

# *Virginia State Capitol*

## *Visitor's Guide*



*House of Delegates  
Virginia General Assembly*



# *The Virginia State Capitol*

## *History*

In 1779, the Virginia legislature voted to move the capital from Williamsburg to Richmond. Until a permanent Capitol structure could be built, the Virginia General Assembly met in two wood-framed buildings at the corner of what is now 14th Street and Cary Street. These buildings were demolished before 1811, and a plaque now marks the site of these buildings. With the establishment of Richmond as the new capital, six squares of land were selected for the placement of permanent public buildings.

The Virginia State Capitol was designed by Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States. Thomas Jefferson modeled the Capitol after the Maison Carée, an ancient Roman temple in Nîmes, France, and secured the services of Charles-Louis Clérisseau, a well-known French authority of Classical buildings, as the Capitol's draftsman.

The Virginia General Assembly held its first Session in the Capitol in 1788. Jefferson's building is the middle structure of the present day Capitol complex. The Rotunda displays the life-size Houdon statue of George Washington and seven busts of the other Virginia-born presidents and the Marquis de Lafayette, the Frenchman who fought for America during the American Revolution. The Capitol building has witnessed two wars, a cholera outbreak, and the collapse of its third floor, known as the "Capitol Disaster." Despite all of this, the Capitol continues to represent a symbol of democracy.

In 2004, Virginia embarked on a comprehensive three-year plan to restore both the exterior and interior of the Capitol. Virginia's historic Capitol has been fully restored to its early 20th-century appearance. The working space of the Capitol has been increased by about one-third by means of an underground extension. This new working space features many visitors' amenities, including a gift shop, an exhibit gallery, and a café.

The Virginia Capitol restoration project has succeeded in its project vision of continuing the vitality of our nation's second oldest working Capitol by sustaining the integrity, viability, and dignity of the Capitol as a symbol of a prosperous and democratic Commonwealth.



*House of Delegates Chamber*



*Rotunda Dome*



*Virginia State Capitol*



*Houdon statue of George Washington*



*Senate Chamber*

## The Virginia State Capitol

### Rotunda

At the center of the Capitol is the Rotunda, a two-story space capped by a dome (30 feet in diameter) and illuminated by skylights. The builders constructed the dome beneath the pitch of the gable roof, which makes it invisible from the exterior of the building. The dome was added to the building in 1794. Jefferson made no reference to a dome in his first written description for this central space, and whether adding the dome was a later idea of Jefferson's or a modification made by Samuel Dobie, the actual builder of the Capitol, remains unknown. We do know Jefferson intended for a statue of Washington to be placed on this spot.



*View of Rotunda interior dome*



*Houdon statue of George Washington*

In 1784, the Virginia General Assembly commissioned a marble statue of George Washington and a marble bust of the Marquis de Lafayette, with the intent that the statuary would be placed in the new Capitol as symbols of public virtue from the Old and the New Worlds. These two statues were done from life by renowned French sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon. Lafayette was voted a citizen of Virginia by an "act of assembly" in 1785 for his valuable services on behalf of the Commonwealth during the American Revolution. Lafayette's bust was received from France in 1789 and Washington's statue was put into place in 1796.

In 1930, the Virginia General Assembly authorized the placing of seven marble busts in the Rotunda as a Virginia "Hall of Presidents." All seven busts were installed on various dates in 1931, using private funds. Virginia is known as the "Mother of Presidents" with eight of her sons (including Washington) serving in that office. The busts depict Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, Zachary Taylor, and Woodrow Wilson.



*Houdon bust of the Marquis de Lafayette*

## *The Virginia State Capitol*

### *Houdon Statue of George Washington*

A magnificent life-size marble statue of George Washington stands under the interior dome in the two-story Rotunda, located in the central portion of the Capitol. In June of 1784, the Virginia General Assembly commissioned this statue “of the finest marble and best workmanship” as a tribute to Virginia’s most respected citizen-soldier. Governor Benjamin Harrison wrote to Thomas Jefferson, who was serving on a diplomatic mission in Paris, and asked him to engage a sculptor. Jefferson secured the services of Jean-Antoine Houdon, a skilled French artist. In the fall of 1785, Houdon visited Mount Vernon to study General Washington. He made a plaster mask of Washington’s face, took detailed measurements of his body, and modeled a terracotta bust. The statue was sculpted in France from fine Carrara marble and shipped to America early in 1796. Placed in the Rotunda on May 14th of that same year, the statue has been on nearly continuous display ever since. It was viewed by many of Washington’s contemporaries, all of whom attested that it was a perfect likeness.

