

National Statuary Hall Collection

Washington, D.C., 1864. Still in the midst of a devastating civil war, the U.S. Congress met in the Capitol building to draft, debate and vote on laws for our country. At the time, 34 states had been admitted to the United States, but 11 of them had seceded and formed the Confederate States of America. One bill proposed that spring hoped to establish both a national statue collection and a room in which to display it. Because a new hall for the House of Representatives had been built a few years before, the old hall they used to meet in was empty and unused. This new bill proposed that each state donate statues to a national collection and that the “Old House Hall” be renovated in order to display the future statues. House Joint Resolution 66 was signed into law on July 2, 1864 and stated that:

“the President is hereby authorized to invite...all the States to provide and furnish statues, in marble or bronze, not exceeding two in number for each State, of deceased persons who have been...illustrious for their historic renown or for distinguished civic or military services such as each State may deem to be worthy of this national commemoration; and when so furnished the same shall be placed in the Old Hall of the House of Representatives, in the Capitol of the United States, which is set apart...as a national statuary hall for the purpose herein indicated.”

As states began donating statues, they were all placed in the “Old House Hall”. Visitors to the Capitol enjoyed seeing the beautiful works of art. This room became known as National Statuary Hall. Over time, as additional states were added to the U.S, and as states donated more statues, the hall began to be overcrowded. So, Congress passed an amendment to the original law that allowed for statues to be relocated throughout the Capitol Building. In 2000, Congress passed another amendment to the law which allowed states to replace their donated statues with new ones. When an underground visitors center was finished in 2008, some of the National Statuary Hall Collection was placed in the Exhibition and Emancipation Halls of the new Capitol Visitor Center.

The Utah state legislature has authorized the donation of two statues to the National Statuary Hall collection: one of Brigham Young, which is placed in National Statuary Hall, and one of inventor Philo T. Farnsworth, which is placed in the Exhibition Hall of the Capitol Visitors Center. A statue of Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon will replace the statue of Mr. Farnsworth in 2022.

Adapted from “About the National Statuary Hall Collection” www.aoc.gov