



Oriental Flowering Cherry Trees

Thomas Jefferson Memorial appears in its most beautiful setting in early spring, when the Oriental Flowering Cherry Trees are in bloom. It is then that the memorial receives the greatest notice from the public. Although the blossoming of these famous trees, 650 of which encircle the Tidal Basin, depends upon seasonal conditions, they ordinarily bloom for 10 to 12 days starting about the first week in April. During this period, the annual Cherry Blossom Festival is staged near the Tidal Basin.

The cherry trees were the gift of the city of Tokyo to the city of Washington. The ceremony of official planting took place on the north side of the Basin on March 27, 1912, when Mrs. William Howard Taft, wife of the President of the United States, planted the first tree, and Viscountess Chinda, wife of the Japanese Ambassador to the United States, planted the second tree.

Construction of the Memorial

Provision for building an appropriate permanent memorial to Thomas Jefferson in the Capital City was made by act of Congress in 1934 (Public Resolution No. 49, 73rd Cong., approved June 26, 1934). The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Commission, created by this act, was responsible for the planning and supervision of this great work. John Russell Pope and the survivors of his firm, Otto R. Eggers and Daniel P. Higgins, designed the structure. Ground-breaking ceremonies were held on December 15, 1938, and the cornerstone was officially laid on November 15, 1939. On both of these occasions the President of the United States and the members of the Commission took active part. The memorial was dedicated on April 13, 1943.

Administration: Thomas Jefferson Memorial is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Address inquiries to the Superintendent, National Capital Parks-Central, 1100 Ohio Drive SW., Washington, D.C. 20242.

The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the great natural, historical, and recreational places of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of all the people.

The Department of the Interior: As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.



u.s. department of the interior
national park service



washington

Thomas Jefferson
Memorial

Washington DC

“I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.”

These words of Thomas Jefferson now indelibly inscribed in this memorial to him might be called the heart of his political and social thinking. His opposition to tyranny in all its forms was repeatedly voiced. In the Declaration of Independence it appears in his famous phrase “. . . that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights . . .” It is seen in his Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom as “Well aware that Almighty God hath created the mind free; . . .” Elsewhere it is expressed in supporting his beliefs in a simple democratic form of government, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and education of the masses. These principles and his leadership of the common man won for him the high place of third President of the United States. In this capacity he tried to insure these liberties by expanding the Nation’s frontiers and political system to include the great Louisiana Territory. As an early champion of the natural and civic rights of the individual, which have remained the principal doctrines of Americanism, Thomas Jefferson will forever be remembered as one of the great figures in American history. This memorial, built in a style of his own liking, carries inscriptions giving his views of liberty and democracy. It houses a heroic statue by Rudolph Evans of New York City, a famous American sculptor, and is an appropriate tribute to Jefferson’s contributions to the founding of the American Republic.

The Memorial Site

The pleasant reflections of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, seen along the south banks of Washington’s Tidal Basin, enhance its beauty. However, the selection of this site was influenced by factors of far greater significance than the purely aesthetic. The importance of Jefferson as one of the great figures in the Nation’s history demanded a memorial site of prominence in the central plan of the Capital City and in relation to the other great memorials already built. The Capitol, the White House, and the Mall were located in accordance with the famous L’Enfant Plan. These, together with the erection of the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial on the west axis of the Capitol, long ago established the cardinal points of the city’s plan. The lone remaining site in this cross-like scheme was the one selected for the Jefferson Memorial south of the Tidal Basin on a line with the south axis of the White House.

The American visiting the Nation’s Capital will sense the meaning of this arrangement. Standing in the center of the group at the memorial to George Washington, he may look east along the wide vista of the Mall to the Capitol. To the north of him, and in clear view, is the White House. The Washington Monument, where he stands, the Lincoln

Memorial to the west, and the Jefferson Memorial to the south are the great national memorials. These are his tribute to those figures in our Nation’s history who he feels have contributed most to our independence, to the preservation of the Union, and to his ideas of liberty and democracy.

