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Statues and Busts in the U.S. Capitol: Collections and Authorities

The U.S. Capitol is home to hundreds of works of art. Among them are a number of statues and busts, including the National Statuary Hall Collection and the Senate Vice Presidential Bust Collection, which account for most of the statuary on display in the U.S. Capitol building.

These works of art arrive in the Capitol in different ways. For many years, Congress vested authority to acquire and place art in the Joint Committee on the Library (JCL). Current law provides that the JCL may be involved in the process of accepting future donations of art to Congress, pursuant to authority granted in 1872, particularly with regard to changes in the National Statuary Hall Collection, discussed below. In addition to those authorities, in 1988, Congress assigned responsibility to provide for works of fine art and other property for display in the Capitol to the Capitol Preservation Commission. Similar authorities were granted to the House and Senate through the House of Representatives Fine Arts Board, the Senate Commission on Art, and the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration for art in their office buildings and respective wings of the Capitol.

National Statuary Hall Collection

Created in 1864, the National Statuary Hall Collection contains two statues from each state. Under the law, the JCL maintains final approval over the design of these statues. It is up to each individual state to choose who is honored and to pay for the design, creation, and delivery of a new statue to Washington, DC, and removal of an outgoing statue, which becomes the property of the state when it leaves the collection.

In 2000, states were authorized to replace statues in the National Statuary Hall Collection. Eleven states have replaced a total of 12 statues. For a list of replaced statues, see CRS Report R42812, *National Statuary Hall Collection: Background and Legislative Options*. **Figure 1** depicts the most recent additions to the collection: Harry Truman, from Missouri, and Willa Cather, from Nebraska.

Senate Vice Presidential Bust Collection

In 1885, the Senate authorized the acquisition of the first vice presidential bust for Henry Wilson, who served as the 18th Vice President (1873-1875), shown in **Figure 2**. In 1886, the Senate authorized placement of marble busts of each Vice President, in niches of the Senate chamber.

In 1947, oversight of the acquisition of vice presidential busts was transferred from the Senate Committee on the Library to the Committee on Rules and Administration. Each bust is acquired by the Architect of the Capitol, with the committee's approval.

Figure 1. Most Recent Additions to the National Statuary Hall Collection: Willa Cather (NE) and Harry Truman (MO)



Source: Architect of the Capitol.

Other Methods of Acquiring Statues

In addition to the established processes for the National Statuary Hall Collection and the Vice Presidential Bust Collection, Congress also acquires statues and busts by commission or receives art by donation.

Figure 2. Bust of Vice President Henry Wilson



Source: U.S. Senate, *Senate Vice Presidential Bust Collection*.

Commission Artwork

In some cases, Congress has chosen to commission, or purchase, artwork to commemorate an event or the importance of an individual to the United States. For

example, in the 109th Congress (2005-2006), Congress authorized the JCL to commission a statue of Rosa Parks for placement in the Capitol (P.L. 109-116). The Rosa Parks statue was installed and dedicated in 2013. Similarly, in the 117th Congress (2021-2022), Congress directed JCL to obtain statues of former Supreme Court Associate Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The Architect of the Capitol is directed to permanently install the statues in the Capitol or on Capitol Grounds (P.L. 117-111). **Figure 3** shows the Rosa Parks statue located in National Statuary Hall, although it is not part of the National Statuary Hall Collection.

Figure 3. Rosa Parks Statue in the Capitol



Source: Architect of the Capitol.

Donation of Artwork

Historically, Congress has accepted donated artwork for display in the Capitol. To accept a work of art commissioned and paid for by a third-party entity, Congress has historically passed legislation authorizing the acceptance of the work. Congress has accepted the donations of numerous works of art. These works have been donated by various individuals and groups, including private citizens, social organizations, military organizations, and foreign governments. **Figure 4** shows the following donations:

- Statue of Ulysses S. Grant (1899; S.J.Res. 75, 51st Congress);
- Bust of Raoul Wallenberg—a Swedish citizen who worked to save thousands of Hungarian Jews during

World War II (1994; H.Con.Res. 222, 103rd Congress); and

- Bust of Sojourner Truth—an abolitionist and women's suffrage advocate who worked to end slavery and to aid newly freed slaves following the Civil War (2006; P.L. 109-427).

Figure 4. Examples of Statues and Busts Donated to Congress



Source: Architect of the Capitol, *Capitol Campus Art*.

Removal of Statues and Busts

In the 117th Congress (2021-2022), Congress authorized the removal of a bust of former Chief Justice Roger Taney from the Old Supreme Court Chamber in the U.S. Capitol and the acquisition of a bust of Justice Thurgood Marshall (P.L. 117-326). The law directed the JCL to remove the Roger Taney bust within 45 days of enactment and to “enter into an agreement to obtain a bust of Thurgood Marshall” not later than two years after enactment.

Legislation, 118th Congress (2023-2024)

In the 118th Congress, legislation has been introduced to “remove all statues of individuals who voluntarily served the Confederate States of America” displayed in the U.S. Capitol (H.R. 1248 and S. 573). Similar legislation was introduced in the 116th (2019-2020) and 117th (2021-2022) Congresses.

H.R. 1248 was referred to the Committee on House Administration. S. 573 was referred to the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration. No further action has been taken on either measure at the time of this writing.

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