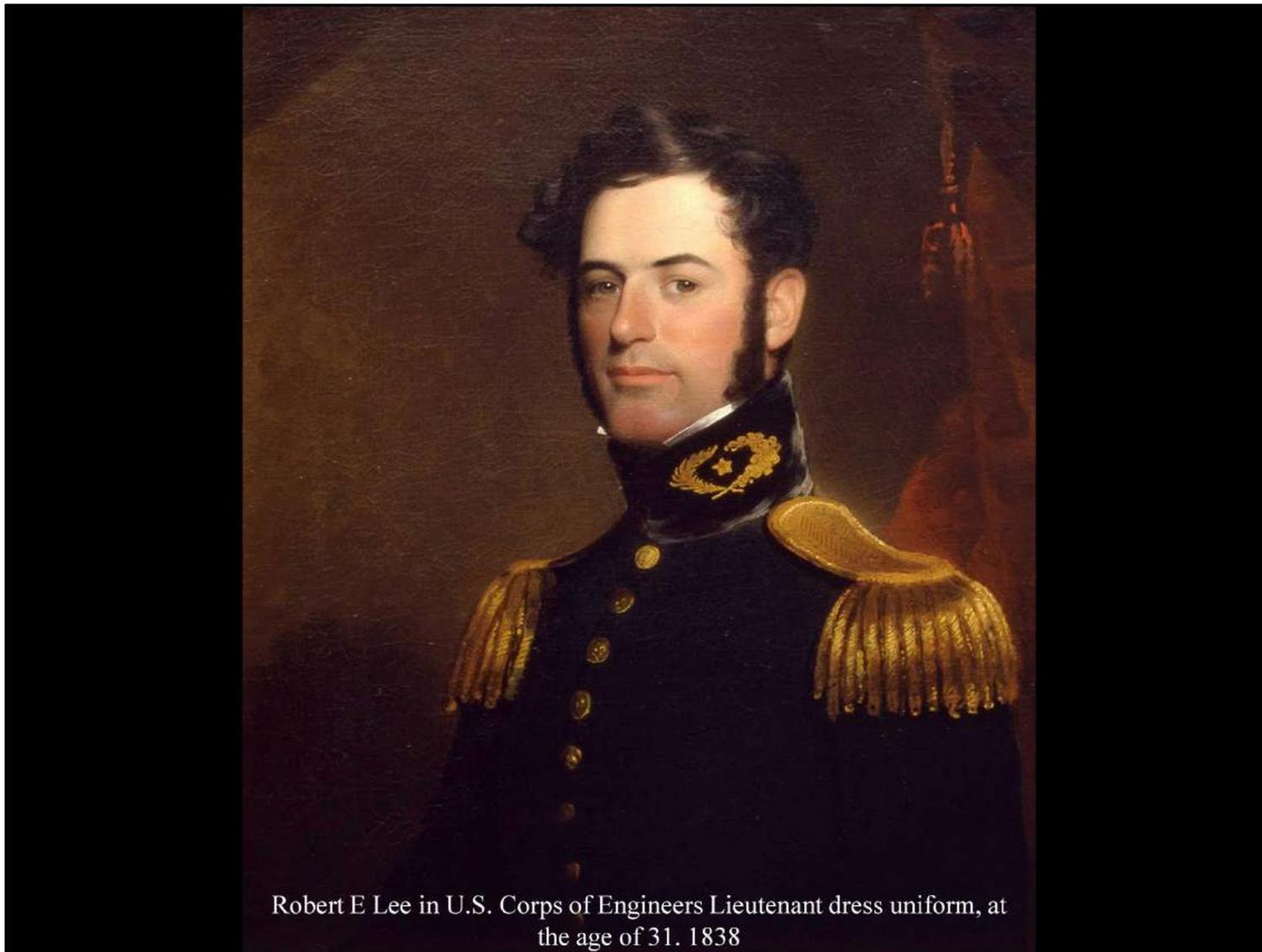




Robert E. Lee as
Landscape Architect

PowerPoint prepared by Arthur Bartenstein.
Copyright © 2018



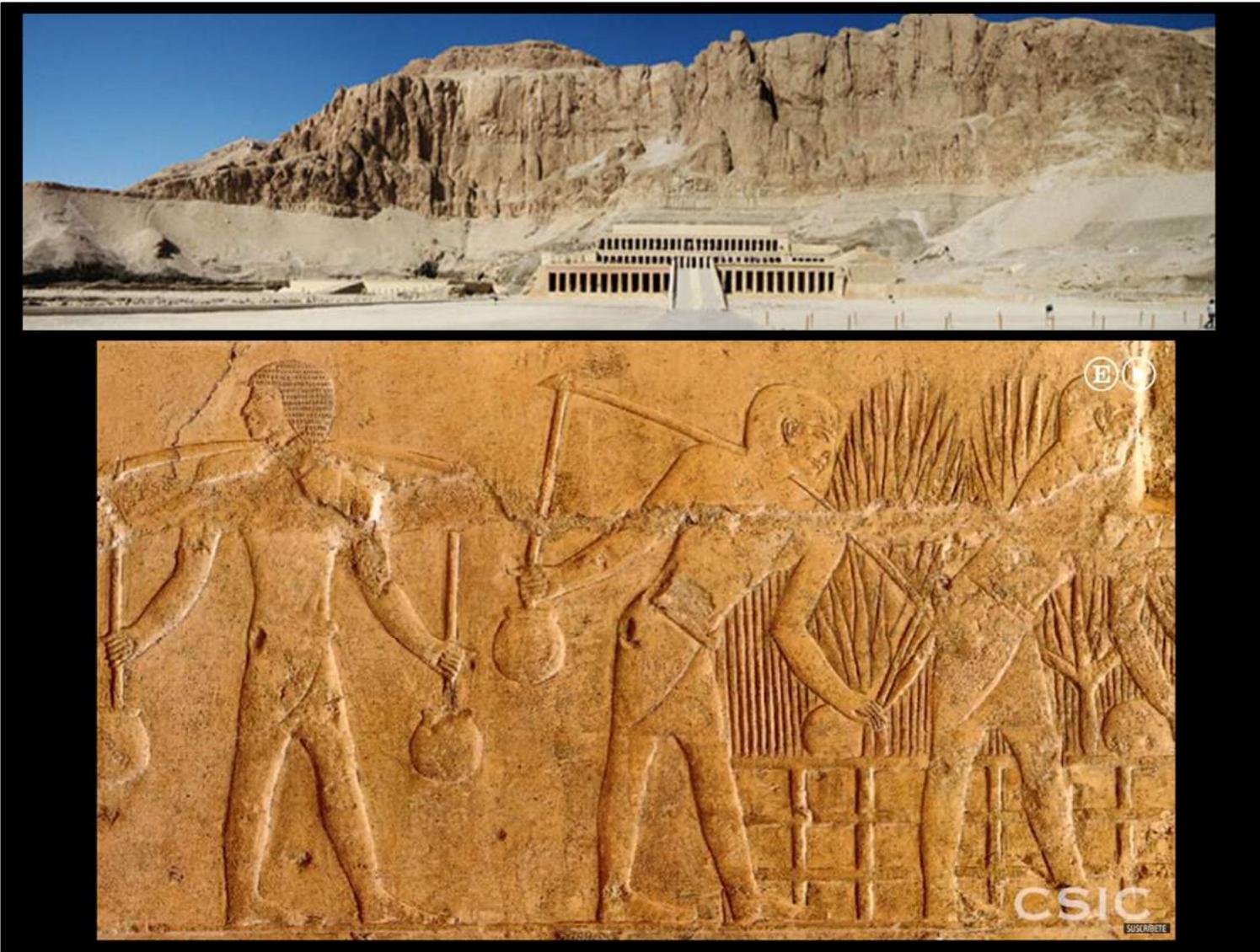
Robert E Lee in U.S. Corps of Engineers Lieutenant dress uniform, at the age of 31. 1838

In addition to soldier / General, Robert E. Lee assumed occupational roles: farmer, civil engineer, college administrator, railroad president, and, might it be said, landscape architect?

(Portrait by William Edward West, 1838)

Landscape architecture is the art and science of arranging land together with spaces and objects upon it, for healthful, meaningful, and rewarding human use.

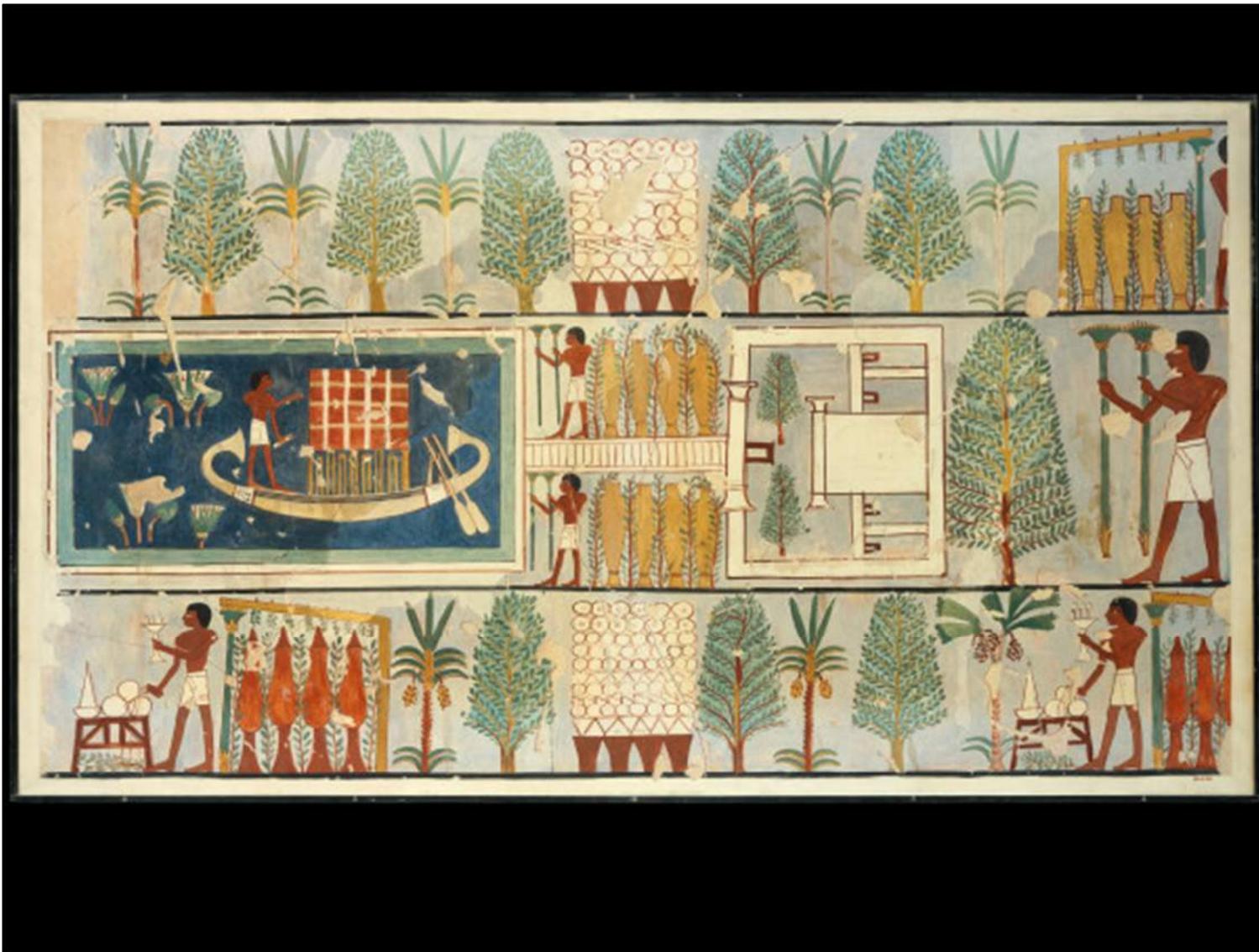
A common definition: Landscape Architecture is the art and science of arranging land together with spaces and objects upon it, for healthful, meaningful, and rewarding human use. *(Newton, p. xxi)*



But a young profession; landscape architecture as a practical *art* goes as far back as the Ancient Egyptians.

(top photo from website: <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/mortuary-temple-hatshepsut-known-djeserdjeseru-built-1184395717>)

(bottom photo from website: <http://benedante.blogspot.com/2017/05/ancient-egyptian-funerary-garden.html>)



Egyptian Garden as depicted by a wall painting in the tomb of Minnakht.

