


# Hokie, Hokie, **HOKIE, HY!**

and a Few Other Virginia Tech Symbols and Traditions



Peel away the groundbreaking research, eminent scholarship, nationally ranked programs, and service to society that set Virginia Tech apart. Pare our world-renowned faculty, high-achieving students, and dedicated staff. What remains? At our base, you'll find an innovative core that permeates even our traditions. Take the ones that follow, for example.

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*John M. McBryde*  
UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT 1891-1907

Several of those traditions date back to the late 19th century after we hired a top-notch guy as president—John M. McBryde. His 16 years at the helm were so impressive that two other colleges tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to lure him to their camps, including that school down the road in Charlottesville.

McBryde assumed his duties as president of Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, as we were known then, in 1891 and immediately began reorganizing the curriculum. His vision was for us to become more professional and technical, and his plan for implementing that vision laid the foundation for modern-day Virginia Tech.

McBryde's changes in the little school in Blacksburg spurred the Virginia General Assembly to make a change of its own in 1896 to reflect the "new" college. Our name became—and you'd better take a deep breath if you want to pronounce it aloud—Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute. It's no wonder that the general populace shortened it to Virginia Polytechnic Institute, or simply VPI, but it took the General Assembly another 48 years to make it official—possibly spurring creation of the phrase "change is eternal." At least we learned then that the Old Dominion is not about to adopt a new fad too quickly.

**TRADITION-MAKER**

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With that new name in hand and aided by his son, also named John, McBryde proceeded to develop a coat of arms, motto, and seal, all the trimmings needed to grace the hallways of academe.


The coat of arms features a shield divided into four quarters. The first quarter portrays the figures from the obverse of the Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia—representing our status as the state's land-grant college.

The third quarter shows a chemical retort (a glass vessel used for distilling) over a flame, with liquid dripping into a graduate beaker—expressing our additional academic scope.

Since the college would need a seal for official documents, the McBrydes encircled the coat of arms with a band that includes the name of the institution. In the late 19th century, the name used was the unofficial Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Today, we use our official name, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Yes, after the General Assembly finally changed our name to Virginia Polytechnic Institute in 1944, that august body bestowed one more official name in 1970, giving us four names over the course of our history.



# UNIVERSITY SEAL



Above the shield sits the burning lamp of knowledge being filled by a human hand.

The second quarter is comprised of a transit theodolite (that's an instrument that measures horizontal and vertical angles) and a leveling rod superimposed over a scroll—reflecting our engineering heritage.

And the fourth quarter illustrates an upright half-shucked ear of corn—depicting our agricultural roots (so to speak).

At the bottom lie the Latin words *Ut Prosim*, which translate to "That I May Serve." *Ut Prosim* remains the school's motto, a timeless ideal for our land-grant-school values of discovery, learning, and engagement.



# UNIVERSITY LOGOS

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Nearly a century after the McBrydes created the official seal, Larry Hincker, associate vice president for University Relations, recognized the need for a less formal visual element that we could use on signs, publications, and other items that don't require the official seal. So in the early 1990s, Hincker and graphic designer Michele Moldenhauer developed a logo, which consists of a shield that incorporates the Pylons of the War Memorial, underscored with the year of the university's founding: 1872. The shape of the shield reflects the collegiate heritage of all universities.

The university officially adopted the logo in May 1991 and updated it in 2006.



The 2006 update followed a yearlong study by a branding consultant, who worked closely with the university community to develop a representative tagline for Virginia Tech. That tagline—*Invent the Future*—expresses the future-altering and future-enhancing work of each facet of the Virginia Tech experience. So usually when you see the updated logo, you'll see the version that incorporates the tagline.



The university also has an athletic logo: a streamlined VT, which is used only for sports and sports merchandise. Unveiled in 1984, the athletic logo is a composite of designs submitted by two Virginia Tech art students—Lisa Eichler of Chesapeake, Va., and Chris Craft of Roanoke, Va.—to a competition sponsored by the university's art department. It replaced an older athletic logo that consisted of a large V with a T centered inside it, which had debuted in 1957.



