

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF THE COMMONWEALTH



Why is Virginia a Commonwealth?

Virginia was first known as a Commonwealth in the period between the execution of Charles I in 1649 and the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II in 1660. This period was referred to as the Interregnum ("between reigns"). During this time Oliver Cromwell was Lord Protector of England. (He refused to take the title "King"). Under his leadership, the colony of Virginia enjoyed greater freedom in self-government than it had before. After Cromwell's death in 1658 his son tried but failed to continue his father's legacy. The British Parliament reconvened and restored the monarchy. Charles II took the throne and once again the colonies were under a firm British rule.

Britain's thirteen colonies broke ties with the Crown in the American Revolution and the first Constitution of Virginia was adopted on June 29, 1776. The delegates at the Williamsburg convention decided to name their new form of government the Commonwealth of Virginia, probably in deference to the rebellion against the Crown and the relative freedom they had enjoyed as a colony over one hundred years before during the Interregnum.

Massachusetts and Pennsylvania also chose to adopt the name Commonwealth following the War of Independence. Kentucky, which was once part of Virginia, kept the name Commonwealth when it joined the Union as the 15th state in 1792.

Virginia's Constitution states "Government is, or ought to be, instituted for the common benefit, protection, and security of the people..." and "That all power is vested in, and consequently derived from, the people..." These statements are the foundation and heart of the meaning of the "Commonwealth of Virginia." The citizens of Virginia are encouraged to have direct participation in their own government. One of the most important duties of the Secretary of the Commonwealth is to foster this inclusion by assisting the Governor in appointing Virginians from all walks of life and all corners of Virginia to serve on our many boards and commissions. This enables the public to have direct input to the policies and activities of each and every agency. Every Governor is bound to honor the Constitution by encouraging all citizens to actively and directly participate in Virginia's government.

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