

Visitor Information

Present-day Capitol Square changes with the seasons, the General Assembly Sessions, and the bustle of Richmond's vigorous downtown.

Beginning in January of each year, the Square pulses with activity as legislators from all parts of Virginia convene to conduct the business of the people.

Throughout the year, visitors enjoy the magnificent grounds, walkways, monuments and magic of the historic Square. School children and tourists from around the globe use the Square as a starting point to visit downtown and statewide historical attractions.

Operating Hours

The Capitol building is open to visitors Monday through Saturday 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Sundays from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Capitol Square is open to the public from 6:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m. daily.

Tours

Free one-hour guided tours begin Monday through Saturday no later than 10:00 a.m. for walk-in visitors (9:00 a.m. for groups by appointment), with the last tour starting at 4:00 p.m. On Sunday, guided tours are available beginning at 1:00 p.m., with the last tour starting at 4:00 p.m. In addition, self-guided tours are available during operating hours each day.* Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

Individuals and small groups are invited to tour the Capitol on their own or with a tour guide. Guided tours for groups of 10 or more may be arranged by calling Capitol Guides at (804) 698-1788.

Virtual Tours of the Capitol and Grounds are available at virginiacapitol.gov/virtualtours. The Capitol's introductory film "Keepers of the Flame" is available for viewing on site and on demand at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RtdAxko74>

Entrance

Visitors enter the Capitol at the Main Entrance at 10th and Bank Streets.

Bell Tower

The Bell Tower at the southwest corner of the Square, formerly the headquarters for the Virginia Public Guard, houses the Virginia Travel Information Center. Brochures and maps to travel destinations and attractions around the Commonwealth are available here.

Monday - Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.* (804) 545-5584

Capitol Gift Shop

Located in the Capitol Extension, near the Main Entrance.

Monday - Saturday, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.; Sunday, 1:00 - 5:00 p.m. (804) 698-7661

Meriwether's Cafe

Located in the Capitol Extension, serving breakfast, lunch, and snacks.

Monday - Friday, 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.* (804) 698-7692

Executive Mansion

Home of Virginia's Governor and First Family since 1813, the Executive Mansion is the oldest governor's residence still used for its original purpose. Guided tours are available on a limited basis and vary according to the season. Call (804) 371-8687 for more information or to schedule a group tour.

*Times subject to change



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1831 engraving of Capitol: Valentine Richmond History Center
Photos & Illustration of Capitol and Interiors: Dick Kirkland, House of Delegates Clerk's Office
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The Virginia State Capitol



"Whenever the people are well informed, they can be trusted with their own government."