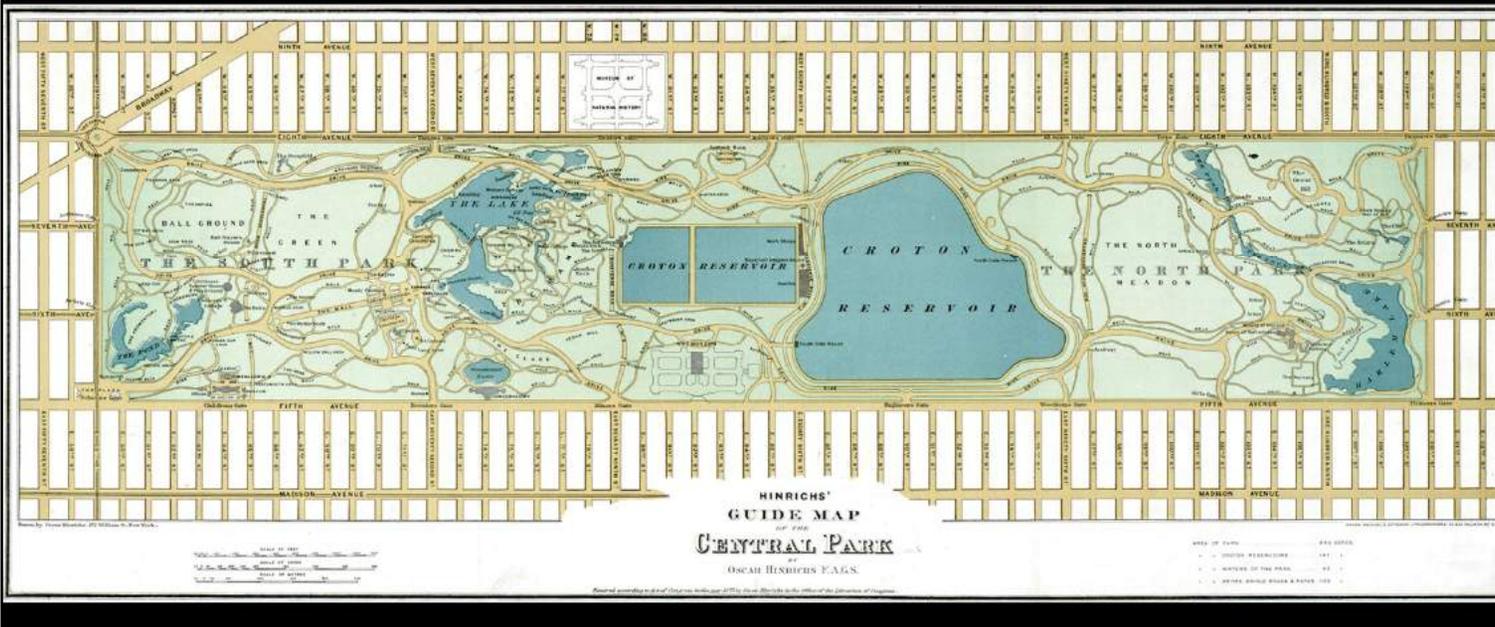
(image from website: <https://www.gardeninspiredliving.com/blogs/the-sage/a-brief-history-of-gardening>)



Vaux

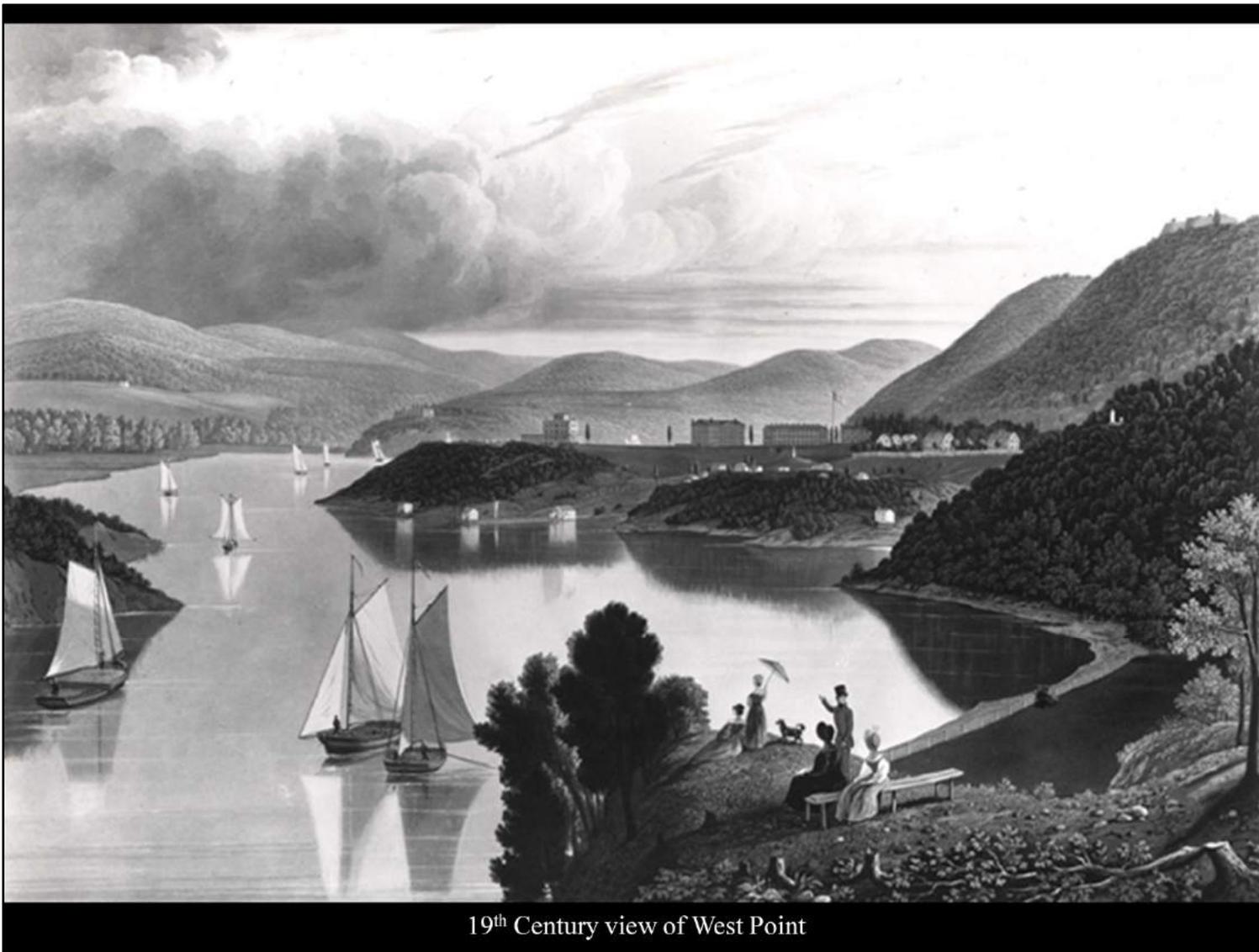


Olmsted



Landscape Architecture's birth as a profession is customarily linked to Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's winning entry for the design of New York's Central Park, submitted 1857, identifying landscape architecture as their principle occupation. Lee, 50 at 1857, is employed protecting settlers from Apache and Comanche attacks, a Texas-stationed U.S. Cavalry Commander. Briefly interrupted by the Civil War, Central Park was completed shortly thereafter.

(top left image from website: <https://cornelisverwaal.photoshelter.com/image/I00008v0tDTv54cA>) (photos of Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted from Library of Congress) (bottom image: Antique Map Of Central Park New York City By Oscar Hinrichs, from Library of Congress)



19th Century view of West Point

Lee was graduate (later superintendent) of West Point;

(View From West Point Hudson River USA From A 19th Century Print Engraved by R Wallis after W. H. Bartlett Print)



Trophy Point at West Point, looking north in 1909

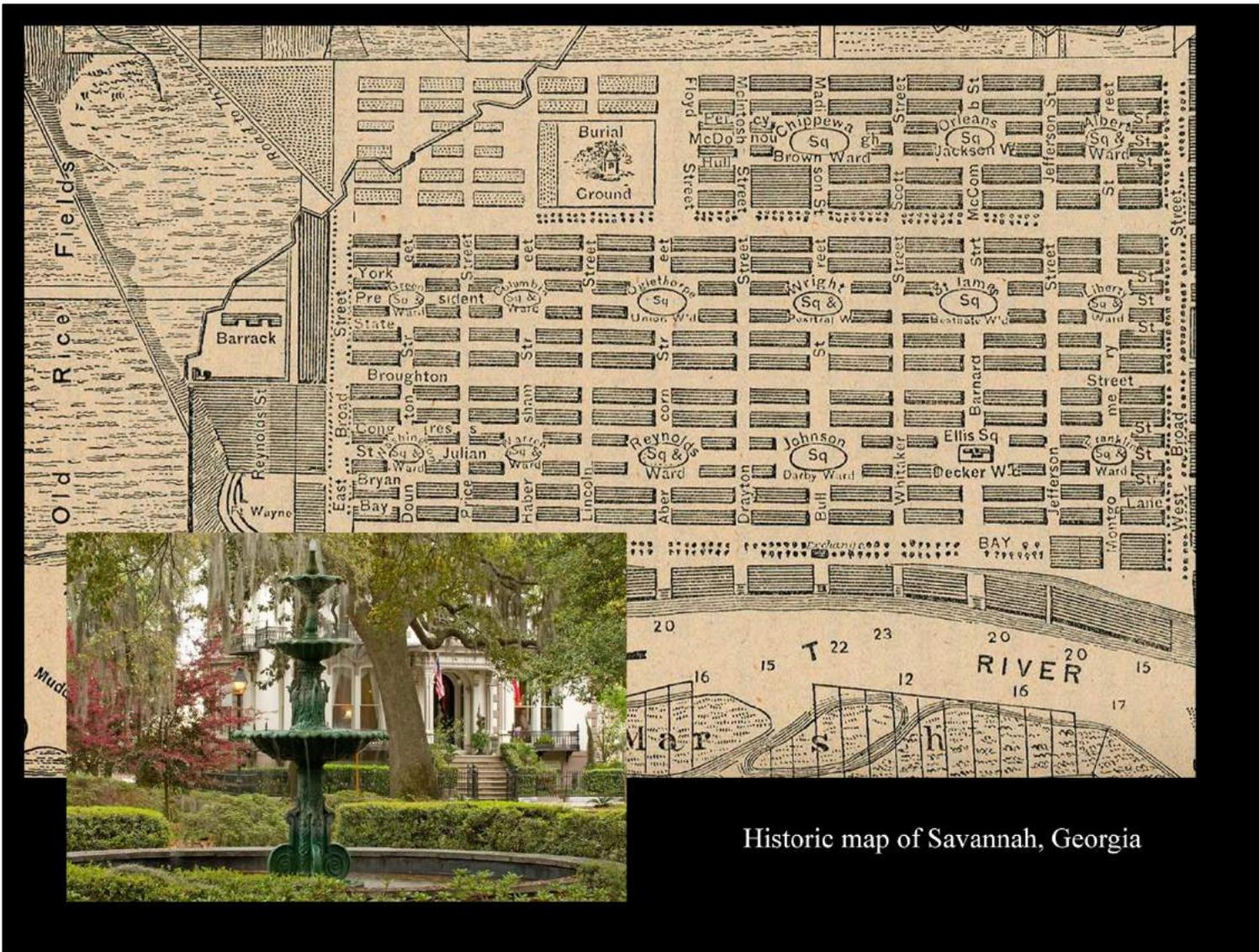
his chosen major Civil Engineering, an expansive course including instruction in architecture, landscape sketching, and topographical mapping. (*DSF, Vol. 1, p. 76*)

(Looking up the Hudson, West Point. Haines Photo Co., c1909. from Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division)



One month after graduation from West Point, on assignment by the Army Corps of Engineers to supervise construction of Fort Pulaski off the Georgia coast, Lee resides in downtown Savannah,

(Illustration from website: <https://vintagecitymaps.com/product/savannah-ga-1856/>)



Historic map of Savannah, Georgia

a progressive city plan based on concepts of urban outdoor space.

(historic map image from website: <https://landscapenotes.com/2014/03/21/savannah-city-of-parks-and-squares/>) (fountain photograph from website: <https://www.vanessak.com/TheCarolinas/Savannah-GA/i-QX5FnW8>)



Fort Hamilton, New York,
Lee serves as Post Engineer 1841-1846

Lee also experiences not only New York City while reconstructing naval fortresses; but also Midwestern cities Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis; the latter while striving to improve Mississippi and Missouri River navigation.

(Photo from website: www.pinterest.com/pin/193021533999121844/)



New York City as Robert E. Lee knew it, 1848

By the way, the tower from which this view was taken, St. Paul's, is the oldest public building in continuous use in New York City, the church that stood immediately next to the World Trade Center and survived. It was completed in 1766, at which time it was New York's tallest structure!

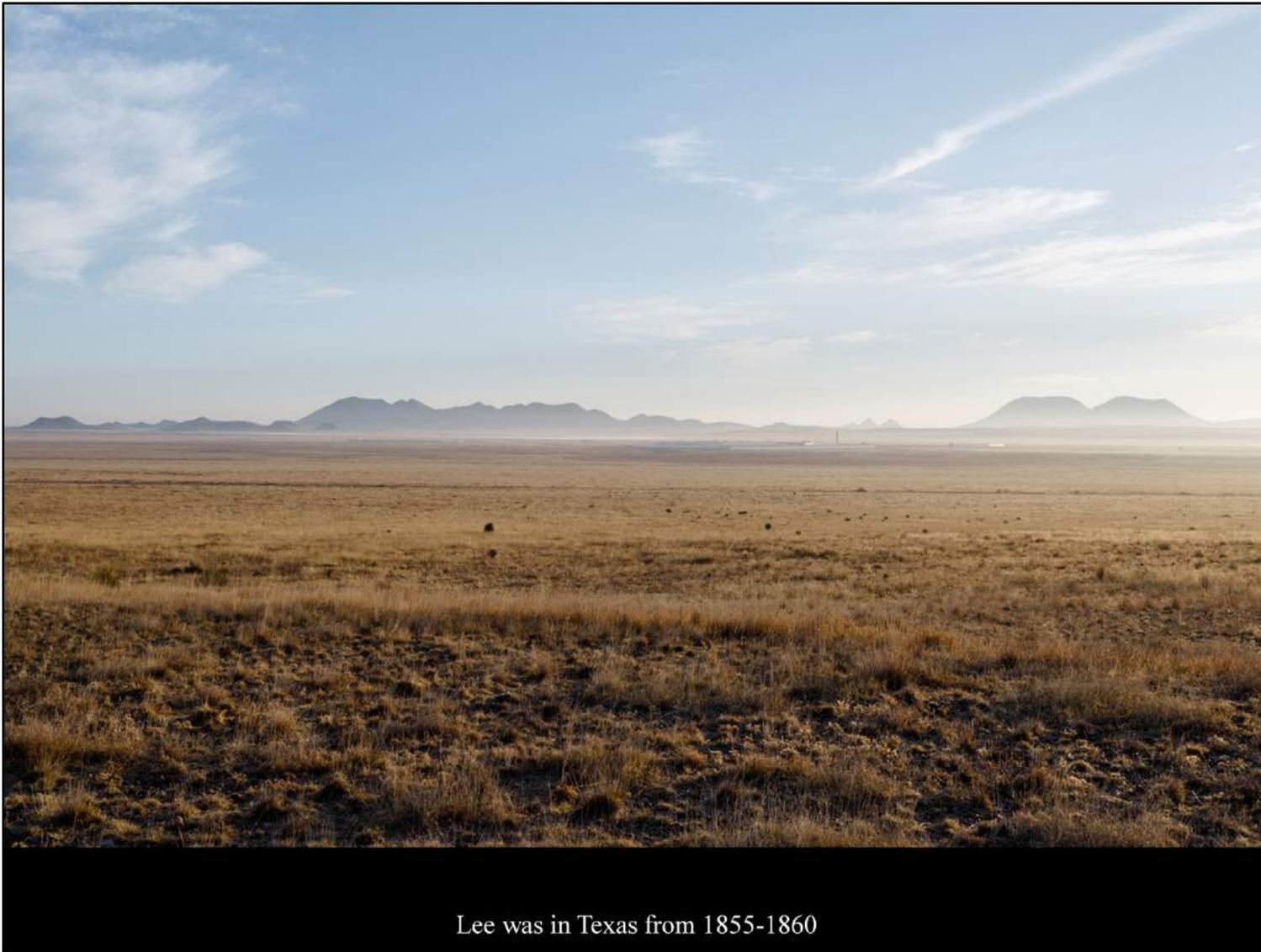
(Engraving from website: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/339873>)



Mary Custis Lee and Robert E. Lee Jr.

