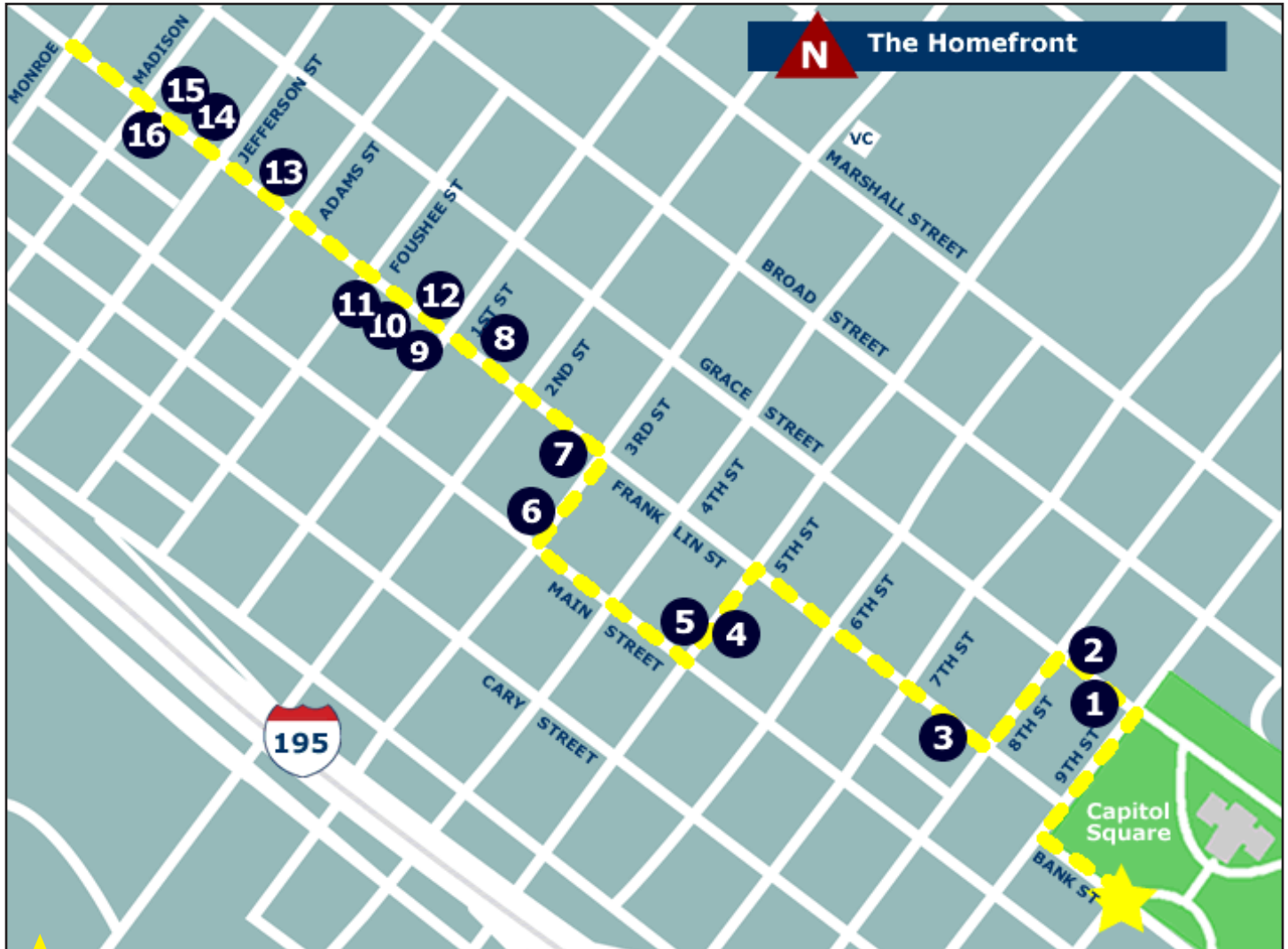


# The Eye of the Storm: Civil War Richmond

## The Homefront Walking Tour



### Introduction

The Homefront tour begins at the Bank Street entrance to the Virginia State Capitol. It will take us west toward one of Richmond's finest wartime residential neighborhoods.

Richmond was the 25th largest city in the United States on the eve of the war and the third largest among cities in states that eventually seceded. The city's prewar population approached 38,000 people: 23,595 white, 11,739 slaves, and 2,576 free blacks. An estimated one in five was foreign born.

The city's African-American population — slave and free — was employed at a variety of skilled and unskilled jobs on the waterfront and in the tobacco and iron industries. Slaves also lived in the outbuildings, basements and



Virginia Capitol, Visitor Entrance

attics of the homes we will see on this tour — working as cooks, maids, stable keepers, and nannies.

