

# Did You Know?

A series of informational bookmarks brought to you by the Virginia House of Delegates



## The Capitol Disaster

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the State Capitol housed all three branches of government. After 1840, the Chamber of the House of Delegates was on the northern end of the main floor while the Senate Chamber was situated at the southern end. The office of the Governor and the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals were located on the third floor.

On April 27, 1870, a large crowd had gathered on the third floor of the Capitol to witness the decision by the Supreme Court of Appeals on a controversial case surrounding Richmond's mayoral election. Tragedy struck when the courtroom gallery gave way under the weight of the spectators and collapsed into the Chamber of the House of Delegates.

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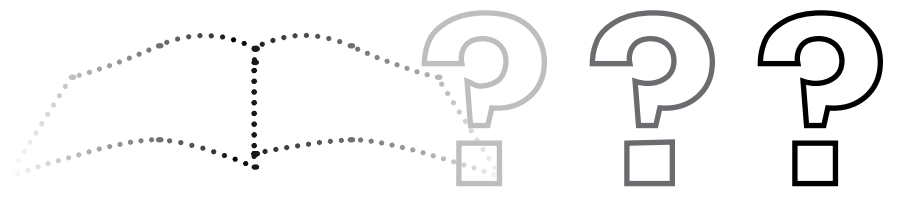
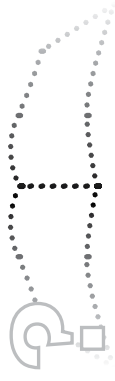
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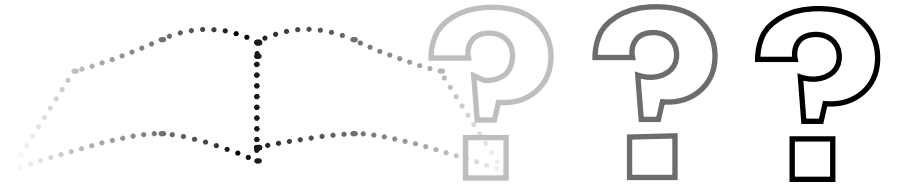
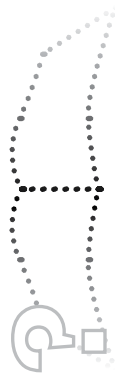


Why is Virginia Called a Commonwealth?

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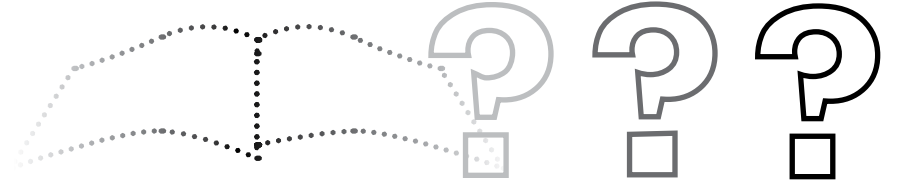
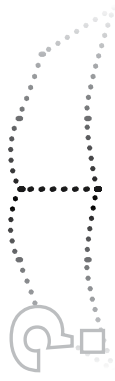


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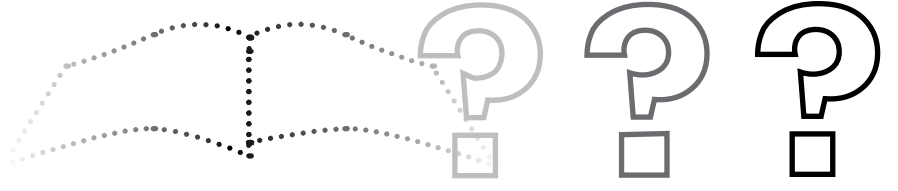
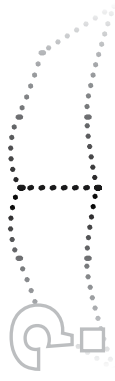


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While Virginia may generally be referred to as a state, it is officially designated as a “Commonwealth.” The Virginia Declaration of Rights, adopted on June 12, 1776, set forth the philosophy that government was created to be the servant of the people. Virginia’s founders viewed government as a contract between free and independent people and sought to emphasize that the government was based upon the sovereignty of the people united for the common good, or common wealth. In essence, the power to govern was derived from the consent of the people. Virginia’s first Constitution, adopted on June 29, 1776, affirmed these principles.

As citizens of the Commonwealth, Virginians are encouraged to actively participate in government. Civic virtue and socially responsible conduct by all citizens are essential to the continued existence of the Commonwealth. This extraordinary form of government depends upon the people’s consent and participation.

In addition to Virginia, the states of Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania enjoy commonwealth status.

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## Homemade Treasure

On the morning of April 3, 1865, Major Atherton H. Stevens, Jr. led a contingent of the Fourth Massachusetts cavalry onto the grounds of Capitol Square. Major Stevens was one of the first Federal officers to enter Richmond following the evacuation of the Capitol. As mobs looted and burned buildings throughout the city, Major Stevens and his troops hauled down the Confederate flag and the Commonwealth of Virginia flag that were flying over the Capitol.

