

Christopher Columbus Statue – Ohio Statehouse

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There has been a lot of talk recently regarding the removal of statues of Christopher Columbus. So far, it just been talk and the three statues of the explorer in Columbus remain standing, as of this writing (June 17, 2020). Sadly, Columbus State has announced the planned removal of their statue.

Because one of the statues in Columbus has a particular Catholic connection to the Diocese of Columbus, I thought it would be interesting to review its history.

The statue of Christopher Columbus which currently stands on the south side of the Ohio Statehouse grounds was not purchased by the state of Ohio. It was donated to the state by the Pontifical College Josephinum.

Founded in 1888, the Josephinum seminary was the religious vocational outgrowth of an orphanage and orphan's industries, founded by Monsignor Jessing, in the early 1870s. In 1888 Jessing founded the *Collegium Josephinum*, as it was first known. It was granted pontifical college status in 1892 by Pope Leo XIII and renamed to its current name, thus

becoming, and remaining, the only pontifical seminary in the Western Hemisphere. The seminary was originally located on East Main and 18th Street near Downtown Columbus.

The bronze statue of Christopher Columbus was commissioned by Monsignor Joseph Jessing (1836-1899). It was cast by the W. H. Mullins Co. of Salem, Ohio. The design was likely based on work by the well known American sculpture artist Augustus St. Gaudens. The statue is approximately 9 feet tall and weighs 150 lbs. Monsignor Jessing purchased it with his personal funds in 1892 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Columbus's voyage, and it cost \$800. From 1892 until 1932, the statue stood on the college grounds.

It was delivered to the college on Friday, October 21, 1892 as part of a grand procession. The day began with the firing of a 17-gun salute fired by a single cannon on the Statehouse grounds, followed by a Pontifical High Mass celebrated by Bishop John A. Watterson at St. Joseph's Cathedral.

The statue itself was transported in a decorated wagon drawn by a team of horses. It was preceded in the procession by four divisions consisting of every Catholic Society in Columbus; bands; seminarians from the college; numerous priests; and delegations from many schools.

It was said that the procession took an hour to pass a given point and that it was the largest procession ever seen in the city up to that point (the Catholic Societies did not include the Knights of Columbus as the first Council in Columbus was not established until 1899).

The only problem encountered in the procession was that the 900 pound statue was difficult to balance standing vertical in the back of the wagon. The horses were described as "mettlesome" (full of spirit) that made the transportation more difficult.

The Statue was placed on a concrete pedestal in front of the main building of the college. It stood there for 40 years. Monsignor Jessing passed away in 1899. In 1931, the Pontifical College Josephinum moved to its present location just north of Worthington, Ohio.

In July 1932 it was decided by the College to sell the statue as it would not be moved to the Worthington site. In September 1932 it was decided by the rector, Monsignor Henry Joseph Gimmelsman, not to sell the statue, but to donate it to the State of Ohio for placement on the grounds of the Ohio Statehouse. The statue was removed from the grounds of the old Josephinum and placed on a new base at the Ohio Statehouse, in preparation for the dedication.

It was decided that a presentation and dedication ceremony would be held on Columbus Day to formally present the statue to the state. The Columbus Day procession was held at noon on October 12, 1932. The grand procession included military organizations, the Knights of Columbus, Italian groups, other Catholic Societies, and American Legion posts.

The Grand Marshal of the procession was Colonel E. P. Lawlor, assisted by Alphonse Capretta, Daniel McEneaney, Colonel John J. Edwards, and Herman Wirthwein.

The procession formed at Town St. and Parsons Ave.; it preceded north on Parsons Ave. to Broad St.; west on Broad to High St.; south on High to Main. It then countermarched north on High to the southwest corner of the Statehouse grounds.

The dedication ceremony was under the joint coordination of the Knights of Columbus and the United Italian Societies. Benediction was given by Rev. Rocco Petracco, Pastor of St. John the Baptist Church and Rev. Donald H. Tippet, Pastor of the Bexley Methodist Episcopal Church.

The statue was presented to the state and city, by Monsignor Gimmelsman and was received by Governor George White and Columbus Mayor Henry Worley. Miss Mary White, daughter of the Governor, unveiled the statue. George O'Brien, State Deputy of the Knights of Columbus and Dr. Giovanni A. Barricelli, former Grand Venerable of the Sons of Italy, each delivered dedicatory addresses. In addition, Governor White and Mayor Worley gave brief addresses.

The statue has undergone several remodeling since its dedication. All religious symbols were removed from the statue's pedestal. The base and fountain upon which the statue is currently mounted was created in 1992, the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus's voyage. In that year the statue was moved to the north side of the Statehouse and was rededicated on Columbus Day. The ceremonies were attended by the Mayor of Columbus and the Governor of the State of Ohio, as well as, the mayor and governor of Genoa, Liguria, the Italian city and state where Columbus is believed to have been born.

Among the inscriptions on the west side of the statue's 1992 base is the following: "The spirit of discovery has the power to change the course of human history as demonstrated by the voyages of Christopher Columbus, whose imagination shattered the boundaries of the Western world. Modern history has been shaped by one man's courage to pursue a dream."

Sources:

Columbus Dispatch, Columbus, Ohio, October 21, 1892

Columbus Dispatch, Columbus, Ohio, July 27, 1932

Columbus Dispatch, Columbus, Ohio, September 4, 1932

Columbus Dispatch, Columbus, Ohio, October 10, 1932

Columbus Dispatch, Columbus, Ohio, October 12, 1932