Thomas Jefferson

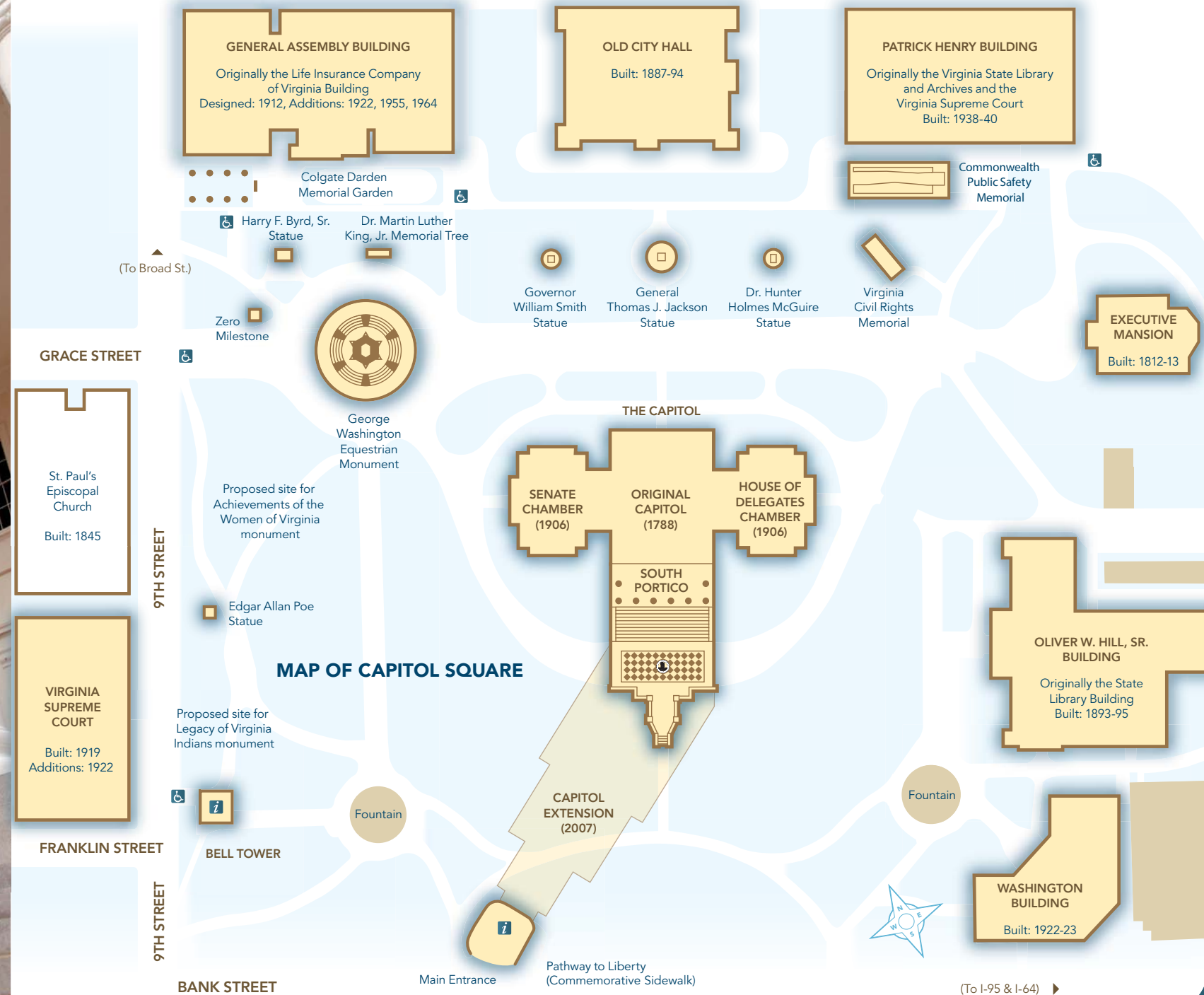
It All Began in Virginia

Americans are not ruled by monarchies and dynasties, nor owe allegiance to a self-appointed few. We are governed by ourselves. We are a representative democracy, which entitles us to liberty, equality, free speech, a free press, protection of private property, privacy, and other inalienable rights. American self-government began in Virginia, and it continues to thrive at the Capitol today.

The Virginia General Assembly convenes here annually on the second Wednesday in January for 60 calendar days in even-numbered years; 45 days in odd-numbered years. Citizen legislators represent the interests of over eight million Virginians.

Forty State Senators are elected for four-year terms. The Lieutenant Governor is the President and presiding officer of the Senate. The Senate elects a senior member as President pro tempore and the Clerk, who serves at the pleasure of the Senate. The House of Delegates has 100 members, who are elected every two years. The Speaker of the House is elected from and by the membership, and the Clerk is elected by the membership, each for a two-year term.

This Capitol is a living landmark to American political ideals and a civics classroom for future citizens of the Commonwealth and the Nation.



The Virginia State Capitol

1000 Bank Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
www.virginiacapitol.gov
(804) 698-1788

"This building is, beyond comparison, the finest, the most noble, and the greatest in all America."

A Visitor to the Capitol from France, 1796

A revolution started here over 200 years ago that ensured our freedom of speech, assembly, rights to privacy, equality and self-government. Thomas Jefferson designed an architectural masterpiece symbolizing this noble experiment.

See the Capitol grounds and the building's historic interiors develop through time at virginiacapitol.gov/virtualtours.



A Noble Experiment

A Home for Virginia's General Assembly

The first session of the Virginia legislature took place in Jamestown in 1619, a year before the first Pilgrim arrived in Plymouth, Massachusetts. The legislature met in churches, homes, a college, taverns and statehouses in Jamestown and Williamsburg for 160 years.

In 1780 the capital was moved to Richmond. The Assembly met in two frame warehouses at 14th and Cary Streets in Shockoe Bottom and appropriated funds to build a permanent home for the new seat of government. The Assembly began meeting in the new Capitol in 1788.