The Confederate flag was immediately torn up into individual pieces that were claimed by souvenir hunters. Major Stevens carried away the large Virginia flag. This historic flag remained in the possession of the Stevens family in Massachusetts for the next sixty-two years.

The Virginia flag was made during the last year of the Civil War at the request of Governor William

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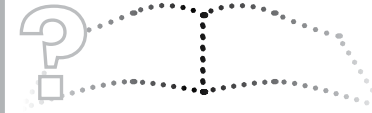
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In 1927, Mr. Frederick A. Stevens personally returned to the Commonwealth the Virginia flag that his grandfather, Major Stevens, had taken away from the roof of the Capitol on that historic April 1865 morning. The treasured flag was briefly raised over the Capitol during an impressive ceremony on November 28, 1927. Fittingly, Sallie Munford, one of the makers of the flag, was able to attend the ceremony and see the flag fly above the Capitol one final time.

The Virginia flag is now displayed within a glass case in the State Capitol underground annex near the public entrance.

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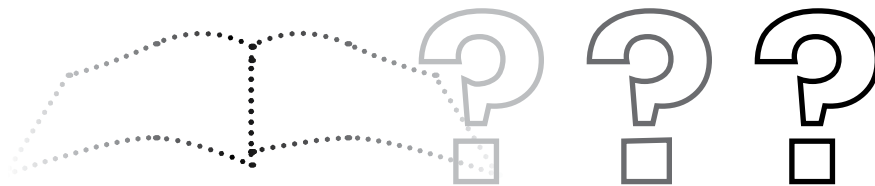
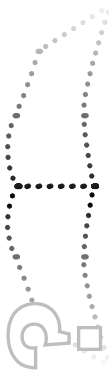
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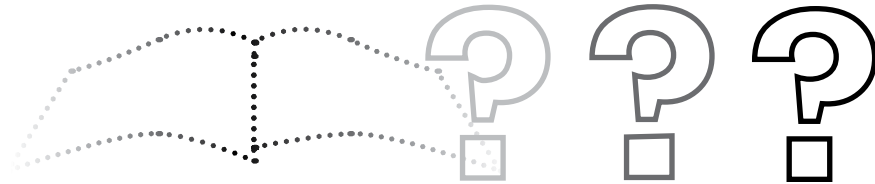
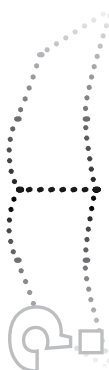


Why is Virginia known as  
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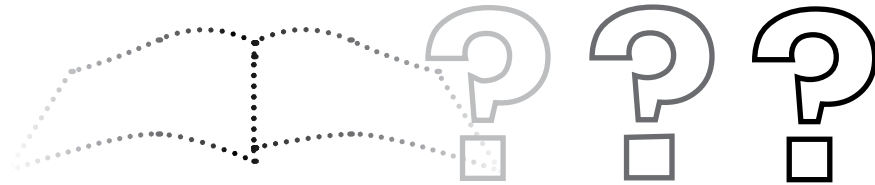
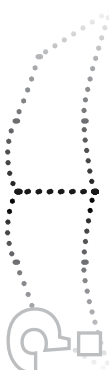


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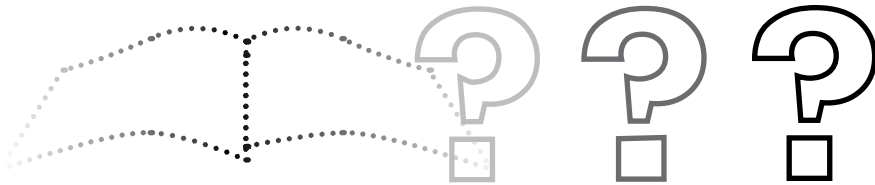
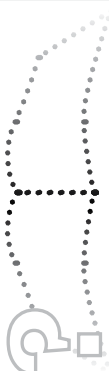


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Why is Virginia known as  
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Virginia holds the distinction as the birthplace of eight United States Presidents:

1. George Washington – Born in Westmoreland County, VA. Served as United States President from 1789-1797.
2. Thomas Jefferson – Born in Albemarle County, VA. Served as United States President from 1801-1809.
3. James Madison – Born in Port Conway, VA. Served as United States President from 1809-1817.
4. James Monroe – Born in Westmoreland County, VA. Served as United States President from 1817-1825.
5. William Henry Harrison – Born in Charles City County, VA. Served as United States President in 1841 (died after one month in office).
6. John Tyler – Born in Charles City County, VA. Served as United States President from 1841-1845.
7. Zachary Taylor – Born in Orange County, VA. Served as United States President from 1849-1850.
8. Woodrow Wilson – Born in Staunton, VA. Served as United States President from 1913-1921.

Since colonial times, Virginians have played vital leadership roles throughout the history of our nation.

