



FMWR TOURS

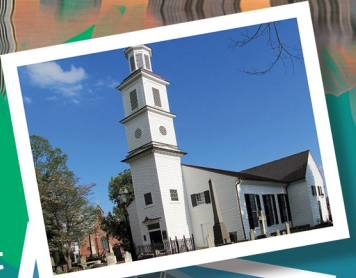
DEFENSE SUPPLY CENTER RICHMOND

River City Loop

HISTORIC RICHMOND TOUR

Discover the rich history and vibrant culture of Richmond (known as the River City) on this special FMWR-sponsored guided tour.

Walk in the footsteps of American history, explore iconic landmarks, and experience the unique stories of this remarkable city along the James River.



1. The Virginia State Capitol

The Capitol is the seat of Virginia's state government and home to the Virginia General Assembly, the oldest continuously operating legislative body in the Western Hemisphere, tracing its roots to the House of Burgesses formed in 1619 in Jamestown.

In 1779, Governor Thomas Jefferson pushed to move Virginia's capital from Williamsburg to Richmond, arguing the new site was safer and more central. A few years later, while serving as U.S. minister to France, Jefferson was asked to design the new statehouse. Working with French architect Charles-Louis Clérisséau, he modeled it after the Maison Carree, a nearly 2,000-year-old Roman temple in Nîmes, France. He had a scale plaster model built and shipped to Richmond so builders could follow it precisely. Construction ran from 1785 to 1788.

Jefferson's choice of a Roman temple, rather than British Georgian style, was deliberate — he wanted the new nation's public buildings to break cleanly from colonial England. From 1861 to 1865, the building served as the capitol of the Confederate States of America, and remarkably survived the fires that devastated much of downtown Richmond during the 1865 evacuation. Two wings were added in the early 1900s. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1960.

Today: *Still Virginia's active, working state capitol — the General Assembly meets here every year, and the building is open for public tours and to visitors touring Capitol Square.*

2. Adam Craig House (Drive-By)

Built between roughly 1784 and 1787 by Adam Craig, clerk of Richmond's Hustings Court, Henrico County Court, and General Court, this wood-frame house is considered the second-oldest surviving structure in Richmond, after the Old Stone House (now the Poe Museum). It's a rare surviving example of a "plantation-in-town" — a small in-city complex with a main house and outbuildings.

The house carries a literary connection: Craig's daughter, Jane Stith Craig, is widely believed to have been the inspiration for Edgar Allan Poe's poem "To Helen." By the 1930s the house had fallen into disrepair and faced possible demolition. A group of Richmond preservationists, led by architectural historian Mary Wingfield Scott, stepped in to save it — an effort that led directly to the founding of the local preservation organization now known as Historic Richmond. The house later served the neighborhood's Black community as an art center in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

Today: *A private residence. Not open to the public — the tour passes by without stopping.*

3. St. John's Episcopal Church

Completed in 1741 on land and timber donated by William Byrd II, St. John's is Richmond's oldest church and the anchor point around which the entire Church Hill neighborhood grew — in fact, local tradition holds that Byrd named the city itself "Richmond" because the view of the James River from this hill reminded him of the view of the Thames from Richmond Hill outside London.

The church is best known as the site of the Second Virginia Convention, held March 20-27, 1775. Virginia's official legislature, the House of Burgesses, had been dissolved by the royal governor, so delegates met here instead — outside his direct reach — to organize the colony's response to rising tensions with Britain. On March 23, the fourth day of the convention, Patrick Henry proposed that Virginia begin arming its militia and rose to deliver his famous speech ending in the call for "liberty or death." The resolution passed. Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and Richard Henry Lee were among the roughly 120 delegates in the room that day — just under a month before the first shots of the Revolutionary War were fired at Lexington and Concord.