Changes came quickly in the spring of 1861 as Virginia seceded, war broke out and the Confederate government came to town. Soon after, government workers, military officers, foreign dignitaries, office seekers, and the attendant gamblers, prostitutes, and ne'er-do-wells swelled the city's population. As the war continued, refugees from Union-occupied sections of a shrinking Confederacy poured into the city as did armies of sick and wounded soldiers.

Estimates vary but the population of the city probably tripled during the war, putting immense strain on Richmond's infrastructure and stretching the dwindling supply of food and fuel to the breaking point.

No Richmond family or neighborhood escaped the

hardships brought by the war and an exploding population.

In 1861, when the Confederate government moved to town and the war began, Richmond was nearly overrun with government workers, military officials and — as the Union army advanced — refugees from occupied areas.

Shortages plagued the city almost immediately and prices for everything — rent, food, fuel — rose alarmingly throughout the war. Judith McGuire wrote in the fall of 1862:

*“I know a family, accustomed to every luxury at home, now in a damp basement room in Richmond. Another family, — consisting of mother and four daughters in one room — is supported by the work of one of the daughters who has an office in the note-signing department. To keep starvation from the house is all that they can do....”*

In December of the same year, war department clerk J.R. Jones noted: “It is proposed to drive away the strangers (thousands in number) if they will not leave voluntarily. There are too many people here for the houses, and the danger of malignant diseases very great.”

Later in the war the physical deterioration of the city began to show. Sallie Brock Putnam wrote: “Richmond was growing rusty, dilapidated, and began to assume a war-torn appearance. Very few of the buildings had been brightened by a fresh coat of paint since the commencement of hostilities.”

Yet some of the old Richmond spirit survived. A group of young women organized weekly “Starvation Parties,” sanctioned by Robert E. Lee himself. Constance Cary, one of the party planners, remembered: “It was decided that we should permit no one to infringe the rule of suppressing all refreshment, save the amber-hued water from the classic James.”

But the sad reality was even the most prosperous Richmond families were hurting. Sallie Putnam wrote: “In the stores of our jewelers were frequently seen diamonds and pearls, watches and valuable plates for sale, placed there by some unfortunate, who disposed of these articles of former wealth, luxury and taste, to procure necessary articles of food and raiment.”

The occupation by Federal troops in early April 1865 came as a relief to many Richmond citizens. Prices came down almost immediately as food and other supplies once again flowed into the city. Relief organizations soon set up shop. Sallie Putnam wrote that the agencies distributed “suitable delicacies, and what, indeed, in many instances, seemed luxuries to the sick and enfeebled.”

## 1 St. Paul's Episcopal Church

*Ninth and Grace streets*

*Date: 1845 (consecrated)*

This classic Greek-revival building was designed by the same man, Thomas Stuart, who designed the Egyptian Building, now part of the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine campus a few blocks away.



St. Paul's is often referred to as the “Cathedral of the Confederacy,” because so many notable military and political characters — including President Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee — worshiped here.

One of the leading clerics of the time, Dr. Charles Minnigerode, led the congregation. He was a staunch Confederate and friend to many of his highly ranked parishioners.

During Sunday services here on April 2, 1865, President Davis got word from Lee that Petersburg and Richmond could not be held. The shaken president got up from his pew (No. 63) to plan the government's evacuation from the city.

The Lee family pew also is marked (No. 111). Windows and plaques in the church are dedicated to church members who were, and are, familiar names in Richmond's Civil War history including the Pegram brothers who died in Confederate service; Joseph Reid Anderson, proprietor of the Tredegar Iron Works; and Matthew Fontaine Maury, “Pathfinder of the Seas,” inventor and naval pioneer.

The church remains very active. Self-guided tours of the church are available during business hours (although not, obviously, during services). Brochures are available inside.

Dr. Charles Minnigerode — who spoke with a decided German accent — shared his congregation's ups and downs during the war, delivering fiery sermons supporting the Confederate cause. In a sermon given Jan. 1, 1865, just months before the end of the war, Minnigerode tried to rally his congregation to the Confederate cause:

*“Our reverses? NO, BRETHREN. For great as they have been, (and no honest man would hide their extent,) we have had reverses before, and God always has blessed them to us, made them the source of greater harmony among ourselves, roused us to new and greater exertions, and taught us to bear them and repair them as men. What makes the present*

*crisis so painful and so perilous lies not in what the enemy has done to us with his armies, but in what our own coward, faithless, selfish hearts may do."*

## 2 St. Peter's Catholic Church

800 E Grace St  
Date: 1835



## 3 Lee Family Home

707 E Franklin St  
Date: 1844

This building is the sole survivor of a series of Greek-revival homes that lined this area of Franklin Street during the war.

