

SLAVE LABOR COMMEMORATIVE MARKER

*to acknowledge the role of slave labor in the
construction of the United States Capitol*



From the time the Capitol's cornerstone was set in 1793 until the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, enslaved laborers performed many skilled construction jobs, such as quarrying the stone that comprises many of the Capitol's floors, walls, and columns.

The marker is comprised of a block of sandstone that was quarried from Aquia Creek in Virginia. It was once a part of the East Front portico, which was completed in 1826. The stone is presented in reverse position to feature its original chisel marks.

EMANCIPATION HALL • LOWER LEVEL

U.S. CAPITOL
Visitor Center

EMANCIPATION HALL

On December 18, 2007, Congress passed legislation to name the Capitol Visitor Center's central space "Emancipation Hall" to recognize the contributions of the enslaved laborers who helped build the U.S. Capitol. Emancipation Hall is a central gathering place for visitors coming to see the Capitol.



Emancipation Hall, the heart of the Capitol Visitor Center, was named by Congress to recognize the enslaved laborers and craftsmen who helped build the U.S. Capitol.



When construction of the Capitol began in 1793, Washington, D.C., was little more than a rural landscape with dirt roads and few accommodations beyond a small number of boarding houses. Skilled labor was hard to find or attract to the fledgling city. The federal government relied heavily on enslaved labor to ensure the new capital city would be ready to receive Congress when it moved to Washington from Philadelphia in 1800.

Enslaved laborers, who were rented from their owners, were involved in almost every stage of construction. They cut trees, cleared grounds, baked bricks, and quarried stone and delivered it to the building site. They molded clay, sawed timber, and worked with masons to erect the building. In the early 1860s, an enslaved craftsman named Philip Reid assisted with casting the bronze Statue of Freedom on the Capitol dome.



Shackled slaves make their way down Pennsylvania Avenue. In the background is the U.S. Capitol before the central domed portion was constructed in the 1820s.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS