JEFFERSON MEMORIAL

THE JEFFERSON MEMORIAL WAS BUILT TO COMMEMORATE THOMAS JEFFERSON (1743-1826), ARCHITECT, PRINCIPAL AUTHOR OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, AND THIRD PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. ESTEEMED AS AN ADVOCATE FOR NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND PERSONAL SPIRITUAL FREEDOM, JEFFERSON'S PHILOSOPHY IS PERHAPS BEST EXPRESSED IN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, WHERE HE WROTE 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." THE MEMORIAL BUILT IN HIS HONOR, WITH THE CLASSICAL SERENITY OF ITS ARCHITECTURE REFLECTED IN THE TIDAL BASIN AND FRAMED BY ORNAMENTAL JAPANESE CHERRY TREES, REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST FAMILIAR AND POPULAR IMAGES OF THE NATION'S CAPITAL.

THE LAND WHERE THE JEFFERSON MEMORIAL IS LOCATED WAS CREATED BY LANDFILL DREDGED FROM THE POTOMAC RIVER IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY, AND FOR MANY YEARS THIS STRETCH OF SHORELINE ALONG THE TIDAL BASIN SERVED AS ONE OF WASHINGTON'S MOST POPULAR BATHING BEACHES. THE FIRST PROPOSAL FOR A MEMORIAL ON THIS IMPORTANT SITE, ON AXIS WITH THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT, WAS MADE BY THE SENATE PARK COMMISSION (BETTER KNOWN AS THE McMILLAN COMMISSION) IN ITS 1901 PLAN. THE COMMISSION PROPOSED A ROUND, DOMED, PANTHEON-LIKE STRUCTURE IN WHICH WERE TO BE GROUPED "THE STATUES OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS MEN OF THE NATION, OR WHETHER THE MEMORY OF SOME INDIVIDUAL SHALL BE HONORED BY A MONUMENT OF THE FIRST RANK MAY BE LEFT TO THE FUTURE." FLANKING THIS BUILDING WERE TO BE SIX LARGE RECTANGULAR BUILDINGS CONTAINING BATHS, A THEATER, GYMNASIUM, AND ATHLETIC FACILITIES. NO IMMEDIATE ACTION WAS TAKEN BY CONGRESS, HOWEVER, AND, IN FACT, THE SITE WAS TO REMAIN UNDEVELOPED FOR NEARLY FOUR DECADES.

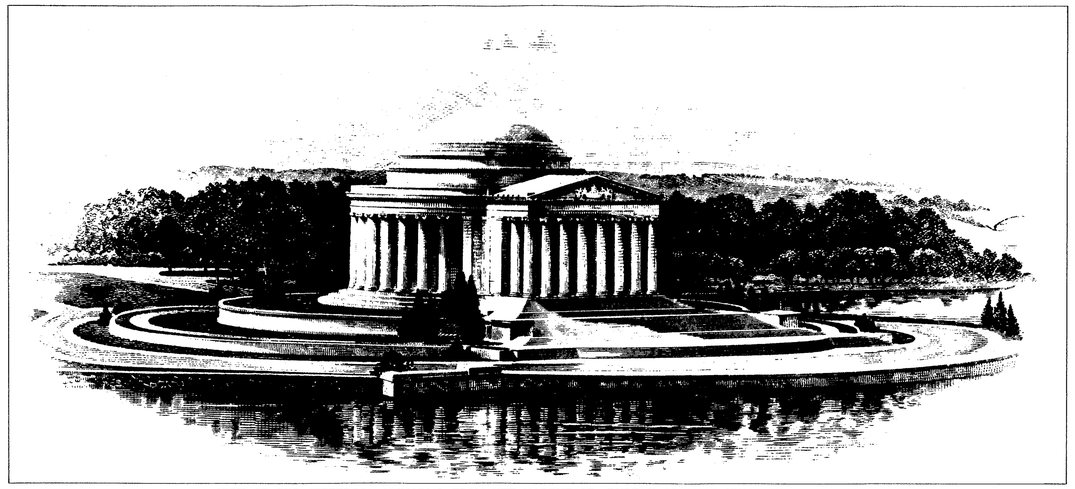
IN 1925 A DESIGN COMPETITION WAS HELD FOR A MEMORIAL TO THEODORE ROOSEVELT TO BE LOCATED ON THE TIDAL BASIN SITE. THE WINNING ENTRY, BY PROMINENT NEW YORK ARCHITECT JOHN RUSSELL POPE, CONSISTED OF TWO QUARTER-CIRCLE COLONNADES FLANKING A LARGE CIRCULAR BASIN, WHICH WAS TO CONTAIN A CENTRAL ISLAND WITH AN ARRANGEMENT OF SCULPTURE AND A FOUNTAIN. AGAIN, HOWEVER, NO MONEY WAS APPROPRIATED BY CONGRESS FOR CONSTRUCTION, AND THE PROJECT LANGUISHED.