Mrs. Robert E. Lee, disabled by arthritis, and her daughters lived here during the later stages of the war. The general spent little time here, his duties in the field keeping him away from his family.

The Lee women remained in their home as the April 1865 Evacuation Fire nipped at the back porches. All the buildings on Main Street behind the house were destroyed. Gen. Lee came "home" after surrendering at Appomattox, spending two months in this house before moving to a rural area southwest of Richmond.

The photograph shown here is one in a series made a few days after Lee returned to the city. The famous pictures of Lee wearing his Appomattox uniform were made on the back porch of this house.



## 4 Second Presbyterian Church

13 N Fifth St  
Date: 1847

The early history of this church is dominated by its first minister, Moses Hoge, who served the congregation 1845–1899. Hoge, dedicated to the Southern cause, also served as minister for the Confederate Congress. He famously traveled to England to purchase Bibles for Confederate soldiers, running the Union blockade on the way back.

Gen. Stonewall Jackson worshiped here (sometimes sleeping through the service) during his rare visits to



town. His pew is located under the south gallery, fourth row from the back, and is marked with a plaque.

This was a dangerous place April 2–3, 1865, when explosions destroyed the Virginia Arsenal a few blocks south, near the river. The explosion blew out the distinctive diamond-shaped stained glass windows in the front of the church.

Much of the original window glass was salvaged and stored in the attic. That glass was used to restore the windows in 1973.

## 5 Wartime residence

2 N Fifth St  
Date: 1809



## 6 Robertson's Hospital (site)

Third and Main streets (northwest corner)

This was the site of the Robertson Hospital during the war, noteworthy because it was run by a woman, Sally Tompkins. Her enterprise was one of the most successful in the city, treating more than 1,300 sick and wounded soldiers while losing only 73 during the war, the lowest mortality rate of any wartime hospital. Since all Confederate hospitals required military supervision, Tompkins was made a captain of cavalry. She was the only woman to hold such a commission in the Confederate armed forces. A plaque noting the site is on the east wall of the building.

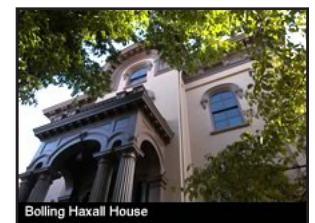
## Franklin Street Historic District

This area was designated a historic area by the city in the late 1970s. It was the far west end of the city during the war, with the Fairground (now Monroe Park) located just outside the city limits. Many antebellum residences survive, although the appearance of many has been altered over the years.

## 7 Bolling Haxall House

211 E Franklin St  
Date: 1858

Many people are surprised that flour milling — not tobacco nor manufacturing — was the largest industry in Richmond prior to the war. One of the largest mills in town, and in the world at the time, was owned and operated by the man who lived here, Bolling Haxall.



The Richmond mills turned out flour that was able to “keep sweet” during long voyages and in hot climates. It commanded a premium price. Before the war the Haxall Mill produced 160,000 barrels of flour annually.

An ardent Confederate supporter, Haxall may have hedged his bet by constructing what some believe was an escape tunnel in the lower level of the home. Believing he would be arrested, Haxall fled the city April 2, 1865. His fortunes declined rapidly after the war. Haxall sold this house in 1869.

The house is now occupied by The Woman’s Club of Richmond, and the interior has been restored. Call 804-643-2847 about visiting the inside of the house.

## 8 Linden Row

North side of Franklin Street, between First and Second streets

Date: 1847-1853

Before there were buildings here, John Allan, foster father of Edgar Allan Poe, maintained a garden on the site. Poe no doubt played in the garden as a child and perhaps later referred to it as the “enchanted garden” in his poem “To Helen.”

Eight of the 10 Greek Revival row houses built in the 1840s and 1850s survive. They were home during the war to many of Richmond’s most prominent citizens.

Most of Linden Row is now a hotel.



Linden Row

## 9 Wartime residence

15 E Franklin St, Date: 1837

## 10 Wartime residence

13 E Franklin St, Date: 1847

## 11 Wartime residence

11 E Franklin St, Date: 1840

## 12 Kent-Valentine House

12 E Franklin St, Date: 1845

## 13 Wartime residence

110 W Franklin St, Date: 1845

## 14 Wartime Residence, Cole Diggs House

204 W Franklin St

Date: 1800

Now the headquarters of Preservation Virginia.



Cole Diggs House

## 15 Wartime Residence

212 W. Franklin St, Date: 1805

## 16 Wartime Residence

211 W. Franklin St, Date: 1852