Houdon’s statue alludes to the similarities between Washington and the ancient Roman General Cincinnatus who, when Rome no longer needed him, gave up his military power and returned to the simple life of a farmer. The artist carefully balanced the military and civilian elements of Washington’s career: his sword is by his side and he rests his left hand on a fasces (a bundle of rods, which was a Roman symbol of power), but he carries a civilian walking cane and stands next to a plow. Washington wears his Revolutionary uniform, but his head is uncovered and his facial expression is fatherly. Houdon’s monument to America’s foremost hero recalls Washington’s life as a soldier, statesman, and virtuous private citizen.



*Houdon statue of George Washington*

## The Virginia State Capitol

### The Old Hall of the House of Delegates

The Old Hall of the House of Delegates is located off the Rotunda in the north end of the Capitol. At 76 feet in width, it has a dramatic coved ceiling, projecting cornices, and carved interior woodwork, which reflect the Capitol's Roman Classicism. Delegates assembled in rows of seats arranged around the Speaker's chair. As there was no other large meeting hall in the area, the room was also used for community events and church services in its early years. The Virginia House of Delegates met in the Old Hall from 1788 until 1904.



*The Old Hall of the House of Delegates*

The Old Hall has been the scene of many historic events. In December 1791, the House voted to ratify the proposed U.S. Bill of Rights. Later that month the Virginia Senate concurred, and the Bill of Rights was nationally adopted as the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution. In 1807, Aaron Burr was acquitted of treason in this room in a Federal Circuit Court trial presided over by John Marshall, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. The convention that drafted the Virginia Constitution of 1830 also met here, as did the Constitutional Conventions of 1850-1851, 1867-1868, and 1901-1902. The Virginia Secession Convention of 1861 met here during part of its first Session. The Old Hall was restored in 1929 and again during the 2004-2007 Capitol Restoration and Expansion Project to resemble its mid-nineteenth century appearance.



The Old Hall is filled with statuary and historical objects. Marble and bronze busts represent great Virginians, including George Mason, Richard Henry Lee, Patrick Henry, George Wythe, and Meriwether Lewis. Confederate Generals represented are Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, J.E.B. Stuart, Joseph E. Johnston, and Fitzhugh Lee. Other busts are of oceanographer Matthew Fontaine Maury; Cyrus McCormick, inventor of the grain reaper; John Marshall, fourth Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court; and Sam Houston, first President of the Republic of Texas. Niches on either side of the entrance contain marble busts of two non-Virginians: Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy and Alexander H. Stephens, Vice-President of the Confederacy. Most striking of all the statuary is the full-length bronze likeness of General Robert E. Lee, created by Rudolph Evans in 1931 (*left*). The statue was erected where Lee stood on April 23, 1861, when at the age of 54 he accepted command of the military forces of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

On display is a silver mace with 24-karat gold wash, made in England in 1938. It was presented to the Virginia House of Delegates in 1974 by the Jamestown Foundation. The mace symbolizes the authority of government. During the General Assembly Session, when the House of Delegates convenes, the mace is carried by the Sergeant at Arms to the current House Chamber and placed in a cradle in front of the Clerk's podium.

# The Virginia State Capitol

## The Old Senate Chamber



*The Old Senate Chamber*

The Old Senate Chamber originally served for more than 50 years as the General Court Room for the Commonwealth of Virginia. After serving as a courtroom for half a century, the Chamber was converted in the early 1840s for use by the Senate of Virginia, which previously met in a smaller room on the third floor. In late 1861, the room was remodeled as the “Hall of Congress” for the Confederate House of Representatives, which met here from 1862 until 1865. Former U.S. President John Tyler and Confederate General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson each lay in state here after their deaths. After the Civil War, the room was reclaimed by the Virginia Senate, which held its last Session in this room in 1904.

Virginia is the first of the 13 English-speaking colonies in North America. The original seat of colonial government was at Jamestown. *The Arrival of the First Permanent English Settlers off Jamestown Island, May 13, 1607*, painted by Griffith Baily Coale in 1949 (*right*), was authorized by the Virginia General Assembly with public funds to pay tribute to the 104 settlers who established the first successful English settlement in the New World. The Chamber’s west wall displays two portraits from Virginia’s Colonial period: Captain John Smith, a leader of the Jamestown Settlement; and Pocahontas. The Chamber’s south wall displays a portrait of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., philanthropist responsible for the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg.



