Mt. Rushmore started in 1923 as an idea in the mind of Doane Robinson, the founder of the South Dakota Historical Society in 1901.

His idea was to have a sculptor carve a gigantic monument in the area of the Needles in the Black Hills. He thought that the subject of this monument could be Lewis and Clark, Red Cloud, John C. Fremont, or other great heroes of the American west. This would bring thousands of tourists to South Dakota and would help the econmy of their state.

Soon United States Senator Peter Norbeck supported the idea and wrote to Gutzon Borglum and invited him to come to the Black Hills to find a site to carv a monument.

Gutzon and his 12 year old son traveled by horse through the spectacular granite "Needles" but found that the rough and weathered Needles would not be good for carving.

A year later they again traveled to South Dakota. They found a massive peak known as Mt. Rushmore. Gutzon felt that this was the site for his giantic sculpture. Gutzon Borglum said, "I want, somewhere in America on or near the Rockies, the backbone of the Continent, so far removed from succeeding, selfish, coveting civilizations, a few feet of stone that bears witness, carries the likenesses, the dates, a word or two of the great things we accomplished as a Nation, placed so high it won't pay to pull down for lesser purposes. Hence, let us place there, carved high, as close to heaven as we can, the words of our leaders, their faces, to show posterity what manner of men they were. Then breathe a prayer that these records will endure until the wind and the rain alone shall wear them away.”

The site was very isolated and Senator Norbeck was disappointed in the choice. Robinson said that if Gutzon could carve it, then he could find a way to get the visitors to the site.

The elevation of Mt. Rushmore is 5,725 feet. Each figure is approximately sixty feet in height, and the entire monument can be seen from roghly a distance of sixty miles. The total cost of the project was just under 1 million dollars.

Amazingly, there were no deaths and only a couple of injuries during the entire period of carving at Mt. Rushmore. This is a remarkable safety record considering the workers regularly used dinamite and heavy equipment.