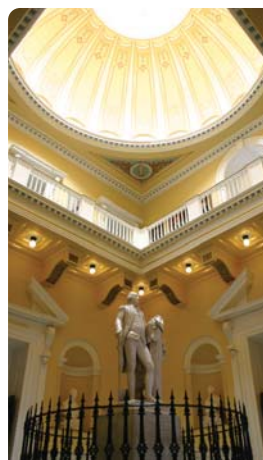
Jefferson's Architectural Vision

It was 1785, two months into his tenure as Ambassador to France, when Thomas Jefferson agreed to design Virginia's Capitol — from afar. Inspired by the Maison Carrée in Nîmes, France, and based on classical Roman temple design, Mr. Jefferson's Capitol, atop Shockoe Hill, is made of brick and covered with stucco. The Ionic columns on the South Portico contain the original pine tree center posts. The cornerstone was laid in 1785 when Patrick Henry was the Commonwealth's seventh governor. (Henry also served as Virginia's first non-Colonial governor in 1776.) In 2013, Virginia's Capitol was featured in a nationwide TV documentary that noted an esteemed panel of historians and architects had chosen it as one of "10 Buildings that Changed America."



The Rotunda

In the center of the Capitol stands the two-story Rotunda, featuring likenesses of the eight Virginia-born presidents. A dramatic interior dome and skylight illuminate Jean-Antoine Houdon's marble statue of George Washington. In 1785, Houdon visited the General at Mount Vernon, took detailed body measurements, and made sketches. He coated Washington's face with oil and covered it in plaster to make a life mask. The completed life-sized statue stands 6'2" and is considered a perfect likeness.



Originally a courtroom, the **Old Senate Chamber** displays "The Arrival of the First Permanent English Settlers Off Jamestown Island, May 13, 1607" by Griffith Baily Coale, and "Storming of a British Redoubt at Yorktown by American Troops" by Eugene Louis Lami.



In the **Old Hall of the House of Delegates**, the Bill of Rights was ratified into the U. S. Constitution. Aaron Burr was tried for and acquitted of treason, and Robert E. Lee assumed command of the Virginia forces.



The **Jefferson Room** contains a large full-length portrait of Thomas Jefferson by George Catlin, the original plaster model of the Capitol, commissioned by Jefferson and built by Jean-Pierre Fouquet, and an 18th-century clock given to the Commonwealth by Lady Astor.



Notable Visitors to Capitol Square

Included among the hundreds of thousands of visitors to Capitol Square are many historical figures and notable personalities.

Three days after his famous "Iron Curtain" speech, **Winston Churchill** joined **General Dwight D. Eisenhower** for a speech to a joint session of the General Assembly in 1946.

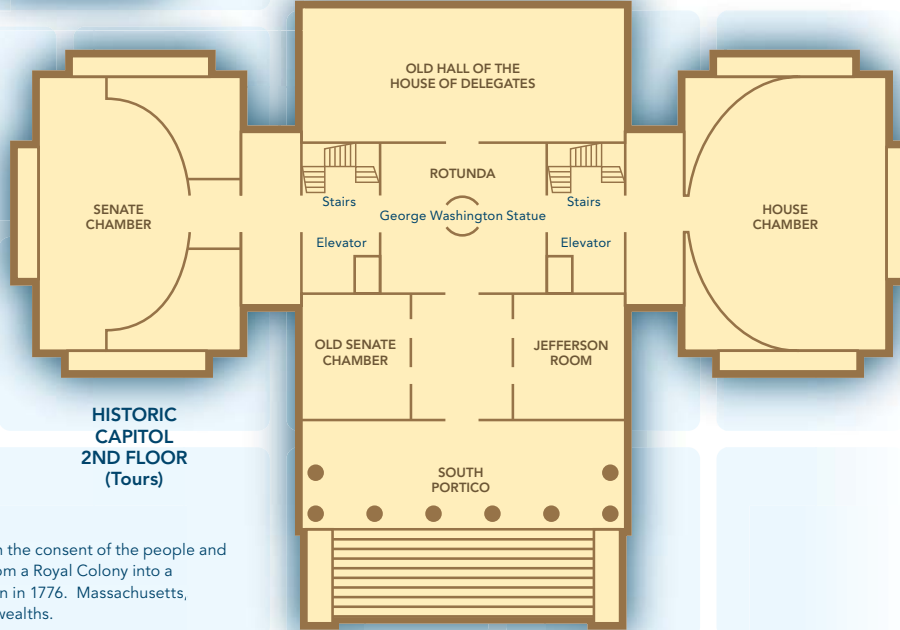
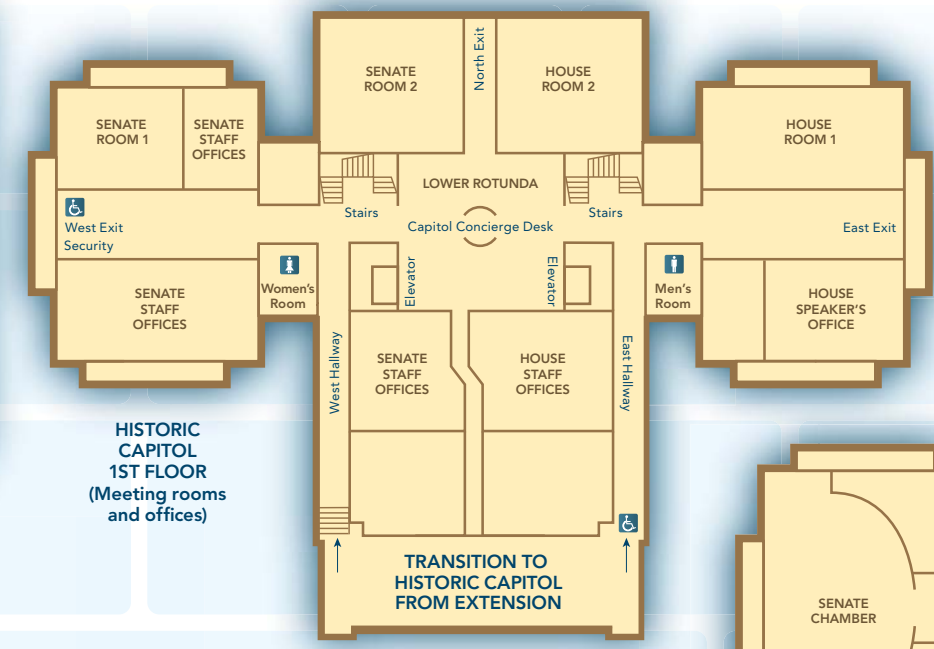
Andrew Jackson, **Winfield Scott**, **Meriwether Lewis** and **Washington Irving** were spectators and reporters at the treason trial of **Aaron Burr** in 1807. Chief Justice **John Marshall** presided.

