

Primary Source: Washington Monument Is Almost Finished

from Wisconsin State Journal, January 2, 1885

The Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. took many years to build. The cornerstone was laid in 1848, the obelisk was completed in 1884, and the entire building was finished in 1888. Below is an article from the Wisconsin State Journal in January 1885 regarding the completion of the obelisk. As a comparison, \$1,130,000 in 1885 is equivalent to almost \$27,000,000 in today's money.

Washington Monument Is Almost Finished.

[From a Washington letter, Dec.

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There yet remains about two years' work before the Washington monument will be complete. The obelisk, it is true, is finished, and the rest of the work relates to the base of the monument, but some of the details are not yet decided upon. Col. Casey, who has had charge of the work since it was recommenced in 1878, comes of a family of engineers. His father was considered one of the ablest engineers in the United States Army, and several of his family have distinguished themselves in scientific pursuits. He was asked if he had studied other obelisks.

"Not much," he said. "This one is unlike any other. In fact, I was so much taken up with contriving how to put up the Washington obelisk that I didn't have time to study any others."

So far it has cost \$1,130,000 – not quite as much as the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. It has settled only 4 inches from the top to the foundation bed. With what is underground, the monument is 592 feet high, and the weight of the foundation is 80,378 tons. The most difficult part of the work was the underpinning, which was something unique in monument building. The foundation was deepened 12 feet 4 inches, and extended in all directions 23 feet 8 inches, and this gigantic work was done under a mass of stone weighing 32,176 tons. One by one the stones of the foundation were removed and new ones substituted.

Only one accident has happened, and that near the base of the shaft. A workman slipped and broke his arm. But nearly all of the workman have at one time or another fallen into the netting which surrounded the obelisk on a level with the platform where the work was being done. Once a young lady visitor in a spirit of bravado threw herself into the netting—an experiment which not even the workmen had tried for fun. During the last stages the workmen were often enveloped in the clouds which drifted around them. The only elevator in use has been the open platform on which the stone was hoisted to the top. As it was not allowed to make trips except when it was required to carry the block up, the passengers had the privilege of ascending this frightful height in company

with a mass of stone weighing six to ten tons. The president and Mr. W. W. Corcoran, of the monument commission, have frequently been up to the top. There is to be a new closed elevator which will make the ascent in about 12 minutes. There is certainly nothing in all the difficult ascents of buildings like the sensation of being suspended by a rope 550 feet in the air. The elevator will have all the newest appliances for catching it incase the rope should break.

The plan for the base of the monument has not yet been decided upon, but it will probably include a series of grande terraces ornamented with statuary. Many of the memorial stones are inappropriate, and others are unfit for exposure to the weather. The situation of the obelisk has been much criticized, but it was recommended by both Washington and Maj. L'Enfant as the spot most suitable for a grand national monument.

Questions

1. Including the underground portion, how tall is the monument?
2. What saved all the workmen that fell?
3. How are the stones raised to the top?
4. When completed, how long will a trip to the top take in the closed elevator?