The Memorial Building

The significance of the architectural scheme of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial is apparent to even the casual student of Jefferson. One of the best-known characteristics of this great genius was his many-sided ability and the remarkable practical application of his vast knowledge to many fields of activity. Outstanding among them was Jefferson’s ability in architecture, as illustrated by the design of the Virginia State Capitol, which was essentially his. The admiration he held for the circular-domed Pantheon in Rome was also mentioned several times. His designs of the rotunda at the University of Virginia and his famous home, Monticello, further indicate his preference for this type of building. In the preparation of the plan for the memorial the architects were clearly influenced by Jefferson’s own taste as expressed in his writings and demonstrated by these works. Thus, the circular colonnaded structure is an adaptation of the classic style which Jefferson himself is credited with having introduced into this country. It reflects a measure of the respect held by our Nation for this great American.

The entrance to the memorial is on the north, or Tidal Basin side. As you pass from the plaza up the steps toward the memorial room you may view at close range the sculptural group above the entranceway. It depicts Jefferson standing before the committee appointed by the Continental Congress to write the Declaration of Independence. To the left of Jefferson, as viewed from the steps, are Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, and seated on his right are Roger Sherman and Robert R. Livingston. Adolph A. Weinman, a sculptor of New York City, was selected by the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Commission to do this work.

The domed interior of the memorial is dominated by a heroic statue of Thomas Jefferson. Rudolph Evans, the sculptor, was chosen from more than a hundred who were considered in a nationwide competition conducted by the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Commission. The final selection of the standing figure presented by Evans was made with the advice and assistance of critics having national reputation in the fine arts. The height of the statue is 19 feet, and it stands in the center of the memorial room upon a pedestal of black Minnesota granite reaching 6 feet above the floor. The statue of Jefferson, together with the inscrip-

tions executed in bronze, is in pleasant contrast with the white Georgia marble of the interior. The four colonnaded openings of the memorial—two on the east-west axis, and two on the north-south—make it possible to view the figure from many angles and with varying lights and shadows. The domed ceiling of Indiana limestone reaches approximately 67 feet above the head of the statue.

From the entrance and the walk along the exterior colonnade which surrounds the building, you may see some of the interesting structural detail of the memorial. The exterior walls and dome of Danby Imperial Vermont marble reach approximately 96 feet above this level. The terraces and steps seen below are about 25 feet above the ground. The diameter of the building from this position is approximately 152 feet. From this walk, you may get a glimpse of the Capitol, the White House, the Washington Monument, and the Lincoln Memorial.

The Four Panels

Engraved on the interior walls of the memorial room are four inscriptions based upon the writings of Jefferson, describing the chief principles of his beliefs. On the southwest wall are famous and inspiring phrases from the Declaration of Independence. It is appropriate that these words should occupy the first position in the sequence. It was Jefferson’s wish that he be remembered first as the author of this most famed of American documents.

The words of the second inscription embody his principle of freedom of the mind. It is nowhere better expressed than in his Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom upon which this inscription is based.

The third engraving, seen on the northeast wall, is devoted to his ideas on freedom of the body and to his beliefs in the necessity of educating the masses of the people. Although his efforts to abolish slavery were not successful, he was one of the first Americans to argue forcefully the inconsistency of slavery in a democratic state. Jefferson considered his establishment of the University of Virginia as one of his outstanding accomplishments. Throughout his entire public career, he maintained that the general education of the people was necessary to efficient self-government.

Jefferson’s vision in matters of government is demonstrated by the fourth inscription. By this statement which appeared in a letter to a friend we know that he recognized the necessity for change in the laws and institutions of a democracy. This was especially true, he believed, as opinions altered, new discoveries were made, and circumstances changed.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men. We . . . solemnly publish and declare, that these colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states . . . And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour.

Almighty God hath created the mind free. All attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burthens . . . are a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion. . . . No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship or ministry or shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but all men shall be free to profess and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion. I know but one code of morality for men whether acting singly or collectively.

God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that his justice cannot sleep forever. Commerce between master and slave is despotism. Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free. Establish the law for educating the common people. This it is the business of the state to effect and on a general plan.

I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but laws and constitutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.