



Founded Upon Benevolence:

*A Bicentennial History of
the Mutual Assurance
Society of Virginia*

BY RICHARD LOVE

THE VALENTINE
THE MUSEUM OF THE LIFE AND
HISTORY OF RICHMOND
1994

*It is well known what dreadful calamities
the ravages of fire cause, often in a few
hours the proprietors lost their buildings,
and whole families are plunged into great
distress, merchants reduced to bankruptcies,
the manufacturers stopt from carrying on
their business, and the husbandman ruined,
so that he cannot cultivate his land.*

—William Frederick Ast, 1794



*The Norfolk fire of 1799.
Courtesy The Valentine.*

A City in Flames, 1799

A dull orange sky glowed eerily over Norfolk on the night of February 24, 1799. Fire raced through the coastal city, Virginia's official port of entry, threatening to engulf it. Cinders and smoke swirled in the air as flames leaped from one wooden building to the next, and in the pandemonium people hurried to gather their families and save what they could of their property. Brave efforts to contain the fire appeared futile, and for the second time in its history, Norfolk faced devastation by fire.

Twenty-three years earlier, the British had attacked Norfolk during the American Revolution. That first blaze broke out on New Year's Day in 1776, when the fleet of Lord Dunmore, the Crown's last royal governor of Virginia, bombarded the town from the harbor. Although the 1776 fire destroyed warehouses, homes, and many other buildings, some structures were left standing. It fell to the American forces evacuating Norfolk a month later, to finish the job. Withdrawing from the port city, they set fire to the remaining buildings to prevent the British from occupying the area.

Now, little more than a decade later, with the British gone and the United States an independent nation at peace, fire—the ancient enemy of all people dwelling in towns and cities—threatened once more to consume Norfolk.

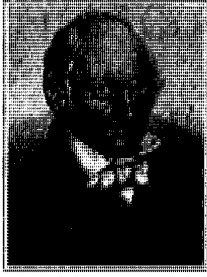
But unlike the fire of 1776, the fierce blaze of 1799 met determined opposition. Residents fought back with bucket brigades and axes, and tried to contain the fire by tearing down buildings near those already burning. So ferocious was the Norfolk fire, however, that picks and axes were not enough. Fire fighters used twenty-five casks of gunpowder to blow up several homes in an attempt to halt the fire's progress. The city's inadequate water supply forced them to use whatever they could to douse the

flames, including a thousand gallons of vinegar. Finally, their extraordinary efforts extinguished the blaze and saved the city, but not before many had suffered the loss of their homes and livelihoods.

Fortunately for some of those who sustained great losses, a new company headquartered in Richmond had begun to sell fire insurance throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. Known as The Mutual Assurance Society Against Fire on Buildings of the State of Virginia, it saved many Norfolk residents from ruin and many families from destitution. "Old Mutual" members in Norfolk received prompt payment on claims that totaled nearly \$35,000, a substantial sum for that time.

The New Capital of Richmond

In the late eighteenth century, Virginia's population stood at nearly 750,000 people. Richmond, the state capital since 1780, grew swiftly as the business of state government attracted some of the Commonwealth's most prominent citizens, especially lawyers, to the new capital. Hundreds of new residents moved to Richmond to find work in its growing service and industrial sectors. But Richmond, like other towns, remained undeveloped in



Dr. William Foushee, first Mayor of Richmond and first President of the Board of Directors of the Mutual Assurance Society. Courtesy Virginia State Library and Archives.

some respects. Most streets were not paved, and ramshackle wooden buildings were bunched closely together along streets and alleys. Taverns and ordinaries overflowed with gamblers, sporting men, and other ne'er-do-wells whose brawls often spilled out into the streets.

But there were other, more enduring, aspects of Richmond's life taking root at this time. The cornerstone for the capitol building, designed by former Governor Thomas Jefferson, had been laid at Shockoe Hill in 1785, and by October 1788 the elegant new edifice was close enough to completion to allow the general assembly to meet there for the first time. New warehouses and wharves rose on the riverfront, testifying to the tremendous influence of the tobacco trade in Virginia. The James River Company, owned in part by George Washington, began construction of a seven-mile canal around the falls of the James to provide for commercial traffic on the waterway as far upstream as possible.

But despite these and other developments, fire—the eternal scourge of city life—remained a constant threat to Richmond. To offer some protection, a group of prominent citizens formed the Fellowship Fire Company. This first volunteer fire brigade enjoyed some small successes until January 8, 1787. Early on that cold winter morning, a fire fanned by high winds quickly became a conflagration of horrifying proportions. By the time the blaze was under control—hastened by the deliberate demolition of nearby buildings—more than fifty houses were in ashes, including nearly every house in a five-block stretch of Main Street.

Including the value of the property inside these residential and commercial buildings, the total loss exceeded \$500,000—a loss so monumental that it would take funds collected from all the state's principal towns to help rebuild the capital. And similar scenes were repeated throughout those towns during this period.

Residents of Norfolk, Petersburg, Alexandria, Staunton, and other communities all dreaded the physical and financial ruin that might at any time engulf their homes and shops. Virginia in the early 1790s was the largest and wealthiest of the thirteen states, but few of its beautiful country homes, townhouses, or commercial buildings were insured against fire.

William Frederick Ast: Visionary Entrepreneur

In 1794 a Prussian émigré named William Frederick Ast met with a group of Richmond citizens to discuss the need for an organization to underwrite fire insurance in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the financial opportunities such an organization would present. Fire insurance was not unknown in the United States, but neither was it widespread. In 1794, only five American companies dealt in insurance. Three Philadelphia companies—the Philadelphia Contributionship (1752), the Mutual Assurance Company (1784), and the Insurance Company of North America (1792) as well as the (New York) Mutual Assurance Company (1787) and the Baltimore Equitable Society (1794) offered policies to insure buildings against loss from fire, but likely none of these operated in Virginia.

Ast's strategy for mutual assurance, which was said to be modeled on a system introduced by Frederick the Great, won enthusiastic support from many prominent Richmonders, including the city's first mayor, Dr. William Foushee. Members of the Virginia General Assembly were told that "The principles of this insurance are founded upon benevolence—a number join to succor such of them that may be so unfortunate to suffer accidentally by fire—a loss falls heavy upon one; but where many contribute towards paying it, each man's share becomes slight." Ast also pointed out

that the only other insurance then available to Virginians came from English companies, a situation that diverted large sums of money from the state due to the high cost of that transatlantic insurance.

Ast's well-conceived idea gained strong support in the legislature. On December 22, 1794, that body approved the plan, declaring in part that, "...from the great and frequent losses sustained by the ravages of fire, it is advised expedient to adopt some mode to alleviate the calamities of the unfortunate who may suffer by that destructive element, and William F. Ast of the city of Richmond, having suggested and submitted to the consideration of the general assembly a plan of mutual assurance... which it is conceived will fully answer the above purposes."

With those words of approval, the assembly passed an act proclaiming that "an assurance be established to be called... The Mutual Assurance Society, against Fire on Buildings, of the State of Virginia, the principle whereof shall be That the citizens of this state may insure their buildings against the losses and damages occasioned accidentally by fire and that the insured pay the losses and expenses, each his share, according to the sum insured."

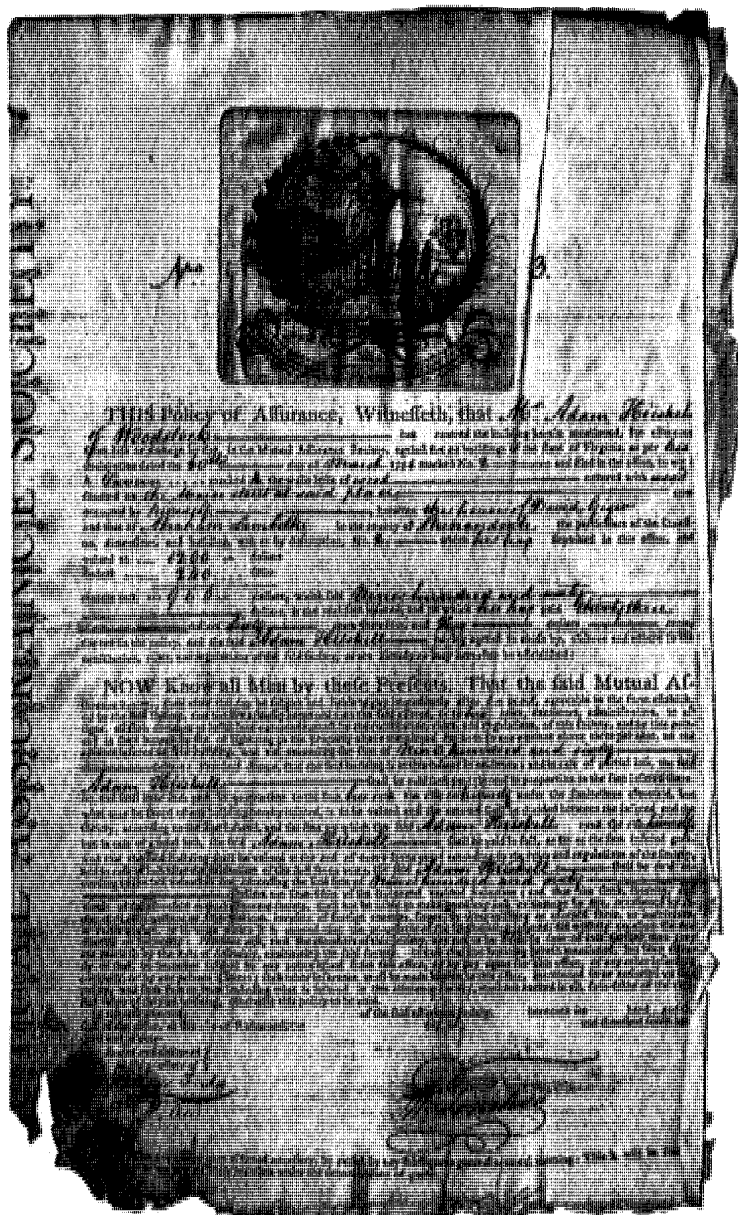
The assembly, however, did not permit the Society simply to set up shop and begin selling insurance policies. Exercising caution in licensing the establishment of the Society, the legislature set forth rules and regulations in the authorizing act, not the least of which was the prerequisite that the Society have subscriptions totaling a minimum of \$3 million of insurance before it commenced doing business. The requirement for such a large subscription was one of the two basic structural guarantees of the Society's financial solvency; the second was a stipulation unique to the fledgling American insurance industry. That second provision required property owners to "engage their property insured (but none other) as security and subject the

same to be sold, if necessary, for the payment of such quotas." That clause effectively gave the Society a lien on the protected property to ensure payment of premiums.

Christmas Eve, 1795

On December 24, 1795, twenty-one men from around the state of Virginia gathered at the Capitol in Richmond for the first meeting of the Society. Representing 450

Mutual Assurance Society, policy #3, dated March 30, 1796. This policy covered Adam Heiskel's Tavern. Early in its history, the Society insured taverns, farms, mills and tobacco factories. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.



Form of the Declarations for Assurance.

I the underwritten John Marshall residing at Richmond in the county of Henrico do hereby declare for Assurance in the Mutual Society against Fire on Buildings of the State of Virginia, established the 26th December, 1795, agreeable to the several acts of the General Assembly of this State, to wit:

My House Buildings on Lots 792 and 793 at The City of Richmond now occupied by Myself situated between the South West Street and that of the West in the county of Henrico.

