

Syracuse Columbus Statue: A Timeline

Timeline based on "A Circle of Controversy" by Robert Searing ([History Highlights](#), 2019)

1910

Torquato DeFelice, an Italian American professor at Syracuse University, meets with sculptor V. Renzo Baldi in Florence, Italy, to discuss creating a monument to Columbus for the city of Syracuse.

1911

When DeFelice gets back to Syracuse, he and Dr Serafino Chiarulli, get together with members of the Italian American community, forming the United Italian Societies. The United Italian Societies decide to raise funds to hold a parade in honor of Columbus Day and use any remaining funds to erect a statue of Columbus.

1910s -20s

Anti-immigrant and anti-Italian prejudices pervade the United States. The most vivid example is the Sacco and Vanzetti case. In 1920, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Italian immigrants and workers' rights activists in Massachusetts, are sentenced to death for the murder of two men during the robbery of a shoe store. The prosecution and the judge show anti-Italian prejudices. Despite another man, Celestino Madeiros, confessing to the crimes, Sacco and Vanzetti are executed in 1927.

1928

The Syracuse Columbus Monument Association, informally created in 1916, becomes a legally recognized corporation.

Their goal is to celebrate the Italian American community by honoring a man who was born in Italy and had a significant impact on United States history. In the words of the association's charter, the statue would be a symbol of achievement and a way to "perpetuate the memory of a man who occupies a peculiar position in the history and tradition of the two great nations (Italy and the U.S.)."

1929

The Columbus Monument Association goes to community members to raise funds, using the motto "Something from Everybody -- it's done." Italians across Syracuse donate whatever they can, typically between \$1 and \$5. The total comes to \$21,783.14.

1929 -30

Controversy develops among Columbus Monument Association members and city leaders about the design and site of the statue.

1931

The mayor of Syracuse approves St. Mary's Circle as the site of the statue.

The Columbus Monument Association contacts Renzo Baldi, the Florentine sculptor who took part in the early planning, and commissions him to make an 11-foot bronze statue of Columbus. Architect Dwight James Baum designs the pedestal and fountain.

1932

On October 12, 1932, a parade is held to dedicate the site. Participants march from North Salina Street to St Mary's Circle. The mayor and the Columbus Monument Association announce that the statue will be unveiled one year later.

Syracuse Columbus Statue Timeline (cont'd)

1932-
1933

The Columbus Monument Association faces more challenges, including struggles over leadership and accusations of misusing funds.

1933-
1934

Financial troubles hit when President Roosevelt abandons the gold standard and the U.S. dollar loses value. The money raised by the Columbus Monument Association is no longer worth enough to pay for the statue, which is under construction in Italy. The association holds another fundraising drive and succeeds in raising enough to complete the statue.

1934

On October 12, 1934, the statue is dedicated, with almost 20,000 people in attendance. V. Renzo Baldi comes to Syracuse for the occasion.

There is a 30 ft. granite pedestal engraved with the words "Cristoforo Colombo Discoverer of America," surrounded by a pool of water. On top of the pedestal stands a 12 ft. bronze sculpture of Columbus. Four bronze sculptures of Native American heads are located at the corners of the pedestal, below Columbus's feet. Bas-reliefs depict events in Columbus's voyage.

1991

Protests against Columbus statues, which have taken place for decades, grow across the country in the lead-up to the 500th anniversary of Columbus's voyage.

In October 1991, protesters in Syracuse throw red paint on the statue's bas reliefs to symbolize the blood of Indigenous people killed during the colonization of the Americas. The city pays \$450,000 to have the statue cleaned.

Protests against the statue continue into the present day

2018

Syracuse mayor Ben Walsh partners with the nonprofit organization InterFaith Works to hold public dialogue circles about the future of the statue.

2020
-now

Protests against the statue intensify. An online petition to remove the monument receives over 18,000 signatures.

In 2020, Mayor Walsh announces plans to remove the statue. The Columbus Monument Association goes to court to stop the removal of the statue. In 2022, the court rules that the city cannot take the statue down, and the city appeals.

The legal battle is ongoing.