Lee's not a city mouse. He writes from Louisville: *"You do not know how much I have missed you and the children, my dear Mary. To be alone in a crowd is very solitary. In the woods I feel sympathy with the trees and birds, in whose company I take delight, but experience no pleasure in a strange crowd."* (DSF, Vol. 1, p. 172)

(historic photo from website: https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/media_player?mets_filename=evm00001718mets.xml)



Lee's then transferred to Texas. While he found the arid landscapes of West Texas quote: "*a desert of dullness*" (McCaslin, p. 57)

(Photo from website: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-desert-escape-to-a-renowned-texas-town-1491320057>)



Mid-19th Century views of Jalapa, Mexico

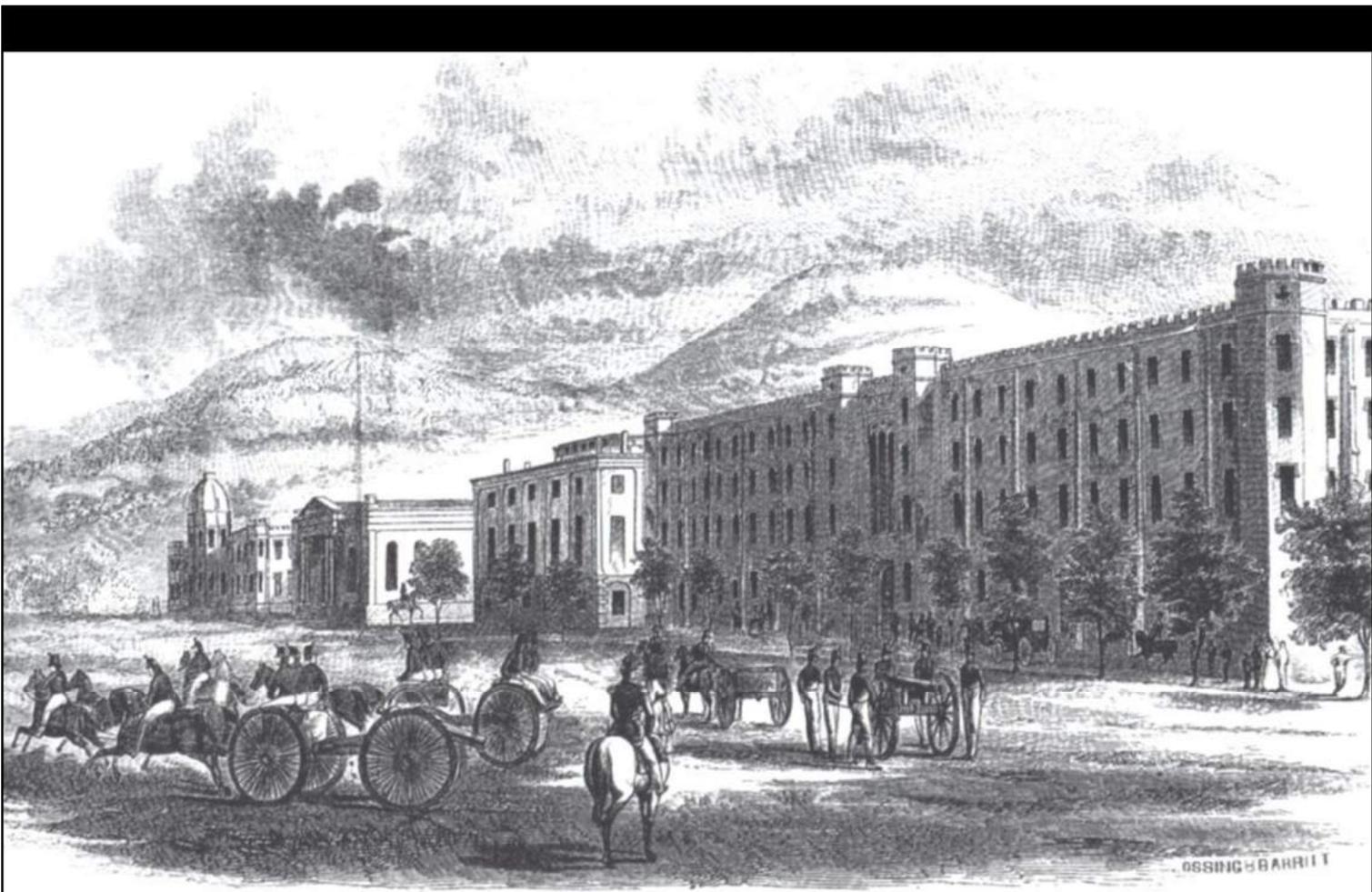
he's fascinated by Mexican-American War landscapes. He writes Mary 1847, *Jalapa is the most beautiful scenery I have seen in Mexico I wish it was in the United States. I can conceive of nothing more beautiful in the way of landscape or mountain scenery.*" (Sanborn, p. 177)

(Images found online – upperleft Palace square and Belem street in Jalapa, French intervention in Mexico, illustration from *L'illustration, Journal Universel*, No 1049, Volume XLI, April 4, 1863, www.gettyimages.com; upper right Street in Jalapa, watercolour by Sir William Eden, 1829, www.watercolour.org; bottom watercolour of Jalapa by James Gay Sawkins, 1858, Wikimedia.org)



View of the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1857

When Lee returns to West Point 1852 to serve three years as superintendent of the Academy, does he oversee landscape enhancements associated with new building projects? Freeman's biography speculates so because West Point's library records indicate that Lee withdrew reference works on North American trees. Contemporary illustrations and subsequent photographs of the West Point campus clearly indicate considerable emphasis on landscape embellishments. (DSF, Vol. 1, p. 353) (illustration from New York Public Library collections)



West Point from the plain, showing the barracks, the chapel, and the library, c. 1855

Note matched street trees fronting the barracks.

(Illustration from New York Public Library collections.)

DESIGN II.
A COTTAGE IN THE ENGLISH OR RURAL GOTHIC STYLE.

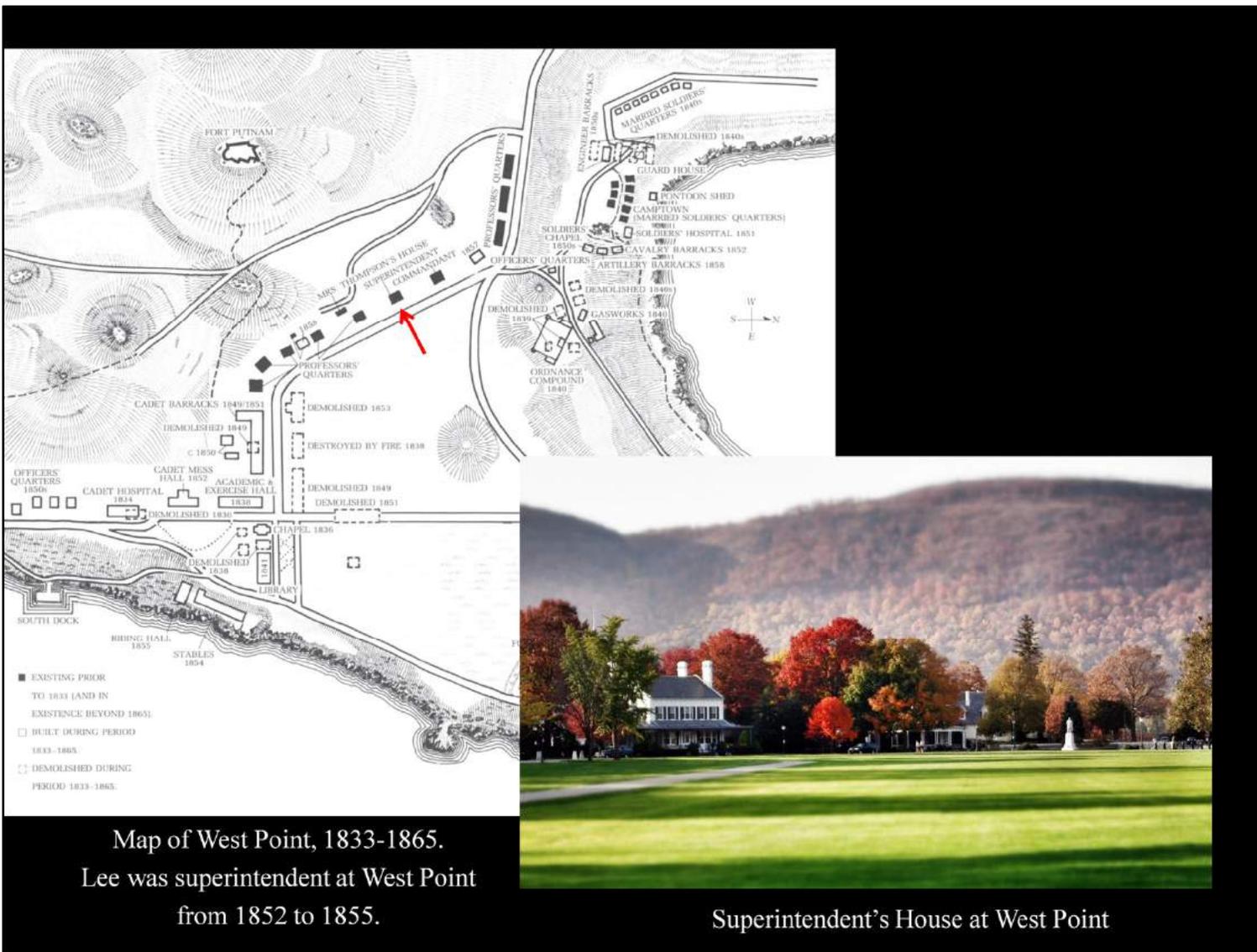


Fig. 9.

Illustration from Downing's Victorian Cottage Residences

Less than 10 miles downriver from West Point is Andrew Jackson Downing's headquarters in Newburgh, epicenter of the American romantic landscape movement. Lee is well aware of Downing – he borrows while at West Point Downing's book on cottage architecture. (DSF, Vol 1, p. 357)

(from Downing, A. (1842). Cottage residences, or, A series of designs for rural cottages and cottage-villas, and their gardens and grounds : adapted to North America. New-York: Wiley and Putnam.)



The Lees enthusiastically maintained their own garden at West Point.

(photo from website: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/232287293254330271/>)



19th Century West Point parade field

The Superintendent's House faced out to the Plain with views of the Hudson.

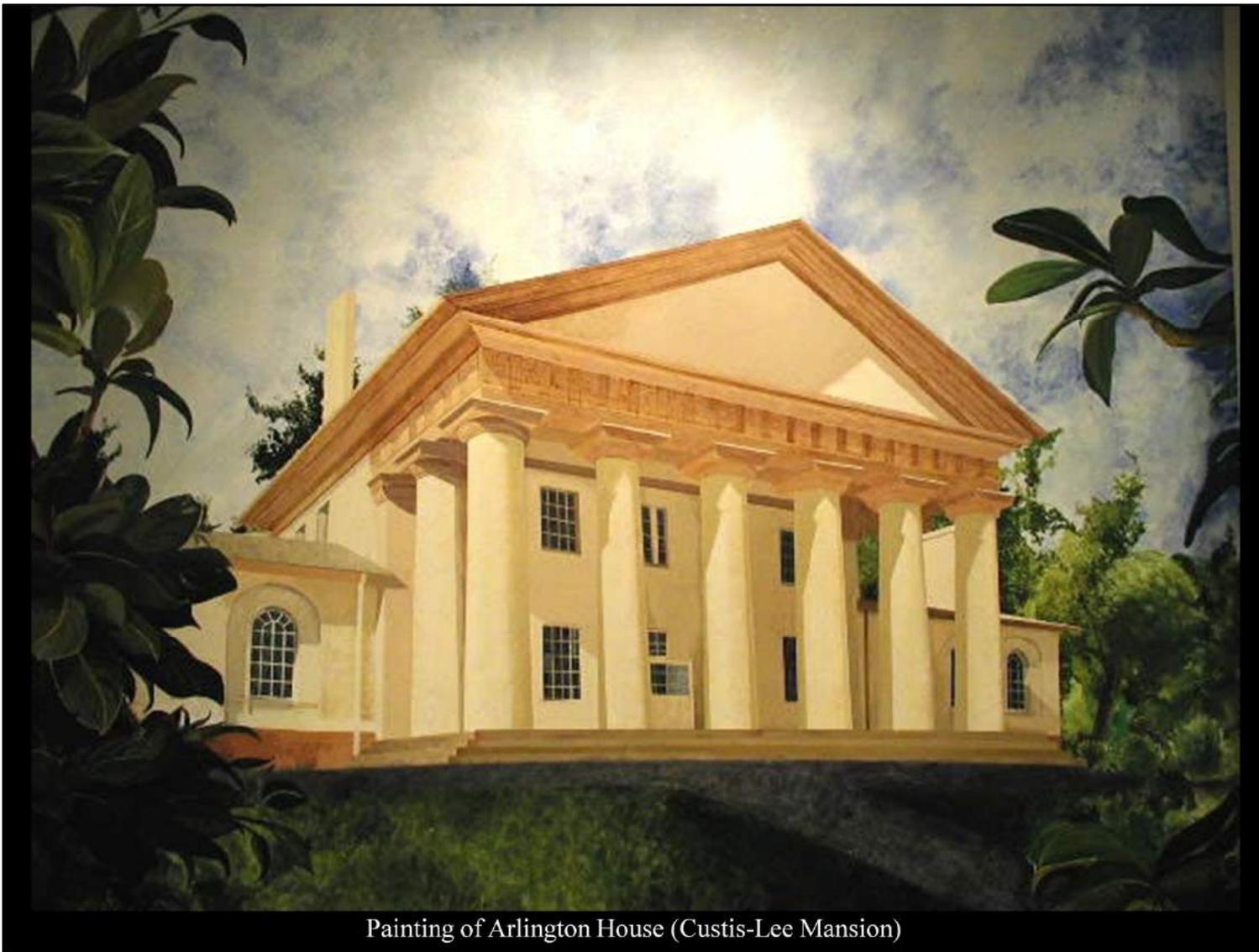
(Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)