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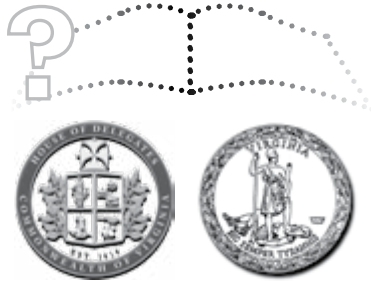
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## The Symbol of Authority

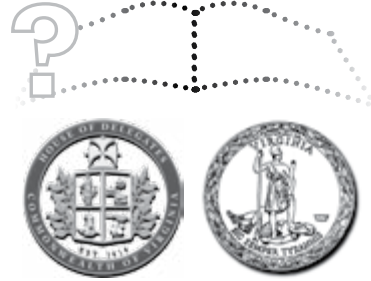
The mace of the House of Delegates has two stories. The first story surrounds the general evolution of the mace from a weapon of war to a ceremonial symbol of authority. The second story involves the current mace of the House of Delegates and its unique journey from England to Virginia.

During the Middle Ages, the mace was introduced as a weapon of war. Medieval bodyguards, known as sergeants-at-arms, carried maces to protect kings and high officials in processions among the people. Gradually, more useful weapons replaced the mace. In the fourteenth century, the mace had become an ornament of beauty made of precious metals and decorated with jewels. Thus, the mace evolved into an object that was symbolic of royal authority and power. The British House of Commons was the first body to use the mace in this manner.

The current mace of the House of Delegates is a symbolic successor to the silver ceremonial mace that was presented to the Virginia House of Burgesses by the

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The current mace of the House of Delegates is a symbolic successor to the silver ceremonial mace that was presented to the Virginia House of Burgesses by the

royal governor in 1700. The silver mace was sold after the Revolution as the legislators felt that it too strongly represented links to the royalist past. The House met without a mace for nearly 180 years.

In 1974, the current mace was purchased in England by the



Jamestown Yorktown Foundation and presented to the House of Delegates. Originally commissioned by a wealthy Englishman, the Edwardian style mace was owned by several families before being purchased by an art dealer. The mace was stolen and then recovered by Scotland Yard just before it was to be melted down.

The 45-inch long mace is made of sterling silver and has a 24-karat gold coating that was electromagnetically applied in 1995. Reinforced with wood, the mace has four sections that feature likenesses of oak leaves, acorns, and blossoms resembling those of the dogwood, Virginia's state flower.

During current legislative sessions, the sergeant-at-arms carries the ten-pound mace into the chamber and places it into a cradle in front of the Speaker's desk. Upon adjournment, it is returned to a glass display case in the Old House Chamber.

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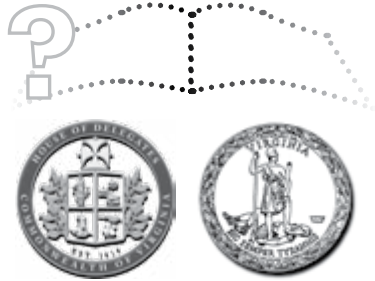
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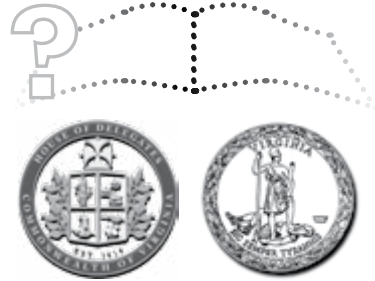
## Trial of Treason

An extraordinary trial involving Aaron Burr, President Thomas Jefferson, and Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall was held in Richmond, Virginia, beginning in March of 1807. Aaron Burr, Jefferson's former Vice President, stood accused of treason for actions that involved the assemblage of armed colonists in New Orleans.

After fatally wounding Alexander Hamilton in a duel in 1804, Burr left Washington and journeyed to New Orleans. There, he allegedly engaged in treasonous activities while in the company of General James Wilkinson - who was secretly in the pay of the Spanish. The intent and details of Burr's plans and activities were never made clear; speculation ranged from the establishment of an independent republic in the American Southwest to the capture the Spanish territory of Mexico. Apparently, in the autumn of 1806, an armed party of sixty men assembled on an island base.

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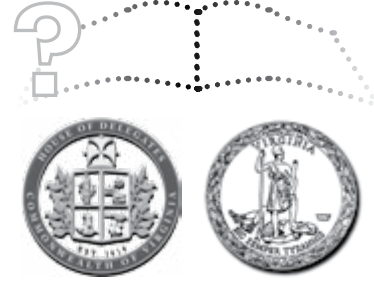
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General Wilkinson betrayed Burr by alerting President Thomas Jefferson to these activities. The trial was held in Richmond because the alleged offenses had occurred on Blennerhassett Island, which was then part of the Virginia territory. The trial site was also in proximity to Washington, allowing President Jefferson to closely monitor the proceedings. In an added twist of irony, the trial's presiding judge, Chief Justice Marshall, was Jefferson's bitter political rival.

News of the trial had spread throughout the country and thousands of people flocked to Richmond to witness the proceedings. The trial was held in the Chamber of the House of Delegates in the State Capitol in an effort to accommodate the large crowds of curious spectators.

During the almost four-month trial, the prosecution and the defense attempted to outmaneuver each other using assorted legal tactics. Ultimately, the prosecution was unable to present sufficient evidence that linked Burr to participation in treasonous actions. The jury rendered a verdict of "not proved to be guilty under this indictment by any evidence submitted to us."

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