Their dimensions, situation and contiguity to other buildings or wharves, what the walls are built of, and what the buildings are covered with, are specified in the herewith annexed description of the said Buildings on the plan, signed by me and the appraisers, and each valued by them as appears by their certificate here under, to wit:

| |
|---|
| The <u>Swelling</u> marked A. at <u>200</u> Dollars by <u>four thousand</u> Dollars |
| The <u>Office</u> do. B. at <u>200</u> do. <u>two hundred</u> do. |
| The <u>Stables</u> do. C. at <u>400</u> do. <u>four hundred</u> do. |
| The <u>Kitchen</u> do. D. at <u>150</u> do. <u>one hundred & fifty</u> do. |
| The <u>Hall</u> do. E. at <u>150</u> do. <u>one hundred & fifty</u> do. |
| The <u>do.</u> do. F. at <u>150</u> do. <u>one hundred & fifty</u> do. |
| The <u>do.</u> do. G. at <u>150</u> do. <u>one hundred & fifty</u> do. |

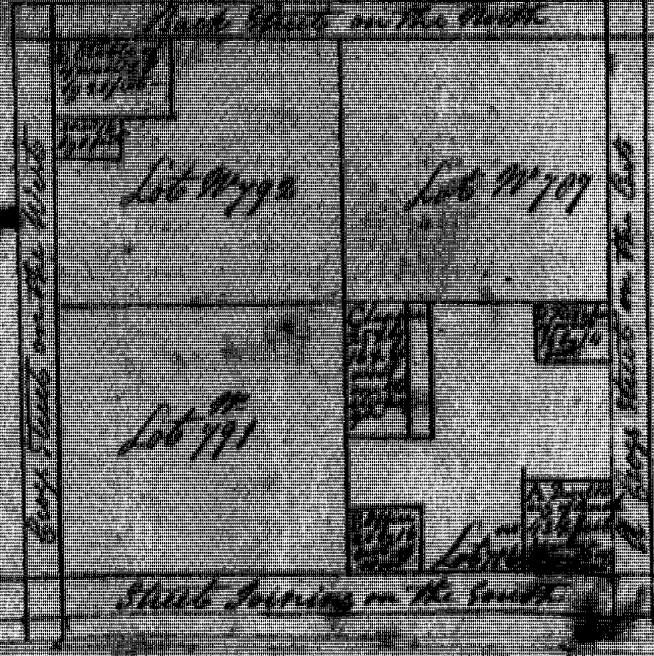
by five thousand three hundred Dollars to all.

I do hereby declare and affirm that the above mentioned property is not, nor shall be insured elsewhere, without giving notice thereof, agreeable to the policy that may issue in my name, upon the filing of this declaration, and provided the whole sum so insured does not exceed the verified value, and that I will abide by notices and orders in the Constitution, Rules and Regulations as are already established, or may hereafter be established by a majority of the insured, present in person, or by representatives, at a general meeting to be agreed upon for the said Assurance Society. Witness my hand and that of Richmond the 24 day of February 1796.

WE the underwritten, being each of us Heads Owners, declare and affirm that we have examined the above mentioned Property of John Marshall and that we are of opinion that it would cost in cash five thousand three hundred Dollars to build the same, and is now actually worth five thousand three hundred Dollars in ready money, and will command the sum or more specified to the best of our knowledge and belief.

City of Richmond
The foregoing valuation James G. Gill in due form before me, a Magistrate for the said City of Richmond given under my hand this 24th day of February in the year 1796.

Residing in Richmond
James G. Gill
Wm. M. Allen



subscribers by proxy, they established the organizational structure of the new association, electing permanent officers, setting salaries, and approving the constitution, rules, and regulations of the Society. Directors were named for each of the principal towns in the state—Richmond alone, by virtue of its size and influence, received eight directors—and operating officers were elected.

From the beginning, the names of those elected as the Society's officers read like a Who's Who of Virginia society. The president was Dr. William Foushee, the cashier general, Jaquelin Ambler, the principal agent, William Ast. Those on the board included Bushrod Washington, nephew of the first United States president; George Pickett, grandfather of the Confederate general; and a number of financial and social leaders of Richmond.

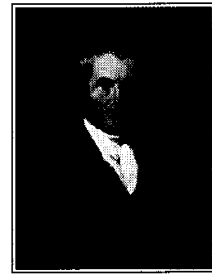
Among the rules governing the duties of Society officers, few were as specific as those that dealt with the cashier general's handling of Society funds. Ambler, held in high esteem by his colleagues, was nevertheless required to post a bond of \$100,000 to protect the Society against financial mismanagement. His primary responsibility was to receive the funds paid

in as quotas and then immediately invest them in bonds issued by the U. S. government or the state of Virginia, and in other "good securities bearing an interest."

From the start, the Society paid particular attention to the security of its members' assets, requiring the cashier general to take newly acquired certificates and put them "immediately into an iron chest deposited in some place of security, with four substantial locks, each of a different construction from the other, one key of which is to be delivered to the president, two others to two of the directors, and the fourth to the cashier general."

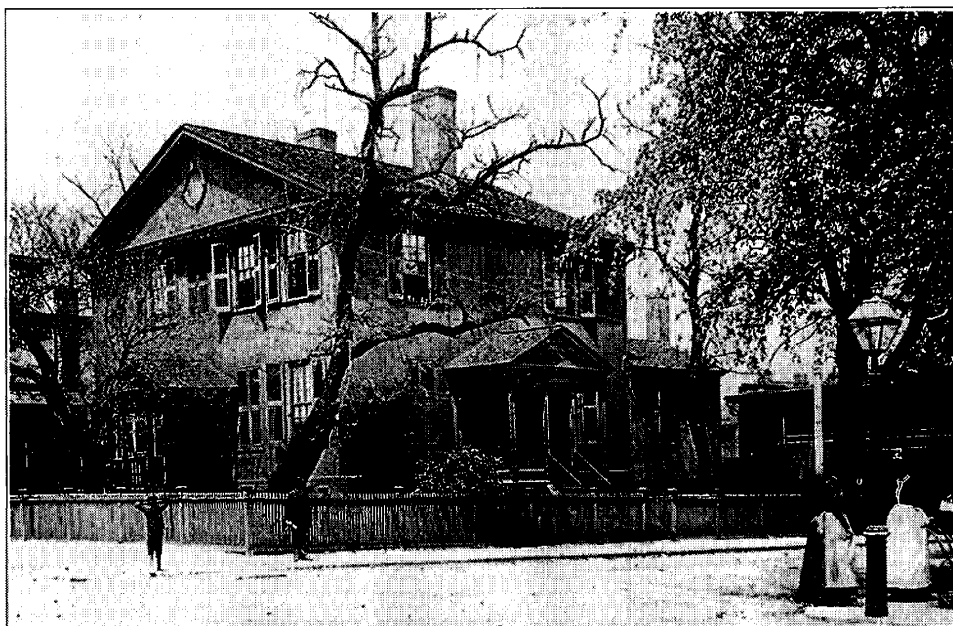
The rules and regulations also set forth the obligations of the insured members. A property owner sustaining loss was required to procure an estimate of that loss, made by "two or more honest, disinterested house-owners in his neighborhood." That estimate went to the principal agent accompanied by a sworn statement by the insured stating that he had not contributed to the loss of the building.

The rules also contained the basic outline for setting the cost of premiums. Among the factors were size, value, hazardous use, and location. Of particular importance—given the methods by which



John Marshall, the Mutual Assurance Society's chief counsel and future U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice. Courtesy The Valentine.

Opposite: The declaration (application) for assurance of the John Marshall House, written February 24, 1796. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.



The John Marshall House, located on the northeast corner of Ninth and Marshall Streets in Richmond, has been continuously insured by the Society since 1796. Courtesy The Valentine.



fires were fought—was whether or not a building was free-standing and if there might be trees or other obstructions situated so that “fire engines cannot play upon them from at least two sides.”

By February 1796 the Society, headquartered in a small wooden house near the corner of Governor and Franklin Streets, wrote its first policy, insuring John McEnnery’s house on Main Street for \$1,800. Several weeks later, John Marshall, the Society’s chief counsel and a future U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice, insured his home for nearly \$6,000. The Marshall house remains insured by the Society, and has been continuously for nearly two hundred years.

Richmond’s First Fire Engine

In that first year, the Society’s president and the directors from Richmond and Norfolk voted to donate their first year’s salaries toward the purchase of a fire engine for the City of Richmond, in the first of many direct and indirect contributions to the safety and welfare of Virginians. The engine was acquired within a year and kept ready for service in a building donated by a member of the Society. By the time the Society bought the fire engine, it had already issued 1,249 policies and paid its first insurance claim.

That first claim was filed by Patrick McMara of Richmond, whose home was damaged in the course of a fire on January 21, 1797. McMara’s house had not burned in the fire, however. Like so many other houses in those years, it was razed in an attempt to keep the fire from spreading to other structures. McMara’s loss was covered, and the Society promptly paid the claim.

During the Society’s first three years of business, its losses totaled less than \$1,500. But the last year of the eighteenth century brought the devastating fire to Norfolk in February, a damaging blaze to

Fredericksburg in April, and a series of smaller disasters throughout the rest of the year. By November 1799, the Society’s loss for the year amounted to over \$60,000, and it was forced to sell a large portion of its securities in order to pay the claims. Based on the original plan, the Society then assessed its members an additional quota and the treasury was quickly restored before the end of the year.

The Early Nineteenth Century: Assessing Risks and Restructuring Rates

Despite the challenges of 1799, the turn of the century found the Society in sound financial condition and somewhat chastened by its losses. Understanding that much of the loss was the result of inexperience in judging the risks of insuring certain types of structures and any hazardous use of them, board members took steps to lower the Society’s exposure to risk by restructuring the rates for insurance.

To assess quotas on businesses whose inherent risks were the greatest, the Society restructured the rates applied to hazardous trades, creating a two-tiered system for payment. Coopers, joiners, smiths, cabinet makers, carpenters, and hatters were among the tradesmen in the first tier. Their rates were raised. Still greater increases were assessed against soap boilers, sail makers, rope makers, and bakers. The increases were designed to distribute the cost of insuring risky properties more equitably, and to reduce the burden upon homeowners and proprietors of less hazardous properties.

A Policy for a President

Among the homeowners insuring property with the Society was Thomas Jefferson, former governor of Virginia and third pres-

Opposite: The declaration for assurance of Monticello, written August 16, 1800. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.

77.989

Declaration for Assurance.

I, Thomas Jefferson, residing at Monticello in the county of Albemarle do hereby declare for Assurance in the Mutual Assurance Society against Fire on Buildings of the State of Virginia, established the 20th December, 1798, agreeable to the several acts of the General Assembly of this State, to wit: My buildings on my Plantation called Monticello now occupied by myself situated between the plantation of H. Lewis and that of Randy J. Hill in the county of Albemarle their dimensions, situation, and contiguity to other buildings or wharves, what the walls are built of, and what the buildings are covered with, are specified in the hereto annexed description of the said buildings on the 1st, signed by me and the appraisers, and each valued by them as appears by their certificate hereunder to wit:

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|------|-------------|---------------|----------|
| The <u>Buildings</u> marked A. | at | 6000 | Dollars, by | five thousand | Dollars. |
| The <u>Office</u> | do. | 400 | do. | four hundred | do. |
| The <u>Lawyers Shop</u> | do. | 400 | do. | four hundred | do. |
| The <u>Slave Quarters</u> | do. | 200 | do. | two hundred | do. |
| The <u>Stable</u> | do. | 200 | do. | two hundred | do. |
| The | do. | | do. | | do. |
| The | do. | | do. | | do. |

6300.

