



## Bartholdi Fountain



The graceful and fluid forms of Bartholdi Fountain are based on Classical and Renaissance

fountain weighs more than 15 tons and stands 30 feet tall. It is an elegant expression of the Gilded Age and was intended as an allegory of light and water. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is included in the National Historic Landmarks lists of American and international historically significant landmarks.

### Origins

Frederic Auguste Bartholdi (1834-1904) is best known for creating the Statue of Liberty. Bartholdi created this cast-iron "Fountain of Light and Water" for the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. The fountain, cast in Paris by A. Durenne, weighs 30,440 pounds, stands 30 feet high, and has caryatid figures 11 feet in height. It is a combination of iron, gas light and water as symbolically appropriate for a modern city.

The fountain was purchased by the U.S. Congress for \$6,000 at the suggestion of Frederick Law Olmsted, the famous landscape architect who designed the grounds. It was moved to Washington, D.C., in 1877 and placed at the base of Capitol Hill on what used to be Botanic Garden grounds.

The gas lamps, lighted by battery in 1881, made the fountain a popular attraction at night. The lights surrounding the basin were added in 1886, and the fountain was replaced by electric lights when the fountain was completely electrified in 1915.

During the relocation of the Botanic Garden in 1927, the fountain was dismantled and erected in its present location in 1932. Over the years, the fountain has been well maintained.

From 2008 to 2011, it was taken off site for a full restoration and updated with energy-efficient systems and water treatment technology. This work ensures the fountain will continue to provide enjoyment for many years to come.

## Description



The fountain is topped by a mural crown resembling a crenellated city wall. Water spills from the crown over three youthful tritons playfully holding seaweed and splashes into the upper basin. Twelve lamps surrounding the basin are illuminated at night.

The pedestal holds three identical nereids, or sea nymphs, wearing headdresses of leaves and standing on their toes among sea shells and coral. The figures seem to support the large basin with their arms, although it is actually held up by the central column. Between the nereids are spouting fish.

At the base, jets of water spray upwards from turtles surrounded by large, scaly sea creatures.

**Source URL:** <https://www.usbg.gov/bartholdi-fountain>