Superintendents Garden at West Point

Lee's third daughter Agnes, then eleven, records in her diary: *West Point is a beautiful place... The great virtue here is everything is so neat and clean. Our house is quite large and convenient. We have a fine garden with a pond in it and several meadows. There is quite a nice greenhouse with a splendid lemon tree.* (Agnes Lee, p. 26)

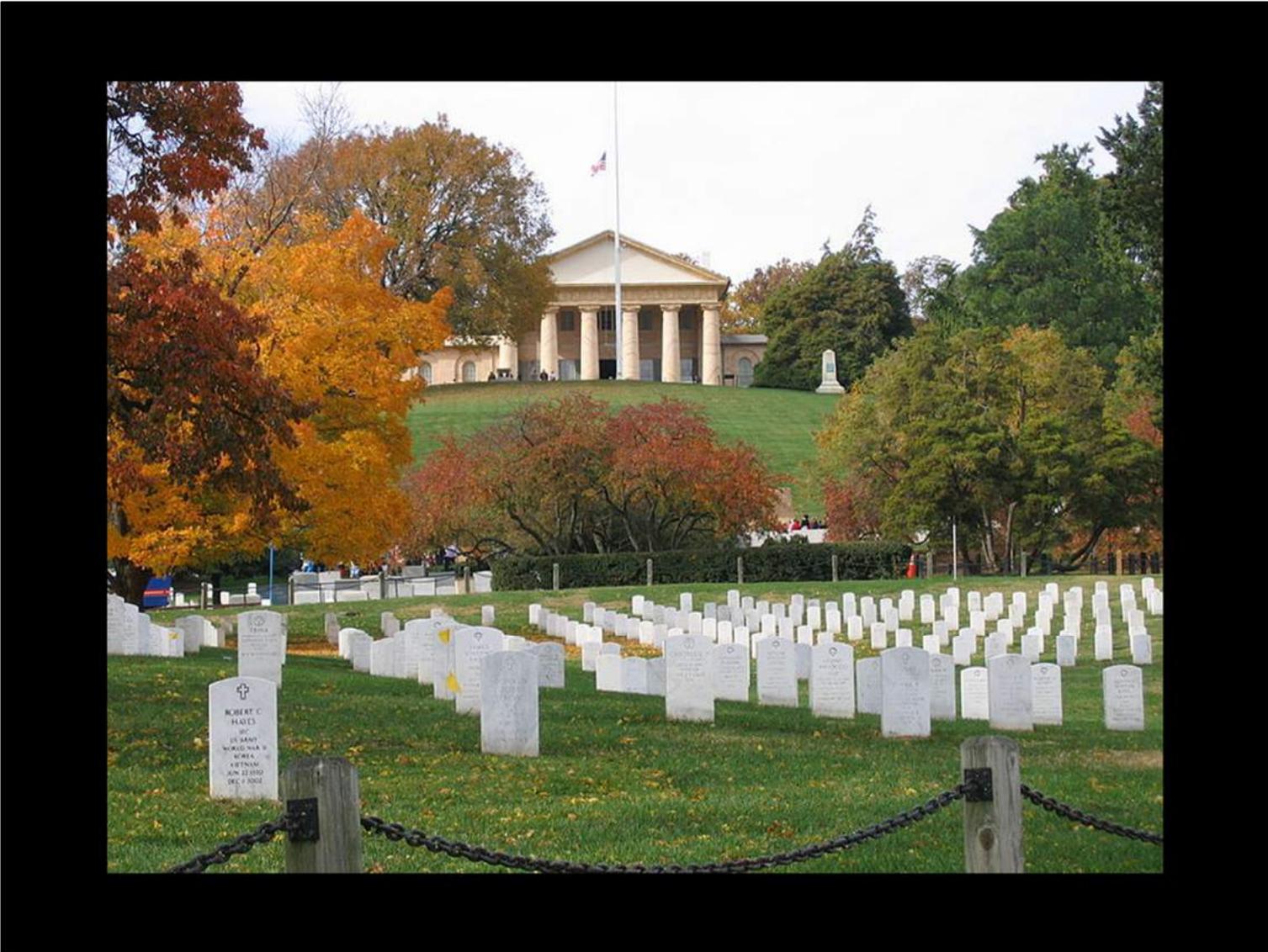
(Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)



Painting of Arlington House (Custis-Lee Mansion)

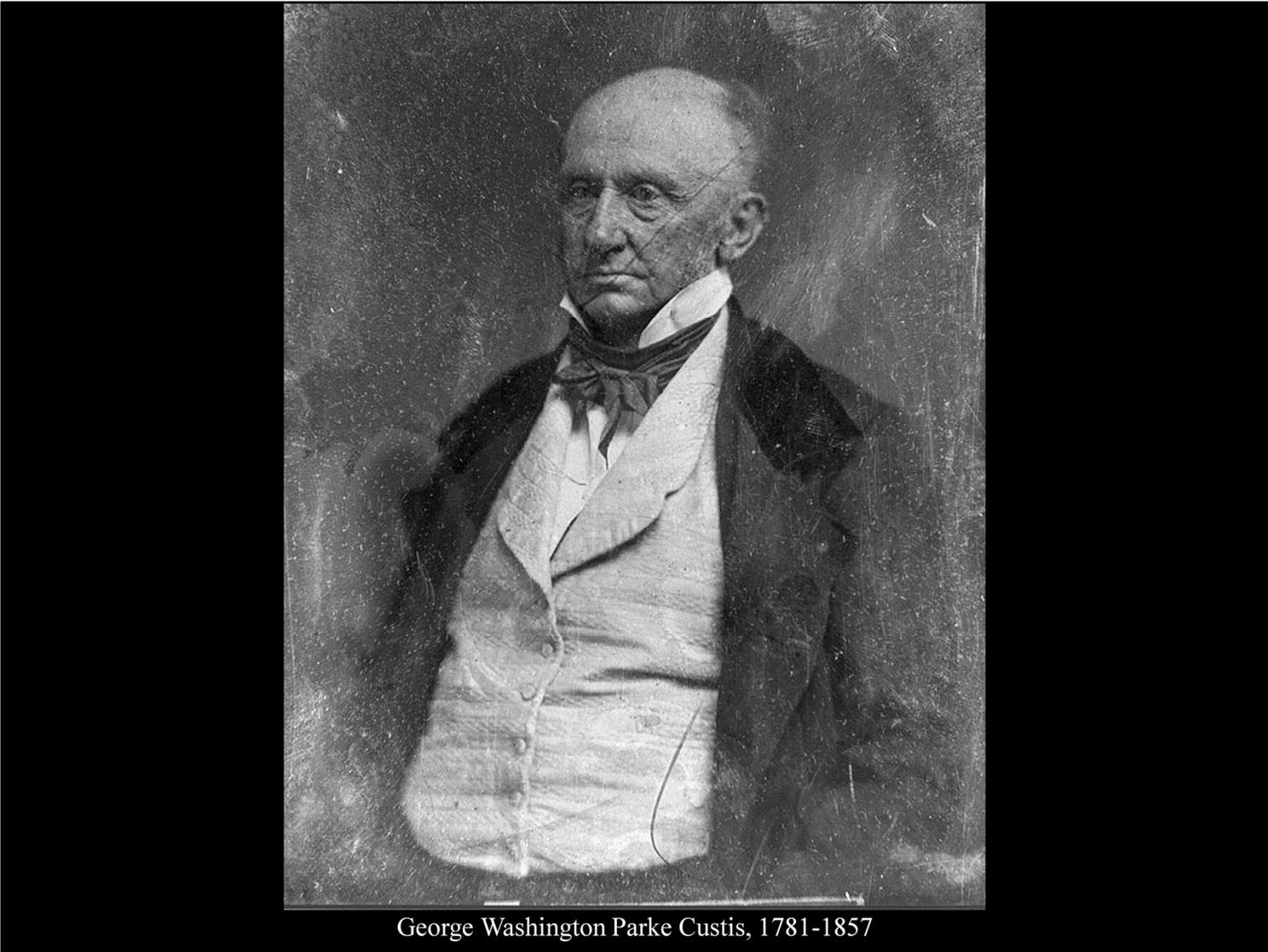
Throughout his peripatetic U.S. Army career, Robert E. Lee is also valiantly striving to keep-up his wife's estate, Arlington plantation,

(illustration from: www.arlingtoncemetery.mil)



today's famous cemetery.

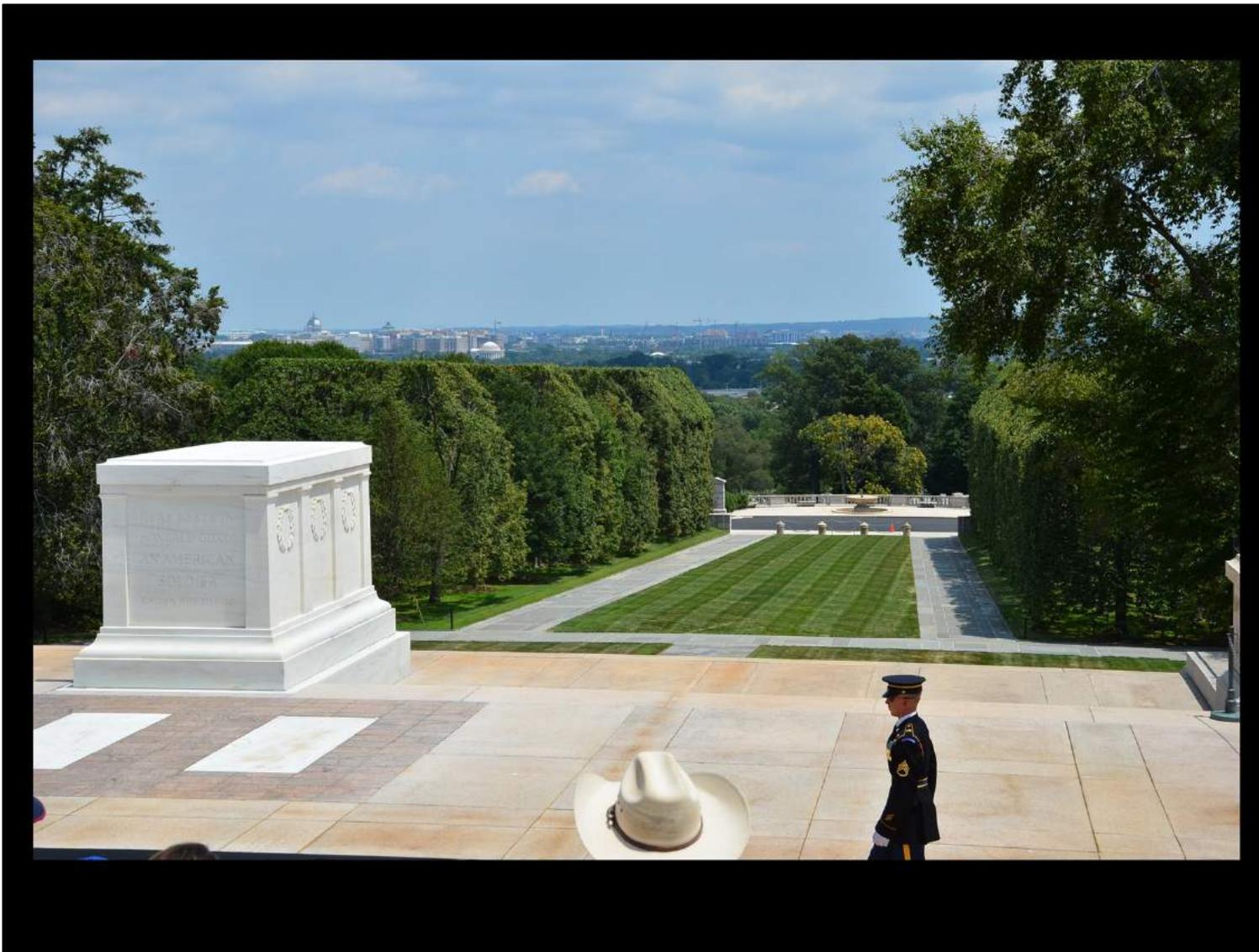
(photo from website: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_battles_with_most_United_States_military_fatalities#/media/File:Arlington_House.jpg)