I do hereby declare and affirm that I hold the above mentioned buildings with the land on which they stand in fee simple, and that they are not, nor shall be in any manner, mortgaged, or otherwise encumbered, without giving notice thereof, agreeable to the policy that may issue in my name, upon the filing of this declaration, and provided the whole sum does not exceed four-fifths of the verified value, and that I will abide by, observe, and adhere to the Constitution, Rules and Regulations as are already established, or may hereafter be established by a majority of the insured, present in person, or by representatives, or by the majority of the property actually represented, either by the persons themselves or their proxy duly authorized, or their deputies as established by the by-laws of the said Society, to be held by the said Assurance Society. Witness my hand and seal at Monticello this 11th day of August 1798.

Thomas Jefferson

...and that we are of opinion that it would cost in cash nothing being required Dollars for decay ... three hundred Dollars in ready money, at there ... knowledge and belief, and he the said subscriber has acknowledged before us his above signature

Wm. M. Anderson
Wm. M. Anderson

| | | | |
|-------------|-------|-------|--|
| A | 4000. | 60. | |
| B | 120. | 2.80 | |
| D | 240. | 4.60 | |
| C | 120. | 10.60 | |
| E | 160. | 15.80 | |
| | | 39.80 | |
| U. S. Stamp | | 2. | |
| | | 41.80 | |

320
160
160
640

A bill of Mr. Anderson
received with the Wood
that the same is to be paid by
the full length of the paper

*The printing of the E. ...
... of ...
... to be shown that there
... by ...*

ident of the United States. In 1800, the year he was first elected president, Jefferson insured Monticello, his home near Charlottesville. He insured the main house, outbuildings, and other structures, for \$6,300. Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, had inquired about a policy with the Society several years earlier, but postponed his decision because of disagreements over several points in the policy. Like other property owners, Jefferson retained the services of two Albemarle County neighbors, William Randolph and William Henning, to inspect Monticello and affirm the value placed upon it, a requirement of the Society before a policy was issued.

Another new policy holder was Virginia Governor James Monroe, later the fifth president of the United States, who insured his home in Albemarle County. In 1801 "Light-Horse" Harry Lee, the brilliant Revolutionary War cavalry leader, insured Stratford, his home and the birthplace of his son, Robert E. Lee, for \$16,700. Other prominent country gentlemen insured their homes with the Society as well, but within a few years it became clear that additional sources of protection against fire were needed.

City Fires Versus Country Fires

In January 1805, the Society's board met to consider the problems posed by the differences in risks between insuring buildings in cities and towns and those in rural areas. Members insuring country properties insisted that "nothing but a separation of the country from the towns will enable the Society to approach anything like a practical equalization of the risks." Their argument was simple: "... when a house takes fire in a town a hundred or more houses may be destroyed, but when a house takes fire in the country only one is consumed. In the former the losses are indefinite and may be immense, in the latter they are limited and must be comparatively small."

The logic of the argument was difficult to contest, and the Society proceeded to divide its business into two distinct divisions. Although administered by a single board and group of officers, the newly separated town and country branches had their own agents, policies, and treasuries. Income and expenses were divided into two accounts, and newly assessed quotas

Thomas Jefferson's home at Monticello, insured by the Society in 1800. Illustration by Bill Perrine, courtesy of Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.



and payments for losses were based on the income generated by each division. This solution seemed to resolve the inequities felt by planters and farmers.

Trouble on the Farms

Within five years, the separation of the town and country branches revealed a problem that was not as obvious as the different risks posed by fire. This problem was the financial risk inherent in farming. Although fire was a greater danger in towns and cities, those insuring urban properties were most often steadily employed, regularly paid, and generally able to pay their bills, including insurance quotas.

That was not the case with the clients of the country branch. Correspondence between its agents and the principal agent in Richmond often dealt with the difficulty of collecting quotas from cash-poor farmers and planters in widely scattered settlements. At the January 1810, annual meeting, members faced two choices: either eliminate the country branch, or increase that branch's quotas by 20 percent to cover a looming deficit. Members voted to continue the country branch for the time being, and the Society appealed to the state legislature to authorize government officials, particularly sheriffs and sergeants appointed by the legislature, to enforce quota collection much as they did in the case of court clerks' fees throughout Virginia.

Despite these actions, the problem of collecting payments in the country branch continued. An Albemarle County agent wrote to Samuel Greenhow, who replaced William Ast as principal agent after Ast's death in 1807, "... ours is almost entirely a wheat country [and] the very depressed price of that article has kept our people so poor that money cannot be collected even in the most urgent cases or smallest in amount. I have forty Blls [barrels] flour



in Rd. for which I can get only about the amount of the expenses that have been pd on it."

A committee investigated the situation and found that although the country branch had a positive balance, the balance was illusory, existing only when the "losses by bad debts, the expenses of collecting the outstanding debt, and interest due on the debt due by this branch of the Society are left out of view."

By 1818 the Society stopped issuing policies on country properties and in 1821, with debts rising, it eliminated the country branch altogether. Rural subscribers received refunds on a prorated basis, and the Society thereafter limited its coverage to structures located in Virginia's towns and cities.

In 1821, the Society eliminated its country branch.

The Society's Structural Evolution

By the time its country branch was dissolved, the Society had gone through other changes as well. Perhaps foremost was the death on September 22, 1807, of its founder and first principal agent, William Frederick Ast. Samuel Mordecai's



Company F of the Richmond Fire Department, located on North 25th Street, 1880. Courtesy of The Valentine.

1856 work, *Richmond in Bygone Days*, described Ast as “a Prussian by birth, a small, shriveled, wizen-faced man, who looked as if he was a descendant of the mother of vinegar; but although his aspect was sour, he was a man of considerable talent and was devoted to the Institution of which he might be considered the founder.”

Despite this rather unflattering description, Ast’s success spoke for itself. Without a candidate of his stature, the issue of who might succeed him so divided the board that a principal agent was not named until the following year, when Samuel Greenhow was appointed to the position. In 1810, the bylaws and constitution of the Society were again amended, eliminating the positions of president, vice-president, and board of directors. The new officers consisted of the principal agent, the secretary, and a standing committee, an administrative structure that remained in place well into the twentieth century. When Samuel Greenhow died in 1815, James Rawlings was appointed principal agent.

Other changes involved several moves of the Society’s headquarters which, by 1820, was located at the southeast corner of Ninth and Marshall Streets, and the elimination of insurance on some very high-risk properties, such as distilleries.

Under its new officers, the Society continued to prosper, making sound investments and conservatively managing its members’ affairs. That fiscal conservatism served the Society well throughout a series of disastrous and extraordinarily expensive fires in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Fire devastated Norfolk for the third time in 1804, leaving over \$100,000 in damages. Three years later, Fredericksburg suffered more than \$50,000 in fire losses, and in 1815, an even larger blaze ravaged Petersburg, leaving losses totalling nearly \$125,000.

Even in the face of these events, a report to the 1816 annual meeting ended on a congratulatory note: “... great as these losses have been, it is a very pleasing source of reflection to your committee, as it must be to every friend of the institution, that

the Society has been able to meet them... and to be left with a considerable fund to meet future demands.”

Practical Philanthropy: Public Works in the Public Interest

The Society's fiscal soundness did not obscure, for members, the need for more effective fire-fighting capabilities in Virginia's cities and towns. The committee assigned several members to report on the "expediency of extending further encouragement to Engine and Hose Companies and also to enquire [sic] whether any steps can be taken to render the property insured in the towns safe by conveying a plentiful supply of water into the principal streets of [the] same."

In 1822, the standing committee voted to subscribe additional moneys for water systems in Richmond, Petersburg, Fredericksburg, Lynchburg, and Manchester, under the condition that the water conveyed through pipes to the principal streets of those towns "be useful in suppressing fires." The Society also contributed \$1,500 to support fire companies, and several years later, donated an addi-

tional \$750 to a Richmond fire company toward the purchase of a new "Hydraulin" fire engine. So large and powerful was the new equipment that with forty men working its pump, it could throw a stream of water up and over the Capitol.

Contributions to fire companies in towns throughout the Old Dominion were a major part of the Society's philanthropic endeavors throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. The Society donated funds to purchase fire engines, fire plugs, screwpumps, and fixtures in both Fredericksburg and Richmond. It also made direct payments, in the form of testimonials, to individual fire fighters. One recipient was Capt. Samuel Freeman of Richmond, awarded several stipends over twenty-five years.

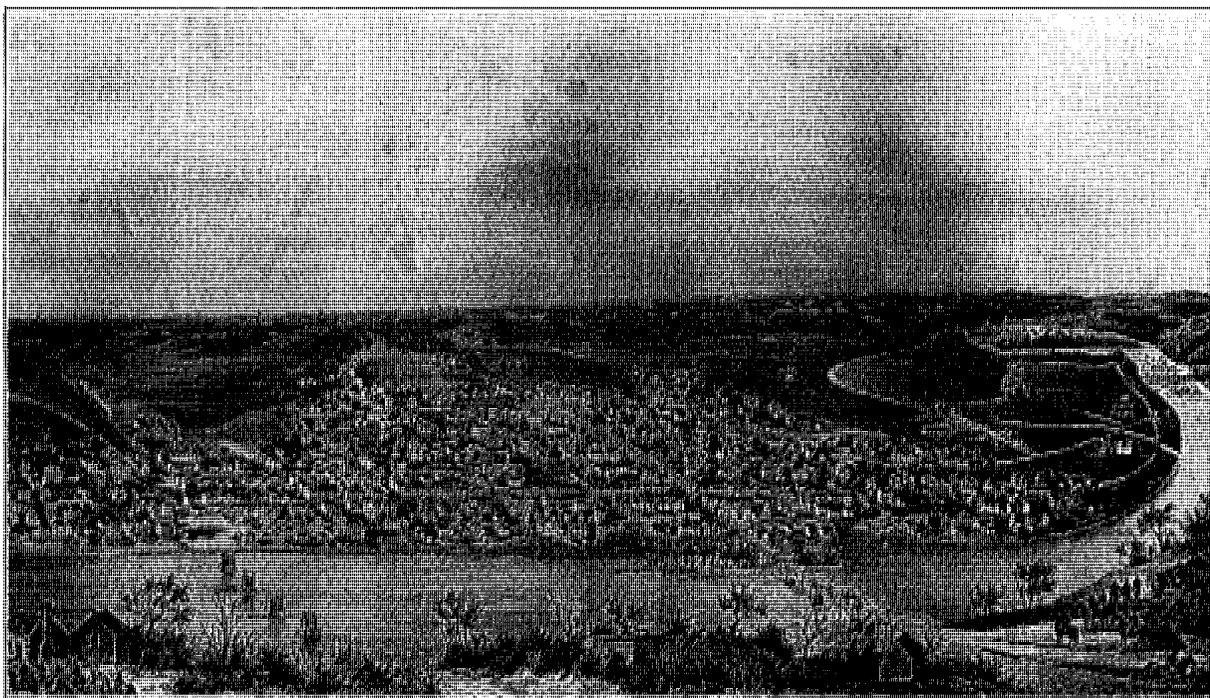
The Antebellum Decades

Throughout the decades leading up to the Civil War, the Mutual Assurance Society prospered, conducting a thriving business throughout the state and investing its surplus funds in federal and Virginia bonds, real estate, and the securities of cities, local banks, and water companies.