IN 1934 PRESIDENT FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT, A GREAT ADMIRER OF JEFFERSON, CONTACTED THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF ERECTING A STATUE OF JEFFERSON AS PART OF THE FEDERAL TRIANGLE PROJECT, THEN UNDER CONSTRUCTION. LATER THAT YEAR, AT THE URGING OF POWERFUL NEW YORK CONGRESSMAN JOHN J. BOYLAN, CONGRESS CREATED THE THOMAS JEFFERSON MEMORIAL COMMISSION. BOYLAN WAS SUBSEQUENTLY CHOSEN AS THE COMMISSION'S FIRST CHAIRMAN. TWO YEARS LATER CONGRESS APPROPRIATED $3 MILLION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MEMORIAL TO JEFFERSON.

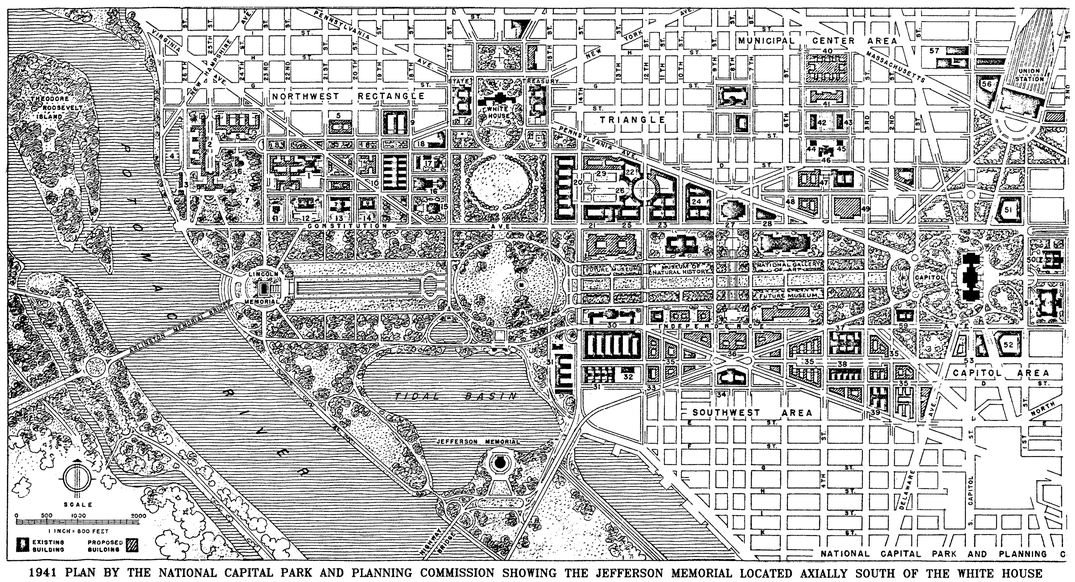
IN 1935 THE THOMAS JEFFERSON MEMORIAL COMMISSION SELECTED JOHN RUSSELL POPE AS ITS ARCHITECT. POPE HAD BEEN THE LOSING COMPETITOR IN THE 1911 COMPETITION TO DESIGN THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL, AND HAD SUBSEQUENTLY DESIGNED A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT BUILDINGS IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL, INCLUDING THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART. UNDER THE COMMISSION'S DIRECTION, POPE PREPARED FOUR SEPARATE SCHEMES FOR A MEMORIAL TO JEFFERSON, EACH ON A DIFFERENT SITE: ONE AT THE END OF EAST CAPITOL STREET AT THE ANACOSTIA RIVER; ONE AT LINCOLN PARK; ONE ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE MALL ACROSS FROM THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES; AND ONE AT THE TIDAL BASIN SITE, DIRECTLY SOUTH OF THE WHITE HOUSE. FROM THE BEGINNING, THE LATTER SITE WAS THE COMMISSION'S PREFERRED LOCATION FOR THE JEFFERSON MEMORIAL, BOTH BECAUSE IT WAS THE MOST PROMINENT OF THE SITES AND BECAUSE IT WOULD COMPLETE THE MISSING CORNER OF THE "KITE" PLAN ARRANGEMENT OF IMPORTANT WASHINGTON BUILDINGS (CONSISTING OF THE WHITE HOUSE, THE CAPITOL, THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT, AND THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL) ORIGINALLY PROPOSED BY THE McMILLAN COMMISSION. FOR THIS SITE POPE DESIGNED AN ENORMOUS PANTHEON-LIKE BUILDING, 21' TALLER THAN THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL, ITS ARCHITECTURE EVOCATIVE OF BOTH JEFFERSON'S USE OF CLASSICISM IN HIS OWN ARCHITECTURE AS WELL AS HIS USE OF DOMES AT MONTICELLO AND AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA ROTUNDA. POPE'S MEMORIAL WAS TO SIT ON A LARGE SQUARE PLATFORM, FLANKED BY TWO SMALLER, RECTANGULAR, COLONNADED BUILDINGS, WITH THE TIDAL BASIN IN FRONT FORMALIZED AND MADE RECTANGULAR.

