

Travel

SUNDAY

GEO QUIZ

What river flows through Prague?

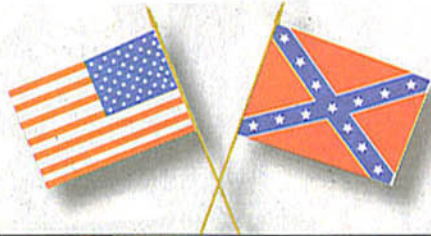
For the answer, please see page D13



OCTOBER 11, 2009

History underfoot

Tracing the steps of our founding fathers in Richmond, Va.



MICHAEL CERVIN / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

Above left, Special Collections director Thomas Camden of the Library of Virginia holds the only book to have survived the crossing of The Mayflower. Above right, Thomas Jefferson's famed estate, Monticello. Below, monuments are everywhere in Richmond, like this one of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry, all of whom have roots in the area. At bottom, St. John's Church is where Patrick Henry uttered his famous line, "Give me liberty or give me death."



By MICHAEL CERVIN
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

Michie Tavern for lunch before visiting Monticello. Operating since 1784, the tavern serves a daily buffet for about \$20 on stainless steel plates resembling the old pewter dishes and mugs from back in the day. Folks in period clothing will bring you as much food as you wish.

"All our food is based on 18th century fare," says Cindy Conte, a spokeswoman for Michie Tavern. Staples include the excellent fried chicken, biscuits and black-eyed peas. But you must save space for the peach cobbler.

Jefferson's near obsession with Monticello is evident from his constant tinkering with the place. Tours of the 11,000-square-foot home, an example of Roman neoclassicism, last about an hour: There you'll see part of Jefferson's original library, his bedroom (he was one of the first people to use skylights) and the restored wine cellar with a dumbwaiter that allowed wine to be delivered to the dining room.

A new visitors center on the property houses a gift shop, additional exhibits and a must-see short film. Honest and unflinching in its approach to the historical records surrounding Jefferson and his slave, Sally Hemings, the film is surprisingly moving.

A shuttle goes from the center to the entrance of Monticello, or you can stroll the 20-minute walk through the lush woods, past the Jefferson grave site and enter via the back side of the property. A brief drive away is Jefferson Vineyards. The vines, planted in 1981, have the distinction of not only bearing Jefferson's name but of producing pretty good wine. No, these are not actual vineyards from Jefferson's time, but the plantings advance the idea that Jefferson sought to bring fine wine to America.

On your way back to Richmond, spoil yourself by visiting the Clifton Inn for dinner: This Relais & Chateaux property creates some of the finest dinners in the area, like pan-seared halibut with buttered lump crab and their decadent warm, bittersweet chocolate tart with Virginia peanut nougat.

Richmond is home to the Poe Museum. Utilizing the oldest building in the city (from 1754) as its gift shop, the museum was formed in 1922. There's an eclectic and rather odd collection of all things Edgar Allan Poe, including one of his vests, his boyhood bed, the staircase from his childhood home, a lock of his hair and a peculiar diorama a local woman made in 1926 showing how Richmond looked during Poe's time. The self-guided tours will help you understand that writer Poe wasn't just about the macabre.

Perhaps the most frequented structure in Richmond is St. John's Church, built in 1741, with renovations and expansions into the 1930s. This is the church where an impassioned five-term Virginia Governor Patrick Henry declared, "Give me liberty or give me death" on March 23, 1775, as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington listened. Though the interior looks nothing like the original, it's still a reminder that you can sit in the same spot where our forefathers wrestled with the idea of democracy and ponder how we are the result of those fateful and often difficult decisions.

In keeping with historical themes, the Library of Virginia houses Special Collections — old books, mainly, that might seem tedious and academic and something to skip over. But

Place, a cooking school in downtown Richmond in the Shockoe Slip area, the site of old tobacco warehouses. Weekly classes focus on anything from making soup to cooking with your partner. The focus is on sustainable farm-to-table ingredients, like scallops and crab from the Chesapeake Bay, farm-raised beef and organic vegetables.

A short drive will take you to Hanover Tavern and its adjoining courthouse and jail. This is where Patrick Henry served as a tavern keeper and bartender for awhile prior to becoming a lawyer and involving himself in the cause of liberty. The original portion of the tavern from 1791 is still there, though additions to the building have created a live theater venue and restaurant.