The **Marquis de Lafayette**, a Revolutionary War hero, was made a full citizen of Virginia by an Act of Assembly. A bust of the Frenchman, sculpted by Houdon, is displayed in the Rotunda. Lafayette visited the Capitol in 1824.

Presidents **George Washington**, **Zachary Taylor**, **Millard Fillmore**, **James K. Polk**, **Abraham Lincoln**, **Theodore Roosevelt**, **William Taft** and **Gerald Ford** all came calling during their terms of office.

Thomas Jefferson, **James Madison**, **James Monroe**, **William Henry Harrison**, **John Tyler**, **Woodrow Wilson**, **Dwight Eisenhower** and **Bill Clinton** visited the Capitol either before or after their presidencies.

Other notable visitors include **Charles Dickens**, **Charles Lindbergh**, **Lady Astor**, **Henry James**, **Frederick Law Olmsted**, **Daniel Webster**, **Daniel Boone**, **Jefferson Davis**, **John James Audubon**, **Muhammad Ali**, **Margaret Thatcher**, **Vice President Al Gore** and **Queen Elizabeth II**.



FLOOR PLANS OF THE CAPITOL

The Last Days of the Civil War

On April 3, 1865, President **Abraham Lincoln** was outside of Richmond when the Confederate government fled and Union forces occupied the city. Landing on the banks of the James without ceremony on April 4, he was instantly recognized by local African-Americans who surrounded him and bowed. "Kneel to God only," he told them, "and thank Him for the liberty you will hereafter enjoy."



The Burning of Richmond

When the South fell in 1865 and the capital city of the Confederacy was in flames, citizens fleeing the fires along the James River assembled in Capitol Square as a place of refuge. The Capitol and Executive Mansion escaped destruction. President **Abraham Lincoln** and his son, **Tad**, visited the day after the fall of Richmond. Lincoln would be assassinated 10 days later.

Virginia Civil Rights Memorial

The Virginia Civil Rights Memorial commemorates events beginning in 1951, when 16 year old **Barbara Johns** led a student walk-out to protest the deplorable conditions in her segregated high school. Bronze figures depict the student walk-out, legal and religious leaders who supported the students' cause, and a group of individuals of all races walking confidently into the future.



What is a "Commonwealth"?

A "commonwealth" is a government based on the consent of the people and guided by the rule of law. Virginia evolved from a Royal Colony into a commonwealth with a new written constitution in 1776. Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Kentucky also are commonwealths.

Creating Constitutions

The Capitol is an historic meeting place for amending and creating new constitutions expressing our most fundamental laws. In 1791 the proposed Bill of Rights to the U.S. Constitution became law of the land when the Virginia Assembly cast the deciding votes in their favor. In 1829 the "Convention of Giants" (including **Madison**, **Monroe** and **Marshall**) met here and created a new Constitution for Virginia. Five of Virginia's six constitutions have been created in this building, as recently as 1970.