THE MERITS OF POPE'S DESIGN WERE WIDELY DEBATED. A NUMBER OF PROMINENT WASHINGTONIANS OPPOSED THE TIDAL BASIN SITE BECAUSE CONSTRUCTION THERE WOULD INVOLVE THE DESTRUCTION OF A LARGE NUMBER OF ELM AND CHERRY TREES. OTHERS FELT THAT THE VISTA SOUTH FROM THE WHITE HOUSE SHOULD BE KEPT UNENCUMBERED, AS SHOWN IN PIERRE L'ENFANT'S ORIGINAL 1791 PLAN FOR WASHINGTON. STILL OTHERS DECRIED POPE'S SCHEME AS TOO GRANDIOSE FOR A MAN OF JEFFERSON'S SIMPLE AGRARIAN BACKGROUND. A NUMBER OF PROMINENT ARCHITECTS CRITICIZED BOTH THE TRADITIONAL STYLE OF THE ARCHITECTURE AS WELL AS THE UNCOMPETITIVE MANNER IN WHICH POPE HAD BEEN SELECTED.

POPE DIED IN 1937. IN 1938, THE MEMORIAL COMMISSION, IN RESPONSE TO CRITICISM FROM THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS, PROPOSED A SMALLER-SCALE VERSION OF POPE'S EARLIER THEODORE ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL. USE OF THIS SCHEME, HOWEVER, WAS PROHIBITED BY POPE'S WIDOW, AND THE MEMORIAL COMMISSION RETURNED TO THE PANTHEON PROPOSAL. THE JEFFERSON MEMORIAL WAS NEVER APPROVED BY THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS, WHICH IN 1939 ISSUED A PAMPHLET OPPOSING BOTH ITS DESIGN AND LOCATION.



VIEW OF THE JEFFERSON MEMORIAL FROM THE NORTHEAST (BUREAU OF ENGRAVING AND PRINTING)



1941 PLAN BY THE NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION SHOWING THE JEFFERSON MEMORIAL LOCATED AXIALLY SOUTH OF THE WHITE HOUSE

NONETHELESS, THE MEMORIAL'S SUPPORTERS WERE ABLE TO OVERCOME THIS OPPOSITION, DUE TO BOTH THE POWERFUL CONGRESSIONAL CONNECTIONS OF THE MEMORIAL COMMISSION, AS WELL AS THE PERSONAL INTEREST OF PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT IN THE PROJECT. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DESIGN OF THE BUILDING WAS ASSUMED BY POPE'S SURVIVING PARTNERS, OTTO R. EGGERS AND DANIEL P. HIGGINS. ON DECEMBER 15, 1938, GROUND WAS BROKEN FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SCALED-DOWN VERSION OF POPE'S PANTHEON SCHEME. A CEREMONY TO COMMEMORATE THE LAYING OF THE CORNERSTONE, ATTENDED BY THE PRESIDENT, WAS HELD ON NOVEMBER 15, 1939. THE JEFFERSON MEMORIAL WAS COMPLETED AND OPENED TO THE PUBLIC IN EARLY 1942, LACKING ONLY ITS STATUE OF JEFFERSON.

IN 1939 THE MEMORIAL COMMISSION HELD A COMPETITION TO SELECT A SCULPTOR, RECEIVING 101 ENTRIES. SIX FINALISTS WERE ASKED TO SUBMIT MODELS. THREE OF THE FINALISTS, LEE LAWRIE, RUDOLPH EVANS, AND ADOLPH A. WEINMAN, WERE ASKED TO SUBMIT ADDITIONAL MODELS. EVANS WAS EVENTUALLY SELECTED AS SCULPTOR OF THE STATUE OF JEFFERSON FOR THE INTERIOR CHAMBER OF THE MEMORIAL, AND WEINMAN WAS CHOSEN TO SCULPT THE PEDIMENT RELIEF AT THE ENTRANCE PORTICO.

