracy and the meeting place of the nation's government. As well as housing an important collection of American art and being an architectural achievement in its own right, the Capitol is still a working office building and a tourist attraction visited by millions every year. The building has been at the heart of the country's history since it was first completed in 1800.

*[ We have built no temple  
but the Capitol. We consult  
no common oracle but the  
Constitution ]*

*Rufus Choate,  
Congressman & Orator*

# History

On September 18, 1793, President George Washington laid the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol Building at the southeast corner of its foundation. The ceremony was carried out with great pomp and celebration as it marked the building of the young nation's most symbolically important and architecturally impressive building.

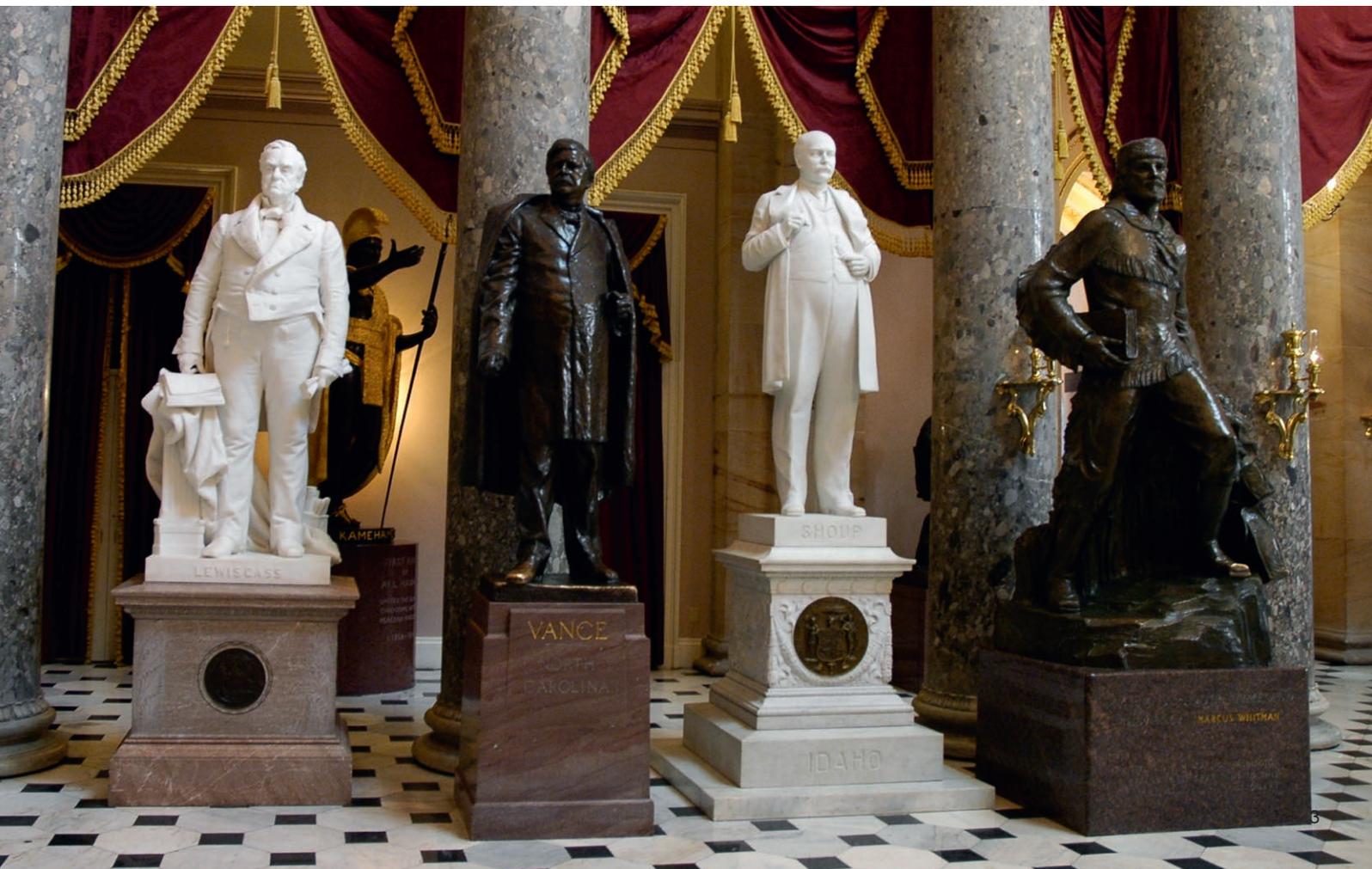
The building was to be the centerpiece in the creation of Washington, D.C. as the nation's new capital. Pierre Charles L'Enfant, who created the plan of the city, selected the site and laid out the wide boulevard leading up to it, but was dismissed before he could draw the building itself.

In the democratic spirit that the building represented, the then U.S. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson announced a public competition to design the new Capitol Building.

An idea submitted by the amateur architect William Thornton was selected and received praise from President Washington for its "Grandeur, Simplicity and Beauty". Three renowned architects of the time, Stephen Hallet, George Hadfield and the designer of the White House, James Hoban, were asked to realize Thornton's plan. After seven years and many changes to Thornton's original drawings, the first stage was completed in 1800.



After being partially burned down by the British in 1814, the U.S. Capitol Building was rebuilt and the first dome at the center of the building was added in 1818. By the 1850s it was clear that the building could no longer accommodate the growing number of states joining the union and the Capitol was expanded to become the building we recognize today.





