



# VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The Story of Virginia*

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## Virginia Historical Society Begins Work on 1912 Skylight Restoration Project

### Saving Historic Glass Panels to Illuminate History

Richmond, VA – The Virginia Historical Society (VHS) is restoring skylights in the 1912 portion of their headquarters on the Boulevard. The clear and yellow glazed glass panels, more than one hundred years old, have been carefully removed and transported to New Jersey for restoration by Femenella & Associates.

The building, originally known as Battle Abbey and now known as the VHS, was designed in 1912 by Ecole des Beaux Arts graduate John P. B. Sinkler, of the Philadelphia firm Bissell and Sinkler. It was constructed for the Confederate Memorial Association. One enters the neoclassical-style limestone-clad building through bronze doors that are centered beneath a pedimented, tetrastyle Ionic portico, which is flanked by symmetrical wings with shallow, rectangular, Doric pilasters. Though there have been several additions to the building, the Battle Abbey interior has retained the original entry sequence and circulation spaces since its completion in 1912. All of these original spaces were lit by the leaded glass skylights. Perhaps the most significant portion of this historic interior is the south gallery, which contains the Memorial Military Murals painted by Charles Hoffbauer from 1913–1920 to commemorate the Confederacy's military heroes in settings that depict the four seasons.

There are four main murals, two measuring 26' x 14' and the largest two spanning 36' x 14', and four smaller flanking panels that are 3.5' x 14' each. Outside of the cycloramas at Gettysburg and Grant Park in Atlanta, the murals are one of the few large-scale pieces of Civil War artwork on public view.

The skylights consist of 27 large panels approximately 9' x 4'. Signs of deterioration that required extensive restoration led to the removal of the 104-year-old delicate glasswork. Careful inspection revealed broken glass, deflection, staining, and UV solarization. Extreme displacement from gravity, high heat, moisture, and previous improper repairs have added stress and cracks in the skylight panels. A structural analysis of the existing steel trusses that supported the skylights was evaluated. A report of recommendations based on the preservation of historic material, safety, and cost helped evaluate and select the appropriate preservation treatment.

The restoration project of all 27 panels is a careful endeavor requiring the expertise of leading specialists. The skylight panels will be restored by salvaging 90 percent of the original glass.

Historic tax credits may help cover a portion of the project. The VHS is seeking additional funding to pursue the upkeep of the exterior of the Battle Abbey, including the repointing and cleaning of its limestone façade.

The Virginia Historical Society (VHS)—a privately funded nonprofit organization—collects, preserves, and interprets the Commonwealth's history, linking past with present to inspire future generations. The VHS 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 library. For more information about the VHS call (804) 358-4901, visit [vahistorical.org](http://vahistorical.org), or connect with the VHS on Facebook and Twitter.

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