Virginia in general and Richmond in particular are home to many wineries, and the Commonwealth boasts about 150 of them, showcasing viognier, which is quickly becoming a signature white wine, and native American varieties like Norton and Vidal. New Kent Winery offers great values and fine quality in their tasting room, which comprises reclaimed wood from various states.

Of course, Richmond is Civil War Central. It was here where Jefferson Davis set up his own white house of the Confederate States of America and where Abraham Lincoln visited days after the South finally surrendered. The American Civil War Center at Historic Tredegar, located on the banks of the James River, is a six-block walk from the downtown core. Located in the Tredegar Iron Works building, the foundry that produced all manner of cannons and firearms for the Confederate Army, the exhibits examine the war from both political and philosophical perspectives. The fully restored two-story exhibit hall, though heavy on text, gives a comprehensive overview of the war. Eight bucks will get you in and you can tour with a guide or download a podcast to your iPhone.

Richmond is one of those fundamentally seminal cities where we begin to understand much of who we are in our present context. That we can visit, sit, eat, drink and walk in the steps of our founding fathers is of no small importance.

e-mail: life@newspress.com

IF YOU GO

Richmond Visitors Bureau: 800-370-9004 or
www.visitrichmondva.com

WHAT TO DO

American Civil War Center at Historic Tredegar:
804-780-1865 or www.tredegar.org

The Library of Virginia: Hours are 9 a.m.
to 5 p.m. Monday-Saturday. 804-692-3706 or
www.lva.virginia.gov

Michie Tavern: Tours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Call
for pricing. 434-977-1234 or www.michietavern.com.

Mise En Place: 804-683-3858 or
www.miseenplacechocolate.com

Steeped in Revolutionary War and Civil War history, Richmond, Va., rose from its own ashes (37 blocks were destroyed by retreating Confederate soldiers during the Civil War) and has recreated itself as a cultural destination worthy of exploring.

Virtually anywhere you go in Richmond you'll run into something of historical value. Scattered among the beautiful brick buildings with ornate iron work reminiscent of New Orleans are monuments and statues. You'll find memorials to Robert E. Lee, commander in chief of the Confederate Army, and Confederate General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson, among others.

Using the downtown five-star Jefferson Hotel as a base (one of only two five-star hotels in all of Virginia), you'll be within walking distance or a short cab ride to most of Richmond's coolest attractions.

The Jefferson Hotel, built in 1895, is old-school. A statue of Thomas Jefferson sits dead center in a massive domed atrium, though its recently renovated bar and restaurant, Lumaire, is all modern. Of note is that the hotel used to be home to alligators that lived in the marble pools in the Palm Court until 1948.

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Richmond's culinary scene is thriving and more than 900 restaurants compete for your attention. Buz and Ned's is famous because this barbecue joint dethroned TV chef Bobby Flay in a "Throwdown." Staffers wear "The Flay Slayer" T-shirts as they serve up hush puppies, cornbread, baked beans and pork and beef ribs, all slow-cooked and smoked over real wood. The busy spot is no-frills, using rolls of paper towels as napkins and serving food in plastic baskets.

The Hard Shell is another local favorite. Lobster rolls, crab cakes, a raw bar and lobster chowder are the standards, along with beef and chicken dishes. A quick-and-easy breakfast can be found at Perly's, a 20-year institution located on 5th Street, popular with locals who like inexpensive items like grits, eggs, homestyle potatoes and Virginia ham. The food is simple but good and the vibe is definitely local.

To really get a feel for Virginia cuisine, visit Mise En

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Mise En Place: 804-683-3858 or www.miseenplaceshockoe.com

Monticello: Hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. March-October and 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. November-February. Adult tickets \$15-\$45; discounts for children. 434-984-9822 or www.monticello.org.

Poe Museum: Self-guided tours offered 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Saturday; call for guided tours. Admission is \$5-\$6. 804-648-5523 or www.poemuseum.org.

St. John's Church: 804-648-5015 or www.historicstjohnschurch.org

Wineries of Virginia: www.virginiawine.org

WHERE TO STAY

The Jefferson Hotel: Rates start at about \$250. 804-283-1594 or www.jeffersonhotel.com

WHERE TO EAT

Perly's: 804-649-2779

Clifton Inn: 434-971-1800 or www.cliftoninn.net

Buz and Ned's: 804-355-6055 or www.buzandneds.com

The Hard Shell: 804-643-2333 or www.thehardshell.com