Now, let's go back to the 1890s, which introduced at least one more lasting tradition. Take our colors, for example (some might say, "Please!"). If you think they tend toward the—let's say—unusual now, consider that originally they were black and cadet gray. That drab combo was picked in 1891 by the brand new student-run Athletic Association to reflect the principal colors of the cadet uniforms worn by the all-male, military student body.

But when the black and gray appeared on athletic uniforms in the striped style popular in the late 19th century, our athletes looked rather like convicts—and lodged a few complaints about their appearance.

So we did what all good schools do when faced with a problem—we formed a committee. Actually, the corps of cadets and a few other people from the college banded together to examine the question of colors. What they found—or, should we say, what they didn't find was a college or university anywhere in the country that had orange and maroon as its school colors. So we decided to be innovative—maybe even bodacious—in the color category. We established burnt orange and Chicago maroon as our official colors—back in 1896.

Since most of our fans wear these colors and since Lane Stadium is the arena where the greatest concentration of Hokie fans gather all at once, during football season we extend the fall colors of the surrounding countryside into late November and early December. So you might think of our colors as environment-friendly.

# SCHOOL COLORS

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**SKIPPER**

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Various cannons have been used off and on for years at Virginia Tech, but in the 1960s one industrious student formally proposed to the student governing body that a cannon be acquired to fire at football games. The proposal was approved but went no further.

About the same time, two cadets from the class of 1964 made a pact at a traditional Thanksgiving Day game with then-archrival VMI that they would build a cannon for Virginia Tech (then known as VPI) to outshine—or outblast—VMI’s “Little John.” The cadets, Alton B. “Butch” Harper Jr. and Homer Hadley “Sonny” Hickam (of *October Sky* fame), were tired of hearing the VMI keydets chant “Where’s your cannon?” after firing Little John.

Harper and Hickam collected brass from their fellow cadets, added it to metal donated by Hickam’s father, collected donations from the corps to purchase other supplies, and used a mold created in one of the engineering departments from Civil War-style plans to make their cannon. They derived the name of the cannon—“Skipper”—from the fact that President John Kennedy, who had just been assassinated, had been the skipper of a PT-boat, and they wanted to do something to honor him.

On its first firing at the next game with VMI, the eager cadets tripled the charge, blowing the hats off half the VMI keydets and shaking the glass in the press-box windows of Roanoke’s Victory Stadium. They never heard the VMI chant again.

Today, cadets fire Skipper from outside Lane Stadium when the football team enters the field and when it scores and for other notable occasions.



## Hokies

We hear it again and again. What’s a Hokie? The short answer to that oft-asked question is that a Hokie is a supporter of Virginia Tech.

The long answer takes—well—longer but is certainly more interesting. When the General Assembly changed our name to Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute (and you thought Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University was a mouthful), we needed a new college cheer.

The old one had been a simple play on the college’s name:

**Rip, Rah, Ree!  
Va, Va, Vee!  
Virginia, Virginia!  
A-M-C!**

The “e” was added to “Hoki” some time later, either for looks or to forestall mispronunciation of the word that Stull said he created merely as an attention-grabber in the cheer, which became known as “Old Hokie.” Can’t you just hear some Wahoo calling us Ho-kiiz?

Obviously, with “and Polytechnic Institute” added to our name, that wouldn’t work (picture the last line: “A-M-C-&P-!”—forget about the beat, who could remember that many letters). So the college, whose name was shortened in popular usage to Virginia Polytechnic Institute, or, simply, VPI, held a contest for the student body to come up with a new spirit yell. The cheer entered by O. M. Stull, a member of the class of 1896, won the five-dollar prize for first place. Like the old cheer, the new one was also a play on the college’s name, but this one was a little more complex—at least it had more words in it:

**Hoki, Hoki, Hoki, Hy!  
Techs, Techs, V.P.I.!  
Sola-Rex, Sola-Rah.  
Polytechs – Vir-gin-i-a.!  
Rae, Ri, V.P.I.!**



## Gobblers

Interestingly, another nickname, which didn't exist when Stull wrote the cheer, became more popular than Hokies. Our fans called us "Gobblers," beginning in the early 20th century, more than they called us "Hokies"—at least until the 1980s.

