

THE STATUE OF FREEDOM



U.S. CAPITOL
Visitor Center

THE STATUE OF FREEDOM



The Statue of Freedom has stood atop the United States Capitol Dome since 1863. Hoisted into place while the country was divided by the Civil War, the bronze statue designed and sculpted by American sculptor Thomas Crawford was created as the crowning feature of the building's new cast-iron Dome.

The statue depicts a classical female figure with long, flowing hair wearing a helmet with a crest composed of an

eagle's head and feathers. The helmet is encircled by nine stars. She wears a graceful classical dress secured with a brooch inscribed "US." Over it is draped a heavy, flowing, toga-like robe fringed with fur and decorative balls.

Her right hand rests upon the hilt of a sheathed sword wrapped in a scarf; in her left hand she holds



*Thomas U. Walter,
"Tholus on Dome
of U.S. Capitol,"
1863.*



a laurel wreath of victory and the shield of the United States with thirteen stripes. Ten bronze points tipped with platinum are attached to her headdress, shoulders, and shield for protection from lightning.

She stands on a cast-iron pedestal on a globe encircled with the motto "E Pluribus Unum." The lower part of the pedestal is decorated with fasces (symbols of the authority of government) and wreaths.

Late in 1863, the statue was hoisted in sections to the top of the Dome and assembled on the cast-iron pedestal.

The final section, the figure's head and shoulders, was raised on December 2, 1863, to a salute of 35 guns, representing the number of states at the time, answered by the guns of the 12 forts around Washington.

STATUE OF FREEDOM FACTS

HEIGHT: 19½ feet tall

HEIGHT ABOVE EAST PLAZA:
288 feet

WEIGHT: approx. 15,000 lbs

PEDESTAL HEIGHT: 18½ feet tall

SCULPTOR: Thomas Crawford

FOUNDER: Clark Mills

PLACED ON DOME: December 2, 1863

RESTORATION: 1993,
with periodic maintenance

Three Designs

Captain Montgomery C. Meigs, superintendent of construction for the Capitol Extension and Dome, asked Crawford to design a statue to surmount the new Dome designed by architect Thomas U. Walter and authorized by the Congress in 1855.

Working at his studio in Rome, Crawford began in the tradition of sculptors past and present by making a small model of the statue in a pliable material, such as clay or wax. He sent photographs of plaster casts of his designs to Meigs in Washington. Based on the comments and suggestions that he received in return, Crawford would create three versions of the statue, making a series of changes to its dress, symbolic objects, and pedestal.

In 1856, Jefferson Davis, the Secretary of War in charge of the construction of the Dome, approved Crawford's third and final design. This version, referred to as the maquette, would serve as the basis for the full-size model.



Crawford called his first proposed design for the statue (left) "Freedom Triumphant in War and Peace." After receiving a drawing of the Dome from Meigs, he redesigned the statue (center) and introduced the globe in the pedestal. After Jefferson Davis questioned the use of the liberty cap (in ancient Rome, the emblem of a former slave) as inappropriate for a nation of free people, Crawford created his final design (right).



Thomas Crawford (1814–1857) Sculptor

Like many other American sculptors of his day, Crawford kept a studio in Rome, where examples of classical art, superior marble, and skilled carvers were readily available. Captain Meigs had already commissioned Crawford to create the House and Senate bronze doors; the figures of Justice and History over the Senate doors; and the Senate pediment sculpture, *Progress of Civilization*. The two men worked out the final design for the Statue of Freedom in a series of letters.

The Full-Size Plaster Model

Crawford enlarged the approved maquette in clay to create the full-size model. Molds made of it were then cast in plaster. Because of its large size, the plaster model was made in five main sections to facilitate the casting in bronze.

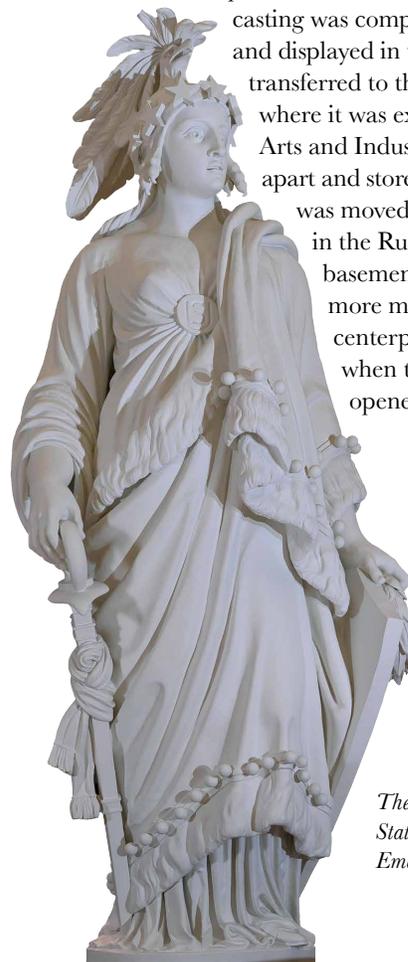
After the sculptor's sudden death, his widow had the model packed into six large crates, including one for the smaller elements, and had them shipped from Italy in 1858. After numerous problems and delays, all of the crates finally reached Washington by late March 1859.