George Washington Parke Custis, 1781-1857

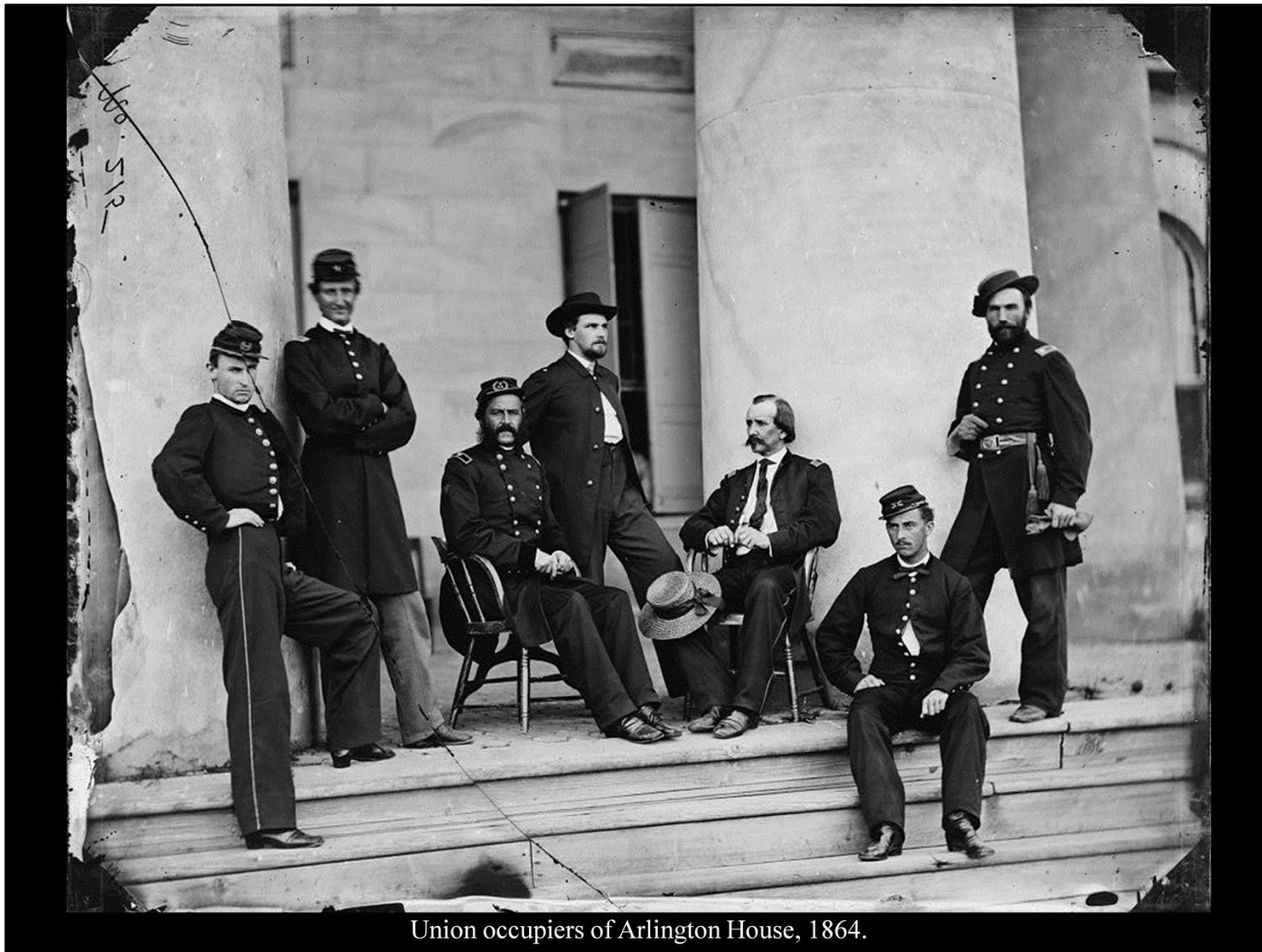
Lee's father-in-law, George Washington Parke Custis is Martha Washington's grandson by her first marriage; George Washington's step grandchild. Parke Custis builds Arlington

(photo from: <https://www.nps.gov/arho/learn/historyculture/george-custis.htm>)



overlooking the nation's new capital with inherited wealth essentially as a monument to his step grandfather George Washington. By wedding Mary Custis, George Parke Custis's daughter, Robert E. Lee has joined his lifelong hero, George Washington's, immediate family. Due to George Washington Parke Custis's being somewhat of an otherworldly, *city-mouse*, Robert has his work cut out at Arlington. Robert E. Lee's son's memoir reveals: *My father was always fond of farming, and took great interest in the improvements he immediately began at Arlington in relation to cultivation of the farm, to the buildings, roads, fences, fields, and stock, so that in a very short time the appearance of everything on the estate was improved.* (*Recollections and Letters*, p. 20)

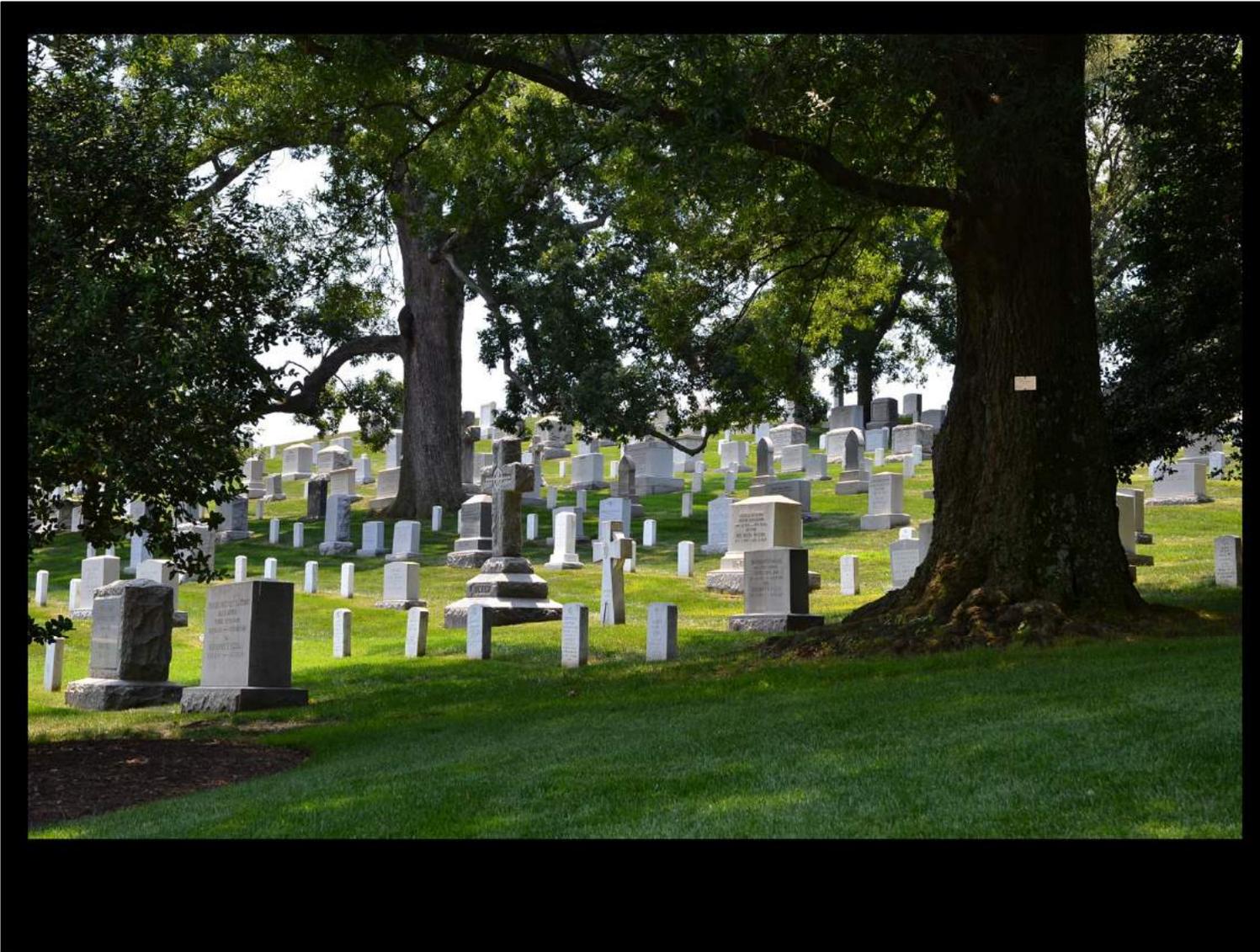
(photo by author)



Union occupiers of Arlington House, 1864.

The Lees of course were forced to abandon Arlington at the start of the Civil War. Extremely bitter regarding Arlington's fate at the hands of the occupying Union, Mary Custis Lee writes very near the end of life: *I rode out to my dear old home, so changed it seemed but as a dream of the past.*

(Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)



I could not have realized that it was Arlington but for the few old oaks they had spared, & the trees planted on the lawn by the Gen'l & myself which are raising their tall branches to the Heavens which seem to smile on the desecration around them. (Perry, p. 145)

(photo by author)



Charles Peale portrait of George Washington in 1772

In addition to oversight of the grounds, Robert E. Lee is called on to proof and edit Parke Custis' memoir and biography of George Washington for which Mary Custis, Lee's wife, contributes a preface.

(portrait of George Washington by Charles Peale, Washington and Lee University)

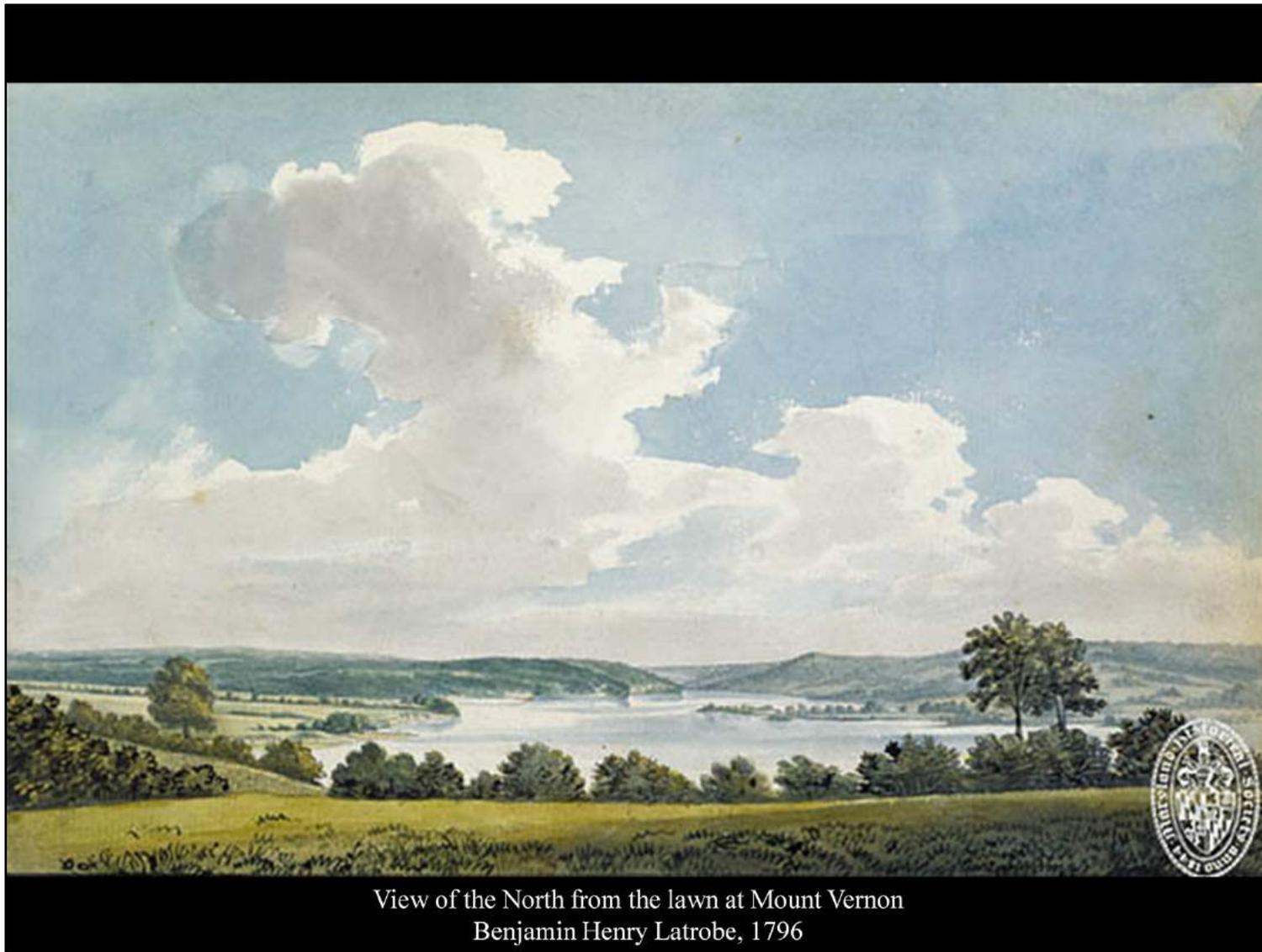


View of Mount Vernon looking to the North
Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1796

Parke Custis's book that Lee's editing reveals: Quote:

Washington was his own architect and builder (at Mount Vernon), laying off everything himself. The buildings, gardens, and grounds all rose to ornament and usefulness under his fostering hand. He made drawings of every plan, made a memorandum of every relative distance of buildings, enclosures, et cetera, and designated the position of every tree that was planted. (Custis, p. 371)