So where did "Gobblers" come from? In 1909, football Coach Branch Bocock pulled his players aside, one by one, and initiated them into an impromptu and informal "Gobbler Club" to build team spirit and camaraderie. After that, the name took off, appearing in print for the first time that same year. Some other stories float around about the origins of the nickname on campus, so maybe Bocock was influenced by a gobbler spirit that permeated the campus. Nonetheless, his "club" does seem to be the kick-off point for wider use of the nickname.

At some time during the Gobbler heyday, a myth arose that the nickname was derived from the way our athletes ate their food. That myth ultimately spelled the demise of the nickname.

In the late 1970s, we hired a football coach/athletic director who eventually heard that the Gobblers moniker evolved from the eating habits of athletes. Not liking the image, he took steps in the early 1980s to ensure that our prominent nickname became Hokies rather than Gobblers—he even went so far as to remove the beloved turkey gobble from our scoreboard.

Frank Beamer, who had played on the Gobbler football team in the 1960s, put the gobble back on the scoreboard when he came to town in 1987 to coach the football team. But by then the Hokies nickname had stuck—even though fans still love to hear the scoreboard emit that turkey gobble.

# NICKNAMES

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# MASCOT

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Virginia Tech's beloved HokieBird has quite a history, which is intertwined with the nickname.

Initially, the official mascot was a VPI employee who had become a favorite of the cadets—and his special designation as mascot extended to his turkey, which eventually usurped his position. The Gobbler nickname had already become popular when—and no doubt was the reason why—Floyd “Hard Times” Meade, a local resident and VPI employee chosen by the student body to serve as the school’s mascot, trained a large turkey to perform various stunts. Meade first demonstrated his turkey’s skill—and strength—at a football game in 1913 by having the turkey pull a cart—with Meade riding in it. But college President Joseph D. Eggleston Jr. thought the cart-pulling was cruel to the turkey and halted it after one game (we don’t know how he felt about cross-body blocks by big linemen but have no record that they ceased during his administration). After that, Meade only paraded the turkey, which he had trained to gobble on command, up and down the sidelines—and did so until another turkey trainer, William Byrd “Joe Chesty” Price, took over in 1924. Use of a live turkey mascot on the sidelines continued at least until Price’s retirement in 1953.

While a costumed Gobbler joined the live turkey for at least one game in 1936, the first permanent costumed Gobbler did not appear until the fall of 1962. In the early 1960s, Mercer MacPherson, a civil engineering student, saw the mascot for another university and decided that VPI should have one as well. He contacted a manufacturer, learned what a mascot suit would cost, and raised the money, most of it from civilian students.



Money in hand—all \$200 of it—MacPherson drove to the manufacturing company, located in Pittsburgh, to help create the costume. The result, which MacPherson has called “a thing of beauty” (should we mention the eye of the beholder at this point?), was a somewhat unusual turkey with a cardinal-like head. It sported—in vital spots—real turkey feathers dyed in school colors.

The costume arrived a few days before the last football game of the season—what was then the annual Thanksgiving Day face-off between VPI and VMI in the “Military Classic of the South.” MacPherson donned the get-up to become the first of Virginia Tech’s permanent—though evolving—mascots.

Even though the mascot was known as the Gobbler and then the Fighting Gobbler for 20 years, the costume itself underwent at least one major alteration. In 1971, the costume was modified to a long-necked bird—some 7 1/2 feet tall. That’s when the name was modified as well—to Fighting Gobbler—on the suggestion of the football coach at the time.

