

The Story of Freedom's Silhouette

EXTENSION OF REMARKS OF HON. JAMES E. VAN ZANDT

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Mr. VAN ZANDT. Mr. Speaker, it is surprising, yet true, that the identity of the figure represented by the statue atop the Capitol dome in Washington is unknown to the vast majority of native-born citizens of the Capital of the United States.

Since this statement is attested to by competent observers in Washington, it is little wonder that the most common question asked by tourists of Capitol officials is a request for the identity of the mystery figure perched 380 feet above street level since December 2, 1863.

Even legislators of many years' service have been known to be guilty of faulty memory when asked what has become Washington's \$64 question.

The famous statue, which is called the Statue of Freedom, has an interesting history, as revealed by the following article titled "The Story of Freedom's Silhouette" by John J. Daly, which appears in the April 1948 issue of the National Republic magazine.

THE STORY OF FREEDOM'S SILHOUETTE

(By John J. Daly)

By the end of the June bride season, close to 500,000 sightseers will visit Washington, look at the Capitol dome, and go away without hearing the story of the statue atop the building.

Placed so high above the street level—380 feet—the human eye can hardly tell whether this is a statue of a man or a woman, whether it's a mythical god or goddess. Few know what it represents. Liberty, freedom, or the pursuit of happiness. It has even been called Miss America.

Through the years other names have been given this work of art.

David Lynn, Architect of the Capitol, says the official name of the great bronze is Statue of Freedom. He should know.

An American sculptor, Thomas Crawford, created this work. He called his statue Armed Liberty. Crawford worked out all the details in the ancient city of Rome, where he had gone to study under the masters. He finished the model, but never had the pleasure of seeing his statue cast in bronze. The same ship that brought the plaster model to America also carried word of the sculptor's death.

That was back in 1857. The statue was swung into place on December 2, 1863, at noon. Booming of cannon from nearby forts and the hurrahs of crowds gathered on the Capitol lawn greeted the placement. The Nation was then in the midst of a civil war. As the statue had been authorized and designed long before this conflict there is in its motif no mention of this warfare even though the finished product presents as its theme the past and the present of America.

At the time the award was made, Jefferson Davis, later President of the Confederacy, was Secretary of War for the United States. Under his authorization, Crawford, the sculptor, was told to proceed with the work.

Crawford and Davis then entered into a series of correspondence over the statue.

In his workshop on the Via del Orto di Napoli in the Eternal City, Tom Crawford set out to make his masterpiece for the young city then just reaching man's estate on the banks of the Potomac. He knew he had to meet the approval of Jeff Davis, the Secretary of War. As soon as the cast was in proper shape, photographs were taken. These were sent to Washington by slow-moving ocean vessels.

Receipt of the first set of photographs, several in number, drew this letter from Jeff Davis: "The second photograph of the statue with which it is proposed to crown the dome of the Capitol impresses me most favorably. Its general grace and power, striking at first, have grown on me as I studied its details.

"As to the cap, I can only say, without intending to press the objection formerly made, that it seems to me that its history renders it inappropriate to a people who were born free and would not be enslaved.

* * * The liberty cap has an established origin in its use as the badge of the freed slave, and though it should have emblematic meaning today, a recurrence to that origin may give to it in the future the same popular conception which it had in the past.

"Why should not Armed Liberty wear a helmet? Her conflict being over, her cause triumphant, as shown by the other emblems of the statue, the visor would be up, so as to permit the display of a circle of stars expressive of endless existence and of heavenly birth."

Indeed, that's the way the head of the statue came to be adorned. The sculptor, on receipt of Jeff Davis's critique, dispensed with the so-called liberty cap and in its place fashioned a helmet, "the crest of which is composed of an eagle's head and a bold arrangement of feathers, suggested by the costume of our Indian tribes." That was Crawford's own description, and it pleased Jeff Davis.

Encouraged, Crawford went to work with renewed vigor. But he had other commitments. This work was shared with his Statue of Freedom. One of the major pieces was a statue of George Washington. So the Washington statue and Freedom went up hand in hand, so to speak.

It happened this way. Previously, on a visit to his native land, the young sculptor—Crawford was only 44 when he died—had entered a competition authorized by the city of Richmond, Va., for a heroic statue of the Squire of Mount Vernon. Crawford won.

This was the work he was engaged upon in his little studio in Rome when the Jeff Davis suggestion for a change in the Statue of Freedom came along. Only at that time they were calling it Armed Victory.

Six years of unflagging labor kept Crawford busy. He was the busiest sculptor in seven nations, as he afterward said. And it was this unrelenting drive that brought about his end.

Aside from the statue now atop the dome and the Washington equestrian statue, Crawford had also accepted from the United States Government an invitation to compete for sculptural decorations proposed as adornments to the Capitol. As a result of his ability, Crawford had received the award for the most exclusive commission of that period. As a result of this he made the marble pedimented doors to the Senate wing of the Capitol. Over one of these doors is a piece called History, over another, Justice.

Better American sculptors came after Crawford, not before. That was the dictum. Even his rivals admitted the man had a genius for work of this sort. This was proved

when he laid plans for decorating the dome of the Capitol.

Up to that time the dome had been bare. Under Crawford's direction, years before the statue itself was finished, Italian workmen came to America to make the scene ready. They carved, in Massachusetts marble, Crawford's huge pedimented group with its busy unrelated figures now planted at each side of the central subject. It was about this time that the statue's name began to be shifted from Armed Liberty to Freedom. Crawford liked the idea of "Freedom." As he conceived the statue, it was an America—or "Freedom"—amply draped, secure in her laurel wreaths, eagle, and sun rays.

