

Press Release
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Virginia Museum of History & Culture Presents New Exhibit *John Marshall: Hidden Hero of National Union*

Richmond, VA — The distinguished life of John Marshall (1755–1835), the fourth and longest-serving Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, parallels the growth of the American experiment in self-government. Coming of age with a new nation, Marshall fought for independence and served in all three branches of the federal government. On Sunday, February 10, the Virginia Museum of History & Culture (VMHC) will remember this important leader with an exhibit exclusively focused on the man and his contributions that shaped the Supreme Court as we know it today. The exhibit, *John Marshall: Hidden Hero of National Union*, brings to life the little-known story of America’s longest serving Chief Justice, and the first president of the Virginia Historical Society, elected in 1831. It is presented to commemorate the 200th anniversary of *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819), the case that defined the scope of federal legislative power and its relationship to state government authority.

In an era when the Supreme Court is ever-present in the news and stirs great debate in Congress and among popular opinion, it is clear that Marshall’s legacy is highly relevant today. It was he who gave the Supreme Court the might that it now possesses—a co-equal branch of the federal government with powers to check and balance those of the executive and legislative branches.

“Indeed, Marshall’s reach is further than most,” said VMHC President and CEO, Jamie O. Bosket. “We are thrilled to be showcasing this historic Richmonder with an entire exhibit that recounts his life and legacy. He may be the most important Founding Father few know anything about.”

Highlighting objects like his 1780 Law Commonplace Notebook, spectacles and inkwell, writing desk, and even his hair and bladder stones, this exhibition will explore the themes and accomplishments of Marshall’s life. Among the interesting little-known facts about Marshall is that he established the tradition of justices wearing black robes. In a letter approving the loan of his robe to the exhibit, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito, Jr., wrote, “all of the work of the Supreme Court rests on the foundation [Marshall] laid.”

At age 20, Marshall served in a militia unit that became a part of George Washington’s Continental Army. He rose from the rank of lieutenant to captain, wintered with Washington at Valley Forge, and fought in the battles of Brandywine, Germantown, and Monmouth. On military leave in 1780, Marshall studied law with George Wythe and received a law license. He served a year in the U.S. House of Representatives and later as secretary of state to President John Adams. It was during his thirty-four years (1801-1835), leading the Supreme Court as Chief Justice, however, that Marshall made his most visible and lasting contributions to the nation. Landmark decisions, including *Marbury v. Madison* (1803) and *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819), established precedents that remain in force today. In *Marbury*, Marshall stated, “It is emphatically the province and duty of the judicial department to say what the law is.” *McCulloch*, arguably the most important case in the history of the Supreme Court, established the extent of federal power and the limits of state sovereignty. “The government of the union . . . is, emphatically and truly, a government of the people. In form and in substance it emanates from them. Its powers are granted by them, and are to be exercised directly on them, and for their benefit.”

John Marshall: Hidden Hero of National Union is co-sponsored by the Virginia Museum of History & Culture, Preservation Virginia, and The John Marshall Foundation with support from Hunton Andrews Kurth, LLP, McGuireWoods, & E.B. Duff CLAT. The exhibit will be on display through September 29, 2019, in the Stern Family Gallery at the VMHC. Free for VMHC members or included with museum suggested admission.

The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is owned and operated by the Virginia Historical Society — a private, non-profit organization established in 1831. The historical society is the oldest cultural organization in Virginia, and one of the oldest and most distinguished history organizations in the nation. For use in its

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state history museum and its renowned research library, the historical society cares for a collection of nearly nine million items representing the ever-evolving story of Virginia.

The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is located at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond's Museum District. Hours are Monday – Sunday 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for the galleries and museum shop, Monday – Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for the research library. For more information call 804.340.1800, visit VirginiaHistory.org, or connect with the Virginia Museum of History & Culture on Facebook and Twitter.

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