Visitor Information

Capitol Square is a public park that changes with the seasons, the General Assembly Sessions, and the bustle of Richmond's dynamic 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 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Mon-Sat 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 9:00 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.*
The Capitol is 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**.

The Capitol's introductory film *Keepers of the Flame* is available for viewing on demand at https://virginiacapitol.gov/kotf

Entrance

Visitors may enter the Capitol at the entrance plaza, located on the north side of Bank Street opposite 10th Street.

The Capitol entrance address is 1000 Bank Street Richmond, VA 23219.

Food Service

The Capitol offers a cold beverages and foods at a vending machine. A gift shop is in the same area. A full-service cafeteria is located on the 1st floor of the General Assembly Building nearby. Visitors entering from street level will need to pass through this building's security in order to visit the cafeteria.

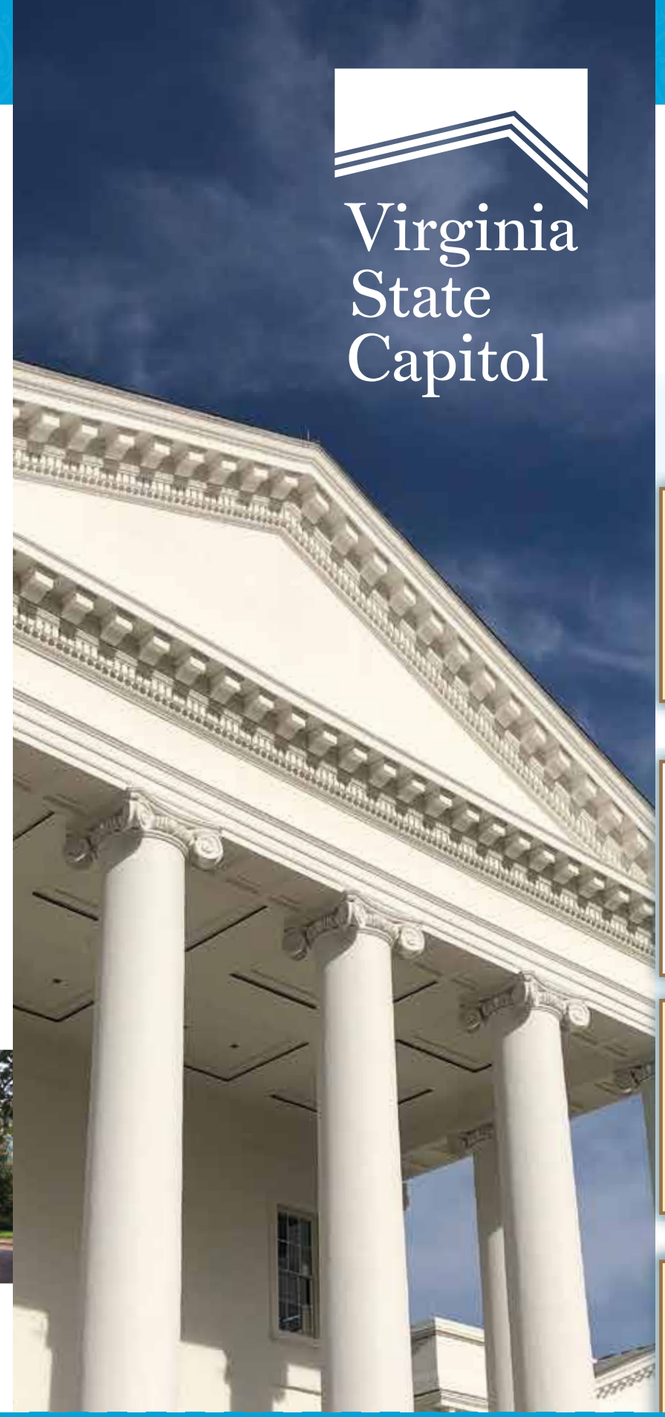
Executive Mansion

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

Photography, Design, & Illustrations of Capitol and Interiors:
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Virginia State Capitol

rev. January 2026

The Virginia State Capitol
1000 Bank Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
vga.virginia.gov/visit
Tour Information: (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

