The Virginia State Capitol

Capitol Square is a public park that changes with the seasons, the General Assembly Sessions, and the hustle 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.*

*Times subject to change

Guided tours are still used for its original purpose.  Guided tours are offered for groups and children.  Citizen legislators represent the interests of over 8.7 million Virginians.

For more information about Capitol Square over time please visit https://virginiacapitol.gov/capitol-square

“The building is, beyond comparison, the finest, the most noble, and the greatest in all America.”
—Thomson Jefferson

Visitor Information
1000 Bank Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
www.virginiacapitol.gov
Tour Information (804) 698-1788
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, Virginia’s Capitol, atop Shockoe Hill, is made of brick and coated with stucco. The Ionic columns on the South Portico contain the original pine tree centerpieces. The cornerstone was laid in 1785 when Patrick Henry was governor. The completed building became central to the city and state. In 1923, Virginia’s Capitol was featured in a nationwide TV documentary that introduced an esteemed panel of historians and architects who had chosen it as one of ten Buildings that Changed America.

The Capitol was completed to house the newly elected Governor’s residence in use and a plaster to make a file mark. The completed life-sized statue stands 62" and is considered a perfect likeness of Washington at the age of 53.

**The Capitol**: Its architectural style is Federalist, a style that was popular in the United States in the early 19th century and is characterized by symmetrical proportions, classical elements, and a preference for simple, elegant designs. The Capitol is constructed of brick and surrounded by a cast iron fence. It contains a large full-length portrait of Thomas Jefferson, which was commissioned by the Marquis de Lafayette in 1804. The portrait is one of the most well-known and cherished pieces of American art.

**The Baking of Richmond**: When the South fell in 1865 and the capital city of the Confederacy was in flames, citizens bakers took the bread from the jaws and assembled in Capitol Square as a sign of protest. The Capitol and Executive Mansion were occupied—President Abraham Lincoln passed through, on April 7, 1865. He arrived in Richmond the following day. Lincoln was assassinated on April 14, 1865.

**Women of Virginia**: The Women’s Monument, located to the Garden and a nature of the city, is a tribute to the suffrage movement. A large bronze statue of the suffragist movement is part of the monument. The statue is approximately 50 feet tall and includes images of women from different eras and backgrounds.

**Civil Rights Movement**: The Virginia Civil Rights Memorial commemorates events beginning in 1956, when 16 year old Beverly A. was just one of the thousands of African American students who demanded the right to attend the integrated public high schools. African American students were arrested, beaten, and even murdered for exercising their legal rights to attend the integrated schools. Today, the Virginia Civil Rights Memorial includes the names of over 200 African American students who were arrested, beaten, and murdered for attending integrated schools.

**Constitutional Creation**: The Constitution of the United States is the supreme law of the land and serves as the foundation for the country’s political and legal systems. It was written by a group of delegates who met in Philadelphia in 1787, chosen by state legislatures. The Constitution was ratified by 11 states and took effect in 1789. It outlines the fundamental principles and structural framework of the federal government, including the separation of powers between the three branches—legislative, executive, and judicial. The Constitution is amended by two-thirds of state legislatures or two-thirds of state conventions at the call of Congress, or a convention called by the state legislature on the request of the legislature of two-thirds of the states. Currently, there are 27 amendments to the Constitution.

**Virginia's Capitalist**: The Virginia State Capitol, located in Richmond, Virginia, is the state’s seat of government. It was designed by Thomas Jefferson for the General Assembly in 1786 and completed in 1792. The Capitol is a Neoclassical structure and is considered one of the most significant and influential buildings in American architecture.

**What is a "Commonwealth?"**: A "Commonwealth" is a government commissioning the content of the people and guided by the rule of law. Virginia evolved from a Royal Colony into a Commonwealth with a written constitution in 1776. The Bill of Rights, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Kentucky also are Commonwealths.

**Notables 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 the famous “Iron Curtain” speech in Warsaw, Winston Churchill joined General Dwight D. Eisenhower for a speech to a joint session of the Virginia General Assembly in 1946.

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

**Virginia Indian Tribes**: The Virginia Indian Tribes are a testament to the rich cultural diversity of the state. They include the Eastern Division, Monacan, Nansemond, Nottoway, Western Division, Monacan, Nansemond, Nottoway, Shenandoah, Mattaponi, Upper Mattaponi, Rappahannock, and the Skyline. The “Virginia Indian Tribes” not only yield the Capitol in Capitol Square.

**A Name Fit for a Queen**: Sir Walter Raleigh may have suggested the name for Virginia around 1584 after the queen of England. Also known as the Virgin Queen, she was Elizabeth I, who reigned as Queen of England from 1558 until her death in 1603. She was an advocate for religious tolerance, literature, and music.

**The Seal of Virginia**: In the Summer of 1776, a committee of four—George Wash, George Moun, Robert Carle, and H. S. M. W. M.—chose an official seal for the Commonwealth. The design features a heraldic eagle, which was adopted by the new state.

**A Noble Experiment**: In 1788, the Virginia General Assembly established a public school system, known as the “Noble Experiment,” which was designed to provide education to all children in the state.

**The Capital Restoration and Expansion Project**: The project is completed at a cost of $104.5 million. Historic restoration efforts are ongoing to ensure that the Capitol and its grounds reflect their original appearance as they were in 1921.