

Dr. Mary McCleod Bethune's Ascension to Statuary Hall

On February 20, 2018, the Florida House of Representatives approved House Bill 139 by a vote of 111-1. Jay Flant, (R, Jacksonville) cast the one abstaining vote.

On March 19, 2018, then Governor Rick Scott signed the bill into law.

On July 10, 2019, on what would have been Dr. Bethune's 144th birthday, Governor Ron DeSantis sent a letter to the Architect of the United States Capitol officially requesting that the statue of General Edmund Kirby Smith in National Statuary Hall be replaced with Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune. Securing [funding](#) and a [sculptor](#) were next steps. To that end, The National Statuary Hall Campaign Kickoff was held on April 20, 2019, at Bethune-Cookman University to solicit donations toward the estimated \$400,000 needed to fund the statue. Nilda Comas was selected in 2017 from 1,600 artists to sculpt the statue.

Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune will be the first African American figure to be honored with a monument in National Statuary Hall in the United States Capitol and one of only ten women to appear among the 100 statues (each state is allowed two statues in Statuary Hall). Florida's second statue is of physician, scientist, inventor and humanitarian John Gorrie.

So what is National Statuary Hall?

According to the Architect of the Capitol (AOC) website, the AOC is the builder and steward of the landmark buildings and grounds of Capitol Hill – including the National Statuary Hall Collection.

According to its website, [The National Statuary Hall Collection](#) was established as law on July 2, 1864, is comprised of statues donated by individual states to honor persons notable in their history. It was proposed by Representative Justin S. Morrill on April 19, 1864, when he asked: "To what end more useful or grand, and at the same time simple and inexpensive, can we devote it [the Chamber] than to ordain that it shall be set apart for the reception of such statuary as each State shall elect to be deserving of in this lasting commemoration?" However, by 1933, the situation grew unbearable as the Hall held 65 statues, more than the chamber could support, compelling Congress to pass House Concurrent Resolution No. 47 to provide for the relocation of statues and to govern the reception and placement of future additions.

This resolution mandated that only one statue from each state be placed in Statuary Hall, the other would be placed prominently throughout the Capitol. The first statue was placed in 1870, all 50 states had contributed at least one statue by 1971, and all but five states had contributed two statues by 1990.

A second rearrangement occurred in 1976; thirty-eight statues were rearranged according to height and material, those representing the original colonies were relocated to the Central Hall of the East Front Extension on the Capitol's first floor. The remainder were distributed mainly in the [Hall of Columns](#) and the connecting corridors of the House and Senate wings. In 2008, the

Joint Committee on the Library approved another relocation of statues to improve their display, including the [Capitol Visitor Center](#).

Each statue is the gift of a state, not of an individual or group of citizens. Proceedings for the donation of a statue usually begin in the state legislature with the enactment of a resolution that names the citizen to be commemorated and cites his or her qualifications, specifies a committee or commission to represent the state in selecting the sculptor, and provides for a method of obtaining the necessary funds to carry the resolution into effect. When the donated statue arrives at the Capitol, it is placed in a location specified by the Joint Committee on the Library.