The plaster model for the Statue of Freedom displayed in National Statuary Hall after casting was completed.

The plaster model was assembled and placed on view in the old Hall of the House (now National Statuary Hall). Once Clark Mills was selected to cast it, it was transported to his foundry in 1860. After the

casting was completed, it was reassembled and displayed in the Hall. In 1890 it was transferred to the Smithsonian Institution, where it was exhibited for 75 years in the Arts and Industries Building and then taken apart and stored for 25 years. In 1992, it was moved to and restored for display in the Russell Senate Office Building basement rotunda. It was once more moved and restored as the centerpiece of Emancipation Hall when the Capitol Visitor Center opened in 2008.



The original plaster model for the Statue of Freedom is on display in Emancipation Hall.

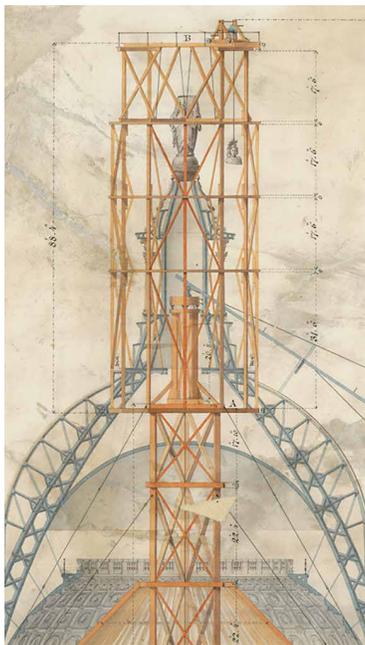
Casting Freedom

Beginning in June 1860, the bronze statue was cast in five sections by Clark Mills. Among his foundry assistants was Philip Reid (c.1820-1892), an enslaved laborer respected for his intelligence and skill, whom Mills had purchased in South Carolina. Reid figured out how to disassemble the plaster model and worked in the foundry seven days a week.



The foundry where the Statue of Freedom was cast.

The hollow statue was made by sand casting, with molds made by pressing the plaster model into fine, moist sand. Molten bronze was poured into the void between the sand mold and a core. The rough cast pieces were then smoothed and fine details added.



By May 1862, when the statue was finished and temporarily displayed on the Capitol grounds, Reid and other enslaved people in the District of Columbia were free.

Shortly before it was finally erected, the bronze statue was “pickled” in various acids to clean it and make it turn “bronze green.”

Thomas U. Walter, Detail of “Section Showing Scaffolding U.S. Capitol,” 1863. The drawing shows the final section of the statue, the head and shoulders, being lifted to the top of the Dome by a steam hoist.

Clark Mills (1810–1883) Founder

Clark Mills was a sculptor known for his monumental equestrian statue of Andrew Jackson, which stands in Lafayette Square in Washington, D.C. Mills owned a foundry off Bladensburg Road, just within the District of Columbia line. For the casting of the Statue of Freedom, the government rented the foundry, paid for the services of Mills and his workers, and furnished all materials.



Caring for the Statue

Follow-Up Care



Workmen pose for a photograph after cleaning the statue in 1913. For many years, the statue was cleaned each time the Capitol Dome was painted.

Since 1993, a specially designed scaffold is used for the regular maintenance of the statue. (below)



On May 9, 1993, after almost 130 years in place, the bronze statue was removed from the Dome by helicopter for restoration of the statue and its pedestal. The restored Statue of Freedom was returned to its pedestal by helicopter on October 23, 1993, amidst the congressional celebration of the bicentennial of the U.S. Capitol.

Since then, its protective coating has been renewed every few years to prevent corrosion, keeping it in good condition.



The bronze statue was removed by helicopter to the East Front plaza for restoration in 1993. Surface corrosion and discoloration of caulk in the seams were the most visible signs of its exposure to the elements for over a century.

LOCATION & HOURS

The Capitol Visitor Center, the public entrance to the U.S. Capitol, is located below the East Plaza of the Capitol between Constitution and Independence Avenues.

Hours: The Capitol Visitor Center is open to the public from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday. It is closed on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, and Inauguration Day.

Official Business: Visitors with official business appointments may enter the Capitol Visitor Center as early as 7:15 a.m.

Accessibility: Listening devices with audio description of the U.S. Capitol tour orientation film and Exhibition Hall are available at the Information Desks. Visitors may request wheelchairs at the North Coat Check located on the Upper Level or from Capitol Visitor Center staff. All restrooms are accessible.

International Visitors: Visitors may request listening devices for foreign-language versions of the U.S. Capitol tour orientation film and the Exhibition Hall audio tour at the Information Desks.

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*Photographs and architectural drawings from the records
of the Architect of the Capitol.*



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