THE JEFFERSON MEMORIAL WAS FORMALLY DEDICATED BY PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT ON APRIL 13, 1943, THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF JEFFERSON'S BIRTH. DUE TO THE SHORTAGE OF MATERIALS DURING WORLD WAR II, EVANS HAD BEEN PREVENTED FROM CASTING HIS STATUE IN BRONZE. FOR THE DEDICATION, A PLASTER CAST OF EVANS'S STATUE, PAINTED TO RESEMBLE BRONZE, WAS TEMPORARILY INSTALLED. IT REMAINED UNTIL 1947, WHEN REPLACED BY THE PERMANENT BRONZE VERSION, CAST BY THE ROMAN BRONZE COMPANY OF NEW YORK. IN RESPONSE TO CRITICISM BY EVANS, SUBSEQUENT CHANGES WERE MADE TO THE LIGHTING OF THE STATUE, ALTHOUGH HE DIED IN 1960 STILL DISSATISFIED WITH THE SITUATION.

AS COMPLETED, THE JEFFERSON MEMORIAL TAKES THE FORM OF A COLONNADED, CIRCULAR ROMAN IONIC TEMPLE WITH A PORTICO ON THE NORTH SIDE. RAISED ABOUT 25' ABOVE GRADE ON SUBSTANTIAL REINFORCED CONCRETE FOUNDATIONS, THE BUILDING IS SURROUNDED BY TWO CONCENTRIC TERRACES. THE OUTER TERRACE, NEARLY 422' IN DIAMETER, IS DEFINED BY A 3'-HIGH GRANITE RETAINING WALL. A 10'-HIGH MARBLE RETAINING WALL ENCLOSES THE 294'-DIAMETER INNER TERRACE. A COMBINATION OF MARBLE STEPS AND TERRACES ON THE NORTH SIDE LEADS VISITORS TO THE TEMPLE ENTRANCE.

THE TEMPLE ITSELF SITS ON A 184'-DIAMETER PLATFORM, SURROUNDED BY THREE STYLOBATE STEPS, EACH 5'-4" WIDE. ALL EXTERIOR STONE IS VERMONT DANBY MARBLE. THERE ARE THIRTY-EIGHT 41'-TALL EXTERIOR COLUMNS, TWELVE AT THE PORTICO AND TWENTY-SIX AT THE TEMPLE COLONNADE. THE PEDIMENT ABOVE THE BUILDING ENTRANCE CONTAINS WEINMAN'S RELIEF OF THE FIVE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE APPOINTED BY THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS TO WRITE THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE--BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, JOHN ADAMS, JEFFERSON, ROGER SHERMAN, AND ROBERT LIVINGSTON.

THE INTERIOR OF THE JEFFERSON MEMORIAL CONSISTS ESSENTIALLY OF THE ROUND, DOMED MEMORIAL CHAMBER, 82' IN DIAMETER, SURROUNDED BY THE COLONNADED AMBULATORY. THE FLOOR OF THE MEMORIAL CHAMBER IS A PINK TENNESSEE MARBLE AND THE INTERIOR WALLS ARE SHEATHED IN GEORGIA MARBLE. THE INTERIOR DOME, RISING TO A HEIGHT OF 91'-8" ABOVE THE FLOOR, AND THE PORTICO VAULT ARE BUILT OF INDIANA LIMESTONE. THE MEMORIAL CHAMBER HAS FOUR OPENINGS, AT EACH OF THE FOUR COMPASS POINTS. EACH OF THE OPENINGS IS FLANKED BY FOUR 39'-2" INTERIOR COLUMNS, OF THE SAME ORDER OF THE EXTERIOR COLUMNS, BUT PROPORTIONALLY SMALLER. ON EACH OF THE FOUR CHAMBER WALLS IS A QUOTATION FROM JEFFERSON'S WRITINGS, IN APPLIED BRONZE LETTERS. THEY ARE TAKEN FROM THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE (SOUTHWEST), THE VIRGINIA STATUTE FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND A 1789 LETTER TO JAMES MADISON (NORTHWEST), THE "NOTES ON VIRGINIA" AND A 1786 LETTER TO GEORGE WASHINGTON (NORTHEAST), AND AN 1816 LETTER TO SAMUEL KERCHEVAL (SOUTHEAST). INSCRIBED IN THE FRIEZE IS ANOTHER JEFFERSON QUOTATION: "I HAVE SWORN UPON THE ALTAR OF GOD ETERNAL HOSTILITY AGAINST EVERY FORM OF TYRANNY OVER THE MIND OF MAN."