*Painting by Griffith Baily Coale*



*Painting by Eugène-Louis Lami*

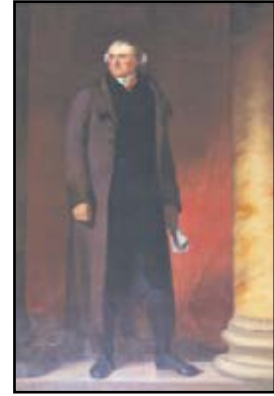
The *Storming of a British Redoubt by American Troops at Yorktown*, painted by the French artist Eugène-Louis Lami in 1840 (*left*), shows an American attack on a British redoubt at Yorktown in October 1781. That same month British General Cornwallis surrendered to General Washington and America won its national independence on the fields of Virginia. The painting was a gift to the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1878 from Virginia-born philanthropist William Corcoran.

The 174-year historical journey from Jamestown to Yorktown transformed Virginia from a colony into a Commonwealth. “Commonwealth” refers to a form of government which relies on the consent of its citizens rather than the power of an absolute monarch.

## The Virginia State Capitol

### The Jefferson Room

This room, which served as the Clerk of the House of Delegates' Office during the 20th century, contains a large full-length portrait of Thomas Jefferson painted by George Catlin (*right*), who copied an original portrait by Thomas Sully now on display at West Point.



*Painting by George Catlin*

Jefferson once wrote that “architecture is my delight.” After the Revolution, Virginians instinctively turned to Jefferson and asked him to design a new state Capitol, combining “economy with elegance and utility.”

Jefferson was responsible for recommending the Shockoe hilltop location, choosing the Classical temple form, and arranging the interior floor plans to accommodate the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Virginia’s new “Commonwealth” government.



*1786 plaster model of the Capitol by Fouquet*

Intending to leave no doubts about the exterior form of the great specimen of Classical architecture that would rise in Richmond, Jefferson adopted the costly European practice of commissioning a scale model of the proposed building and turned to the eminent model maker Jean-Pierre Fouquet (1752-1829). Jefferson justified the additional expense of the model by proclaiming it “absolutely necessary for the guide of workmen not very expert in their art.”

The plaster model for the Virginia Capitol shipped from France in December 1786 and arrived in Richmond in late February 1787. Jefferson intended to provide “models of the front and side in plaster of Paris” along with the drawings of his design prepared by Cl risseau. He described the maker of the model, Jean-Pierre Fouquet, as “an artist who had been employed by the ambassador of France to Constantinople, in making models of the most celebrated remains of ancient architecture in that country.” Fouquet was one of the most accomplished artisans working in the French architectural model making tradition of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The model for the Virginia Capitol is his earliest extant work. Fouquet’s model, constructed of plaster of Paris at a scale of 1:60, or one inch to every five feet, and reinforced with internal iron rods, displayed architectural details with precision.



# The Virginia State Capitol

## The House of Delegates and Senate Chambers

Between 1904 and 1906, architect John K. Peebles, a University of Virginia graduate, completed Jefferson's original architectural intent by adding front steps to the building. In addition, Peebles complemented the original Capitol with compatible classical wings for each house of the Virginia General Assembly, flanking the original temple form structure.



House of Delegates Chamber,  
Hillier Architecture

The House of Delegates (*left*), is composed of 100 Delegates who are elected every two years. The Speaker of the House is the presiding officer of the House of Delegates. The Speaker and the Clerk of the House are elected by the membership, each for a two-year term. Desks for the Delegates fill the room, surrounding the Speaker's and Clerk's podiums. On the wall behind the podiums is a bronze and marble tablet honoring Nathaniel Bacon. A marble bas-relief portrait of Lila Meade Valentine, a prominent educational reformer and suffragette, is displayed on the south wall. On the north wall is a marble tablet honoring the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom written by Thomas Jefferson.

The Senate (*right*), is composed of 40 Senators who are elected every four years. The Lieutenant Governor, a statewide elected official, is the President and presiding officer of the Senate. The President Pro Tempore and the Clerk of the Senate are elected by the membership, each for a four-year term. Portraits of former Lieutenant Governors who did not become Governor of Virginia are hung on the Chamber walls. Desks for the Senators fill the room, surrounding the Speaker's and Clerk's podiums. Over the podiums is the marble "Signers Tablet" commemorating the seven Virginians who signed the Declaration of Independence.



