To begin your tour you will need to find the Capitol's cornerstone located at the northeast corner of the building. If you are starting from the Capitol's west entrance turn right and follow the sidewalk past the statue of Jimmy Carter and around the north entrance. The cornerstone is facing north and is marked with a carving of the Georgia Coat of Arms.

The Capitol Cornerstone
By 1885, this building had been under construction for almost a year. It was decided that the time had come to lay the cornerstone. Traditionally, a cornerstone is the first stone placed while constructing a building. Every stone laid after will be placed according to that first stone.

In this case the official cornerstone was not the first stone laid, but it symbolized the official beginning of construction and was marked with a ceremony on September 2, 1885. The ceremony featured hymns, speeches that recognized the importance of this building in the New South, and a Freemason ritual dedication involving water and oil being poured over the stone.

This cornerstone is hollow and holds a time capsule filled with government documents, a bible, and various other mementos from 1885. By examining the cornerstone, which is made of marble, you can see the difference between it and the oolithic limestone, which was used for the rest of the building.

To find our next stop walk back from where you came and stop in front of the building’s north entrance.

North Facade
This is a great place to examine the architecture of the Georgia Capitol. From this point you can clearly see some of its most distinctive features. Notice how the stone is treated to distinguish the different interior floors in the building: from the rough-hewn first floor to the smooth top floor. Some of the columns are actual columns, but many are simply carved into the stone. When this building was completed in 1889 it was called a “Temple of Democracy” which referred to its use of designs from ancient Greece and Rome.

From this point you can look around and see how the construction of government buildings has changed since the building of the Capitol. Directly across the street is the Agriculture Building completed in the 1950s. Its front is covered in Georgia marble and features elaborate stone carving, while the rest of the building is simple brick. Located northwest of the Capitol is the Sloppy Floyd Building completed in 1980. It is a 20 story office building housing many state agencies. While the Georgia Capitol's architecture tries to inspire us to remember the roots of our democracy, the other buildings provide a place for state government to provide services.

Our next stop is the equestrian statue of John Brown Gordon located on the Capitol Grounds northwest corner.

Gordon Statue/Gold Dome/Miss Freedom
When the Capitol was opened on July 4th, 1889, then Georgia governor John Brown Gordon welcomed the General Assembly and the public into the building. Gordon made his name as a young officer during the Civil War. He used his war fame to garner great political power in Georgia. When he passed away in 1904 a committee was formed to create a fitting memorial for him on the Capitol grounds. This statue, unveiled in 1907, captures both his stature as a Georgia statesman and his fame during the Civil War. Notice how he is portrayed as an older man in his Confederate uniform, even though it had been almost half a century since the end of the war. Even on the grounds of the Capitol of the New South, the Old South was not soon forgotten.

If you look beyond Gordon you will get a great view of the Capitol dome. It was not until 1959 that the dome was gilded. Prior to that, the dome was painted to resemble the limestone on the rest of the building. The 85 ounces of gold for the first gilding was donated by the citizens of Dahlonega, Georgia to commemorate their town as the location of the first gold rush in U.S. History in 1828.

Above the gold dome is a small gold dome that is called a cupola. Above the cupola stands Miss Freedom. Many might mistake her for a model of the Statue of Liberty, but, as you can tell from the model donated by the Boy Scouts of America located in front of you, they are very different sculptures. Miss Freedom is 22 feet tall and her torch reminds us of those who have lost their lives defending freedom.

For our next stop go back towards the street and walk south along Washington Street turning towards the west entrance of the Capitol. As you walk notice Central Presbyterian to your right. This church is older than the Capitol and reminds us that when the Capitol was built the surrounding streets were largely residential. Please stop once you reach the statue of Thomas Watson.

Watson Statue, Capitol Pediment
This statue of Thomas Watson was unveiled in 1932. Watson, a leader of the populist movement in Georgia, became a model for many Georgia politicians on how to exploit the county-unit system and white only primary to win elections. No one mastered this strategy better than Gov. Eugene Talmadge. It was fitting that this statue was unveiled less than a month after Talmadge was elected to his first term as Governor.
In the original design the Capitol’s pediments, the triangle sections above the columns were to have elaborate carvings and crowning statues. As the building funds began to dwindle it was decided that the only pediment to be embellished was the one atop the west entrance. It features the Georgia Coat of Arms and four allegorical figures representing commerce, industry, justice, and prosperity. Can you guess which symbols represent which idea? You may also notice the spikes and netting around this section of the Capitol that looks like a porch or portico. Those devices are there to keep birds from damaging the surfaces.

Our last stop is just to the left at the statue of President Jimmy Carter. Feel free to take a seat while you enjoy this statue.

Carter Statue, Governor’s Office
If you take a look at the Capitol from this plaza you can see right into the original location of the Governor’s office. It is the office at the very front of the building. It was moved in the 1950s to a larger space in the interior of the second floor, but for sixty years Georgia’s top executive officer could be easily seen. In one case a Governor tried to leave office unseen by climbing out of one of these windows.

Jimmy Carter, from Plains, Georgia, served as Governor of Georgia from 1971 to 1975. During his inauguration, which took on the Capitol’s steps, he spoke these words, “I say to you quite frankly the time for racial discrimination is over...” this statement offered the hope that state government in Georgia would, for the first time, actively seek to end discrimination. His speech gained national attention and may have been his first steps towards reaching the oval office.

This statue was placed on the grounds in 1994 and portrays Carter much as he portrayed himself during his political campaigns: a simple man ready to roll up his sleeves and get to work (or maybe go fishing with you take a look at his belt buckle).

Other Statues of Interest
Before you leave, take a look around the whole building. There are many more statues to discover, including statues of Joseph E. Brown, Richard Russell, Ellis Arnall, Eugene Talmadge, Herman Talmadge (across Washington Street in Talmadge Plaza) & and many other memorials (Liberty Bell, DOGNY, etc.).

One of the most unique and moving is titled “Expelled Because of Color” and is located close to where we started this tour at the Capitol’s cornerstone. It commemorates the first African Americans elected to Georgia’s General Assembly in 1868 and then illegally removed a few weeks into their terms. The statue captures the struggles of African Americans from slave ship to emancipation to the civil rights struggles of the 1960s.

Once you are finished at the Capitol take a walk across the street to the Sloppy Floyd Building (Twin Towers) to see Georgia’s memorials to World War I, World War II, and the Korea, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf wars.