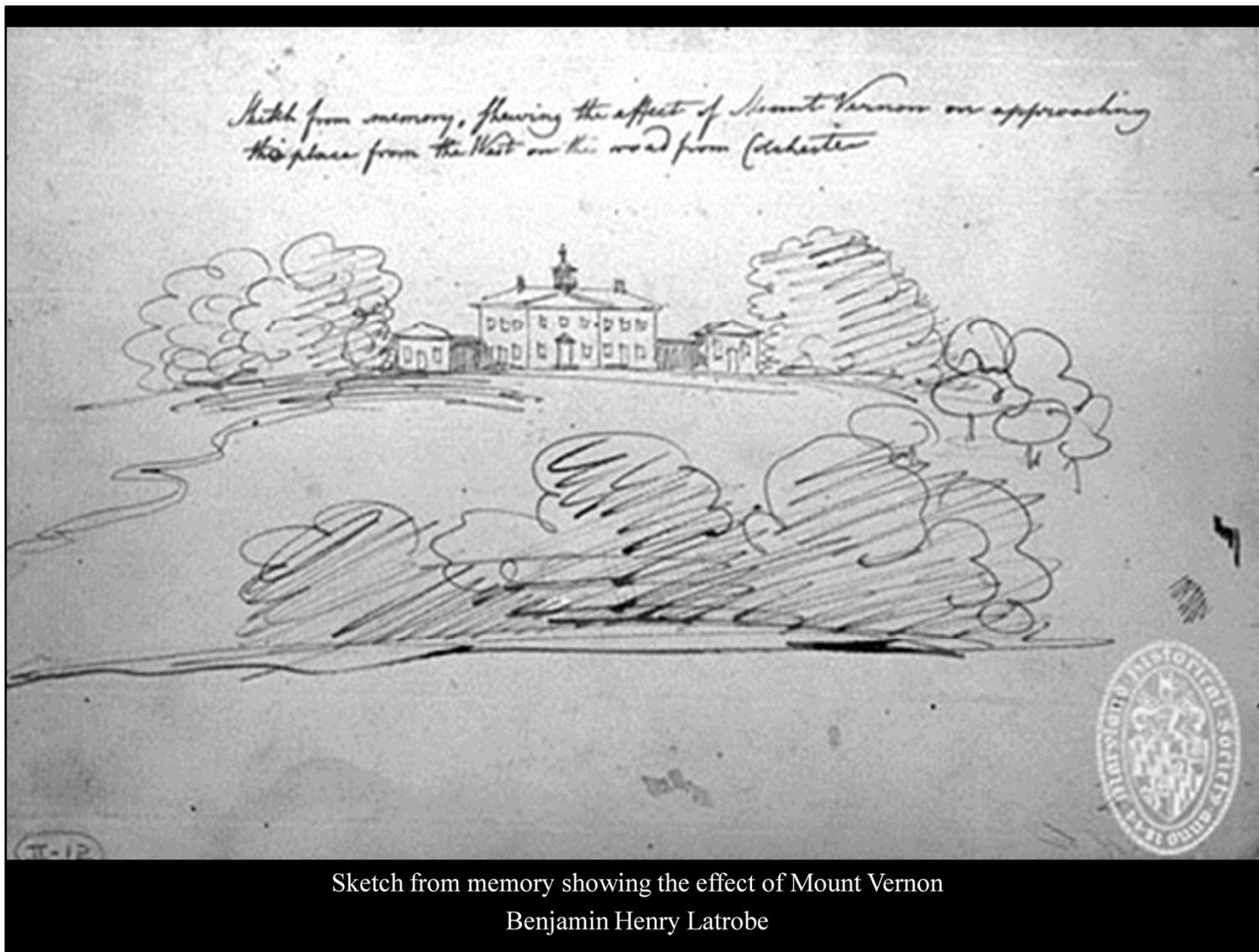
(illustration from Latrobe Sketchbooks, Maryland Historical Society Museum Department)



View of the North from the lawn at Mount Vernon
Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1796

Washington admired Batty Langley's *New Principles of Gardening*, a book he had bought years earlier, in 1759. Langley advocated gardens "after Nature's own Manner."

(illustration from Latrobe Sketchbooks, Maryland Historical Society Museum Department)



Sketch from memory showing the effect of Mount Vernon
Benjamin Henry Latrobe

Following Langley's advice, Washington created two "shrubberies" – plantations of ornamental shrubs and trees – between the bowling green and the walled garden.

(illustration from Latrobe Sketchbooks, Maryland Historical Society Museum Department)



Mount Vernon today.



Stratford Hall

Although Lee's immediate family, facing financial ruin, is forced to abandon Stratford, the ancestral Lee family plantation, in 1810,

(photo by author)



Robert E. Lee Boyhood Home, 607 Oronoco Street, Alexandria, Virginia

for Alexandria, (Robert's just 3 – he lives at the home pictured here until departure for West Point),

(Photo from website: https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https://www-tc.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/media/filer_public_thumbnails/filer_public/91/43/9143cc83-2d96-4510-a5f3-905034dacd5c/lee-timeline-home-va-8501.jpg_400x298_q85_crop_subsampling-2_upscale.jpg&imgrefurl=https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/lee-timeline/&h=298&w=400&tbnid=pp7uJ6vJCvvoiM&tbnh=194&tbnw=260&usq=K_KEbHx4eEICZPX6ppd1HmQbGGI8c=&hl=en&docid=pkk8xbNcNdkdCM)



Stratford Hall Plantation, South Lawn.

Robert returned to Stratford on numerous occasions. He writes at age 54 at the start of the Civil War to daughter Agnes: *Stratford is endeared to me by many recollections ... it has been always a great desire of my life to be able to purchase it. Now that we have no other home and the one we so loved has been so foully polluted (Arlington), the desire is stronger with me than ever.* And, the letter adds: *The horse chestnut you mention in the garden was planted by my mother.* (Horn, p. 146)

(photo by author)



Stratford Hall Plantation, East Garden.

Stratford Hall offers the consummate landscape: spacious lawns, formal terrace gardens,

(photo by author)



Stratford Hall Plantation, North Lawn view to James River.

magnificent pastoral vistas.

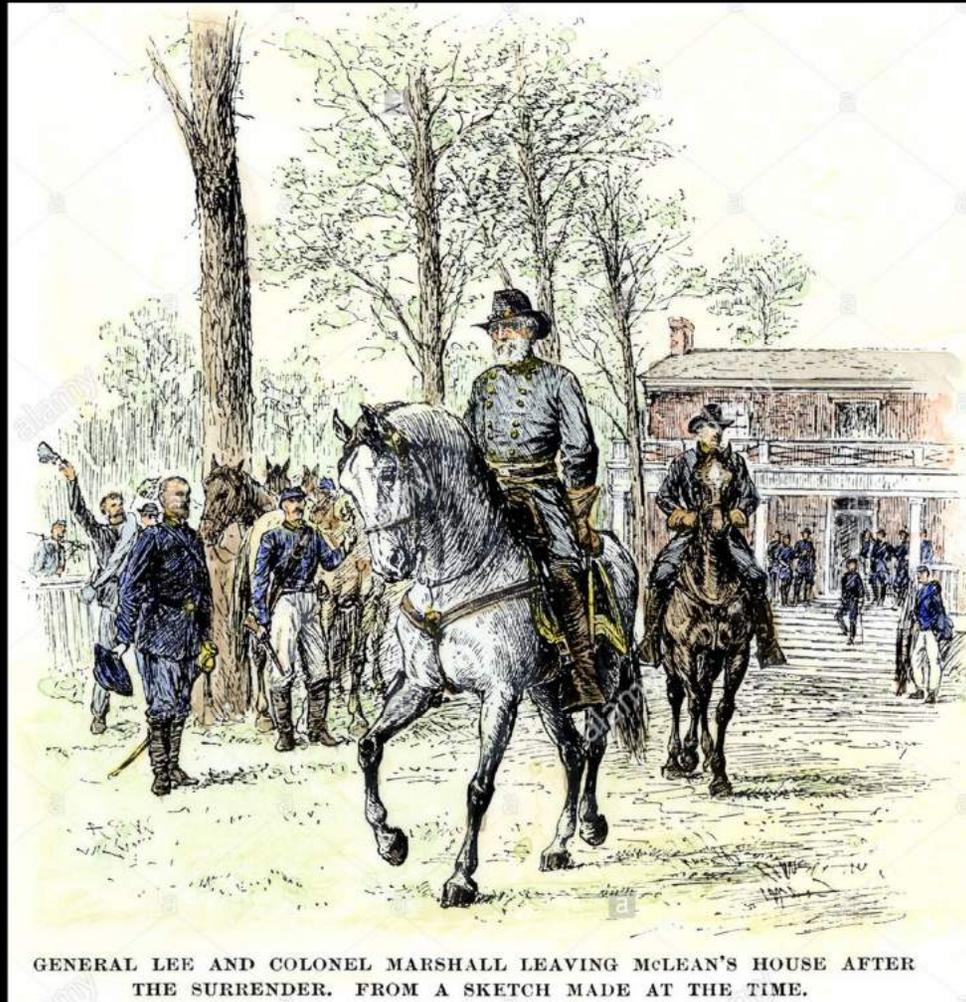
(photo by author)



Throughout the Civil war, 1861 – 1865, Lee takes solace in landscape:

He writes Mary 1861, *I traveled from Staunton on horseback. A part of the road, as far as Buffalo Gap, I passed over in the summer of 1840, on my return to St. Louis, after bringing you home. If anyone had then told me that the next time I travelled that road would have been on my present errand, I should have supposed him insane. I enjoyed the mountains, as I road along. The views are magnificent – the valleys so beautiful, the scenery so peaceful. What a glorious world Almighty God has given us. How thankless and ungrateful we are, and how we labor to mar his gifts. (Recollections, p. 39)*

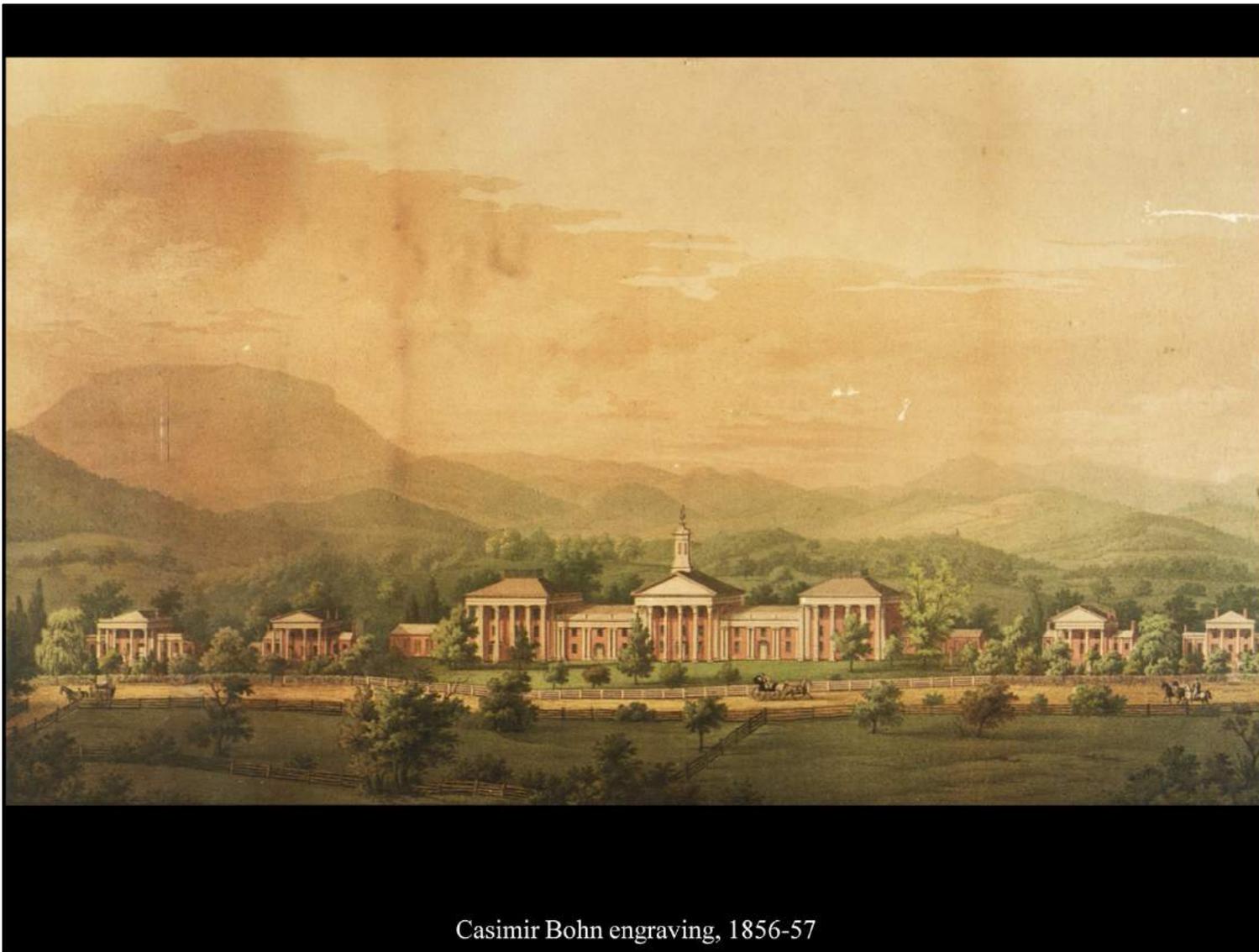
(Painting of Lee and His Generals by Charles C.J. Hoffbauer, 1920.)



GENERAL LEE AND COLONEL MARSHALL LEAVING McLEAN'S HOUSE AFTER THE SURRENDER. FROM A SKETCH MADE AT THE TIME.

Lee surrendered at Appomattox April 9, 1865 – just over 150 years ago.

(Alfred Waud sketches of surrender. Library of Congress)



Casimir Bohn engraving, 1856-57

In six more months, September 18, 1865, Lee arrives in Lexington to lead Washington College. He writes Mary, his wife, the following day, *“I have not yet visited the college grounds. They seem to be beautifully located, and the buildings are undergoing repairs.”* (*Recollections*, p. 184)

(engraving by Casimir Bohn, Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



Eleanor Agnes Lee (1841–1873)

Forty days later, October 26th, Lee's letter to Agnes, his third daughter begins, "*I want very much to have you all with me again, and miss you dreadfully.*"

(Photo from (Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial, National Park Service)



19th century view of Lexington looking east

The letter ends: “*Lexington is a beautiful spot by nature*”

(photo by Michael Miley, Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



Post-war Lexington, Virginia Main Street

– man has done but little for it.” (Recollections, p. 194)

Both economic deprivations suffered throughout the war and Hunter’s 1864, direct raid battered Lexington.

