

A rare event occurred last week at the Capitol—the unveiling of a new addition to the Statuary Hall Collection; in this case, a statue of Helen Keller representing the state of Alabama.

Governor Bob Riley participated in the dedication ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda along with the Alabama Congressional delegation, the majority and minority leaders of the Senate, the Speaker of the House and Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, descendants of Miss Keller, and students from the Alabama School for the Deaf and Blind.

The Statuary Hall Collection began in 1864 when Congress authorized each state to provide two statues of distinguished citizens of the state to be displayed in the U.S. Capitol.

Since 1925 Alabama has been represented by the statues of military leader and former House Member, “Fighting” Joe Wheeler and educator and former House Member Jabez Curry. While Mr. Curry is credited with making significant advances in public education in Alabama, he is no longer a famous name whose statue is sought out by tourists to the Capitol.

Miss Keller’s statue will replace that of Mr. Curry.

General Wheeler’s statue will remain in the Capitol as part of Alabama’s contribution to the

collection. Of note, General Wheeler is also honored near the Capitol at Arlington National Cemetery where he has one of the most prominent tombstones in the cemetery, located on the hill just below Robert E. Lee's former home.

Governor Riley began his remarks at the Helen Keller statue dedication ceremony by reciting five letters, "W-A-T-E-R". These letters were signed into the hand of a seven-year-old deaf and blind girl by her teacher Anne Sullivan. At the time the two were standing at the water pump of Helen's home in Tuscumbia, Alabama and it was at that moment when Helen began to associate language with objects around her.

Helen in her later writings said, "Once I knew only darkness and stillness... my life was without past or future... but a little word from the fingers of another fell into my hand that clutched at emptiness, and my heart leaped to the rapture of living."

Fittingly, this is the scene that is memorialized in the new statue that has become part of the exclusive and treasured statuary collection in the Capitol. Many will relate to the scene from the dramatic depiction in the 1962 motion picture, "The Miracle Worker".

Helen Keller went on to become the first person with her disabilities to graduate from college. She became a noted author, activist and advocate for people with disabilities.

In 1964 she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Lyndon Baines Johnson. In 2003, the state of Alabama and the U.S. Mint honored Miss Keller by placing her image on the state's quarter.

Of significance, Helen Keller's statue is the first in the Statuary Hall Collection that depicts a child, and it is the first depiction of a person with a disability. Also of note, Miss Keller becomes the ninth woman to be honored among the 100 statues in the collection.

This new symbol of Alabama should prove to be one of the most popular and most visited statues in the Capitol. Much as Helen Keller inspired a generation, this memorial should serve to inspire generations to come. We should all be proud that this Alabamian who overcame so much, and accomplished so much, is now representing our state in the Nation's Capitol.

You can view the Helen Keller statue at this internet link:

<http://www.aoc.gov/cc/art/nsh/keller.cfm>

Or, I invite you to visit Washington, D.C. and view the statue in person. The statue is expected to be permanently located in the new Capitol Visitor's Center where it will be easily accessible

to the millions of people who visit the Capitol complex annually.

If you have not toured the Capitol lately, you should plan a return trip to see the Capitol Visitor's Center, which opened December 2, 2008, as well as the Helen Keller statue.

Errical Bryant, my director of constituent services, will be happy to arrange a tour of the Capitol for you. You can reach Errical at (202) 225-4931 or via email at errical.bryant@mail.house.gov
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My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.