

# 10 Facts About the U.S. Capitol Building



Some sentences have been removed from the text below. Choose from sentences A-J the one that best fits into each gap. Write the corresponding letter in the boxes. There is an extra sentence which you do not need to use.

**A** It's shorter than the Washington Monument, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the Old Post Office and the Washington National Cathedral.

**B** The current Architect is Stephen T. Ayers.

**C** It's been there in some variation since 1909 and carries politicians from House and Senate office buildings to the Capitol.

**D** This was due to some pretty extensive additions to the Capitol.

**E** The government wondered whether they should remain in Washington or move to Philadelphia, and should the Capitol be rebuilt or should a new one be built near Georgetown.

**F** At 15,000 pounds, I bet the old gal would do more than a little damage.

**G** His design would have been too expensive, though, and so the search continued.

**H** Designers even received permission from Martha Washington to do so.

**I** The building was pretty well gutted, as was the Library of Congress.

**J** Many people have wondered why the building faces away from the Mall instead of toward it, like most other important buildings and monuments.

I admit it: I'm reading the new Dan Brown book. I feel like I should be a little bit embarrassed, but it's the fastest-selling adult novel of all time, so obviously I'm in good company. In case you're not familiar, *The Lost Symbol* involves the typical Robert Langdon-style hunt for clues and symbols through a bunch of familiar, historic places, including the U.S. Capitol Building. I know Brown is

known to take some liberties with history, so I thought I'd look for some of the Capitol's more interesting features for myself.

**1. The Capitol was built after Thomas Jefferson held a design competition to elicit entries from some of the finest architects in America.**

The prize was \$500, but the only one of the submissions that even came close to earning it was one by a French architect.  Finally, a late entry by William Thornton did the trick. Washington and Jefferson both raved over it, and the design was chosen.



**2. The Capitol has its own subway.**

And I bet it doesn't smell like subways usually smell.



**3. George Washington himself laid the cornerstone for the Capitol on September 18, 1793, and, as Dan Brown said, it was a Masonic ceremony.**



**4. At one point, there were plans for the first president to be buried under the Capitol building in an area called the Crypt.**

When the time came to move the body from Mt. Vernon to D.C., plans fell through because Washington's will specified that his final resting place should be Mt. Vernon. The Crypt is now used to keep some of the National Statuary Hall Collection and to house a gift shop.

**5. There used to be a law in place that restricted any building in D.C. from being built taller than the Capitol.**

It could be equal to the Capitol in height, but no higher than. Passed in 1899, this law didn't last long. It was amended in 1910 and now the Capitol is only the fifth-tallest building in the District of Columbia.



**6. The statue that sits atop the dome is called the Statue of Freedom.**

If she ever fell off, someone below would be in trouble.  She's 19-and-a-half feet tall and stepped down from her pedestal for the first time in 1993 for a much-needed restoration. Hey, you'd need some spackling too if you were 130 years old.

**7. If you've ever thought that the Capitol seems to be backward, you're not alone.**

The reason, according to the Capitol website, is that the east side of the Capitol is the only one with level ground for a proper entrance, so the Capitol and the statue on top face east toward the people who are entering it.

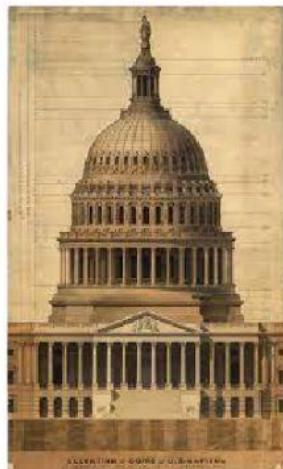
**8. The Architects of the Capitol oversee the maintenance, operation and preservation of all of the Capitol buildings and grounds.**

Only 11 men have ever served in this position, starting with William Thornton in 1793.

**9. The Capitol didn't fare too well during the War of 1812 and nearly burned to the ground.**

It would have been just ashes if a well-timed storm hadn't put the fire out.

**10. The famous dome we know today wasn't added to the building until the 1850s**



under the watch of Architect Thomas U. Walter, the fourth Architect. The picture shows the first dome, which third Architect Charles Bulfinch added.

Although rebuilt after the War of 1812 fiasco, politicians quickly outgrew their workspace as states were added and more representatives filled the building. As the Capitol building was extended to make room, the Bulfinch dome looked out of place and disproportionate. The construction of the new dome took 11 years (Lincoln was sworn in under a half-finished dome) and nearly nine million pounds of iron.

So, it would appear that Dan Brown was accurate about a couple of things (I won't spoil it in case you're waiting to read it). Anyone else reading it? What's your opinion?

