

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

as mentioned in the *Virginia Pathways Episode 4* video

Biographical sketches taken from *Virginia: The History and Culture of a Commonwealth* are indicated with an asterisk. Reprinted with permission from the Library of Virginia, John Kneebone, Publications Director.

Note to the Teacher: Explain to students that there are two different ways to indicate dates. One way is to put the month first, followed by the day and then the year. When this form is used, there are commas between the day and the year. For example: July 4, 1776. Another way to show dates is to put the day first followed by the month and the year. There are no commas when this form is used. For example: 4 July 1776.

John Brown (1800 – 1859) was born on May 9, 1800, in Torrington, Connecticut. His family moved to Ohio when he was five. Brown learned opposition to slavery from his father, and spent about twenty years involved in the cause of abolition. In 1855, along with five of his sons, he moved to Kansas Territory, which was a center of the struggle between the slavery and antislavery movements. He and his sons became active in the antislavery movement, and he gained a national reputation as an abolitionist. On 16 October 1859, he, his sons, and eighteen other men seized the U. S. Arsenal at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia. On 17 October, Colonel Robert E. Lee and his marines surrounded the arsenal and forced Brown to surrender. He was tried, convicted, and hanged on 2 December 1859 at Charlestown, Virginia. His attempts to end slavery were very influential in increasing the tension between the North and South before the Civil War.

Patrick Henry (1736-1799) of Hanover County, was one of the most important Virginia leaders of the American Revolution. A great orator and statesman, he led the opposition to the Stamp Act in 1765. In 1775, he made the most famous speech of his career in support of a resolution to put Virginia into a state of defense. He concluded with these words: “I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.” He was elected the first governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia in June 1776. He served for three years and was elected again in 1784 for two more years. In 1788 he led the Virginians who opposed ratification of the Constitution because they feared that the government it created would be too powerful and would endanger the liberties for which they had fought during the Revolutionary War. *

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) of Albemarle County, was author of the Declaration of Independence, governor of Virginia, and third president of the United States. Jefferson's writings on behalf of individual liberty are among the most famous and powerful of any of the Revolutionary founders of the United States. He was the second governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia (from 1779 to 1781), member of the Continental Congress, and minister to France from 1784 to 1789. He served as secretary of state in the cabinet of President George Washington, was the second vice president of the United States, and served as president from 1801 to 1809. Among the great achievements of Jefferson's administration was the

Biographical Sketches, continued

purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803. In retirement, Jefferson lived at Monticello, which he designed, and spent the final years of his life founding the University of Virginia. Thomas Jefferson died at Monticello on 4 July 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. *

James Madison (1751-1836), of Orange County, was the fourth president of the United States (1809-1817) and is known as the Father of the Constitution because of his central role in the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Madison was one of the most creative legislators of the Revolutionary generation and persuaded the Virginia General Assembly to adopt the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom drafted by Thomas Jefferson. Madison served in the Virginia Constitutional Conventions of 1776 and 1829-1830, the Virginia Ratification Convention of 1788, the Virginia House of Delegates, the Continental Congress, and the U. S. House of Representatives. He was secretary of state during the eight years of Thomas Jefferson's administration, and he was elected president in 1808 for the first of two terms. The War of 1812 took place during Madison's presidency. *

George Mason (1725-1792), a native of Northern Virginia, was a planter who lived at Gunston Hall in Fairfax County. He served in the House of Burgesses before the American Revolution and in the House of Delegates during and after the Revolution. In 1776 he was a member of the convention that voted to make Virginia independent of Great Britain, and he was the principal author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights and of the first Constitution of Virginia. He also served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, but he refused to sign the Constitution, in part because it did not contain a Bill of Rights. As a member of the Virginia Ratification Convention of 1788 Mason unsuccessfully tried to have the Constitution amended before it went into effect. His arguments on behalf of a Bill of Rights contributed to the adoption of the first ten amendments to the Constitution of the United States in 1791. *

James Monroe (1758-1831) was born in Westmoreland County and lived in Albemarle County, and Loudon County. He was the fifth president of the United States (1817-1825). Monroe served in the Continental Army during the American Revolution and in Congress afterward and was one of the founders of the Jeffersonian Republican Party. He served as governor of Virginia twice, from 1799 to 1802 and again in 1811. He was also an experienced diplomat who served as minister to France and to Great Britain, was one of the Americans who negotiated with Napoleon for the purchase of the Louisiana Territory in 1803, and was Secretary of State and Secretary of War under President James Madison. Monroe served two terms as president of the United States and is most remembered for the Monroe Doctrine. He died on 4 July 1831. *

Biographical Sketches, continued

Pocahontas (ca. 1595 –1617) also known as Matoaka, was a daughter of Powhatan, principal chief of the Algonquian tribe of Native Americans whom the English settlers of Jamestown encountered in 1607. According to Captain John Smith's history of Virginia, published in 1624, Pocahontas saved his life in 1608 when he believed her father's warriors were preparing to kill him. In 1612 the colonists captured Pocahontas and took her to Jamestown, where she became a convert to Christianity, took the name Rebecca, and in 1614 married John Rolfe. In 1616 she traveled to England, but on the eve of her return to Virginia in 1617, she died of smallpox. She was buried in Gravesend, England. *

John Rolfe (1585 – 1622), an English colonist, lived near Jamestown and in 1614 married Pocahontas. About that same time, he exported to England the first profitable crop of tobacco to be grown in Virginia. Thereafter, tobacco cultivation enabled the colony to prosper. John Rolfe died about the time of the Indians' attack on the English settlements of 22 March 1622. *

Captain John Smith (ca. 1580 – 1631), an English colonist, was one of the seven members of the governing council of Virginia who settled in Jamestown in 1607. At first colonists fared badly, but after Smith became president of the colony in 1608 his strict discipline enabled the colonists to survive. He organized trade with the Native Americans, and on one of his expeditions chief Powhatan captured him. According to Smith's account of the event, first published in 1624, Pocahontas saved his life. After Smith was injured in an explosion in 1609 he returned to England. Smith's books on the founding of the colony are among the most important sources for the story of the first years of Virginia. *

Nat Turner (1800 – 1831) was born in Southampton County, a slave of Benjamin Turner. In 1831 Nat Turner led one of the most important revolts against slavery in American history. Turner was a preacher who became convinced that God had chose him to lead his people to freedom. On 22 August 1831 he and five other slaves killed their master's family. With about sixty other slaves from neighboring plantations, they started a general revolt. The rebellion caused widespread panic in Virginia, and the governor called out the militia to put down the rebellion. Nat Turner and fifteen of his companions were captured and hanged for murder. As a result of Nat Turner's revolt, the General Assembly imposed stricter control over slaves and made it a criminal offense to advocate the abolition of slavery. *