

John Hancock

(1737-1793)

Best known as the bold first signer of the Declaration of Independence, John Hancock played a key role in the formative years of the American nation. Born in Braintree (now Quincy), Massachusetts, Hancock became a successful merchant in Boston, where he rose to prominence in local politics and the pre-Revolutionary movement. As president of the Massachusetts Provisional Congress from 1774 to 1775, and as Massachusetts delegate and president of the second Continental Congress from 1775 to 1777, the wealthy and outspoken Hancock rallied support for the cause of independence. Following the Declaration of Independence—which circulated abroad with only Hancock’s signature—Hancock strove to be named commander-in-chief of the army. When passed over in favor of George Washington, Hancock resigned the presidency of the Continental Congress. He became increasingly involved in state politics and in 1780 was elected the first governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Hancock died in office while serving his ninth term.

Born in New York State, Horatio Stone was a physician before turning to sculpture and relocating to Washington, D.C., in 1848. Attracted to the developing federal city by its expanding market for decorative sculpture, Stone practiced his craft successfully and became active in the politics of the city’s artistic community. In 1856 the Joint Committee on the Library commissioned Stone to furnish a full-length marble statue of John Hancock for the Senate extension to the Capitol. The U.S. government’s Works of Art Fund paid the artist in a series of installments beginning in 1856 and continuing until 1861, when the Hancock figure was completed.

Stone helped establish the Washington Art Association and was president of the organization during its five-year existence. The group resented the large number of foreign artists employed to embellish the Capitol’s new extension that was being constructed during the late 1850s. Under Stone’s leadership in 1858, the association organized a protest that included a memorial to Congress seeking an art commission “composed of those designated by the united voice of American artists . . . who shall be the channels for the distribution of all appropriations to be made by Congress for art purposes, and who shall secure to artists an intelligent and unbiased adjudication upon the designs they may present for the embellishment of the national buildings.”¹ This led to the formation of a short-lived art commission that made general recommendations on Capitol art; the commission never achieved the importance hoped for by Stone and his fellow artists.

Stone’s statue of John Hancock was placed in the Capitol in 1861. For more than 20 years it occupied a temporary base; in 1883 a permanent pedestal was constructed of granite quarried on the Hancock family farm in Lexington, Massachusetts. In 1912, following passage of House Concurrent Resolution 58, a cast was made of the Hancock statue’s head so a replica could be presented by the Society of the Sons of the Revolution of Massachusetts to their home state. Stone’s full-length statues of Alexander Hamilton and Edward Dickinson Baker, a U.S. representative from Illinois and U.S. senator from Oregon, also are displayed in the Capitol as part of the National Statuary Hall Collection.

John Hancock

Horatio Stone (1808-1875)

Marble, 1861

88¾ x 33½ x 25 inches (225.4 x 85.1 x 63.5 cm)

Signed and dated (on base under subject's left leg):

Horatio Stone, / Sculp't 1861.

Inscribed (on base centered at front): HANCOCK

Commissioned by the Joint Committee

on the Library, 1856/1857

Accepted by the Joint Committee on the

Library, 1861

Cat. no. 21.00009

