

CIVIL DEITIES; AN ANALYSIS OF THE VIRGINIA STATEHOUSE



A templesque resemblance from the front view of the Virginia Statehouse



A gold lined internal dome located within the Virginia Statehouse, peering down upon the statue of George Washington



The First Confederate Convention during the heat of the Revolutionary War 1861

1786, CLERISSEAU AND JEFFERSON, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA USA

QUAID LAWLER, RICHMOND, USA

The Virginia Statehouse began as a replacement of the original first elected body of government in the US, The House of Burgesses in 1786. Being a replacement for such an important governmental system, the Virginia Statehouse was meant to be not only impressive, but functional as well. Therefore, the Virginia Government hired none other than Thomas Jefferson to oversee its creation and genesis. The Virginia Statehouse then went on to become one of the most important Government buildings in US history.

JEFFERSONIAN ARCHITECTURE

Because of the amount of importance the new face of American government had to be after the decided exodus from the House of Burgesses, the only logical pick for the architect of the new governmental building was one the most popular American architects at the time, Thomas Jefferson. Famous for not only the writing of the constitution, but also buildings such as the Virginia College. His architecture style was noted by taking inspiration from Greek temples and significant other buildings. The use of domes and columns in most of his work was mostly likely a display of power and authority to those that viewed it. In fact, the Virginia Statehouse combined a few of these elements in its design, using a hidden internal dome of the Washington Statue. This was most likely to illuminate the importance of the Statue, which as made molded and to-size for Washington.

Outside of the buildings, in image one, ionic columns can be noted supporting the outside porch of the building, comparable to those of the Temple of Erectheus in Athens and other famous Greek temples. However, it can be noted that some of these traditional Greek features were replaced by ones that more traditionally represent American history. For example, on the edges of the columns previously mentioned, and lining the corners of the senate rooms was the tobacco leaf, a symbol that represented the great agricultural power America boasted in the Revolutionary Era. Another notable Jeffersonian feature that can noted is the large central staircase, which did not finish completion until later In the buildings lifespan.

CIVIL WORSHIP

Something else to be noted about Jeffersonian Architecture, and many other American structures, is that there was a fascination with upholding civil figures as "deities". This theme of upholding civil figures as deities is called civil religion. This can be seen in the Virginia Statehouse by the use of a large central statue of George Washington located in the main room, portraying although he was a religious figure or god within a temple. In addition to the statue of America's first president is a wall lining of all of the previous US presidents, which was continuously added to until the Confederacy took the building in 1860. In fact, the only reason the Virginia Statehouse was chosen to be the capital of the Confederate States was due to it's connection with the original presidents and it's representation of power within the South.

Other examples of this civil religion can be seen in Washington DC. The Lincoln memorial is a fantastic representation of this. Being very comparable to the Temple to Zeus in Olympia, with a large central statue and ionic columns surrounding the entire structure, the resemblance is unmistakable. In the Capitol Building in DC, George Washington is also on display in the Rotunda surrounding the top dome, viewed ascending into Heaven, almost like Jesus Christ. Returning to the Virginia Statehouse however, the final prominent example of this concept of civil religion can be observed through the most recently removed statue of General Robert E. Lee. He was a prominent general within the Civil War on the Confederate side. Despite being on the losing side of the civil war, a statue and robust paintings ornately decorated the building, erected during the civil war in 1861. The statue was removed on July 20, 2020.