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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

200-Year-Old Cornerstone Discovered During Baltimore's Washington Monument Restoration

Contents Revealed Wednesday, February 18th at 1:00 pm

(Baltimore, Maryland) – Today, the **Mount Vernon Place Conservancy** (*Conservancy*) reports that it believes the original cornerstone of the Washington Monument has been discovered. It likely has a hollowed out well in the granite base in which items were deposited during the cornerstone ceremony on July 4, 1815. On Wednesday, **February 18th at 1:00 pm**, the Mount Vernon Place Conservancy invites the press to be on-site at the Washington Monument (699 N. Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21201) when the **two-hundred-year old contents of the cornerstone will be revealed.**

The laying of the cornerstone in 1815 was of national interest because Baltimore's Washington Monument was the first American monument dedicated to the Father of American democracy. Interestingly, the cornerstone laying ceremony was well documented, but the location of the cornerstone was not mentioned, and its location had been lost to time. The stone was discovered while George Wilk, II, Project Superintendent for Lewis Contractors, was overseeing the digging of a pit for a sewage tank off the northeast corner of the building.

The cornerstone is a large square of granite with a marble lid. Its overall dimensions form a nearly-perfect cube measuring 24 inches. Conservators from the nearby Walters Art Museum will assist in removing the contents of the cornerstone. Accounts mention papers items and coinage, typical cornerstone offerings at the time. The condition of the items is unknown. As the cornerstone is well below grade, 200 years of dampness may have compromised their condition. After the cornerstone has been opened the contents will be taken to the nearby Walters Art Museum for safekeeping and conservation analysis while work on the Monument restoration continues.

Since January 2014, the Monument has been undergoing a \$5.5 million restoration by the Mount Vernon Place Conservancy. Restoration work on the Monument will be completed in the late spring of 2015. The "**Monumental Bicentennial**" celebration, presented by **Bank of America** and the **Conservancy**, will take place on **July 4, 2015.**

The festivities will include a formal rededication ceremony and the reopening of the monument to the public once again. (It has been closed since 2010). The ceremony will be followed by a family friendly old fashioned country fair in Mount Vernon Place.

Earlier in the restoration process, in October 2014, a time capsule installed during the Monument's 1915 centennial was discovered. "Few buildings have two time capsules," notes Lance Humphries, Chair of the Conservancy's Restoration Committee. "These items speak to the antiquity and symbolic importance of the monument in the history of our country." The 1915 time capsule is currently on display at the Walters Art Museum and will be opened in May 2015. The contents of the 1915 capsule will then go on display at the nearby Maryland Historical Society.

"At the time the Monument was begun, it was the most heroically-scaled memorial in the country," notes Humphries. "It is largely due to this impressive first monument to Washington that Baltimore was known at home and abroad as "The Monumental City."

The foundations of the exterior walls of the Monument's base are over four feet thick and go deep into the ground. Built of stone rubble, the stone believed to be the cornerstone in contrast is carefully formed and shaped. It was laid in an elaborate ceremony presided over by the Masonic order. Steeped in ancient building traditions, the ceremony included ritual offerings of oil, wine and corn.

It is not surprising the cornerstone was found on the northeast corner, as locally the Masons oversaw the cornerstone ceremonies of their own Masonic Hall (1814, now demolished) and several months after the Washington Monument ceremony, that at the Battle Monument on Monument Square. At each, the stone appears to have been laid in the northeast corner, and similar items placed in a hollowed out well in the stone.

Baltimore's Washington Monument, a nearly 180 foot tall marble column surmounted by a colossal statue of George Washington, was designed by architect Robert Mills. The stonework was completed in 1829 when the statue was raised to the top.

Decades later Mills designed the more well-known monument in the nation's capital whose cornerstone was not laid until 1848. This larger monument was not completed and dedicated until 1885.

Formed in 2008, the Conservancy's mission is to restore and manage the Washington Monument and park squares of Mount Vernon Place in partnership with the City of Baltimore. The Monument restoration is the first phase of a multi-year project. The restoration of the surrounding Mount Vernon Place Squares is planned to follow.

For additional information:

www.MVPConservancy.org Includes history and online membership/donation capability

www.Facebook.com/MountVernonPlace Serves as a blog about the restoration

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCm7IiyJiHv-ddenwgYKDIrg> Includes videos about the restoration and short clips about specific elements of the restoration