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

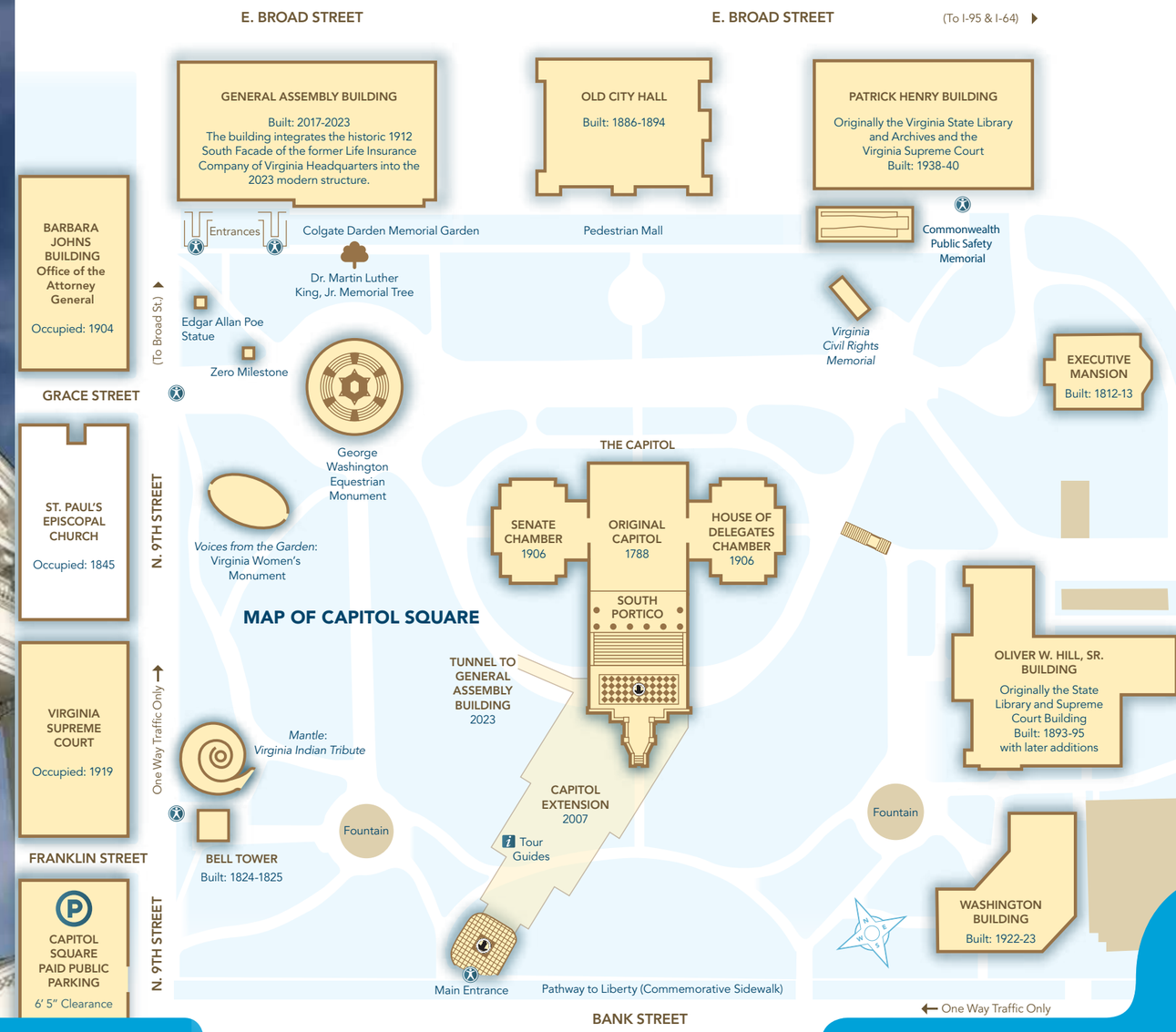
"Whenever the people are well informed, they can be trusted with their own government."
Thomas Jefferson

It All Began in Virginia

American self-government began in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619, 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 8.7 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.



For more information about Capitol Square over time please visit vga.virginia.gov/visit/capitol-square

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 General Assembly met in two frame warehouses at 14th and Cary Streets and appropriated funds to build a permanent home for the new seat of government. Lawmakers began meeting in the new Capitol in 1788.

