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Washington's Monument: And the Fascinating History of the Obelisk

John Steele Gordon

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Conceived soon after the American Revolution ended, the great monument to George Washington was not finally completed until almost a century later; the great obelisk was finished in 1884, and remains the tallest stone structure in the world at 555 feet. The story behind its construction is a largely untold and intriguing piece of American history, which acclaimed historian John Steele Gordon relates with verve, connecting it to the colorful saga of the ancient obelisks of Egypt.

Nobody knows how many obelisks were crafted in ancient Egypt, or even exactly how they were created and erected since they are made out of hard granite and few known tools of the time were strong enough to work granite. Generally placed in pairs at the entrances to temples, they have in modern times been ingeniously transported around the world to Istanbul, Paris, London, New York, and many other locations. Their stories illuminate that of the Washington Monument, once again open to the public following earthquake damage, and offer a new appreciation for perhaps the most iconic memorial in the country.

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