

Closed!!!

24 June 2022

For those of you not aware, Washington and Lee plans to build a permanent wall in Lee Chapel which will forever separate the Valentine recumbent statue gravesite of Robert E. Lee from the sanctuary seating and stage area in Lee Chapel. This is all to appease persons uncomfortable with the sight of Lee in final repose when they enter the Chapel. Alternative locations for mandatory attendance are or can be made available on campus. Washington and Lee is throwing out respect, honor, and basic public access to the Lee story, which has been a part of Washington and Lee and Lexington history for decades.

“Closed for the Summer” is a sign currently posted on what has been known as Lee Chapel for generations of Washington and Lee alumni. It does not explain for what purpose it is now inaccessible to the public. Most likely it is to construct a permanent, internal wall intended to both block the view of and prevent easy pedestrian access from its sanctuary to the tomb of Robert E. Lee and Edward Valentine’s magnificent sculpture - *Recumbent Lee*. It is important to remember Lee Chapel became a national destination highlight in the early 1960’s, when the National Park Service designated it as a National Historic Landmark.

In the following years, an estimated 40,000 visitors have come to Lexington annually to honor the life of Robert E. Lee and to pay respects to the University for which his major contributions, beginning over 150 years ago, led to the creation of one the nation’s premier liberal arts colleges and law schools. Lee was the leading educational innovator of his era. He saved Washington College from the scourges of the Civil War. He laid down its foundations in terms of a sustainable endowment,

stellar nationwide student body, relevant and refreshed curricula and outstanding faculty. And Lee established and passed on a culture based on honor, integrity of one's word and actions, pursuit of excellence and an example of sterling leadership.

The National Park Service did not portend its naming decision to celebrate the Civil War, Slavery and the Lost Cause. Without presenting plausible evidence, a year ago the current Rector claimed the University had used it for such nefarious purposes. The occasion was that of the Trustees announcement they were stripping Robert E. Lee's name from the chapel he conceived, funded and built and which became his and his family's burial place. This led to the removal of all art, plaques and other mementoes honoring George Washington, Robert E. Lee and other historic alumni heroes and benefactors. It now awaits only the planned construction of a Wall of Legacy Desecration.

This construction of the wall must be halted. Failure to do so will dishonor the University's history, its namesakes and all who have given of their Time, Talent and Treasure to support the educational vision of Robert E. Lee and the farsighted investment of George Washington in the late 18th century. Its completion will insult thousands of alumni inspired by Lee's legacy to lead lives of principled achievement and service to their chosen communities, including their alma mater. And its plans will infuriate many of Lexington's citizens, who should expect more of their tax-exempt neighbor than disruption of their economic well-being and trashing of their shared history.

Thomas P. Rideout '63

For The Generals Redoubt