(photo by Michael Miley, Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)

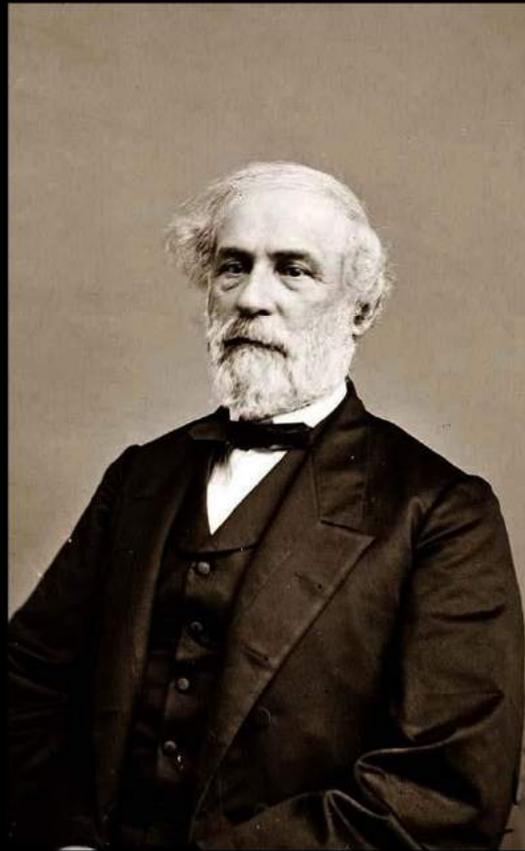


Post-war Lexington, Virginia Main Street

Freeman writes:

When David Hunter's raiders reached Lexington in 1864, they looted Washington College and burned the Virginia Military Institute. The college library was scattered past recovery. The laboratory equipment broken up or carried away. During the last winter of the war, ... the work of the institution was virtually suspended. The war's end found the buildings in such disrepair, some of them were scarcely habitable. (DSF, Vol. IV, p. 223)

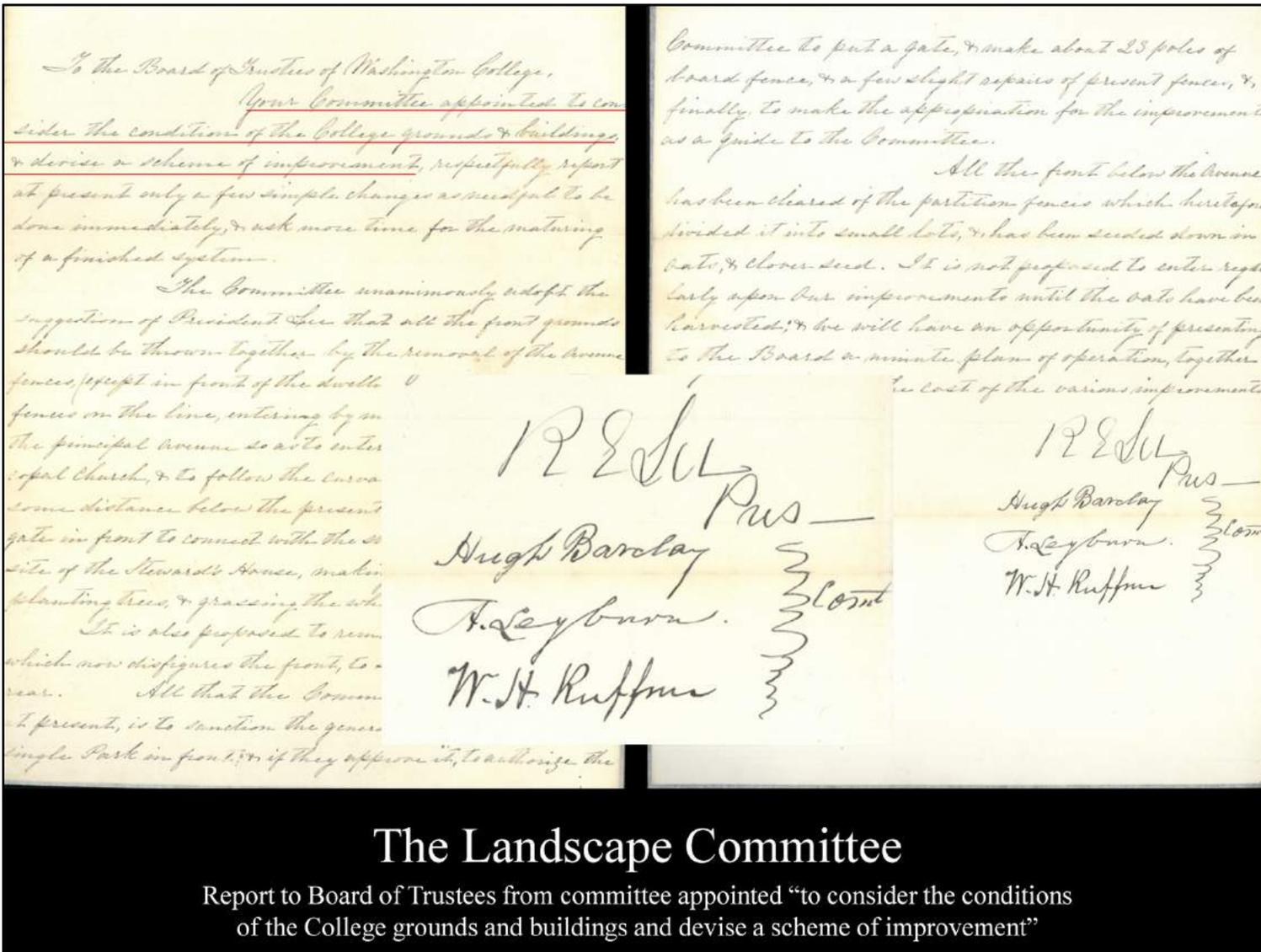
(photo by Michael Miley, Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



Robert E. Lee, c. 1870

Sharing with Washington Academy's former presidents an inspired vision of the natural landscape as an ideal setting for higher education, Lee immediately goes to work improving the college grounds. *(photo by Michael Miley, Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)*

(photo by Michael Miley, Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



Lee forms a board committee to address landscape needs of the college.

(document from Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



Lee's committee submits its report to the Board:

The Committee unanimously adopt the suggestion of President Lee that all the front grounds should be thrown together by the removal of the Avenue.

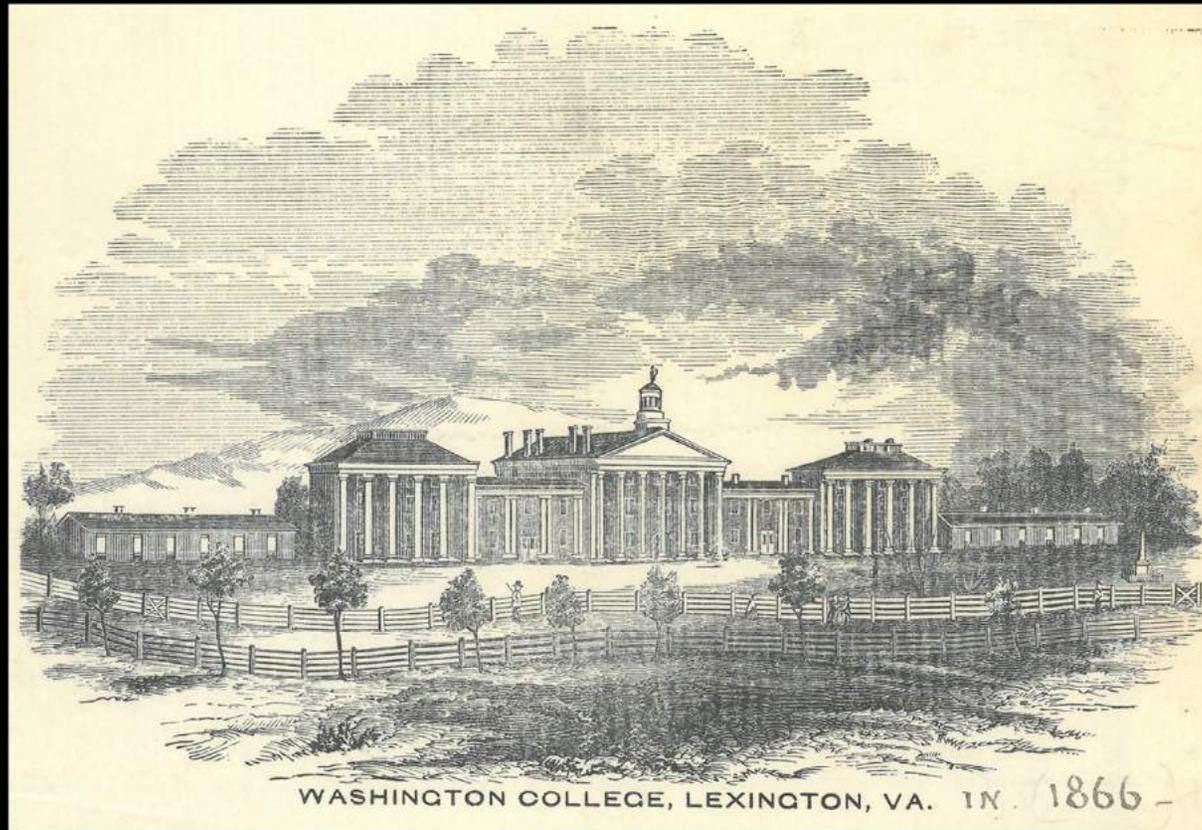
(photo from Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



Path by Grace Episcopal, photograph by Miley

so as to enter just above the Episcopal Church, and to follow the curvature of the surface some distance below the present line making suitable walks and carriage ways, and planting trees and grassing the whole. (W&L Special Collections, Board Notes)

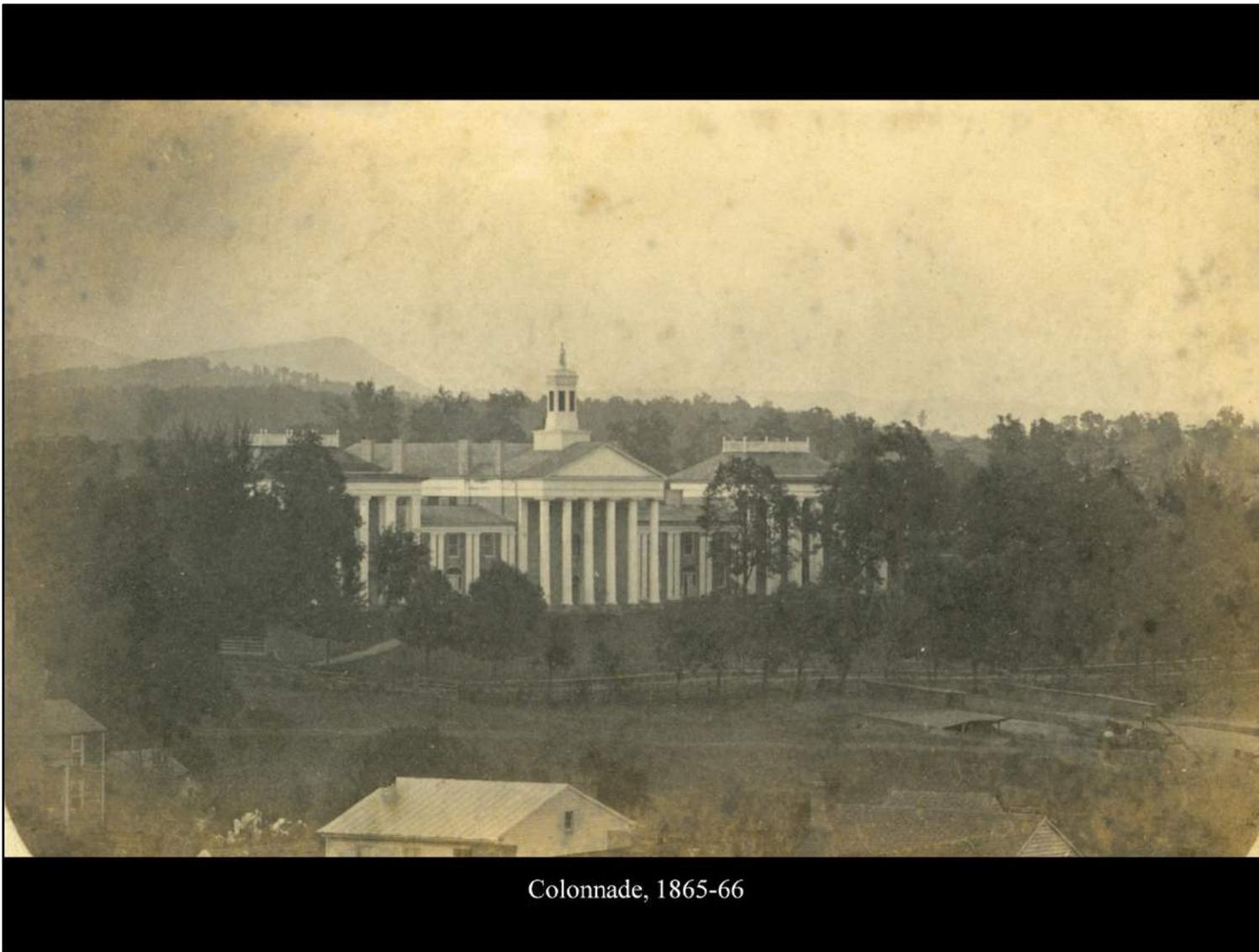
(photo by Michael Miley, Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



The so called Avenue had been intended, early after VMI's 1839 founding, to link the schools – VMI with Washington College, in hope and anticipation of sharing state resources for military education.