Crawford became a story teller through the medium of his statue. In his work, as it now adorns the Capitol, can be found the saga of the vanquished Indian, the career of the woodsman, the hunter with his quarry, the soldier in battle, the merchant, the mechanic, the teacher, and the pupil.

All these things are there, in the Statue of Freedom, on top of the Capitol dome.

Naturally, they cannot be seen because the statue is so high above street level and beyond the focus of human gaze. But there is a place where the visitors to Washington—and Washingtonians, too—may see all the glorious detail of Crawford's Statue of Freedom. That is in the National Museum.

There is a plaster model in the Arts and Industrial Building of the United States National Museum. This is the same model of the Statue of Freedom that was fashioned by the sculptor, Thomas Crawford.

Until this model was placed on public view, in 1890, it had lain in the basement of the United States Capitol, along with a lot of other valuable art—oil paintings and the like. They had all been there more than a quarter of a century, subject to dirt and neglect.

How the model of the Statue of Freedom ever got into the basement of the Capitol Building is something that no one seems able to explain. It was just part of the old-fashioned neglect that has always bothered democracy.

Up to that point, however, here is the history of the model.

Thomas Crawford finished his work shortly after New Year's Day, 1858—and gave a party in his studio. His friends then helped him prepare the plaster model for shipment. There seemed to be no hurry on that score, either. It was not until the Easter time that the statue was placed aboard a ship due to sail for America.

The boat carrying the plaster model of the statue sailed from Leghorn, Italy, April 19, 1858—bound for New York.

Less than 3 days out of port the ship sprang a leak. The leak continued for 30 days. On May 19, the ship put in at Gibraltar. There all the cargo—except the statue model—was taken off and the vessel caulked.

The same ship set sail again on June 26. But whoever hammered in the oakum failed to do a good job and by July 1 the ship was leaking badly again.

On the Fourth of July, when there should have been a good old-fashioned patriotic celebration aboard, water started rushing into the hold of the ship at the rate of 12 inches an hour.

That was bad business. Instead of singing and serenading, or even the lighting of a Roman candle or two—and there were plenty of these aboard—it was every man to the pumps. Not only did they man the pumps, but they started throwing cargo overboard.

As the records show, part of the cargo that hit the sea consisted of 250 cases of valuable rugs and 48 cases of citron. At one time they debated about throwing the model over the side of the ship. Had that hap-

pened, the present-day Statue of Freedom would not be there.

Even at that, the model came very near not getting to Washington. On July 27, in the year of the voyage, water was coming into the ship at the rate of 16 inches an hour. So the captain, knowing he could never make New York, drifted with the tide down to the Bermudas. There the vessel was condemned.

For a long time the ship lay in dock. Then it was sold. The new owner wanted no part of the Freedom model, so he ordered it taken off the ship and parked on a wharf. There it remained until word got to Washington. Promptly a vessel was chartered and sent to Bermuda with instructions to bring the model to the United States.

When the plaster cast arrived in the United States it was taken to Mills Station, a hamlet on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad outside of Washington. There it was cast in bronze by Clark Mills.

This work was begun in 1860. But it was 3 years later before the statue was hoisted to its final resting place. The task was not an easy one. There were no hydraulic derricks in those days.

A mechanical engineer, Charles F. Thomas, of 32 Eleventh Street, Brooklyn, got the job of placing the statue on the Capitol dome.

No one seemed to envy Mr. Thomas his job. Indeed, most of the trade believed he would fail. But he designed and erected a platform and then obtained a certificate from A. Lincoln, signed by the President himself.

While Thomas was building the pedestal and getting ready to place the statue in position, Clark Mills was doing the casting and making out bills. For his work in casting the figure he was paid \$9,800.

For labor, iron work, and copper, there was a further expenditure of \$10,996.82.

For the model, and for all his years of labor, the sculptor—true to art tradition—received only \$3,000.

Thus, it cost the United States Government \$23,796.82 to place the Statue of Freedom on top of the Capitol dome.

At the end of the casting, when it was simply and solidly based, the statue was taken by dray from the little town outside Washington to the Capitol Grounds. It was even a long time after this event that the statue found its permanent place over the Houses of Congress.

The Statue of Freedom was unveiled atop the Capitol on the opening day of the second session of the Thirty-seventh Congress—December 2, 1863—in the administration of Abraham Lincoln, by Hannibal Hamlin, of Maine, the Vice President of the United States.

Crawford, the sculptor, had planned on being present. But that was just another one of the disappointments that shadowed his life.

Several years before the unveiling, the sculptor had been in America to arrange some business matters and plan for other work. In the fall, he returned to Rome. His wife and children remained in the States. On the voyage, Crawford developed a serious eye trouble. Back in Rome he became absorbed in his work, paid no attention to his affliction. Finally he had to give up. Specialists found a malignant growth behind the orbit of his right eye.

His wife was summoned and he was taken to Paris for treatment. He was operated on and spent many months in a dark room. Then he was sent to London to recuperate, and to catch the first boat back to America. He never made the journey. Born in New York City, March 22, 1813, Crawford died in London on October 10, 1857.

In Washington, his statue—Freedom—makes a gorgeous silhouette against the sky.