Senate Chamber,  
Hillier Architecture

Annual Sessions of the Virginia General Assembly convene on the second Wednesday in January and are held in even-numbered years for 60 days and in odd-numbered years for 30 days. The 30-day Session is traditionally extended to 46 days. Every Session the Virginia General Assembly meets in the House of Delegates Chamber for a Joint Session where the Governor delivers his State of the Commonwealth Address.

Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher (both honorary citizens of Virginia), and President Dwight D. Eisenhower have addressed Joint Sessions of the Virginia General Assembly in the House of Delegates Chamber. In May 2007, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain addressed the Virginia General Assembly in the House Chamber. During the 2004-2007 Capitol restoration and expansion project, both Chambers were restored to their 1908 appearance.

# The Virginia State Capitol

## The Capitol Extension and Renovation

The Virginia General Assembly appropriated \$104.5 million to restore and preserve the Virginia Capitol and to bring it up to 21st-century standards for a working seat of government. Problems of moisture penetration, outdated electrical and plumbing systems (some of them 100 years old), and insufficient space were addressed in a comprehensive plan laid out by Dr. George Skarmeas of the Hillier Architecture firm of Philadelphia. In addition, a 27,000-square-foot underground extension beneath the Capitol's South Lawn was designed to provide additional meeting and exhibition spaces, a visitor center, gift shop, and café. On May 4, 2012, a newly commissioned bronze sculpture was dedicated entitled *Thomas Jefferson, Architect of Liberty*. It is an original larger-than-life statue representing Mr. Jefferson at approximately age 42 when he was architect of the Virginia Capitol.



*Thomas Jefferson,  
Architect of Liberty*



*Virginia State Capitol  
after restoration*

Two significant surprises came to light during the Capitol's restoration. Decorative wall and ceiling paintings done in 1908 by commercial Richmond painter R.L. Peters were discovered under 24 layers of paint. Some of this work was still intact in the Capitol's Rotunda, but most of the paintings in the House of Delegates and Senate Chambers had been covered over by the 1930s. Restoring the Rotunda's decorative panels without damaging the early 20th-century fabric proved impossible. Instead, the decorative details were encapsulated in place, and reproductions were superimposed over them.

The Capitol's original interior woodwork was long thought to have been replaced during the renovations of 1904-1906. Working drawings of the renovations were discovered in 2002, and they showed that architect John Kevan Peebles specified that much of the original woodwork be saved and re-installed. Further investigation indicated that sections of woodwork in the Rotunda area had never been removed and had remained undisturbed since the late eighteenth century. Restoration and documentation of the woodwork was funded by a private Richmond foundation.

By re-installing the Capitol's decorative finishes and conserving its 18th-century woodwork, the completed Capitol now appears, inside and out, much as it did 100 years ago. The Capitol remains the working seat of Virginia's government, and it now has state-of-the-art facilities to welcome visitors to Thomas Jefferson's temple to democracy.

## Capitol Square

### History



*Capitol Square*

The public area surrounding the Capitol was originally a weed-filled, virtually treeless open square with informal lanes and footpaths. In 1816, the Virginia General Assembly hired French architect and landscape gardener Maximilian Godefroy to lay out a formal park. Two years later, the newly landscaped grounds were enclosed by a cast-iron and wrought-iron fence, and this area eventually came to be called Capitol Square. In 1850, John Notman, a native of Edinburgh, Scotland, who practiced architecture and landscape gardening in Philadelphia, developed a plan of meandering walkways and native trees and shrubs that gave Capitol Square much of the appeal it retains today. Notman channeled the springs in the Square to two fountains he placed near its southeast and southwest corners. The fountains still exist, but are now fed by the municipal water supply.

Along the lower western edge of Capitol Square is the brick Bell Tower. It was completed in 1825 for use by the Virginia Public Guard, a military predecessor to the present-day Virginia Capitol Police. The Virginia Tourism Corporation maintains a public visitor center on the tower's first floor.

The Neoclassical Oliver W. Hill, Sr., building, begun in 1893 as the Commonwealth's first state library building, stands to the east of the Capitol and south of the Executive Mansion. The Lieutenant Governor and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services have offices here. In the southeast corner of Capitol Square is the twelve-story Washington Building, an imposing structure completed in 1924 and currently undergoing renovations.