George A. Ainslie served as chief of the Richmond Fire Department from 1870 to 1880. Courtesy The Valentine.

In 1807, Fredericksburg suffered more than \$50,000 in fire losses. Courtesy Virginia State Library and Archives.





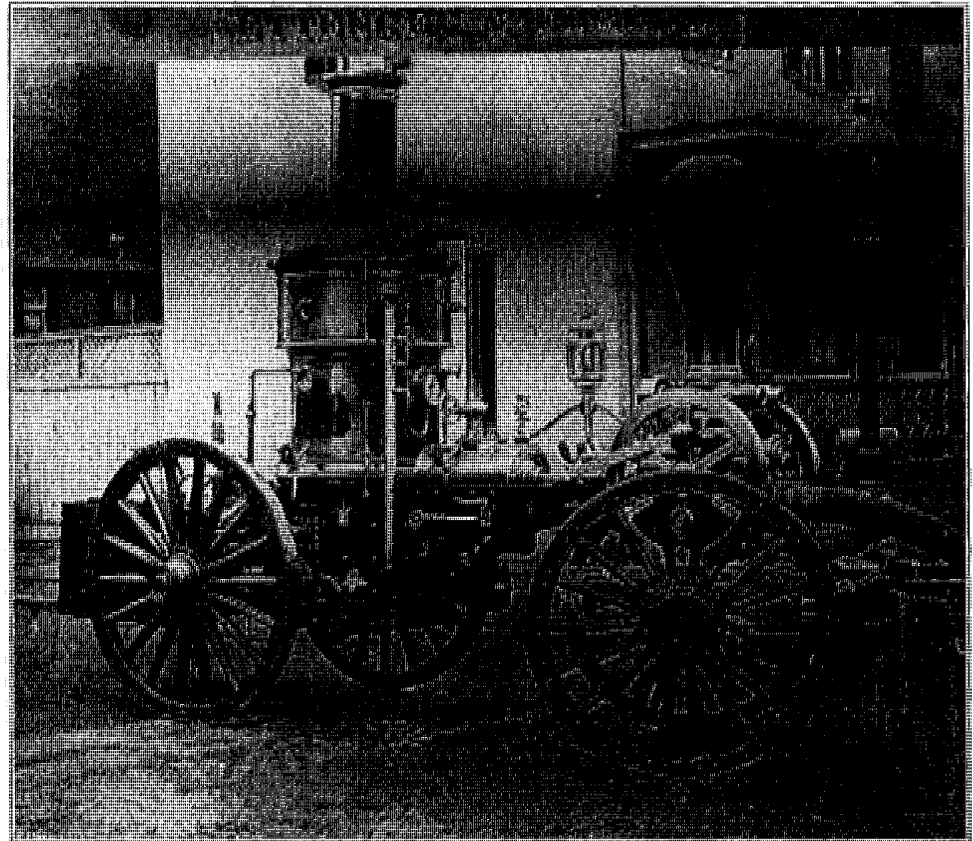
John Rutherford served as Principal Agent between 1837 and 1866, guiding the Mutual Assurance Society through Civil War. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.

The Society also continued to add to its list of properties for which the risks of fire, and large payments for damage, exceeded the benefits of collecting quotas. Among the uses rejected for insurance or subject to special high-premium contracts were wooden buildings of all types, mills, taverns, livery stables, and tobacco factories.

By limiting the number of high-risk properties the Society insured, the board reduced the costs to those insuring homes and less risky businesses of solid, fire-resistant construction. This action did not grow out of a cold-hearted unwillingness to make payments for losses. On many occasions when questions arose as to the extent of the Society's responsibility for payment, the Society paid claims without recourse to the courts or other means by which payment might be avoided. In one instance, the widow of an impoverished Revolutionary War veteran, residing in Staunton, found herself deeply in debt and appealed to the Society to forgive the

quotas owed on the property she inherited from her husband. The Society canceled legal proceedings to collect the debt, and waived all demands during the widow's lifetime, assuring her comfort and security during the rest of her life.

By the mid-1850s the Society was flourishing. It had nearly \$11 million worth of insurance in force and had paid out over \$1.5 million in claims. But no member of the standing committee nor any one of the Society's insured was unaware of the tension building between the federal government and the Southern states. Talk of war made business-as-usual a fading reality. With the bombardment of Fort Sumter and Virginia's secession in April 1861, the Mutual Assurance Society entered an era that witnessed the bloodiest conflict in the history of the United States.



This fire engine, built by Ettenger & Edmond of Richmond, helped defend Richmond from fire during the Civil War. An effective engine, it fought the severe fires of 1863 and 1865. Courtesy The Valentine.



The Civil War

For the Society, the Civil War brought immediate consequences, not the least of which was the loss of many of its officers, agents, and members to service in the Confederate Army. The committee also had to face the question of whether or not the Society would take on war risks. The members unanimously decided that it could not, for the risks were far greater than the Society's ability to cover them. One year after the hostilities began, the Society invested \$40,000 in Confederate States certificates. It later added \$10,000 more when the investment was exchanged for 8 percent Confederate bonds.

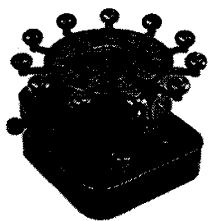
In other respects, the early days of the war saw the day-to-day activities of the Society remain more or less normal. In March 1862 the Society joined with other Richmond insurance companies to purchase a steam fire engine for the capital of the Confederate States of America. Built by Ettenger & Edmond of Richmond, the engine cost nearly \$6,000. Although wartime circumstances delayed its delivery,

it soon became a fixture of Richmond's fire-fighting service. But it could not prevent a great blow to the city and the Confederacy when, in 1863, a severe fire caused \$21,000 in damages to Richmond's Tredegar Iron Works, one of the chief suppliers of iron products and munitions to the South.

The urgent demands of wartime created chaos for the businesses and financial institutions of the South, and the Society was no exception. Richmond's insurance companies adopted new minimum rates in the spring of 1863. Col. John Rutherford, principal agent since the resignation of James Rawlings in 1837, outlined the war-related reasons for the rate increases in a letter to the standing committee in February 1864. "The cost of damages," explained Rutherford, "has been greatly increased by the high price and scarcity of labor, and of every material for building. The rapid depreciation of the currency has greatly aggravated the evil."

Fire damage, which before the war might have been easily and inexpensively remedied, was now so expensive that the cost of repairs often exceeded the whole

During the Civil War, the Society invested in Confederate States securities as pictured above. Courtesy of Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.



The Society retains this check writing machine, patented by the Automatic Bank Punch Co. of New York in 1885. Courtesy of Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.

sum insured. Rutherford estimated that the price of repair work had multiplied ten times, keeping pace with the rising costs of virtually every commodity. Wood cost \$40 a cord, butter \$4 a pound, and boots, \$100 a pair.

Perhaps even more distressing was the effect of the invasion of Union forces. "Fully one half of the cities and towns in which we have insurance," wrote Rutherford, "have been from time to time in the hands of the enemy... for more than two years we have found it very discouraging, indeed almost useless to attempt collections." With many Virginia towns often behind enemy lines, Rutherford believed that the destruction of insured buildings and subsequent losses to the Society "will not be small unless we can prove that they were by the enemy. We should be prepared to meet these liabilities."

The Society joined the other insurance companies in raising rates, but made it clear that the increase was a wartime expedient only. "When the return of peace shall ... restore the currency and improve the general condition of things," Rutherford's

letter concluded, "there is reason to believe that our rates... may be safely reduced."

Wartime Richmond

Three years into the fighting, Richmond was a depressed, down-at-the-heels city, suffering shortages of everything from fuel to building materials to food. Crime was rampant and the city's population had doubled to nearly 80,000 people. Nevertheless, Richmond residents soldiered on as Union forces attempted to take the city. Each Northern assault was beaten back until the siege of Richmond and Petersburg began in June 1864. On April 2, 1865, General Grant's army finally broke through the defenses and the Confederate Army abandoned the city.

As the defenders fled, they put the torch to munitions stockpiles, armories, tobacco warehouses, and other buildings and commodities that might be of value to the Union forces. Those fires, whipped by high winds, spread quickly to structures of all kinds, and as Union soldiers occupied the Confederate capital, the blaze virtually



Richmond's Tredgar Iron Works, the South's chief suppliers of iron product and munitions. Courtesy The Valentine.



destroyed Richmond's business district from Main Street to the James River.

The toll from the fire was almost incalculable. In addition to the buildings torched by the retreating Confederate Army, the blaze destroyed nine hundred buildings, three bridges across the James, the Henrico County Courthouse, two railroad depots, several banks, and a church. One week later, as Richmonders continued to sift through the rubble, Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse and the American Civil War was over.

Winning the Peace

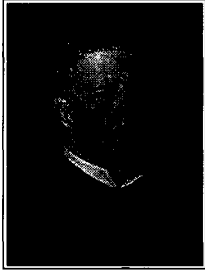
For the Mutual Assurance Society, and for most businesses in the South, the devastation of the war made the transition to peacetime a difficult journey. Communications with field agents had been almost nonexistent, fire had destroyed

thousands of buildings, and premiums went unpaid. Sorting out claims for damage would take years as the Society worked to rebuild its business.

On May 17, 1865, the standing committee convened to take stock of its circumstances and found itself facing aggregate claims of over \$100,000 without any hard currency in its treasury. A large portion of its securities had been rendered completely valueless while the remainder had greatly depreciated. Nevertheless, when the Society's assets and liabilities had been examined thoroughly, and allowing for its obligations and losses on investments, the Society found itself with a surplus of \$126,000.

That happy circumstance, combined with its solid reputation and operating experience of over seventy years, helped put the Society back on its feet after the war. In time, the Society paid off every valid claim for loss and the public confidence generated by those payments helped lift

When Richmond fell to Union forces on April 2, 1865, fire consumed the city's business district from Main Street to the James River. Courtesy The Valentine.



Herbert A. Claiborne served the Society as Principal Agent for thirty-six years between 1866 and 1902. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.

In the aftermath of the blaze of April 2, 1865, much of Richmond lay in ruins. Courtesy of The Valentine.

