

Cover Letter for Lee Chapel - Temple of Redemption

22 August 2022

One of the inspiring aspects of The General Redoubt's ongoing campaign to preserve the history, values and traditions of the University and its renown for classical liberal arts and legal education is that our content is passed on by our readers to others who often become our correspondents. We occasionally receive highly thoughtful letters or potential articles in thanks or for our consideration.

Such is the case this week.

Our author, who asked to be presented anonymously, is someone with no connection to Washington and Lee University. Educated in a small liberal arts college in the latter half of the last century, he has been captivated by the institutional identity struggle that is occurring at Washington and Lee. Recently, he received an article about the University's plans to remake Lee Chapel to include the walling off of the statue chamber that holds Edward Valentine's statue - *Recumbent Lee*. This article, written by reporter Scott Dreyer of the *Roanoke Star*, may be found at <https://theroanokestar.com/2022/08/16/will-washington-lee-university-wall-off-historic-site/>. The author was clearly captivated by this story and writes poignantly about it in the attachment.

You will find an emphasis in his thinking about the concept of Robert E. Lee's redemption, arguably implying it is being ignored by the University President and Trustees. Significantly, there is a memorable recollection by a few attendees of a Founders Day event held in Lee Chapel in January 2019. After reciting comforting words about the legacies of George Washington and Robert E., Lee in the history of the University, President Dudley looked about the chapel and spoke words *sotto voce* to the following effect: "This is a Temple of the Confederacy." Interestingly, just weeks before this event, the Trustees had announced a number of building renaming changes that partly paved the way for President Dudley to almost whisper

that assessment. More directly, the Trustees also announced then a new policy to obscure Valentine's *Recumbent Lee* during University events. Its intent was not to prevent the upset of any uninitiated student or member of the community who might possess a delicate psychological state due to the nearby presence of Robert E. Lee. This policy was and is very consistent with a viewpoint that the chapel is a hostile place, one imbued with strong scents of slavery and the Confederation that decided to enter the Civil War to defend the institution of slavery and, after Appomattox, to perpetuate it in the form of the Lost Cause. This is, of course, total nonsense.

That atmosphere carried on through the George Floyd summer of 2020 and a faculty vote of 80% to do away with everything connected to Lee. Roughly a year later it led to the pronouncements on June 4, 2021 about retaining the University's name, but launching simultaneously a campaign to drastically lower, if not totally eliminate, the legacies of both Washington and Lee in the Pantheon branding of the university. At that time and subsequently, bromides by the leadership charging the chapel's linkage to promotion of the Lost Cause have appeared without supporting evidence being cited. Informal soundings of community members were taken by TGR at that time with a focus on the Lost Cause theory. No one could cite any knowledge of such activities in their experiences with university life. Some did mention that the Lost Cause crowd and highjacked and installed Robert E. Lee as its default leader without his permission.

One should check with the National Park Service to see whether this conspiracy theory squares with its intent with the National Park Service when naming Lee Chapel a National Historic Landmark. For decades, many of these preceding the NHL naming in the early 1960's, the chapel has been a destination for the Washington and Lee, Lexington Area and National communities interested in America's history. The Trustees named it Lee Memorial Chapel in 1918 and it has become an important national landmark to visit and contemplate the life of a

celebrated participant and his family in that overarching struggle to achieve the objectives of the American Revolution begun in 1776 and not yet achieved.

The Generals Redoubt and our thousands of followers do not celebrate Robert E. Lee's connection to the Confederacy. Rather we honor his commitment to our beloved University and his life of national reconciliation and redemption. Our author provides a perspective with which we wholeheartedly agree and for which we will continue to advocate. And it sets forth a pathway that could be revolutionary in healing a badly divided Washington and Lee community. The ball is in President Dudley's court.

Rex Wooldridge, Secretary

The Generals Redoubt

Anonymous Letter From a Washington and Lee University Friend

President Dudley is a revisionist, perhaps the most dangerous adversary in today's cancel culture wars. Good for the Roanoke paper; good for Tom Rideout. I think TGR needs to go national in a campaign to broaden the base of support (and potentially fundraise) because trying to work with President Dudley and the Trustees has failed.

Tom put forth common sense solutions for the Lee Chapel, yet President Dudley and the Board have shown no interest in a negotiated settlement that satisfies all sides.

The University's *brand strength* starts with its Founders, two historical giants, one a Revolutionary War hero and our young nation's first president, and the other a celebrated Union Colonel who later fought for his state. In defeat Grant urged

reconciliation, but it was Lee who worked tirelessly preaching reconciliation each Sunday for the 5 years he was president of Washington College before his death.

This is a story of redemption. It is a great American story worthy of knowing, honoring, and keeping. Lee saved Washington College from extinction by donating his own wealth and raising funds to make the struggling college financially solvent. He had the new chapel constructed so students and townspeople could freely worship there. He dedicated himself to helping heal the division between the states after the Civil War.

It was and is a worthy effort that should not be erased by President Dudley and the Board.

The University's strength starts with its academic excellence and an honor code worthy of emulation. The value of a W&L education is an ability to imbue students with a firm base of knowledge of different liberal arts majors and the law, but also to help students develop the critical thinking skills they will need to be successful, engaged adults.

The University's reputation and its ability to provide an excellent education will be diminished by the revisionist acts of President Dudley and the Board of Trustees who choose to judge the greats of previous generations through the lens of today's culture.

Their acts will deprive future students of knowing the true story of Robert E. Lee's redemption as a great American after the Civil War and his role in saving the college.

Sadly, it appears Will Dudley is unmoved by reason, tradition, and historical perspective. Perhaps national exposure will create the kind of attention the closed mind fears the most. It's time others know what Dudley and the Trustees are trying to do to erase the University's history.