The long-necked bird hung around for 10 years before a new football coach/athletic director began pushing to eliminate the Gobbler image. In 1981, the Athletics Department contacted the art department about assigning a student to sketch designs for a new mascot costume. Student George Wills accepted the assignment and drew several designs for his class project. The designs went to a company in Cleveland that stitched together the final costume based on those drawings.

The new mascot made its first appearance in September 1981 at the Virginia Tech - Wake Forest football game,



George Wills, father of the current HokieBird that we know and love.

arriving on the playing field by helicopter. The turkey-ish figure, which proceeded to wow the crowd with its antics, was referred to as "the Hokie mascot," "the Hokie," and "the Hokie bird." Eventually, the term "Hokie bird" stuck, although it has since been merged into one word: HokieBird. In the evolution of costumes, this one became known as the "diving bell costume" because of the shape of the head.

In 1986, another athletic director pushed for a redesigned HokieBird logo, and Wills, by then a local cartoonist and illustrator, latched onto the project, developing the big-chested bird we know so well today and charging \$75 for his work. Peg Morse of the Athletics Department worked with Wills to alter the mascot costume to match the new logo. Their goal was a turkey that conveyed power and strength, a mascot with moxie.

The new HokieBird made its debut on Sept. 12, 1987, during Virginia Tech's football season opener against Clemson. The now famous mascot entered Virginia Tech history in style, riding onto the field in a white limousine escorted by the Hi-Techs and two students dressed as Secret Service agents.

Since that dramatic entrance two decades ago, HokieBird has conquered the hearts of the Hokie nation; has won national mascot competitions; and has become so popular that he landed an appearance on Animal Planet's "Turkey Secrets," a special shown in 2002 and 2003 in various timeslots during the week before and the week of Thanksgiving (of course).





# CORPS OF CADETS

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So what's the university's longest-running tradition? That would be the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets, which traces its beginnings to the university's founding in 1872 as Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College (VAMC).

Although the first students—all male at the time—had to wear cadet uniforms and were involved in military training, disagreements erupted almost immediately over the level of that training. Brig. Gen. James H. Lane, a professor who oversaw the military program and became its first commandant, wanted VAMC to follow the military organization of VMI. Charles L. C. Minor, the college president, viewed the training as a teaching aid. Their differences over the issue mushroomed over the years, resulting in a flurry of fisticuffs during a faculty meeting—and nearly spelling the demise of the college that was to become Virginia Tech.

VAMC waffled on the issue for several years—depending on the wishes of the members of the board of visitors appointed by whatever governor was in office at the time (hey, the corps wasn't the only target of the board; it tossed out some presidents and the entire faculty a few times, too). The corps of cadets finally became a permanent organization in 1891.

In 1923, President Julian A. Burruss cut the mandatory four-year military requirement for male students in half, a mere two years after the cadets had loudly voiced opposition to the acceptance of women as full-time students (we don't think Burruss was retaliating, although he

was the one who spearheaded the admittance of women).