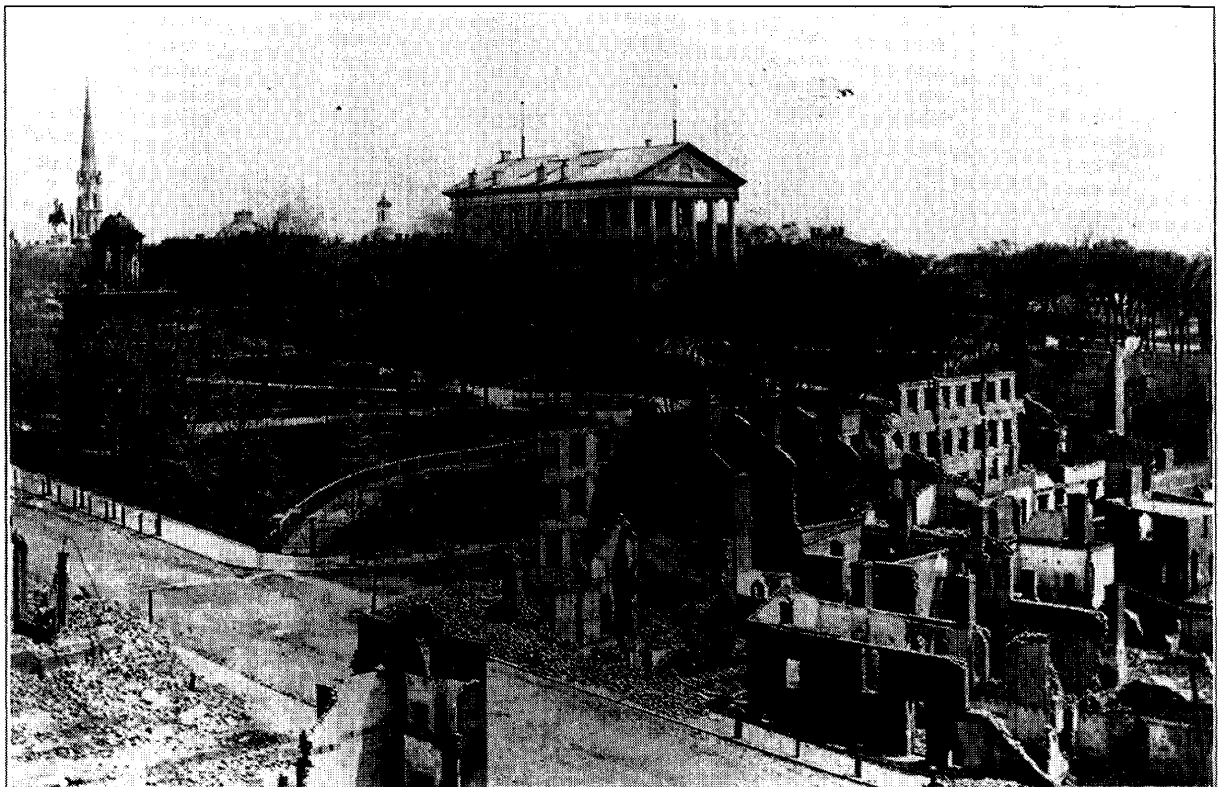
the Society out of the ashes and back into a role of leadership in the financial and commercial life of the Commonwealth.

Even as the Society began its recovery, however, it lost one of the guiding hands that had helped it survive the calamities of war. On August 3, 1866, barely a year after the end of the hostilities, Col. John Rutherford died in Richmond. Rutherford, who had served as principal agent for nearly thirty years, was eulogized by J. B. Danforth, the Society's secretary, as a man whose "exalted sense of honor, sanctified by firm belief in future judgment, was the controlling motive for all his acts." To honor their friend and colleague, the standing committee adopted a resolution that described Rutherford as "generous, urbane... charitable and tolerant." He was a man "regarded with an esteem and respect from which none dissented, an unhesitating tribute to his consistent, elevated and incorruptible life... memorable for the fidelity and modesty which it displayed." By a vote of the committee, Herbert A. Claiborne succeeded Colonel Rutherford as principal agent.

Celebrating the American Centennial

By the time of the nation's centennial in 1876, Virginians were ready to honor the founding of the United States. Once ravaged by war, Richmond and other cities and towns had spent the intervening years rebuilding, and as one local businessman wrote in the *Richmond Dispatch*, it was time to celebrate "in the old fashioned style" by closing businesses for the holiday, giving everyone "one good old day for refreshment and sleep." Many owners did close up shop for the Fourth of July, allowing Virginians to attend picnics, parades, excursions, and concerts. As one Richmond observer noted, "Nearly everyone who could do so left the heat and dust of the city and spent the day in the country."

Some Virginians accompanied regiments such as the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues and the Fayetteville Light Infantry to Philadelphia, where they marched in that city's centennial parade. Others followed Richmond's Atlantic Baseball Club to



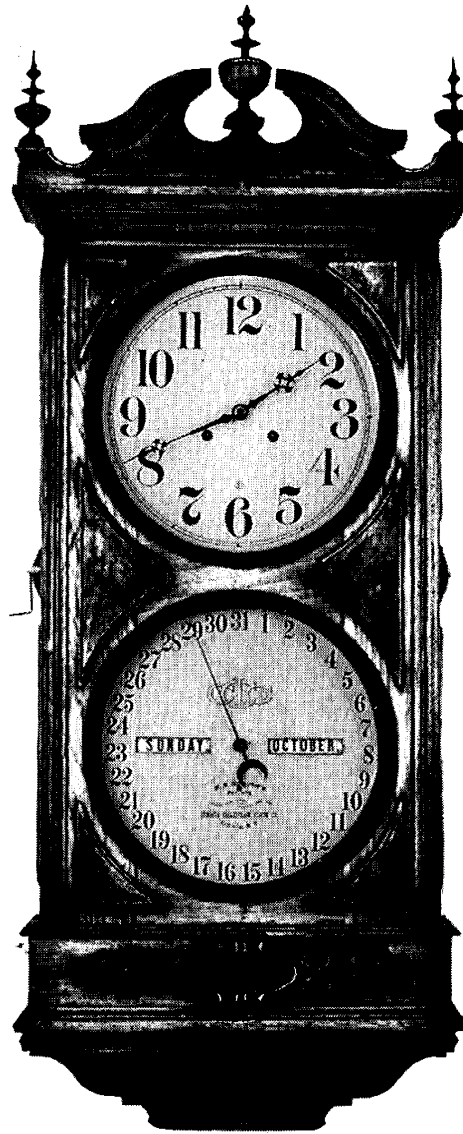
Baltimore for a holiday contest with a Maryland team. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the Society had put the hard times and hardships of the war far behind it, and the new century beckoned with the promise of continuing success.

The New Century and the "Old Mutual"

The turn of the twentieth century found both Richmond and the "Old Mutual" prosperous enough to look forward with confidence and enthusiasm. That shared prosperity was based in part on the connections that linked the Society—by then holding assets of \$1.5 million—with the cities and towns of Virginia and many of the Commonwealth's businesses and financial institutions.

The membership of the standing committee in 1900 exemplified those connections: Joseph Bryan, president of the Richmond Locomotive Works and future publisher of the *Times-Dispatch*; W. J. Leake, president of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac (RF&P) Railroad; and committee chairman Col. William H. Palmer, veteran of the Battle of Manassas, comrade of Stonewall Jackson and a leader in Richmond's commercial and financial circles. Palmer, a towering figure in the city and the state, served, at one time or another, as the founder and president of businesses, banks, and insurance companies, often simultaneously. These men and the other members of the standing committee also served on the boards of colleges, railroads, and manufacturing firms throughout Virginia, forming a network of mercantile and financial interests that worked together to support the economic growth of the Commonwealth.

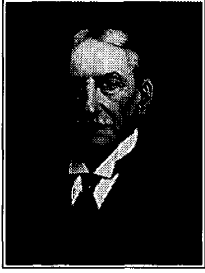
The connections between the Society and Virginia commerce were strengthened further through the Society's considerable



This Calendar Clock, first patented by H.B. Horton of the Ithaca Clock Co. on April 18, 1865, continues to keep the date and time at the Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.

investment in stocks and bonds issued by businesses, institutions, and municipalities throughout the Old Dominion. In 1900 the Society held securities valued at over \$1.3 million, including bonds issued by the U. S. government, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the cities of Richmond, Petersburg, and Lynchburg. The Society also had purchased securities from five different banks and the Petersburg Aqueduct Company, which promised an improved supply of water, much needed for fighting fires in that city.

Its cautious and conservative investment policy reflected the Society's century-old stance in the insurance business, and



After the War, distinguished veterans served the Society. Col. William Palmer, a prominent leader in Richmond's commercial and financial circles and dedicated to the economic growth of the Commonwealth, served on the Standing Committee for fifty-six years, forty of them as chairman. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.

Opposite: Exterior of the Mutual Assurance Society building at 1014 East Main Street. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.

that conservatism enabled it to strengthen its financial reserves while continuing to integrate the Old Mutual into a growing modern commercial network based in Richmond and stretching across the Commonwealth.

The steady increase in the Society's assets mirrored the fortunes of Richmond's financial and commercial sector and the growing stature of Richmond as a major railroad center. At the turn of the century, two new railroad stations were under construction, designed to serve three railroads connecting Richmond with the other cities and towns in Virginia and the nation. The vigor of American railroads was reflected not only in the construction of new stations and new rail lines, but also in the major investments being made in railroad companies by other corporations and financial institutions including the Mutual Assurance Society, which held bonds from half a dozen railroads including the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac; Georgia Midland; and Atlantic Coast Line. The Society's ties to railroading were indisputable. On June 2, 1900, the first-ever train from Tampa, Florida, arrived in Richmond over the newly com-

pleted Seaboard Air Line railroad. The two steam locomotives pulling the first train were built by the Richmond Locomotive Works, whose president, Joseph Bryan, had been a member of the standing committee since 1893.

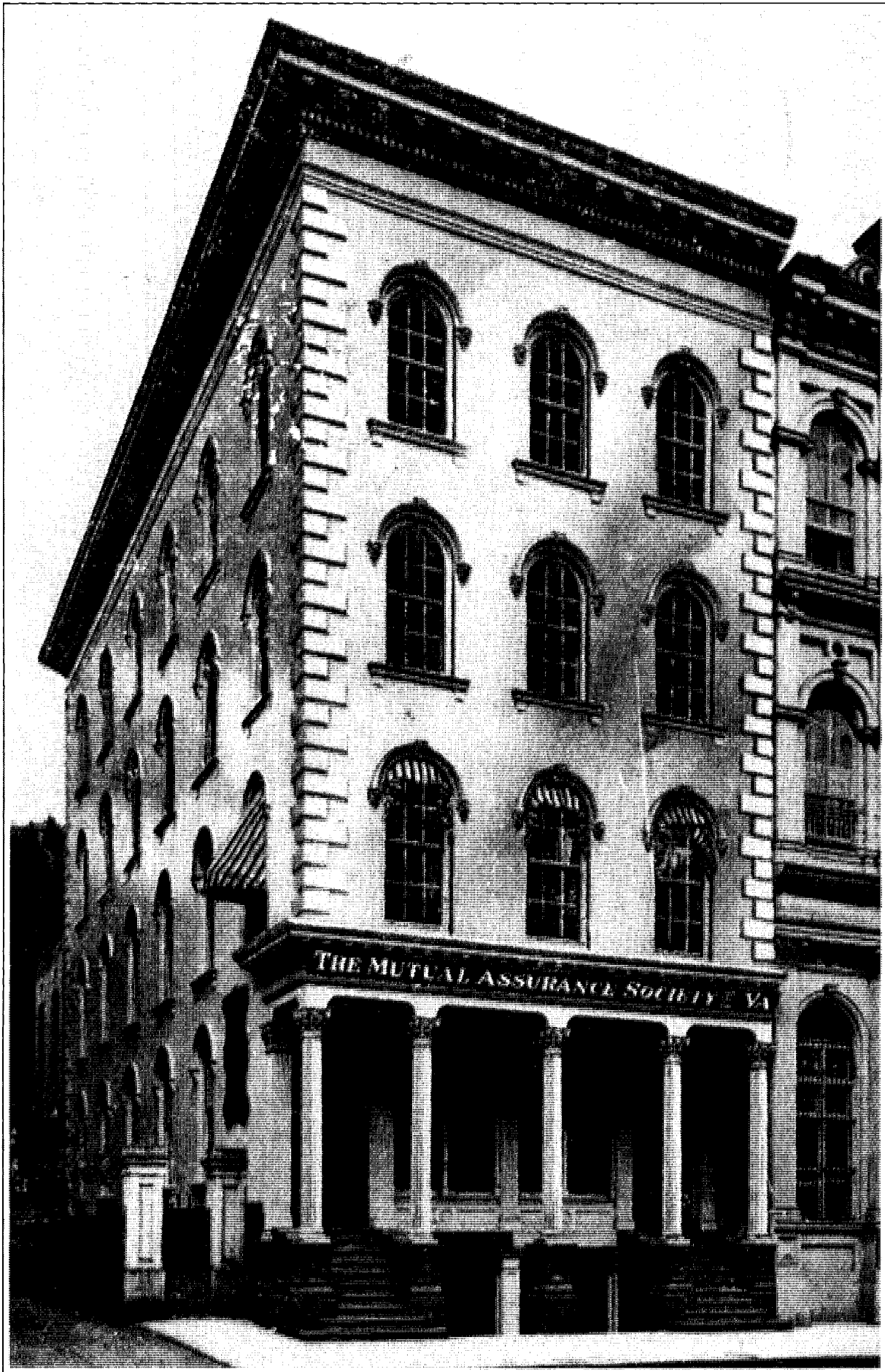
A Skyscraper on the Skyline

The invigorating effects of Richmond's fast-growing financial and commercial interests were most obvious in the changing appearance of the city's downtown. In 1905 the skyline was dramatically recast by the twin wings of a new nine-story office building at the southeast corner of Ninth and Main Streets (subsequently increased to twelve stories). Towering 125 feet above street level, the Mutual Assurance Society Building was designed and built as a sound investment in real estate for its members, and was the sixth home of the Society in its 110-year history.