Jefferson's Architectural Vision

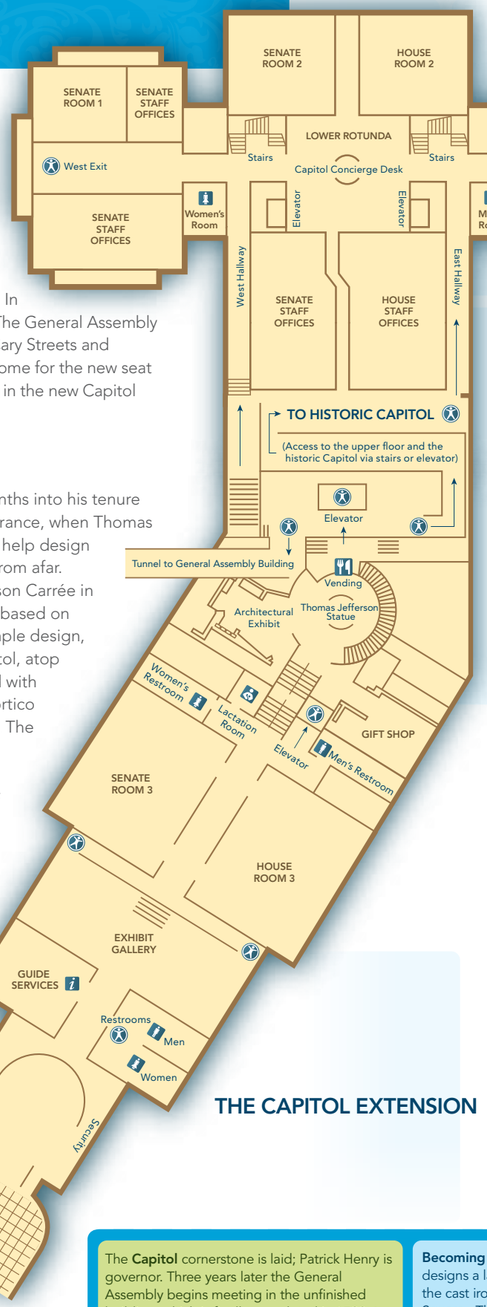


It was 1785, two months into his tenure as Ambassador to France, when Thomas Jefferson agreed to help design Virginia's Capitol—from afar. Inspired by the Maison Carrée in Nimes, France, and based on classical Roman temple design, Mr. Jefferson's Capitol, atop Shockoe Hill, is made of brick and covered 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 governor. The completed building became a centerpiece for the city and state. 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".



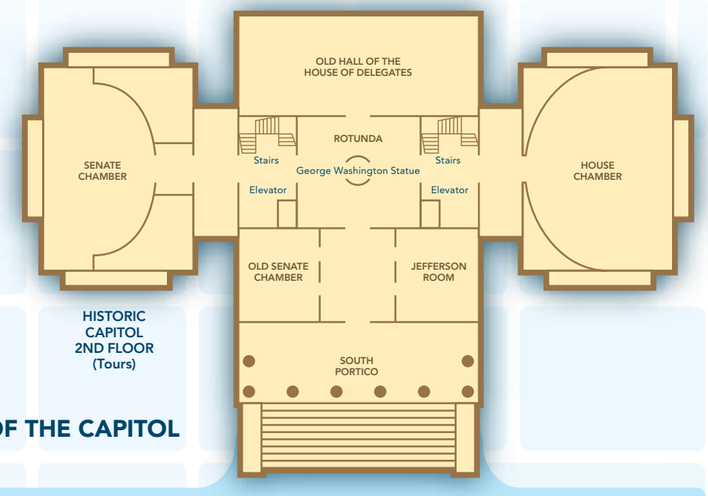
The Rotunda

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 of Washington at the age of 53.



CAPITOL BUILDING PUBLIC ENTRANCE
1000 Bank St. at 10th St.

HISTORIC CAPITOL 1ST FLOOR (Meeting rooms and offices)



HISTORIC CAPITOL 2ND FLOOR (Tours)

FLOOR PLANS OF THE CAPITOL

THE CAPITOL EXTENSION

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 Common-wealth by Lady Astor.



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.



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 constitutions have been created in this building, as recently as 1970.

Women of Virginia

The Virginia Women's Monument, *Voices from the Garden*, is the nations first of its kind on the grounds of any state Capitol.
The monument's 11 life-size bronze statues and Wall of Honor, inscribed with over 200 names of notable women, stands as an enduring tribute to all of Virginia's women, both renowned and unrecognized, who have shaped over 400 years of our culture, our country, and our great Commonwealth.



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. Visit "*Mantle: Virginia Indian Tribute*" next to the Bell Tower in Capitol Square.



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.

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.

Who Built the Capitol?

The Capitol was built between 1785 and 1798 by a diverse and changing mix of tradesmen and laborers. Incomplete records identify payments made to local and itinerant White workers, slave holders, enslaved workers, and free Blacks possessing a variety of construction skills. Research is ongoing.

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 in Missouri, **Winston Churchill** joined **General Dwight D. Eisenhower** for a speech to a joint session of the Virginia 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**, **Franklin D. Roosevelt**, **Dwight Eisenhower**, **Richard Nixon**, **George H. W. Bush**, **Bill Clinton**, **George W. Bush**, **and Barack Obama** 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**, **Susan B. Anthony**, **and Queen Elizabeth II**.

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.

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 66th 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.

Capitol Timeline

1785 — 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. Its design precedes the U.S. Capitol by a decade.

1813 — The **Executive Mansion** is completed. It remains the nation's oldest Governor's residence in use and is a National Historic Landmark.

1816 — **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, designed by Paul Alexis Sabbaton and installed in 1818, remains in place today.

1825 — **The Bell Tower** is completed to house the public guard, predecessor of today's Capitol Police.

1850 — **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.

1858 — **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 in New York City by almost a decade.

1861 - 1865 — **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.

1870 — **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.

1906 — 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.

1964 — **Hyphens** joining the wings to the historic Capitol are enlarged to create more work space for legislators.

2007 — 

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.