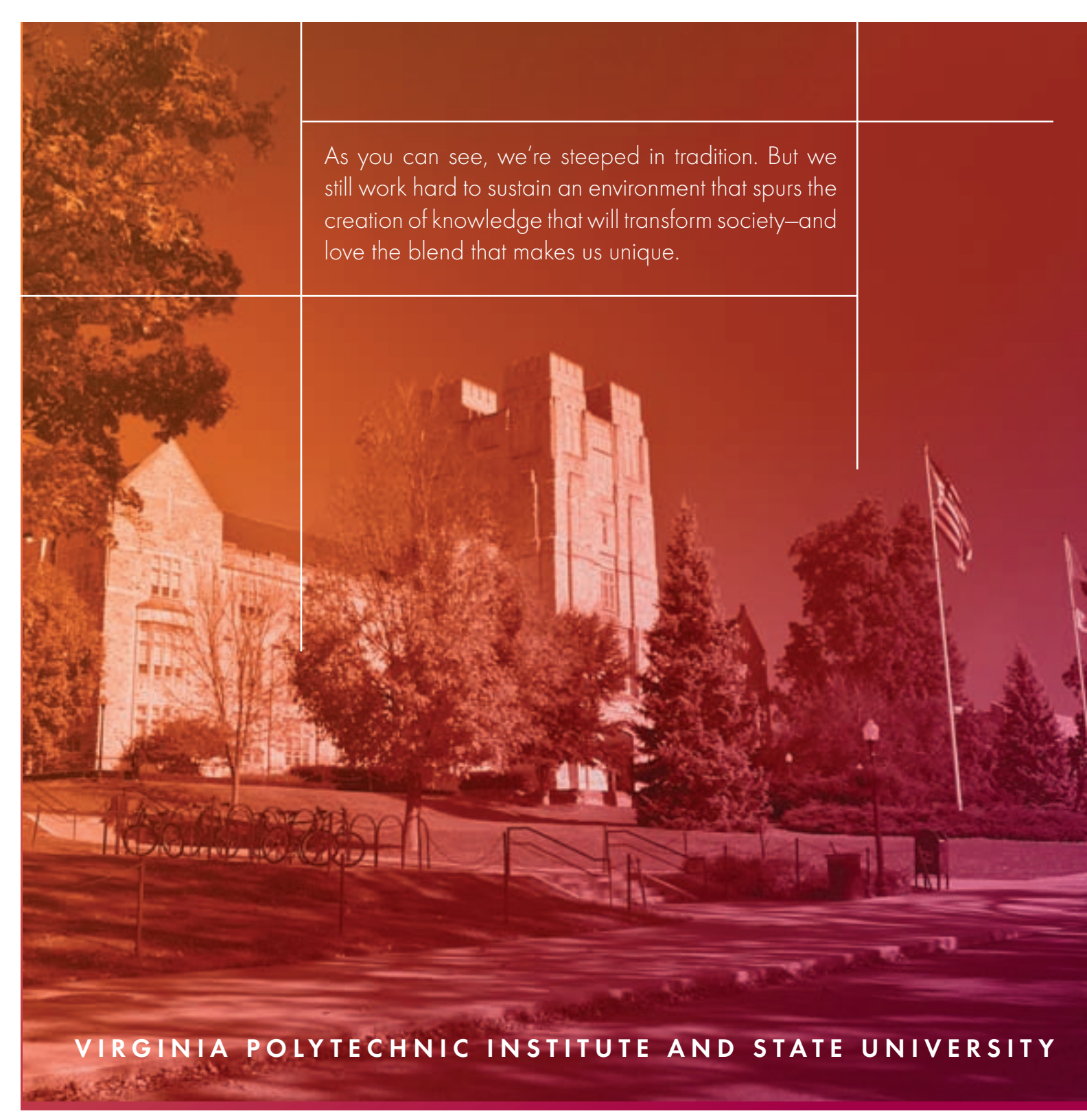
When the state proposed in 1944 moving all women's programs to Radford College, which it named the Women's Division of VPI, the corps staunchly objected, while Burruss, who was still president, said nothing. The cadets' opposition helped influence a compromise that left some women's programs on the Blacksburg campus (and allowed the cadets to continue beating a trail to the "Skirt Barn").

Two more historic changes occurred in 1964, when President T. Marshall Hahn, in a move to transform VPI into a comprehensive university, made participation in the corps voluntary and ended the relationship with Radford College, bringing all women's programs back to Blacksburg. In 1973, the corps voluntarily accepted women into its ranks, setting the standard for even the service academies.

Throughout its existence, the corps has itself spurred countless traditions, some that have come and gone—like the Rat Parade and Sophomore Night—and others that remain—like Skipper and even having a mascot.

One of three corps of cadets operating alongside a civilian student body at a public university, the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets is an invaluable component of the university, enhancing ceremonies, sparking enthusiasm, promoting the attributes of The Pylons, and setting the standard for leadership—and they look swell in their uniforms.





As you can see, we're steeped in tradition. But we still work hard to sustain an environment that spurs the creation of knowledge that will transform society—and love the blend that makes us unique.

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**