

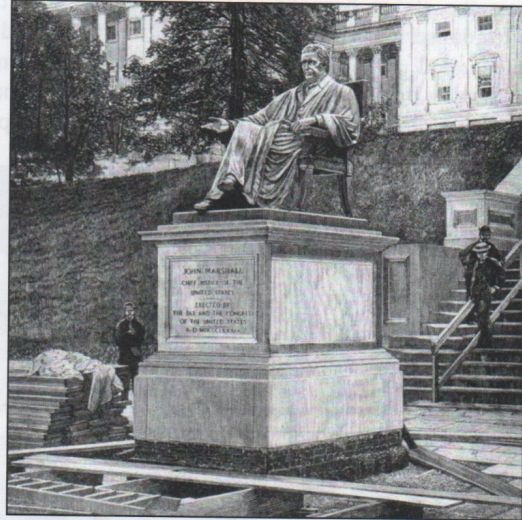
The John Marshall Statue

INFORMATION SHEET

On the ground floor of the Supreme Court Building is an imposing likeness of Chief Justice John Marshall, who served from 1801 to 1835. Cast in bronze by William Wetmore Story, the statue depicts Marshall seated in his judicial robe with his right hand outstretched as if he were discussing the document curled up in his left hand. While today it appears as a permanent fixture inside the building, the statue has only been in the building since 1981.

The statue's history begins following the death of John Marshall in Philadelphia on July 6, 1835. The following day, the Bar of Philadelphia announced it would raise funds to commission a memorial statue to be placed in the Nation's Capital. Donations were collected, but not enough money was raised to proceed, so the funds were invested. The project languished until 1880, by which time the "Marshall Memorial Fund" had appreciated to almost \$20,000. On behalf of the Philadelphia Bar, the Bar of the United States petitioned Congress to authorize an additional \$20,000 for its completion. Congress agreed, passing the necessary legislation on March 10, 1882.

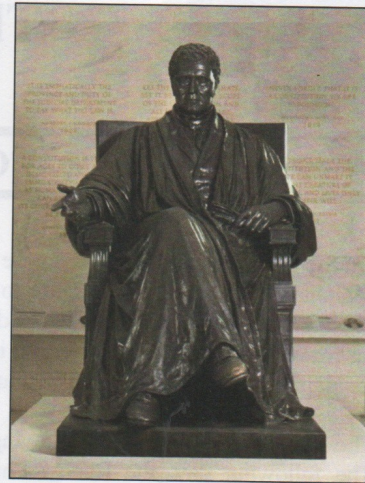
With adequate funding secured, William Wetmore Story was commissioned to sculpt the statue on December 21, 1882. Story was perhaps the perfect artist for the assignment. In addition to being the son of Associate Justice Joseph Story, who served on the Bench with Marshall from 1812 to 1835, he was a Harvard educated lawyer who had opted for an artistic rather than legal career, first as a poet and later as a sculptor. At the time of the commission, Story was working from a studio in Rome, Italy. The statue was cast by the Nelli foundry in 1883 and shipped to the United States along with two marble bas-reliefs that were to be placed on the sides of the statue's pedestal.



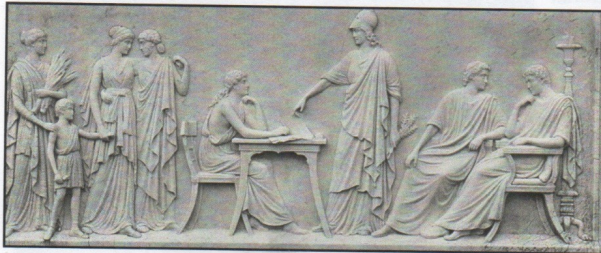
With Story's input, the statue was situated on the West Front of the Capitol, at the center of the lower plaza. On Saturday, May 10, 1884, a ceremony to dedicate the statue was held before a large crowd. The Marine Band played and Chief Justice Morrison R. Waite delivered a short address, after which the statue was unveiled "in the presence of both houses of Congress, the chief officers of the various Departments of the Government, the descendants of Chief Justice Marshall, and many citizens." William Henry Rawle, of the Bar of Philadelphia, followed the unveiling with an oration on the life of the "Great Chief Justice."

About fifty years later, as the Supreme Court Building began to rise across the street from the Capitol, it was suggested that the Marshall statue be moved to the Court's new home. The building's architect, Cass Gilbert, disliked the idea. He wrote to the Architect of the Capitol, "There is no place inside the new Supreme Court Building available for this fine statue, and...if it is placed on the plaza in front of the building it is not large enough to be in scale with the building and its sculpture." The United States Supreme Court Building Commission agreed and the proposal was denied.

In 1940, the idea to move the statue resurfaced and Congress passed legislation authorizing the move. The statue, however, remained in place, and it was not until 1981, when in preparation for the Inauguration of Ronald Reagan (the first held on the West Front of the Capitol), that the statue was moved. At that time, Chief Justice Warren E. Burger asked to have the statue brought into the Supreme Court building. After conservation, it was relocated to the ground floor and rededicated. Subsequently, a backdrop featuring famous quotations from Chief Justice Marshall's opinions was added, and in 2001, the marble panels from the pedestal, separated from the statue during the move from the Capitol, were placed on exhibit nearby (*below*).

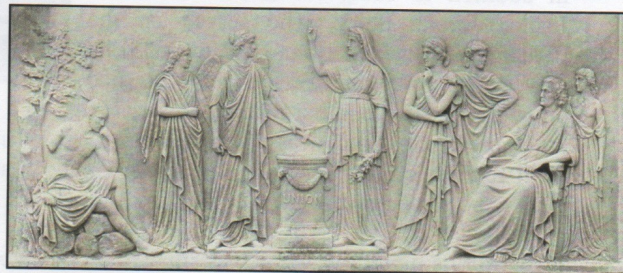


The John Marshall Statue in the Supreme Court Building.



Left: According to William Wetmore Story, the figure seated at the table is Young America, who is being told how to write the Constitution by Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, who stands before her. The figures on the left represent Commerce, Education (holding the hand of the boy), and Agriculture. On the right are two seated figures representing Philosophy and Jurisprudence.

Right: Story described this scene as Victory leading Young America "to swear allegiance on the altar of the union." Religion stands in front of them on the opposite side of the altar, pointing to the sky. On the left sits a Native American man, representing the country's past. On the right, standing behind Religion, are Justice and Equity. Behind them are Age, who is seated, and Youth, who stands behind him.



Today, visitors to the Court can see the memorial to John Marshall as the Bar and Congress of the United States originally intended: "In perpetual memory of the honor, the reverence, and the love which the people of his country bear to the great Chief Justice."

Office of the Curator • Supreme Court of the United States

All photographs from the Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States unless otherwise noted.