The churchyard is also the burial ground of Elizabeth "Eliza" Arnold Poe, the mother of Edgar Allan Poe. Eliza was a stage actress who died of tuberculosis in Richmond in December 1811, leaving three small children behind — including two-year-old Edgar, who was taken in by the Allan family (hence "Edgar Allan Poe"). Because acting was considered a disreputable profession at the time, St. John's initially resisted burying her in consecrated ground, but John Allan helped arrange her interment there. Her exact grave site within the churchyard is unknown today, but a memorial marker honors her in the burial ground.

Today: *An active Episcopal parish that still holds regular Sunday services, alongside its role as a historic site and museum. Visitors can tour the church and churchyard, including Eliza Poe's memorial and the graves of roughly 1,400+ documented burials on the grounds.*

4. Chimborazo Hospital / Park (Drive-By)

Chimborazo sat on a hill in Church Hill overlooking the James River, on land that briefly served as a Confederate training camp before Surgeon General Samuel Preston Moore ordered a hospital built there in October 1861. Named for Mount Chimborazo, a dormant volcano in Ecuador, it grew into the largest military medical facility in the Confederacy — essentially its own small town, complete with a bakery, soap factory, and bathhouses, spread across roughly 120 buildings with room for about 3,000 patients at a time.

Under Chief Surgeon Dr. James Brown McCaw, Chimborazo treated close to 78,000 patients over the course of the war and achieved a mortality rate of roughly 9 percent — remarkable for the era.

After Richmond fell in April 1865, the story of this hill continued: the Freedmen's Bureau took over the old hospital wards and barracks and turned them into a settlement and school for formerly enslaved people. Within about two months, hundreds of freed people were living there in what became known informally as a "tent city" — a self-contained community of newly emancipated refugees. A school on the site enrolled around 200 students in its first session, growing to 345 by that fall, and at various points as many as 1,500 formerly enslaved people were housed in the old hospital wards.

Today: The hospital buildings themselves were dismantled after the war. Today the site is Chimborazo Park, home to a National Park Service visitor center and museum for Richmond National Battlefield Park, with exhibits on the hospital's Civil War history.

5. Libby Hill Park (Drive-By)

Libby Hill sits atop one of Richmond's seven hills and offers the view many historians point to as the reason the city is named Richmond. The park was laid out in the 1850s as one of Richmond's first public parks, designed to give residents a healthy outdoor "breathing place" overlooking the James River and the industrial wharf district below. The neighborhood takes its name from the Libby family, early settlers here.

In 1894, the park became home to Richmond's Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument, a large memorial originally intended to honor Robert E. Lee specifically before that memorial was instead built on Monument Avenue.

Today: A public park, popular for its skyline and river overlook — especially at sunset.

6. Canal Walk / Great Shiplock Park (Drive-By)

This stretch traces the path of the James River and Kanawha Canal, a project championed by George Washington himself, who served as honorary president of the James River Company when it was chartered in 1785. Washington's vision was a continuous water route connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Ohio River, opening trade with the growing western territories. The canal expanded over the decades and by 1854 stretched roughly 197 miles inland. It reached its commercial peak in the late 1850s before railroads made canal transport obsolete; the canal company sold out to a railroad in 1880.

Great Shiplock Park itself preserves a stone lock from the canal system, built in the 1850s, along with a rail trestle overhead.

Today: The modern Canal Walk, completed in 1999, turned roughly 1.25 miles of the historic route into a landscaped public path. Great Shiplock Park is now also the Richmond trailhead of the Virginia Capital Trail — a 52-mile paved biking and walking trail that runs all the way to Jamestown and Williamsburg, passing historic plantations, wineries, and river views along the way.

7. Rockett's Landing

Rockett's Landing takes its name from Robert Rockett, who began operating a cross-river ferry here in the 1730s. The site's history goes back even further — this stretch of riverbank is where Captain Christopher Newport is said to have landed in 1607 while exploring the James River for the Jamestown colonists.