Upon its completion in May 1905, the massive structure—complete with six Otis elevators and its own Westinghouse electrical generating plant—became an instant Richmond landmark. A three-page story in



The office of the Society in its building at 1014 East Main Street, 1902. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.





the *Times-Dispatch* on May 21 called the building “by long odds the handsomest, most substantial and imposing office structure in the City. It will compare with any in the South, and is the result of skillful application of the most improved building methods in every line, working with the best obtainable materials.”

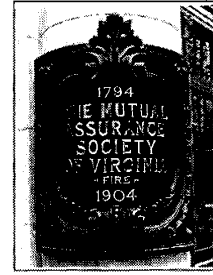
The Mutual Building was a completely modern skyscraper for its day. The headquarters of the fifth oldest fire insurance company in the United States, the building employed the latest in fireproofing technology developed by the Metropolitan Fireproofing Company of New York. The ornate structure, with exterior walls of blue granite, brick, limestone, and terra-cotta over a steel and iron skeleton, covered more than half an acre on one of the city’s busiest blocks and cost nearly \$600,000. Marble, mahogany, oak, and silver-embossed plate glass were applied to the building’s interiors. The Old Mutual took offices on the second floor, and the rest of the building was leased to Richmond firms. The income from those rentals added to the financial security of the Society, whose insurance in force now totaled nearly \$17 million.

Less than one year after the completion of the new headquarters, the standing committee met to honor its chairman of twenty years, Col. William H. Palmer. Joseph Bryan eloquently described Palmer’s long devotion to the Society, his strength, and his wisdom. Noting that Colonel Palmer would discourage expressions of such sentiments, Bryan said that the committee was unwilling not to place on record “their appreciation of one whose character, force, cultivation and refinement made in him that perfect model of a man—the Virginia Gentleman of the old school.” With those words the committee presented its chairman with a silver loving cup inscribed with those words and the name of each committee member.

Colonel Palmer was not the only Palmer to serve the Society. His father,

William Palmer, had served on the standing committee from 1866 until 1870. In 1902, Colonel Palmer’s son, Edwin A. Palmer, was unanimously elected principal agent after serving as the Society’s secretary for six years. The younger Palmer succeeded Herbert A. Claiborne, who had been principal agent for thirty-six years, longer than any other person in the Society’s history. Under the guidance of the Palmers, father and son, the Old Mutual prospered, investing its growing surplus of funds wisely and continuing to strengthen its financial position.

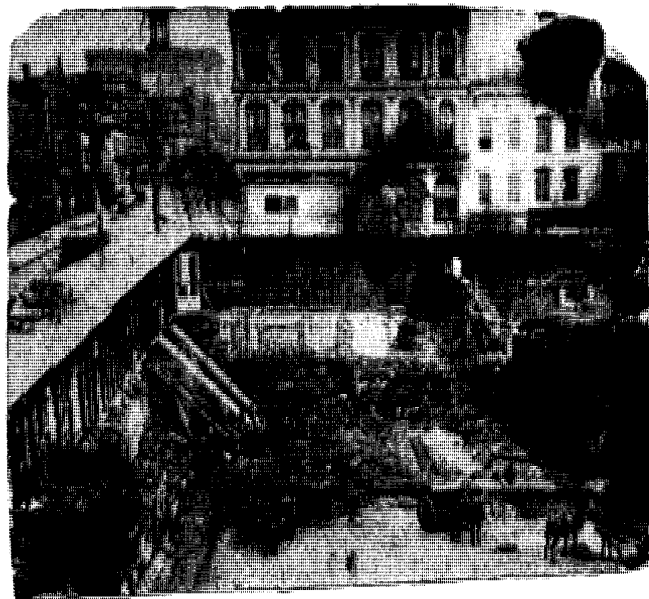
The Society’s investments on behalf of its members were not limited to the stocks and bonds of governments, corporations, and financial institutions. The Society also invested heavily in the future of education in Virginia by subscribing to bonds issued by several of the Commonwealth’s institutions of higher learning. Members of the standing committee also served on the boards of several Virginia universities; with their encouragement, the Society invested in them as well. In 1916 the committee also approved a \$15,000 perpetual fire insurance policy on the newly constructed Jackson Memorial Hall at the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, erected in honor of the Civil War hero.

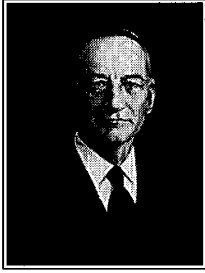


This plaque was placed on the building at 909 East Main Street in 1904, where it may still be found today. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.

Opposite: The Society was headquartered in the building at 909 East Main Street from the time of its completion in 1905 until its sale in 1991. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.

The enormous task of excavation at the Mutual Assurance Society’s site located at 909 East Main Street was performed using horses and wagons. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.





Edwin A. Palmer, son of Colonel William Palmer, served as Principal Agent of the Mutual Assurance Society between 1902 and 1928. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.

World War I

Shortly after the dedication of Jackson Memorial Hall, the political tensions building in nations thousands of miles away erupted in a war that threatened to engulf the world. With the United States entry into World War I in 1917, everyone's attention was focused on Europe. American doughboys crossed the Atlantic to join the Allies in their stand against the Central powers. In addition to the men, women, and material supplied in ample quantities by the Old Dominion, the war effort required significant support from the financial community. By October 1918, the Mutual Assurance Society held over \$400,000 in Liberty Bonds. The Society also took out subscriptions to the Red Cross War Fund and the United War Work Campaign, in addition to its other charitable contributions.

Armistice Day found the Old Mutual in good financial health, and by 1920 its assets reached the \$3 million mark. With surplus funds of \$2.9 million, the Society had no trouble paying out that year's claims of \$42,000 for losses by fire. As it had in the past, the standing committee met at least four times a year, with each claim for loss by a Society member brought before the committee by the principal agent after its inves-

Duke of Gloucester Street ten years prior to the re-creation of Colonial Williamsburg. Courtesy Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.



tigation by agents in the field. The principal agent made his recommendations regarding payment, and the standing committee authorized warrants to pay the outstanding claims. By this time, the amount of insurance in force had grown to over \$36 million.

Standing committee meetings must have been models of civility and decorum, judging by the elaborately recorded minutes. The redoubtable Colonel Palmer presided until his death in 1926. When Palmer died, the Society closed its offices in mourning for the man who had served on the standing committee for fifty-six years, forty of them as chairman. The committee's resolution on the occasion of the Colonel's passing summed up his impact on the Old Mutual: "The Society's wonderful success has been largely due to [its] power and management, with both of which, we think it is fair to say, that no man in its history has had as much to do with as Col. William H. Palmer." Within ninety days, a fourth Palmer came to serve the Society when William H. Palmer, Jr., (Edwin Palmer's brother) was unanimously elected to fill the vacancy on the standing committee occasioned by the passing of his father.

A Sense of History: The Old Mutual and Colonial Williamsburg

Just as the Palmers had faithfully served the Society, so too had the Society faithfully served its members for over 130 years. Shortly after Colonel Palmer's death, the Old Mutual provided an unusual and valuable service to Virginia, one that would help to restore and preserve an important part of the history of the Old Dominion.

Since its earliest days in business, the Old Mutual had written fire insurance policies in Williamsburg. The agents writing those policies had included on the insurance applications detailed written descriptions as well as drawings and elevations describing the buildings upon which

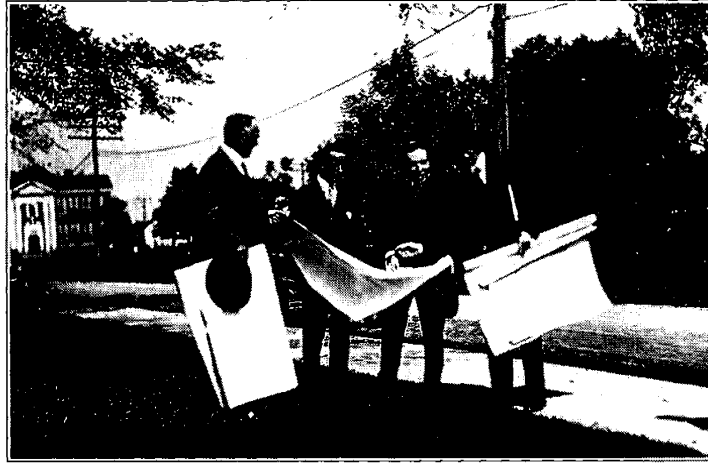
those policies were placed. Unless they were needed in the case of a claim for loss by fire or for reevaluation, those forms remained untouched in the Society's files.

In 1926 a unique and historically significant project was undertaken at Williamsburg, the colonial capital of Virginia from 1699 to 1780. Some years earlier, William A. R. Goodwin, Rector of Burton Parish Church, had conceived the idea of restoring the town to its colonial appearance. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. became involved in Goodwin's project and eventually donated some \$62 million toward its completion. Their goal was the re-creation of the environment of eighteenth-century Williamsburg and the lives of the men and women who made such great contributions to the ideals and culture of the nation.

During the course of the work over the following decades, the main part of the colonial city, an area of some 130 acres, was restored to its original appearance. Seven hundred modern structures were torn down or removed, 83 existing original buildings were restored, and 413 buildings were reconstructed on their original foundations.

From the very beginning of work in 1927, everything done at Williamsburg was based on painstaking archaeological, architectural, and historical research. Much of the success of that research rests on the singular contribution of the Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia. From the start of the project, the Society made available its 130-year-old collection of fire insurance records to the researchers at Williamsburg, providing a resource of inestimable value in the re-creation of the life and architecture of colonial Virginia.

Those involved in the project needed as much first hand information as possible to re-create the city faithfully. Few sources provided as much detailed information about the buildings in Williamsburg as did the insurance applications written by the

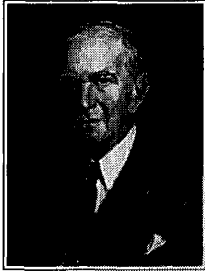


John D. Rockefeller, Jr., inspects renovation plans. The Society's records provided detailed descriptions, drawings and building elevations needed for the re-creation of the environment of eighteenth-century Williamsburg. Courtesy Virginia State Library and Archives.