## The United States Capitol Building Today

The U.S. Capitol Building continues to be the working heart of the nation's government and the 435 Representatives and 100 Senators still sit in the two houses of Congress within the building. Here they debate legislation, hold hearings and conduct investigations as the voice of the American people.

But the U.S. Capitol Building is also an attraction in its own right and houses some of the nation's greatest art treasures. The heart of the Capitol is the rotunda, a 96 ft. (29 m) diameter circular hall crowned by an inner dome. Visible through the eye of the dome, 180 ft. (55 m) above the floor, is a massive fresco painted by Italian artist Constantino Brumidi. The 4,664 sq. ft. (433 m<sup>2</sup>) mural, entitled *The Apotheosis of George Washington*, consists of a portrait of the nation's first president rising to the heavens. Brumidi also designed the frieze at the top of the walls below the rotunda, depicting famous events and people in American history. Eleven statues currently encircle the rotunda and include former U.S. Presidents such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Dwight D. Eisenhower.

To accommodate the ever-increasing number of visitors to the U.S. Capitol Building, a new Visitor Center was opened in 2008. At nearly 580,000 sq. ft. (54,000 m<sup>2</sup>), the Visitor Center was the largest project in the Capitol's more than two-century history and is approximately three quarters the size of the Capitol itself. The entire facility is located underground on the east side of the Capitol so as not to detract from the building's appearance.

*[ Here, sir, the people govern ]*

*Alexander Hamilton*

# The Architects

The U.S. Capitol Building has become a landmark of 19th-century neoclassical architecture, but the history behind its design and construction is full of controversy and drama.

The amateur architect William Thornton (1759-1828) was born in the British West Indies, and became an American citizen in 1787, after completing a medical degree in Scotland. While his design for the Capitol won him praise from the President (as well as \$500 and a building lot in the city), the professional architects employed to oversee the construction were less impressed and tried to alter his design at every turn.

Stephen Hallet (1755-1825) was a professionally trained architect from France. He arrived in the U.S. around 1790 and submitted at least five designs of his own for the Capitol building. Placed in charge of the construction process in 1793, Hallet revised the floor plan of the two wings before being dismissed a year later for insubordination.

The English-born architect George Hadfield (1763-1826) took over for Hallet and immediately suggested major alterations to the original plan. Before his dismissal in 1798, he designed the first office buildings for the cabinet departments.

James Hoban (1758-1831) had supervised both Hallet and Hadfield and now took over the day-to-day supervision. Born in Ireland, he had moved to the U.S. in 1785 after studying architecture in Dublin. Hoban supervised the completion of the north wing and designed its interior, while also overseeing the building of the White House.

The 1850 expansion of the U.S. Capitol was carried out by the American architect Thomas U. Walter (1804-1887). The construction of his two new wings more than doubled the length of the Capitol. As the original dome of 1818 no longer matched the bigger building, Walter replaced it with the larger dome that still stands today.

*[ ...the Capitol "ought to be upon a scale far superior to anything in this Country" ]*

*George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, 1792*



# Facts about the United States Capitol Building

Location: ..... Washington, D.C., USA  
Construction Periods: ..... 1793, 1815, 1850, and 2000  
Architectural Style: ..... 19th century Neo-Classical  
Dimensions: ..... 751 ft (229 m) by 350 ft (106 m)  
Height: ..... 288 ft (87 m)  
Floor Space: ..... 175,170 sq ft (16,258 m<sup>2</sup>)



## Facts and Statements



*The Capitol's original architect, William Thorton, was inspired by the east front of the Louvre in Paris, France.*



*The building's dome is made of 8,909,200 lb. (4,041,100 kg) of cast iron.*



*The building contains approximately 540 rooms, has 658 windows and approximately 850 doorways.*



*The current "wedding-cake style" cast-iron dome was added in 1855 and is three times the height of the original one.*



*There are 108 windows in the dome above the rotunda.*



*The statue at the top of the dome is entitled the Statue of Freedom.*



*The U.S. Capitol Building is divided into five levels. The second floor holds both the Chambers of the House of Representatives and the Senate.*

# LEGO® Architecture—then and now

There has always been a natural connection between the LEGO® brick and the world of architecture. Fans who build with LEGO elements instinctively develop an interest in the form and function of the structures they create. At the same time, many architects have discovered that LEGO bricks are the perfect way of physically expressing their creative ideas.

This connection was confirmed in the early 1960s with the launch of the LEGO 'Scale Model' line. It matched the spirit of the age where modern architects were redefining how houses look and people were taking an active interest in the design of their new homes. These sets were designed to be different from the normal, brightly colored LEGO boxes; they also included a book on architecture as a source of inspiration.

Decades later, architect and LEGO fan Adam Reed Tucker, revived the idea of expressing architecture using LEGO bricks and in partnership with the LEGO Group, launched the

LEGO Architecture line that we know today. His first models, and the original sets in the current LEGO Architecture series, were interpretations of famous skyscrapers from his hometown of Chicago. Since then LEGO Architecture has developed and evolved, first with well-known buildings from other cities in the United States, and now with iconic structures from Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

The introduction of our LEGO Architecture Studio set echoes the ambitions of the earlier LEGO 'Scale Model' line and widens the potential of the LEGO Architecture series. Now you can enjoy building and learning about specific landmark buildings, or create exciting architectural models from your own fantasy. An inspiring 270-page book, featuring a number of renowned architects from around the world, guides you through the principles of architecture and encourages you in your own creative building.



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LEGO Architecture Studio

## References

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