OCCUPYING THE CENTER OF THE MEMORIAL CHAMBER, AT THE FOCUS OF THE SPATIAL AXES CREATED BY THE OPENINGS, IS EVANS'S STATUE OF JEFFERSON. THE 19'-TALL BRONZE STATUE STANDS ON A 6'-TALL PEDESTAL OF MINNESOTA GRANITE SURROUNDED AT ITS BASE BY MISSOURI MARBLE. THE STATUE PORTRAYS JEFFERSON ADDRESSING THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS, CAPTURING BOTH HIS STRENGTH OF CHARACTER AND HIS VITALITY OF SPIRIT. IN HIS LEFT HAND HE HOLDS A SCROLL, PERHAPS THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. AT HIS FEET ARE TWO COLUMN CAPITALS, ON WHICH ARE SCULPTED CORN AND TOBACCO.

THE WEIGHT OF THE ROOF AND DOME IS CARRIED TO THE FOUNDATIONS BY THE COLUMNS AND THE MASSIVE MASONRY BEARING WALLS OF THE MAIN LEVEL. THE DOME ITSELF IS A DOUBLE SHELL, WITH THE INTERIOR DOME SELF-SUPPORTING. THE EXTERIOR DOME, RISING TO A HEIGHT OF NEARLY 120' ABOVE GRADE, IS SUPPORTED BY AN ELABORATE STEEL FRAMEWORK, ENCASED IN CONCRETE.

ALTHOUGH THE SUBJECT OF EXTENSIVE CRITICISM AT THE TIME OF ITS DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION, THE JEFFERSON MEMORIAL HAS SINCE ASSUMED AN INTEGRAL ROLE IN THE ICONIC IMAGE OF MONUMENTAL WASHINGTON. PARTICULARLY RESPLENDENT DURING THE BLOSSOMING OF THE CHERRY TREES IN SPRING, IT HAS BECOME ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR DESTINATIONS FOR THE MILLIONS OF VISITORS TO THE NATION'S CAPITAL. ESTEEMED TODAY AS THE LAST GREAT AMERICAN BEAUX-ARTS MONUMENT, IT IS APPRECIATED AS THE APPROPRIATE COMMEMORATION OF A MAN WHOSE IDEAS AND ACTIONS HAVE ASSUMED A TRANSCENDENT IMPORTANCE FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

DOCUMENTATION OF THE JEFFERSON MEMORIAL WAS UNDERTAKEN FROM JUNE 1991 TO SEPTEMBER 1994 BY THE WASHINGTON, D.C., OFFICE OF THE HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY / HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD (HABS/HAER) OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (NPS). THE PRINCIPALS INVOLVED WERE ROBERT J. KAPSCH, DIVISION CHIEF, HABS/HAER; JOHN A. BURNS, AIA, DEPUTY CHIEF, HABS/HAER; AND PAUL D. DOLINSKY, CHIEF, HABS. THE PROJECT WAS SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, NPS, ROBERT STANTON, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, AND ARNOLD GOLDSTEIN, SUPERINTENDENT, NATIONAL CAPITAL PARKS--CENTRAL; AND THE EASTERN TEAM, DENVER SERVICE CENTER (FALLS CHURCH BRANCH), NPS, MICHAEL DONNELLY, ASSISTANT MANAGER, AND PROJECT MANAGERS KEITH NEWLIN AND AUDREY TEPPER. DOCUMENTATION WAS INITIATED BY PROJECT LEADER PAUL D. DOLINSKY. THE FIELD RECORDING WAS CONDUCTED BY PROJECT SUPERVISOR MARK SCHARA, ARCHITECT; SITE FORMAN DANA L. LOCKETT, ARCHITECT; ARCHITECTS ROBERT R. ARZOLA, ELLYN P. GOLDKIND, LYNNE E. HOLLER, SHELLEY M. HOMEYER, MELLONEE RHEAMS, AND JOSE RAUL VAZQUEZ; AND ARCHITECTURE TECHNICIANS AMY L. DARLING, R. JEFFREY PETRY, AND CRYSTAL N. WILLINGHAM. THE LARGE-FORMAT PHOTOGRAPHY WAS UNDERTAKEN BY JET LOWE, HAER. THE PHOTOGRAMMETRY WAS UNDERTAKEN BY JET LOWE, WITH JOHN A. BURNS AS TECHNICAL CONSULTANT. THE DRAWINGS WERE PRODUCED USING COMPUTER-AIDED DRAFTING, WITH DIMENSIONS DERIVED FROM HISTORIC DRAWINGS, TRADITIONAL HAND-MEASURING, AND PHOTOGRAMMETRY.

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