Duke of Gloucester Street in the recreated Colonial Williamsburg. The restoration has had a significant impact on tourism in the Commonwealth. Courtesy Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Society's agents and inspectors. The earliest research reports written by Williamsburg historians included copies of the Society's applications, providing a century-old, firsthand description of the buildings as they originally stood. Since many policies had been rewritten over the years, the changing descriptions of the properties allowed historians to view the process by which the face of Williamsburg had evolved. The meticulous records of the Society were a windfall. No one in 1927 could imagine the impact that the restoration of Williamsburg would have on the



Appointed as Principal Agent in 1928, W. Meade Addison helped keep the Society financially sound during the Great Depression. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society

Commonwealth. That impact, generated through intensive work in the decades that followed, owed much to the records and policies of the Society.

Weathering the Great Depression

Soon after the death of Edwin A. Palmer and the appointment of W. Meade Addison as principal agent in 1928, the bottom fell out of the Roaring Twenties. The stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed hit the cities and towns of Virginia hard. For the Society and its members, the 135-year tradition of cautious and fiscally conservative investments served to keep the Old Mutual financially sound throughout the 1930s. In the first third of the century, the amount of the Society's insurance in force had climbed to nearly \$52 million. By 1930, the Society's assets in stocks and bonds exceeded \$4.8 million, and there was a surplus of almost \$4.7 million to cover losses by fire.

So well established was the Society, and so singular its means of perpetual insurance through collection of quotas that the State of Virginia, instituting sweeping reforms in the state's insurance regulations, exempted the Society from the new uniform fire

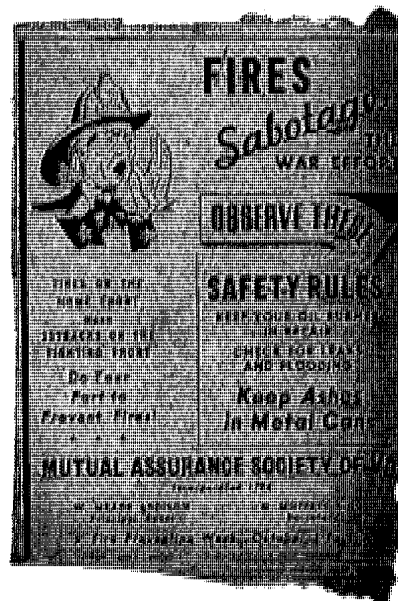
insurance policies now required by state law. Not only did the amount of insurance in force grow throughout the 1930s, but so did the assets and surplus of the Society.

In addition to serving their members by abating quotas for many years during the depression, the standing committee also moved to help others in need. In 1930 the committee resolved that "this Society, realizing the unprecedented conditions confronting the City of Richmond and other cities and towns in the state of Virginia, doth hereby appropriate the sum of \$5,000 to organized and recognized community funds for the year, in the various cities and towns in the state in which this Society does business." These donations continued throughout the 1930s. The removal of the word "unprecedented" from the resolution of 1937 was a grim reminder of the long and devastating impact the depression had on Virginians.

World War II

With the United States' entry into World War II, in December 1941, the Society once again invested a portion of its resources in war bonds, joining others in the Commonwealth to help support the country in wartime. As the conflict drew to a close in 1945, the Society celebrated its 150th anniversary by abating quotas for its members—in essence providing no-cost fire insurance for the year. As it emerged from the war years, the Society could look back over a century and a half of service to property owners in Virginia with great satisfaction. Despite successive calamities—the Civil War, World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II—the Society's careful investments, its ties to businesses and financial institutions throughout the state, and the sound management practices of its standing committee and officers stood the Society in good stead. Poised to enter the modern postwar

This World War II advertisement in the Richmond Times-Dispatch made it everyone's patriotic duty to help prevent fire and help save precious resources needed in the war effort.



era, the Society enjoyed extraordinarily secure fiscal health.

During the tenure of G. Moffett King, Sr., principal agent from 1954 to 1960, and that of his son, G. Moffett King, Jr., principal agent from 1960 to 1966, the Society made several changes in the types of policies it wrote, offering extended coverage, additional extended coverage, and, eventually, homeowner's insurance, which became in time the Society's primary insurance product. Quotas were abated several times during that period, and by 1964 the Society had \$110 million of insurance in force.

After the accidental death of G. Moffett King, Jr., in 1966, the standing committee appointed S. Vernon Priddy, Jr., principal agent. Mr. Priddy completed the significant transition of the Society from writing traditional fire and extended coverage insurance to the relatively new and very popular homeowner's package policy. Mr. Priddy retired in May 1981 after fifteen years as principal agent and twenty-five years with the Society.

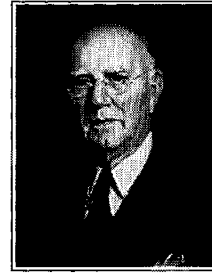
Toward the Twenty-First Century

In 1981 the standing committee appointed L. Gerald Roach as the eleventh principal agent in the Society's 187 year history. Mr. Roach, a native of Richmond, had begun his career on the regulatory side of the insurance business. During eighteen years of public service with the Commonwealth of Virginia's Bureau of Insurance and the State of North Carolina's Department of Insurance, he specialized in the regulation of insurance companies' financial condition and operations. He brought a desirable perspective to the modernization challenges facing the Society's Standing Committee at that time. Under his direction, the Society initiated a thorough review of its operating methods and procedures. Its goal was to prepare the Old Mutual for the challenge of the final

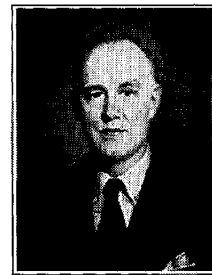
decades of the twentieth century and the coming twenty-first century. At its annual meeting in May 1982, members amended the articles of incorporation to facilitate modern management of the Society. Its name was changed officially from The Mutual Assurance Society Against Fire on Buildings of the State of Virginia to its present and most commonly used name, Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia. The standing committee was renamed the Board of Directors, the principal agent became the president, and the term of office for members of the board were staggered to ensure continuity of management of the affairs of the Society. The Board of Directors also voted to limit its chairman's term of office to four years.

In 1982 the Society made another significant contribution to historical research when it donated its historic records to the Virginia State Archives, making them available to historians tracing the social and commercial development of the Old Dominion. In addition to the ongoing work at Williamsburg, these records became particularly important to historians studying the early life of Virginians throughout the state.

At Monticello, the original documents relating to Thomas Jefferson's efforts to insure his home with the Society have helped historians to restore not only the main house, but also to rediscover other facets of life on Jefferson's plantation. Most recent was the work done at "Mulberry Row," an area of Monticello that included such plantation industries as a blacksmith shop and nailery, a joinery, a carpenter's shop, a sawpit, a smokehouse, and a dairy. Using an early plat of the buildings—believed to be Jefferson's original survey of the property for the purpose of obtaining insurance from the Society—historians at Monticello have provided a significant look at the lives of eighteenth-century Virginians. Other historians also use the Society's records, tracing the early develop-



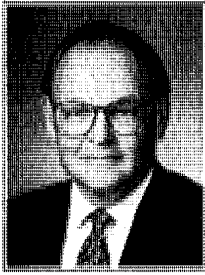
G. Moffett King, Sr. served the Society as principal agent between 1954 and 1960. He served the Society in several different positions for fifty-six years.



G. Moffett King, Jr. served the Society as principal agent between 1960 and 1966. During his tenure, the Society extended its coverage to include homeowner's insurance.



S. Vernon Priddy, Jr. served as principal agent from 1966 until his retirement in 1981. Portraits courtesy of Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.



L. Gerald Roach became the Society's president (formerly the position of principal agent) in 1981. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.

ment of urban communities and historic sites throughout the Commonwealth to preserve the history of Virginia's people.

The donation of those historical records signaled another fundamental change in the Society. Because the Old Mutual still maintained its primary insurance records as it did when it started operations in the eighteenth century, its chronologically perfect collection of bound historical records dating from 1794-1966 was of tremendous interest and value to archival researchers and historians. Recognizing the need to make effective use of technology and to maximize the efficiency of office procedures, the Society installed its first computer system in 1983 and surrendered at last its book-bound system of policy record-keeping in favor of policy files and computer disks.

The Society now had entered a new period of more rapid growth targeted exclusively toward improving its service to members and the insurance products it offered. Over the next ten years, the Society introduced new policy coverages, adopted new and more readable policy forms, broadened coverages and coverage limits, refined its underwriting rules, and generally upgraded its insurance products.

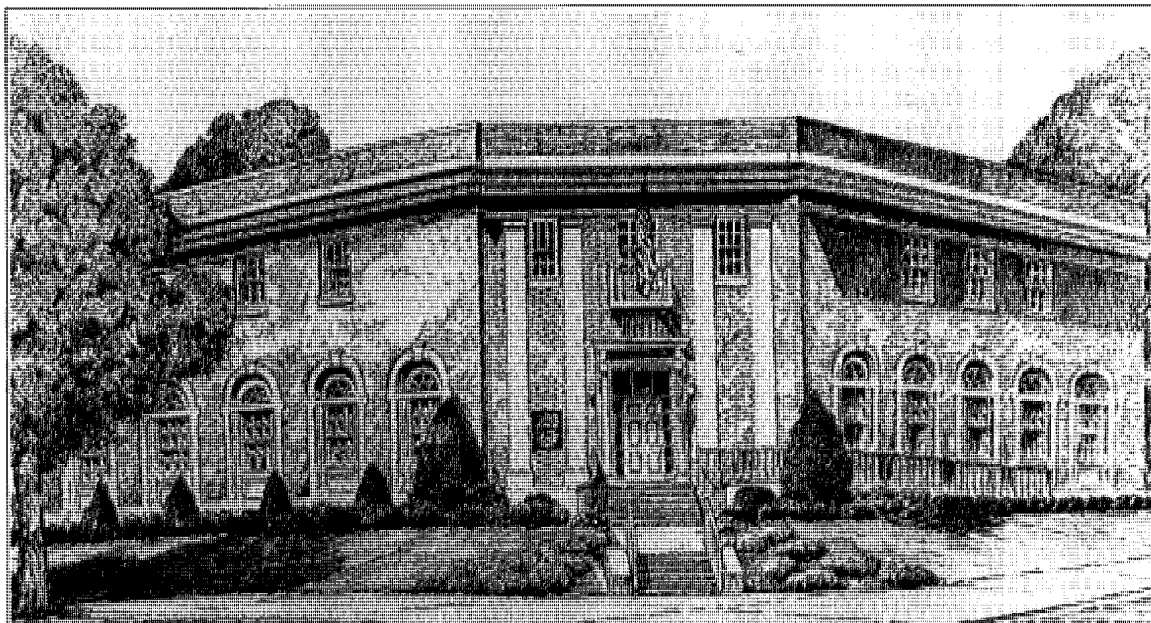
Another important change occurred in 1985 when the Society restricted the

unlimited annual assessment liability its policyholders were exposed to under its bylaws. The board voted to limit the annual assessment liability to no more than 200 percent of the policy premium. This change was made in recognition of the substantial financial resources the Society had come to enjoy, and it afforded all policyholders the comfort and security of an acceptable level of commitment to the Society's concept of "mutual assurance and mutual risk."

