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Contact:

Archives & Special Collections
Waidner-Spahr Library
Dickinson College
P.O. Box 1773
Carlisle, PA 17013

717-245-1399

archives@dickinson.edu

Speech at Commencement
June 1851 by
James L. Thomas

The National Monument.

The thought of being forgotten is repugnant to our very nature; that of being remembered is dear to every heart. To provide against the one, & to secure the other has always been a most desirable object to both individuals & nations. Indeed, to perpetuate the memory of departed friends, is regarded as an imperative duty, imposed upon every one by the constitution of his nature. For this he raises the simple mound, & erects the humble tomb stone, or the lofty pillar. And the same principle holds in respect to nations. They too regard it as binding on them, to keep in perpetual remembrance illustrious deeds, & memorable names. For this the talents of the historian & the skill of the ^{& the wisdom of the architects} Sculptor, are both combined. They mutually aid each other in accomplishing the desired object. History has performed its part nobly. Its pages have abounded with descriptions so graphic, & delineations so striking, that the scenes have been brought distinctly before our minds, & we have recognized the actors. Sculpture

too has contributed its power in recalling the events of former days, by presenting to the sight the very forms of the persons, who figured most prominently in them. Yet not to these alone has mankind entrusted the keeping of the past. Egypt has its catacombs, its gigantic pyramids its towering obelisks, & indeed every country has its monuments & national memorials, & these also remind us of the occurrences of by gone days.

What feelings are kindled? what emotions excited by a view of Bunker Hill & the monument there erected? Thus situated, we are overwhelmed with the thoughts that rush upon our minds, we are transported back to the time of conflict, are present at the scene of battle, we hear the roar of cannon, the thunder of artillery, we behold Warren & his brave associates, foremost in the fight, exposed to the hottest fire & one after another sacrificing themselves on the altar of their country's liberty. The thought of this battle suggests that of the whole American revolution; our bosoms swell with indignation

at the injustice & oppression of England - with feelings of love & admiration, with sentiments of gratitude, we contemplate the bold resistance of our forefathers, we lend to the skies their noble patriotism & unflinching integrity in the cause of freedom. So great is the effect of this single object, this monument raised on old Bunker Hill. So powerful is the influence of local association. So natural is it for us to embody our thoughts in some external object. Who can visit without emotion the interior of Westminster Abbey when the Statesmen, the poets, & the Philosophers of England "sleep with her kings & dignify the scene". To rouse his countrymen to any great or noble action the Athenian Statesman, had only to point them to the Acropolis crowned with the results of former achievements. The Romans attached a superstitious reverence to the rock of the Capitol: and Manlius when brought before their Tribunal of justice answered the charges preferred against him only by bidding his judges, gaze upon that

Consecrated eminence, where he had per-
iled his life in his country's cause. This
was sufficient to withstand the combined
force of the eloquence & intrigue of his ac-
cusers. We too would rear a mon-
umental pile - erect a national monument
as a tribute to the memory of the immortal
Washington, a pledge of our attachment to our
country & like the Roman Capitol "a monument
of her former greatness & a security of her fu-
ture glory". Yet our object is not to preserve
a martial spirit. This befits & characterizes
past ages when bloodshed, rapine & cruelty
marked the progress of nations, & when
fame & reputation varied only with
the number slain in battle. We indeed
cherish & ever will cherish the memory
of the hero of the revolution, but it is
not because he figured prominently in
scenes of battle, but because of the glo-
rious principles which he advocated, the

spirit which he manifested alike in the
councils of war & the halls of legislation, for
this reason may his memory be ever dear, his
virtues imitated by every American, & the
monument which is to perpetuate & signalize
his services as lasting as his own immortal
name; May it rise high above all structures
ancient or modern, & as a stone from each
state in the confederacy is placed in its mas-
sive sides, may it only serve as another
tie to bind them into indissoluble union.
At this critical period its foundation has
been laid, what time could be more ap-
propriate, what place more suitable
than the City of Washington, & for its
construction what design more
beautiful than the one contemplated.
To rear it as the free-will offering
of a grateful & liberal people to the
honor & renown of the paternal Wash-
ington, the man "first in war first in
peace & first in the hearts of his coun-
trymen" & combining in his character

all that is virtuous, or desirable, & "like
the masterpiece of the Grecian artist
exhibiting in one glow of associated
beauty the pride of every model, the
perfection of every master". We
only pray that it may be accomplished
~~We pray~~ that this national monument
"rising toward heaven among the pointed
spires of so many temples dedicated
to God may contribute also to produce
in all minds a pious feeling of dependence
& gratitude. We wish ^{bring} that the last
object on the sight of him who leaves
his country's Capitol & the first to
gladden his who revisits it may be
something to remind him of the glory
& liberty of his country. Let it ^{rise}
till it meet the sun in his coming, let
the earliest light of the morning gild
it & parting day linger & play on its
summit."

The National Monument

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consecrated eminence, where he had periled his life in his country's cause: this was sufficient to withstand the combined force of the eloquence & intrigue of his accusers. We too would rear a monumental pile—erect a national monument as a tribute to the memory of the immortal Washington, a pledge of our attachment to our country & like the Roman Capitol “a monument of her former greatness a security of her future glory”. Yet our object is not to preserve a martial spirit. This befits & characterizes past ages when bloodshed, rapine & cruelty marked the progress of nations, & when fame & reputation varied only with the number slain in battle. We indeed cherish & ever will cherish the memory of the hero of the revolution, but, it is not because he figured prominently in scenes of battle, but because of the glorious principles which he advocated, the

spirit which he manifested alike in the councils of war & the halls of legislation. For this reason may his memory be ever dear, his virtues imitated by every American, & the monument which is to perpetuate & signalize his services as lasting as his own immortal name, may it rise high above all structures ancient or modern, & as a stone from each state in the confederacy is placed in its massive sides, may it only serve as another tie to bind them into indissoluble union. At this critical period its foundation ~~has been~~ is laid. What time could be more appropriate, what place more suitable than the City of Washington, & for its construction what design is more beautiful than the one contemplated to rear it as the free-will offering of a grateful & liberal people to the honor & renown of the paternal Washington, the man “first in war, first in peace & first in the hearts of his countrymen” & combining in his character

all that is virtuous, or desirable, & “like the masterpiece of the Grecian artist exhibiting in one glow of associated beauty the pride of every model, the perfection of every master”. We only pray that it may be accomplished ~~we pray~~ that the national monument “rising toward heaven among the pointed spires of so many temples dedicated to God may contribute also to produce in all minds a pious feeling of dependence & gratitude. We wish finally that the last object on the sight of him who leaves his country's capitol & the first to gladden his who revisits it may be something to remind him of the glory & liberty of his country. Let it rise till it meet the sun in his coming; let the earliest light of the morning gild it & parting day linger & play on its summit.”