

George Washington Statue ^[1]

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George Washington Monument
George Washington Statue
State Capitol, Raleigh

^[2]

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Description: This life-size bronze statue of George Washington stands inside a gated area between two cannons at Union Square. Washington is in military dress and holds a civilian walking stick in his right hand as he looks to the south. He rests his left hand on his cloak, which is draped over a pillar of 13 rods. Jean-Antoine Houdon, a French sculptor and contemporary of Washington, depicted the statesman, patriot, and military hero with realism and naturalism, displaying his quiet American grace and strength at the height of his maturity and accomplishments. The monument is flanked on both sides by cannon produced in France before the American Revolution.

Images: [Contemporary front view](#) ^[4] | [Back view](#) ^[5] | [Side view](#) ^[6]

Inscription:

GEORGE WASHINGTON

Dedication date: July 4, 1857

Creator: William James Hubbard, Foundry Jean-Antoine Houdon, Sculptor

Materials & Techniques: Bronze statue, granite base

Sponsor: State of North Carolina, City of Edenton

Cost: \$13454

Unveiling & Dedication: July 4, 1857

Post dedication use: The statue is frequently used as a starting point for tours of the grounds of the North Carolina State Capitol.

Subject notes: This monument was commissioned to replace the sculpture of Washington by Italian sculptor Antonio Canova ^[7] that burned in the Capitol fire of 1831. While the cornerstone of a new capitol building was laid on June 4, 1833, efforts to replace the destroyed statue stalled until citizens in the city of Edenton subsequently sponsored the casting of a replacement statue and gave it to the state government. The new sculpture was a casting of a copy of Jean-Antoine Houdon's 1796 statue of Washington from a bust he had produced in 1785. Houdon's statue was originally commissioned by the Commonwealth of Virginia and installed in the rotunda in the capitol in Richmond in 1796, a few years before Washington died. The Raleigh sculpture was cast in bronze from Houdon's marble sculpture. The Houdon casting depicted Washington as the mature general, wearing his military attire, but holding a civilian walking stick.

Controversies: The selection of Houdon's statue as a replacement was a significant departure from the damaged rendering by Canova. The Canova statue from 1821, a product of more modern neoclassical European tastes, had been suggested

by Thomas Jefferson in an 1816 letter to Nathaniel Macon as a more desirable rendering than the quiet, modest, and very American depiction of the general by Houdon from twenty years prior. On its arrival in Raleigh, the bold Canova statue had met with some public criticism of its romanticized and Romanized depiction of Washington. According to R. D. W. Connor, it was criticized as a better likeness of Caesar than of Washington (Connor, p. 11). Ironically, Thomas Jefferson had apparently recommended Houdon to Virginia's governor Benjamin Harrison during his time as the American minister to France in the late 1780s. The Houdon depiction may still have better suited Victorian era tastes in 1857.

Location: The monument sits outside the south side of the Capitol.

Landscape: The statue sits on the lawn just outside the Capitol building, surrounded by a low gridiron fence and flanked by two small canon. Also nearby are statues of [Zebulon B. Vance](#) [8] and [Charles B. Aycock](#) [9], two former governors of North Carolina.

City: Raleigh

County: Wake

Subjects: Historic Cultural Figures, Historic Military Figures, Historic Political Figures, Revolutionary War

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