*Bell Tower on Capitol Square*

## Capitol Square

### *Washington Equestrian Monument*

A large equestrian statue of George Washington atop a granite pedestal is located just northwest of the Capitol at the formal entrance to the square. This monument was conceived to honor Washington and to glorify Virginia's contributions to our nation's independence. Virginia's role in the Revolution is represented by bronze statues of six native sons, which surround the mounted figure of General Washington at the top of the granite monument. Smaller allegorical figures below the six standing statues are inscribed with themes reflecting each patriot's contribution: Andrew Lewis, Colonial Times; Patrick Henry, Revolution; George Mason, Bill of Rights; Thomas Jefferson, Independence; Thomas Nelson, Finance; and John Marshall, Justice.

American sculptor Thomas Crawford designed the monument and completed the statues of Washington, Jefferson, and Henry. The cornerstone was laid on Washington's birthday, February 22, 1850, and the Washington statue was unveiled on February 22, 1858. Crawford died in 1857 before completing the monument. His American colleague, Randolph Rogers, executed the statues of Mason, Marshall, Nelson, and Lewis, as well as the allegorical figures, the last of which was put into place in 1869.



# Capitol Square

## Capitol Square Statues and Monuments

On the grounds north of the Capitol are bronze statues of former Virginia Governor and U.S. Senator Harry F. Byrd, Sr.; William “Extra Billy” Smith, Governor of Virginia and Confederate Brigadier General; Confederate Major General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson; and Dr. Hunter Holmes McGuire, a respected Southern surgeon. In the southwest corner of the square near the Bell Tower is a seated statue of Edgar Allan Poe, who grew up in Richmond and returned years later to edit *The Southern Literary Messenger*.

Among those honored with trees on the grounds are Presidents Washington and Tyler, Governors Colgate Darden, Charles Robb, and Gerald Baliles, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Martin Luther King, Jr. The newest monument on Capitol Square honors Virginians who were active in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s and 1960s and was dedicated on July 21, 2008.



**Harry Flood Byrd, Sr.**

A bronze standing figure 10 ft. high, Senator Byrd is depicted carrying the budget in his left hand. Known for his “pay as you go” policies, he was a U.S. Senator and Virginia Governor.



**Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson**

The bronze 7 ft. high standing figure was sculpted and cast in England. It was commissioned by a group of admiring English gentlemen shortly after Jackson’s death.



**Dr. Hunter Holmes McGuire**

A seated bronze figure 6 ft. high, he was President of the American Medical and American Surgical Associations and founded the University College of Medicine (VCU/MCV) in 1913.



**Edgar Allan Poe**

A bronze 5 ft. high statue was a gift to the Commonwealth of Virginia from Dr. George Barksdale. Poe grew up and received his early education in Richmond.



**Governor William Smith**

A bronze standing figure 7.5 ft. high, its 9 ft. high pedestal is inscribed on all 4 sides highlighting Smith’s career, including being a Virginia State Senator and Virginia Governor.



**Civil Rights Memorial**

Honoring Virginia’s heroes of the Civil Rights Movement, the four-sided Memorial, cast in bronze, features 18 figures on four panels around a large granite block.

## Capitol Square

### *The Executive Mansion*

The Executive Mansion is located just east of the Capitol within the grounds of Capitol Square. Designed by Boston architect Alexander Parris, the Federal-style mansion has been the official residence of the Governor of Virginia and his family since its completion in March 1813. Governor James Barbour and his family were the first occupants, and it has been the home of the Chief Executives of Virginia ever since.