By the late 1700s, Rockett's Landing had grown into one of the busiest inland ports in America, connecting Richmond by ship to Philadelphia, New York, Charleston, and ports across Europe and South America. During the Civil War, the site became a Confederate naval shipyard, building and launching warships for the James River Squadron — and was destroyed by fire during the 1865 evacuation of Richmond.

Two days after Richmond fell, on April 4, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln came ashore here. Lincoln had traveled up the James River from the Union's City Point headquarters with his twelve-year-old son, Tad (not Todd — his eldest son, Robert Todd Lincoln, was serving on Grant's staff at the time and was not part of this trip). When their boat couldn't get through obstructions in the river, the party transferred into a small rowboat to reach the landing. With no formal military escort waiting, Lincoln and Tad simply set off on foot, hand in hand, on the roughly two-mile walk to the Confederate White House at 12th and Clay Streets — Jefferson Davis's residence just days before. Newly freed Black Richmonders recognized the President along the way and reportedly surrounded him, some trying to kneel and kiss his hands; Lincoln asked them to kneel only to God. Once inside the Confederate White House, Lincoln reportedly sat at Jefferson Davis's own desk and asked for a glass of water.

Today: A mixed-use riverfront neighborhood with restaurants, shops, and residences along the James, including this tour's lunch stop.

8. Edgar Allan Poe Museum (Drive-By)

The museum is built around the Old Stone House, constructed around 1740 by German immigrant Jacob Ege — the oldest surviving residential building in Richmond. Poe never lived in this specific house, but the museum uses it and two adjoining buildings to tell the story of his formative years in Richmond, where he grew up after his mother's death (though he was born in Boston).

The idea for a Poe museum took shape in the early 1900s, led by local Poe enthusiast James H. Whitty and the Poe Memorial Association, who acquired the Old Stone House in 1911. The museum opened in 1922, making it one of the earliest literary museums in the country.

Today: An active museum holding one of the largest collections of Poe manuscripts, letters, and personal belongings in the world.

9. Lumpkin's Jail — "The Devil's Half Acre" (Drive-By, on the return from lunch)

Lumpkin's Jail was one of the largest slave-trading complexes in Richmond, which by the mid-1800s had become the second-largest slave market in the country after New Orleans. Robert Lumpkin purchased the property on Richmond's Wall Street (now 15th Street) in 1844 and ran it for roughly twenty years as a holding jail, auction site, and lodging house for slave traders. Enslaved people held there gave it the name it's remembered by — "the Devil's Half Acre."

After the Civil War, Robert Lumpkin's widow, Mary Lumpkin — herself formerly enslaved by him — inherited the property. In 1867 she leased it to a Baptist minister who opened it as a theological school for newly freed Black students. That school eventually grew into Virginia Union University, a historically Black university that still operates in Richmond today.

Today: Archaeologists have excavated portions of the original jail's foundation in Shockoe Bottom, part of ongoing efforts to memorialize the site.

10. Hollywood Cemetery

Hollywood Cemetery opened in 1847 on a hilly stretch of land overlooking the James River, designed in the fashionable "rural garden" style of the era. It takes its name from the holly trees scattered across the property.

The cemetery's national significance grew in 1858, when President James Monroe's remains were moved here from New York, 27 years after his death, establishing what's now called Presidents' Circle. President John Tyler was buried nearby in 1862 — notably, his death went unrecognized by the federal government in Washington at the time, since he had sided with the Confederacy. Hollywood is one of only three sites in the country holding the remains of two U.S. presidents.

The cemetery is also the final resting place of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, generals J.E.B. Stuart and George Pickett, and more Confederate generals than any other cemetery in the country. A 90-foot granite pyramid, built in 1869 without mortar from stones pulled from the James River, memorializes roughly 18,000 enlisted Confederate soldiers buried on the grounds.

Today: An active cemetery and one of Richmond's most-visited historic sites, known for its river views, Victorian-era monuments, and walking paths.