

# Charles Priestley's Cover Letter

*19 April 2022*

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees,

I hope that you will allow a British student of American history to comment on the proposed changes to your University in general and to Lee Chapel in particular.

I have been fortunate enough to have visited Washington and Lee three times in my life, most recently in 2018. On this last occasion, as before, I spent some time in Lee Chapel. Once again, I was able to admire Edward Valentine's splendid recumbent statue of Lee, to see the pew where the General had sat during daily worship and to view the portraits of Washington and Lee and the memorial plaque to the Liberty Hall Volunteers, before going below to visit Lee's office and to see the family graves in the crypt.

Now it is proposed that all of this should be denied in future to alumni, students and visitors alike. And what about poor Traveller, whose grave I saw outside the Chapel? Is he, too, to be erased from history, as Stalin's enemies were so carefully erased from earlier photographs? I have to say that I am appalled that a great seat of learning like Washington and Lee should be so eager to yield to the current fashionable mindless iconoclasm and so desperate to deny its own noble history. I am more than ever glad, now, that I was able to see Lee Chapel four years ago when it was still Lee Chapel, to stand in front of Lee House and to find the stable door still open for the ghost of Lee's faithful horse to come and go.

As an outsider, I realize that my words can carry little weight. As a historian, however, I hope that I have the right at least to urge you to think again. To this

end, perhaps I could leave you with the warning words of a fellow-countryman of mine, who makes the point rather more eloquently than I could hope to do:

“Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street building has been renamed, every date has been altered. And the process is continuing day by day and minute by minute. History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right.”

(George Orwell, *1984*)

Yours sincerely,  
Charles Priestley  
(MA, Cantab.)

## **LETTER TO BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

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Yours sincerely,

Charles Priestley

M.A., Trinity College, Cambridge University