*Executive Mansion*

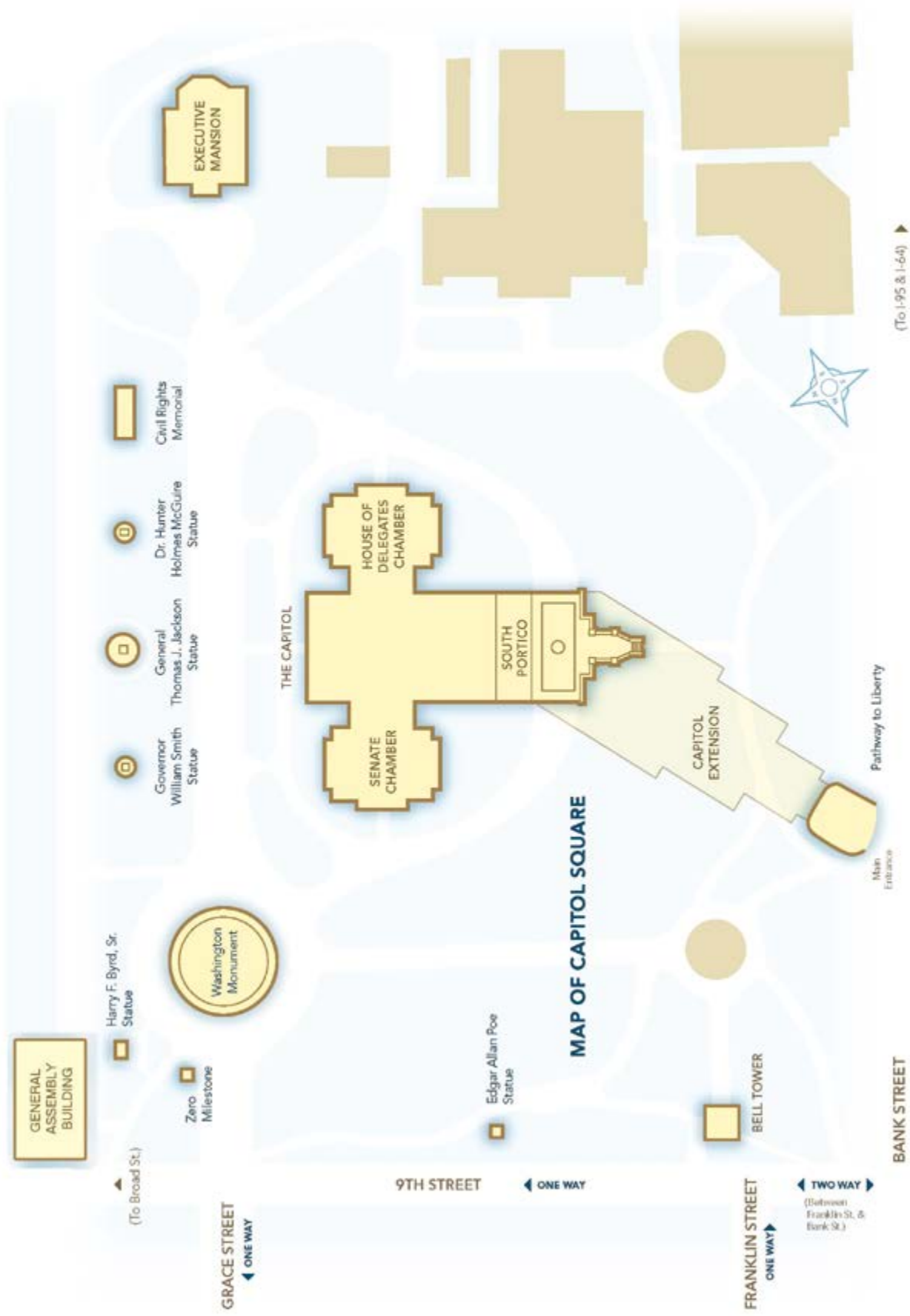
The Executive Mansion was Virginia's third state-owned governor's residence. The first two governors under the Constitution of 1776, Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson, occupied the colonial Governor's Palace in Williamsburg. In the spring of 1780, Governor Jefferson moved with the government to the new capital of Richmond. For a short period after that relocation, Virginia's governors occupied rental properties.

Around 1781, a second governor's residence was purchased in Richmond on almost the same spot the Executive Mansion stands today. The building, a modest frame structure, was home to three future United States Presidents – James Monroe as Governor, and John Tyler, Jr. and William Henry Harrison while their fathers were governors. In 1811, Governor John Tyler, Sr. argued before the Legislature that the house was “intolerable for a private family” and brought about the decision to build the current residence. The General Assembly directed “the building of a house for the use of the Governor of the Commonwealth, on the lot on which the present Executive Mansion stands.”

In the last third of the 20th century, a major effort in historical preservation began. In 1973, Governor Linwood Holton sponsored legislation to research the history and significance of the Executive Mansion. In 1988, restoration began on the Mansion exterior, and a year later the house was designated a National Historic Landmark by the United States Department of the Interior.

In 1999, the General Assembly appropriated \$7.2 million for a major renovation of the Executive Mansion that included new electrical, heating, and security systems, and additions to improve access for the handicapped. The two front rooms on the first floor were restored as nearly as possible to their 1813 appearance and the upstairs private quarters were made more comfortable for the First Family. Many presidents and foreign dignitaries have been entertained here, and the main floor of the Executive Mansion is open for public tours on scheduled days.

# The Virginia State Capitol Area Site Map



(To I-95 & I-64) ▶

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