Since its completion in 1905, the Mutual Building at 909 E. Main Street in Richmond was home to the Society. After 86 years at that location, the building was sold in 1991 to a Richmond bank to complete the bank's assemblage of the entire city block on which it had built its new headquarters. Anticipating the sale, the Society acquired and renovated a building in the city's West End at 4001 Fitzhugh Avenue. The new location was occupied by the Society on May 6, 1991, only the seventh site of the Old Mutual in its two-hundred-year history.

Shortly after the Society relocated, the Board of Directors once again approved a significant contribution to the people of Virginia, the fruits of an investment made by the Society a century earlier. The Society had first invested in the Richmond,

The present day location of the Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia in Richmond's West End at 4001 Fitzhugh Avenue. Illustration by Bill Perrine, courtesy of Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.



Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad in 1880. In 1991, the Virginia Retirement System acquired control of the RF&P. Prior to the redemption of its RF&P holdings, the Society donated 38,500 shares of its appreciated stock to create the Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia Charitable Fund. At that time, the Charitable Fund totaled over \$1.5 million. Today the Fund is administered by The Community Foundation, with advice and recommendations from the Society for its use in support of many charitable and nonprofit organizations in the state. The establishment of this fund continues its long-established tradition of charitable contributions and community service.

In 1994 the Mutual Assurance Society enters its third century with two hundred years of continuous service to the people of the Old Dominion. It has weathered many disasters—any one of which could have destroyed a lesser institution. The Old Mutual has not only survived, it has flourished, first providing protection against the calamities of fire, and now offering a wide range of insurance to the home and property owners of Virginia.

The Society can proudly claim to be the oldest active business in the City of Richmond, the oldest incorporated business in the State of Virginia and the fifth oldest fire insurance company still in business in America. By the end of 1993, the Society's property insurance in force had grown to over \$3.2 billion, with assets being held for the protection of its members exceeding \$140 million.

Many individuals and families have served the Society with devotion, from the notable men of the standing committee—Joseph Bryan, Col. William Palmer, Mann Valentine, and others—to the hard-working agents in the field—the men and women who embody the Society's reputation for honesty, integrity, and service. In the words of its creator, William Frederick Ast, the Mutual Assurance Society was



“founded upon benevolence,” and it has never lost sight of its original mission. The Society continues to offer insurance that produces “the happy effect that those who insure their property have not only the pleasant satisfaction to succor their unfortunate fellow citizens, but like-wise the comfort to secure at the same time their own property against loss or damages.” The Society and its members can look back on the first two hundred years with pride and look forward to the century ahead with confidence, knowing that its past has provided a solid foundation of integrity, service, and protection upon which it may build its future.

Officers and Board Members of the Mutual Assurance Society. Standing left to right: John S. Case, Secretary-Treasurer; Directors: Richard W. Wiltshire, Jr.; L. Gerald Roach, President; O.H. Parrish, Jr. Directors Seated: Richard H. Dilworth, Henry Taylor, Jr., Vice Chairman; Henry Lee Valentine, II, Chairman; Julius P. Smith, Jr.; J.F. Williams III. Courtesy of Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia.



The Bicentennial Fire Mark of the Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia. Courtesy Mutual Assurance Society.

Appendix:

**Principal Agents
(President since 1982)**

| | |
|-----------------------|------|
| William Frederick Ast | 1794 |
| Samuel Greenhow | 1808 |
| James Rawlings | 1815 |
| Col. John Rutherford | 1837 |
| Herbert A. Claiborne | 1866 |
| Edwin A. Palmer | 1902 |
| W. Meade Addison | 1928 |
| G. Moffett King, Sr. | 1954 |
| G. Moffett King, Jr. | 1960 |
| S. Vernon Priddy, Jr. | 1966 |
| L. Gerald Roach | 1981 |

**Members of the Board of
Directors/Standing Committee**

| <i>name</i> | <i>date elected</i> |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| Andrew Dunscomb | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| John Peyton | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| George Pickett | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| Robert Mitchell | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| Jacob I. Cohen | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| James Brown | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| Robert Bolling | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| William Duval | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| William Foushee | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| George French | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| Alex St. Clair | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| Thomas Newton | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| Jonah Thompson | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| Bushrod Washington | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| James Brander | Dec. 26, 1795 |
| Robert Pollard | Dec. 5, 1798 |
| John Thomas Ricketts | Dec. 5, 1798 |
| John Barrett | Dec. 5, 1798 |
| Richard M. Scott | July 16, 1799 |
| Benjamin Hatcher | Jan. 6, 1800 |
| James Campbell | Jan. 6, 1800 |
| James Currie | Jan. 10, 1801 |
| Daniel Call | Jan. 10, 1801 |

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| Alexander McRae | Jan. 13, 1802 |
| George W. Smith | Jan. 13, 1802 |
| Alexander Stuart | Aug. 13, 1804 |
| Henry L. Briscoe | Feb. 7, 1809 |
| Edward Carrington | Feb. 7, 1809 |
| Richard Adams | Feb. 7, 1809 |
| William Marshall | Feb. 7, 1809 |
| John Ambler | Feb. 7, 1809 |
| David Bullock | Feb. 7, 1809 |
| Joseph Gallego | Feb. 7, 1809 |
| Robert Gamble | Feb. 7, 1809 |
| Thomas Rutherford | Feb. 7, 1809 |
| William C. Williams | Feb. 22, 1809 |
| John Prosser | Feb. 6, 1810 |
| John Foster | Feb. 6, 1810 |
| Philip N. Nicholas | Feb. 6, 1810 |
| Charles Copland | Mar. 2, 1811 |
| George Pickett | Mar. 2, 1811 |
| John D. Blair | Mar. 2, 1811 |
| William Wardlaw | Mar. 2, 1811 |
| Thomas Wilson | Mar. 2, 1811 |
| John Brockenbrough | Mar. 13, 1819 |
| William Munford | Mar. 13, 1819 |
| Edward Cunningham | Mar. 13, 1819 |
| Benjamin Tate | Mar. 13, 1819 |
| John Chew | April 5, 1822 |
| Patrick Durkin | May 24, 1822 |
| James Henderson | May 24, 1822 |
| Samuel Myers | June 6, 1823 |
| Robert G. Scott | Mar. 7, 1823 |
| Robert Gwathmey | May 10, 1823 |
| Joseph Marx | May 10, 1823 |
| John Southgate | June 6, 1823 |
| Edmund W. Rootes | Mar. 4, 1825 |
| Philip E. Tabb | Feb. 8, 1826 |
| John Allan | Feb. 7, 1827 |
| William Galt | Jan. 30, 1828 |
| Gustavus Lucke | June 13, 1831 |
| Gustavus A. Myers | April 1, 1831 |
| Archibald Taylor | April 1, 1831 |
| John G. Williams | April 1, 1831 |
| Joseph Allen | Feb. 28, 1834 |
| Richard Anderson | Feb. 28, 1834 |
| Nicholas Mills | Feb. 28, 1834 |
| James Caskie | April 12, 1837 |
| William H. Macfarland | April 12, 1837 |
| Conway Robinson | Jan. 9, 1838 |
| Samuel Marx | April 13, 1839 |

| | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|----------------|
| Henry W. Moncure | April 13, 1839 | C.W. Grandy | July 7, 1926 |
| John C. Hobson | Jan. 3, 1846 | Wm. H. Palmer, Jr. | Oct. 12, 1926 |
| Jaquelin P. Taylor | June 8, 1847 | Thomas C. Gordon | April 6, 1928 |
| William Mitchell, Jr. | June 8, 1847 | John C. Easley | Jan. 3, 1929 |
| William C. Allen | June 8, 1847 | John B. Mordecai | Jan. 3, 1929 |
| Thomas H. Ellis | Mar. 8, 1853 | J. Jordan Leake | July 9, 1929 |
| William Gray | Mar. 8, 1853 | Stuart G. Christian | July 3, 1930 |
| James Dunlop | Mar. 8, 1853 | O. Herbert Funsten | July 3, 1930 |
| Mann S. Valentine | Mar. 8, 1853 | John M. Taylor | July 7, 1939 |
| John Womble | Mar. 8, 1853 | Granville G. Valentine | April 5, 1940 |
| Frederick Bransford | Nov. 22, 1856 | Harry H. Augustine | July 3, 1941 |
| James H. Grant | Mar. 10, 1862 | C. Braxton Valentine | July 16, 1943 |
| Alfred T. Harris | July 13, 1865 | Landon R. Funsten | April 6, 1945 |
| James L. Apperson | Sept. 26, 1866 | Preston B. Watt | April 6, 1945 |
| John Purcell | Aug. 13, 1866 | Overton D. Dennis | May 20, 1946 |
| William Palmer | Sept. 26, 1866 | Fred N. Harrison | July 7, 1949 |
| William Rutherford | Aug. 13, 1866 | C.W. Grandy, Jr. | May 17, 1954 |
| John Freeland | Aug. 13, 1866 | Robert M. Jeffress | Oct. 9, 1959 |
| Garrett F. Watson | Aug. 13, 1866 | Thomas P. Bryan, Jr. | April 8, 1960 |
| George Davis | Dec. 15, 1868 | Edward F. Gee | Oct. 11, 1963 |
| Col. Wm. H. Palmer | June 16, 1870 | L. Burwell Gunn | Nov. 3, 1967 |
| William H. Haxall | June 16, 1870 | R. Colston Christian | Dec. 1, 1967 |
| Samuel C. Tardy | Oct. 15, 1870 | Herbert W. Jackson, III | Jan. 6, 1969 |
| Emile O. Nolting | April 23, 1872 | Henry Lee Valentine, II* | July 27, 1970 |
| Col. Clement R. Barksdale | April 23, 1872 | Richard H. Dilworth* | July 1, 1974 |
| William Fred Gray | Dec. 7, 1876 | O.D. Dennis, Jr. | Oct. 17, 1977 |
| Col. William C. Knight | Dec. 7, 1876 | Henry Taylor, Jr.* | Dec. 4, 1978 |
| James W. Allison | Jan. 18, 1881 | S. Vernon Priddy, Jr. | Nov. 8, 1979 |
| Richard L. Brown | Jan. 18, 1881 | L. Gerald Roach* | May 1, 1981 |
| Alfred T. Harris | Sept. 25, 1888 | Robert N. Pollard, Jr. | Jan. 4, 1982 |
| Thomas M. Rutherford | Sept. 25, 1888 | Richard W. Wiltshire, Jr.* | April 25, 1983 |
| Lewis Ginter | Oct. 18, 1893 | O.H. Parrish, Jr.* | Oct. 15, 1984 |
| Joseph Bryan | Oct. 18, 1893 | Julious P. Smith, Jr.* | Sept. 8, 1986 |
| I.D. Cardozo | July 7, 1897 | J.F. Williams, III* | Aug. 20, 1990 |
| W.J. Leake | July 7, 1897 | | |
| E.T.D. Myers | July 7, 1897 | | |
| E.D. Taylor | July 7, 1897 | | |
| Benjamin B. Valentine | May 27, 1897 | | |
| W.H. Taylor | April 14, 1906 | | |
| A.B. Blair | Jan. 4, 1907 | | |
| Judge Geo. L. Christian | Nov. 27, 1908 | | |
| E.B. Addison | Nov. 24, 1908 | | |
| James Caskie | April 1, 1914 | | |
| Thomas H. Willcox | April 4, 1916 | | |
| Frederick S. Valentine | July 8, 1919 | | |
| W. Meade Addison | July 6, 1922 | | |
| Robert C. Bryan | July 6, 1922 | | |
| T.C. Williams, Jr. | Oct. 2, 1924 | | |

*Current Member of Board of Directors

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*A Bicentennial History of the
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