The Seal of Virginia

In the Summer of 1776, a committee of four — **George Wythe**, **George Mason**, **Richard Henry Lee** and **Robert Carter Nicholas** — drew from classical Roman ideals to design a seal for the newly formed Commonwealth of Virginia.



Emphasizing their independence from Britain, the committee selected the Roman goddess **Virtus**, representing freedom, valor and heroism, and the Latin phrase, "Sic Semper Tyrannis" — *Thus Always to Tyrants* — for the Seal of Virginia. This phrase became the state motto.

Thomas Jefferson, Architect of Liberty

Standing larger-than-life inside the plaza of the Capitol Extension, the bronze statue of **Thomas Jefferson** serves as a focal point and a welcome to visitors as they prepare to enter the historic Capitol building he designed. Completed and dedicated in 2012, the privately funded statue depicts Jefferson at the age of 42. He holds in his hands one of his architectural drawings for the building that would become the Virginia State Capitol.



Architectural Inspiration

The Virginia State Capitol introduced the Classical Revival temple style to the modern world. The first statehouse designed in the new Republic, it has inspired countless public buildings for over 200 years. The Capitol was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1960.

Virginia Indian Tribes

Even before European settlement, Virginia Indians have governed themselves through tribal councils, a form of representative government older than the General Assembly. Today, the Commonwealth of Virginia officially recognizes 11 Indian tribes: the **Cheroenhaka**, **Chickahominy**, **Chickahominy -- Eastern Division**, **Monacan**, **Nansemond**, **Nottoway**, **Pamunkey**, **Mattaponi**, **Upper Mattaponi**, **Patawomeck**, and **Rappahannock**.



Governor L. Douglas Wilder

The inauguration of the nation's first elected African-American governor was held here in 1990. **L. Douglas Wilder**, a grandson of slaves, was sworn in as Virginia's 68th Governor.



A Name Fit for A Queen

Sir Walter Raleigh may have suggested the name for Virginia around 1584 after the powerful **Queen Elizabeth I** of England. Also known as the **Virgin Queen**, she was an advocate for religious tolerance, literature, theater and music.



The **Capitol Restoration and Expansion Project** is completed at a cost of \$104.5 million. Historic Capitol interiors are restored to their appearance when the wings were added in 1906. An underground extension provides 27,000-sq.-ft. of additional space while preserving the exterior beauty of Mr. Jefferson's Capitol.

The Capitol cornerstone is laid; **Patrick Henry** is governor. Three years later the General Assembly begins meeting in the unfinished building, which is finally completed in 1798.

Becoming a Square. French immigrant **Maximilian Godefroy** designs a landscaped park around the Capitol. Two years later the cast iron fence is added, creating the 12-acre Capitol Square. The original fence remains in place today.

Homage to The Revolution. A dedication ceremony is held for the **George Washington Equestrian Monument** on the northwest corner of Capitol Square. Joining the General will be statues of **Andrew Lewis**, representing Colonial Times; **Patrick Henry** for The Revolution; **George Mason** for the Bill of Rights; **Thomas Jefferson**, Independence; **Thomas Nelson**, Finance; and **John Marshall**, Justice. The monument is completed in 1869.

Notman Landscape Plan. Sculpting the Square are the meandering walkways, native trees and shrubs designed by Scottish immigrant, master architect and landscaper, **John Notman**. Its Picturesque design predates Central Park by almost a decade.

The Confederate Congress. The building serves as the Capitol of the Confederacy and as the State Capitol of Virginia during the Civil War. **Robert E. Lee** takes command of the Virginia State forces here in 1861, and **Jefferson Davis** is inaugurated as Confederate President on the Square in 1862. Ex-president **John Tyler** and General **Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson** lie in state here during the war.

The Capitol Disaster. Sixty-two are killed and another 251 injured when the third floor court room, overcrowded with citizens wishing to hear the verdict in a contested election case, collapses into the empty House of Delegates chamber below.

Hyphens joining the wings to the historic Capitol are enlarged to create more work space for legislators.



The **Executive Mansion** is completed. It remains the nation's oldest Governor's residence in use and is a National Historic Landmark.

The **Bell Tower** is completed to house the public guard, predecessor of today's Division of Capitol Police.

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The **East and West Wings**, designed by **John Kevan Peebles** to house new chambers for the House of Delegates and Senate, are completed at a cost of \$250,000.

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