William Ruffner's history of the college explains: *The opening of the avenue moved hesitatingly, owing no doubt to the unsatisfactory workings of the plan of union between the two institutions. In 1844 a check was put on the whole scheme by a resolution of the board of trustees, who were not disposed to make so large a contribution to its neighbor and to the public, unless it was settled that the college was to receive a corresponding benefit. Therefore, although the avenue was made through the college grounds in 1844, the end next to Washington Street was closed by a fence and a large gate, with a stile over the fence for the convenience of pedestrians. (Historical Papers, Chapter VII, , p. 76)*

(engraving from Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



Colonnade, 1865-66

The Committee's report to the Board then continues: *It is also proposed to remove the large Ice house which now disfigures the front - to some position in the rear. All that the Committee ask of the Board at present, is to sanction the general idea of an enclosed single Park in front. (W&L Special Collections, Board notes)*

(photo from Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)

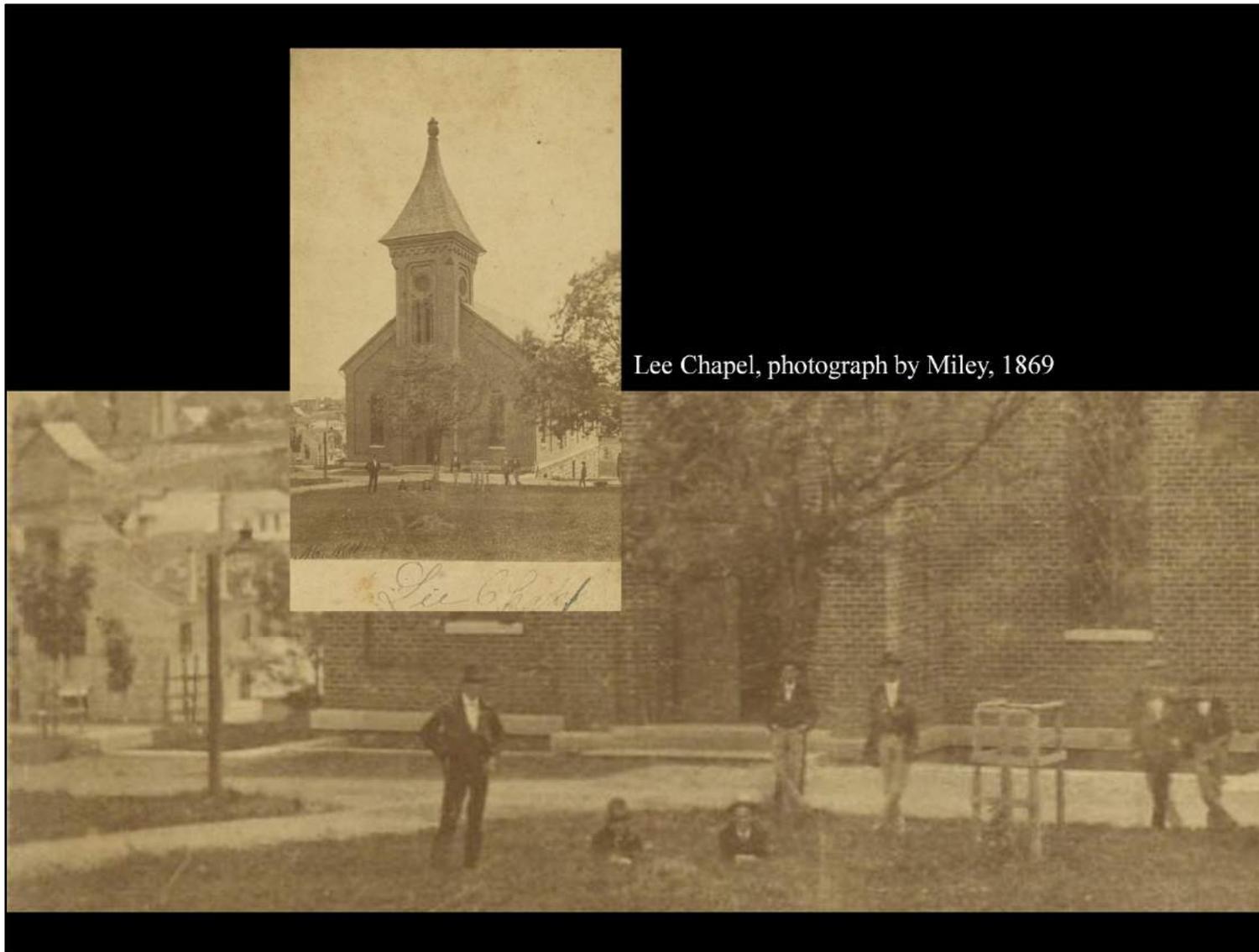


Washington College Colonnade, photograph by Boude and Miley, 1867

In a follow up, 1867 report to the Board, Lee also writes:

I recommend that some measures be adopted to establish gymnastic exercises; so as to furnish a means of recreation; and to promote the health of the students; and that the college grounds be embellished with walks and trees to encourage outdoor exercise. (W&L Special Collections, Board notes)

(photo from Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



Lee Chapel, photograph by Miley, 1869

Lee also talks the Board into hiring a head groundskeeper, Edward C. Gordon, whose recollections may be found in Franklin Riley's *General Robert E. Lee After Appomattox*. Gordon writes: *Here I may mention his (Lee's) keen sense of the fit, the becoming, the beautiful. This sense was manifested in many ways: in his clothes, his personal neatness, his dealings with other men; in his ideas respecting buildings and grounds. Most of the trees which now adorn the front campus were planted under his direction. I once asked him about the arrangement of these trees. He said: Not in rows: Nature never plants trees in rows. As far as possible imitate Nature.*" *He himself selected many of the spots where trees were planted.*

(photo from Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



Robert E Lee President's House, photograph by Miley, 1869

Similarly as to colors. We had to build a fence along the front campus on the south side. It was and is now one of the most conspicuous parts of the college grounds; but, because of the scarcity of money, it had to be a plain board fence. I consulted him about the color to be used in painting the fence. He said: "A fence is a blot on any lawn. We must have a fence; but select a color which will render the fence as inconspicuous as possible: one that will harmonize with the surrounding colors" (Riley, p. 88)

(photo by Michael Miley, Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



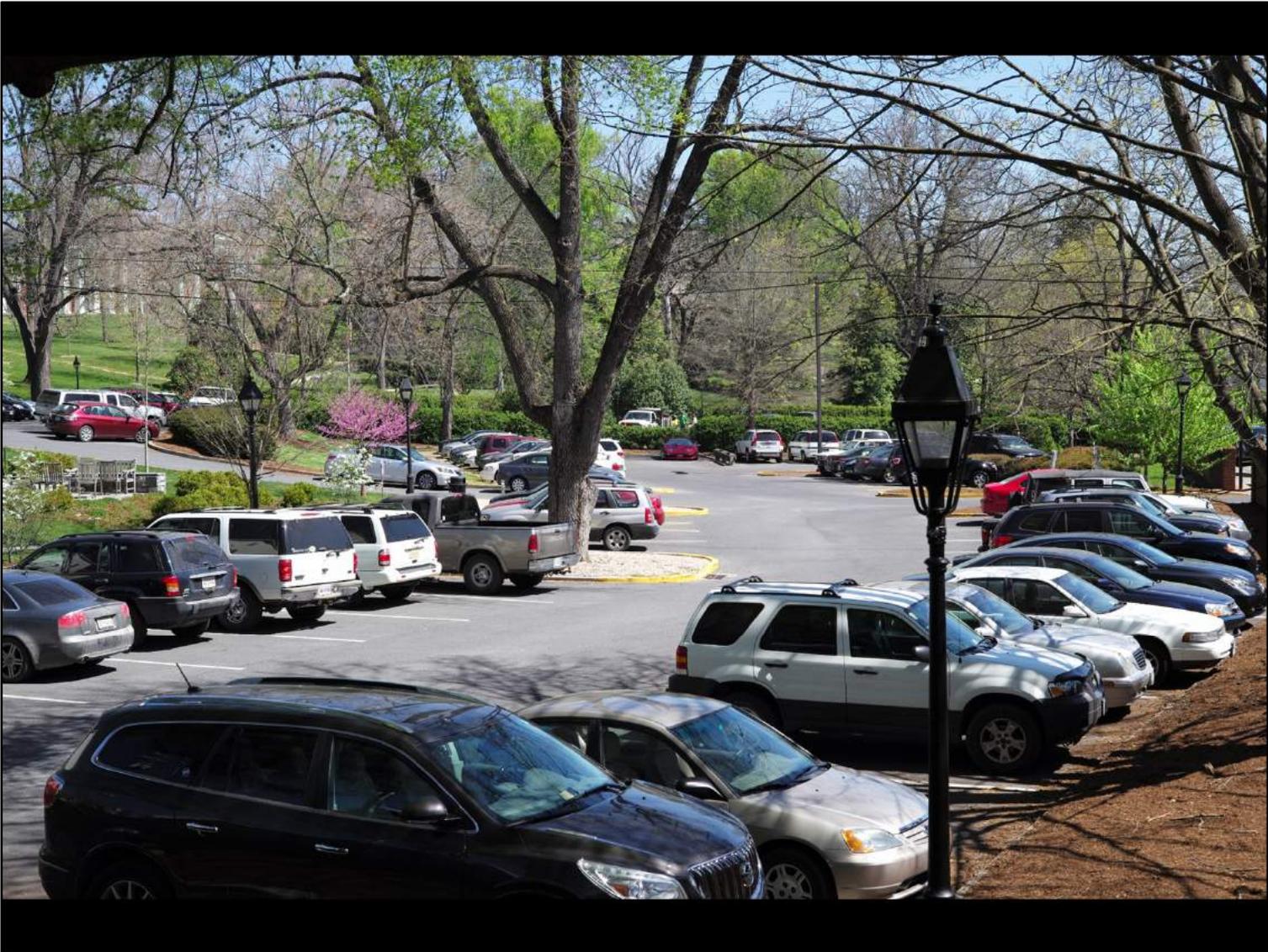
Rev. Frank Bell Webb, Washington College alum reminisces: *I would often see General Lee in conversation with the janitor of the grounds, and giving him instructions, evidently, as to his work about the lawn and grounds. It was remarkable to see him thus engaged, when he had so many other important duties to meet. (Riley, p. 108)*

(photo by Michael Miley, Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)

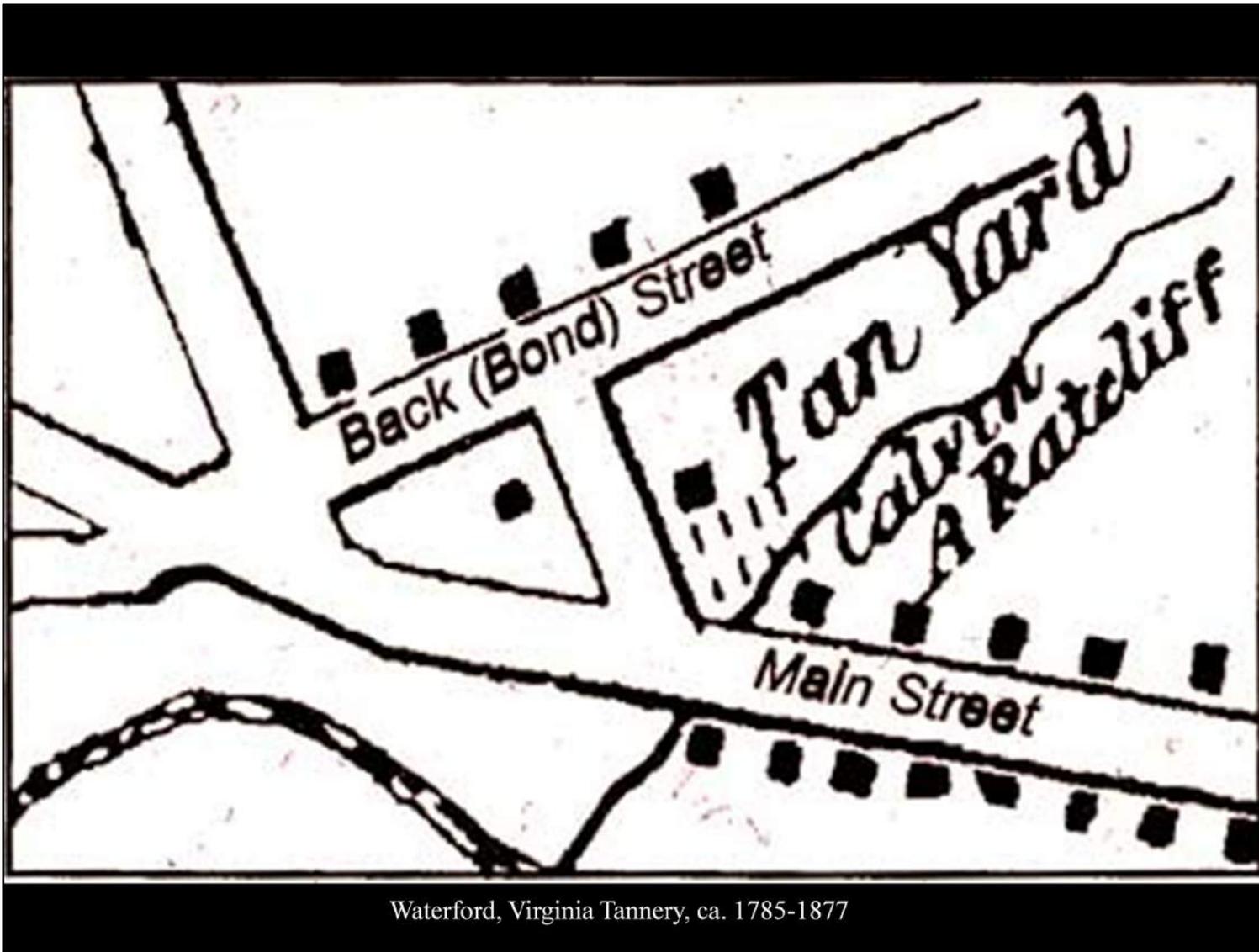


Location of known tanyard lots, ca. 1827-1897

Six Washington College presidents, Baxter through Junkin, were confronted with a growing tannery business (yellow lots) smack dab at the college campus's front door. (*Rivanna*)



(photo by author)



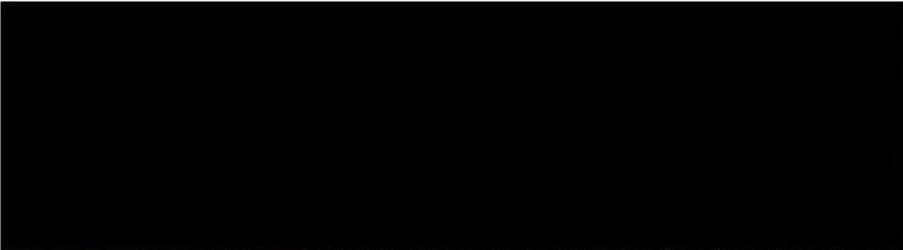
Tanneries were notorious polluting, foul smelling, environmentally degrading, then cottage industries – evidently a quick way to profit.

(map from website: <https://www.waterfordhistory.org/history/waterford-tannery/>)



Hemlock logs by-product of tannery production.

(photo from: <https://craigwhitmoreparker.wixsite.com/bissell-history/settlers-of-scituate>)



Tannery work in the 1880s.



Tanners scraping hair off skins with broad knife.

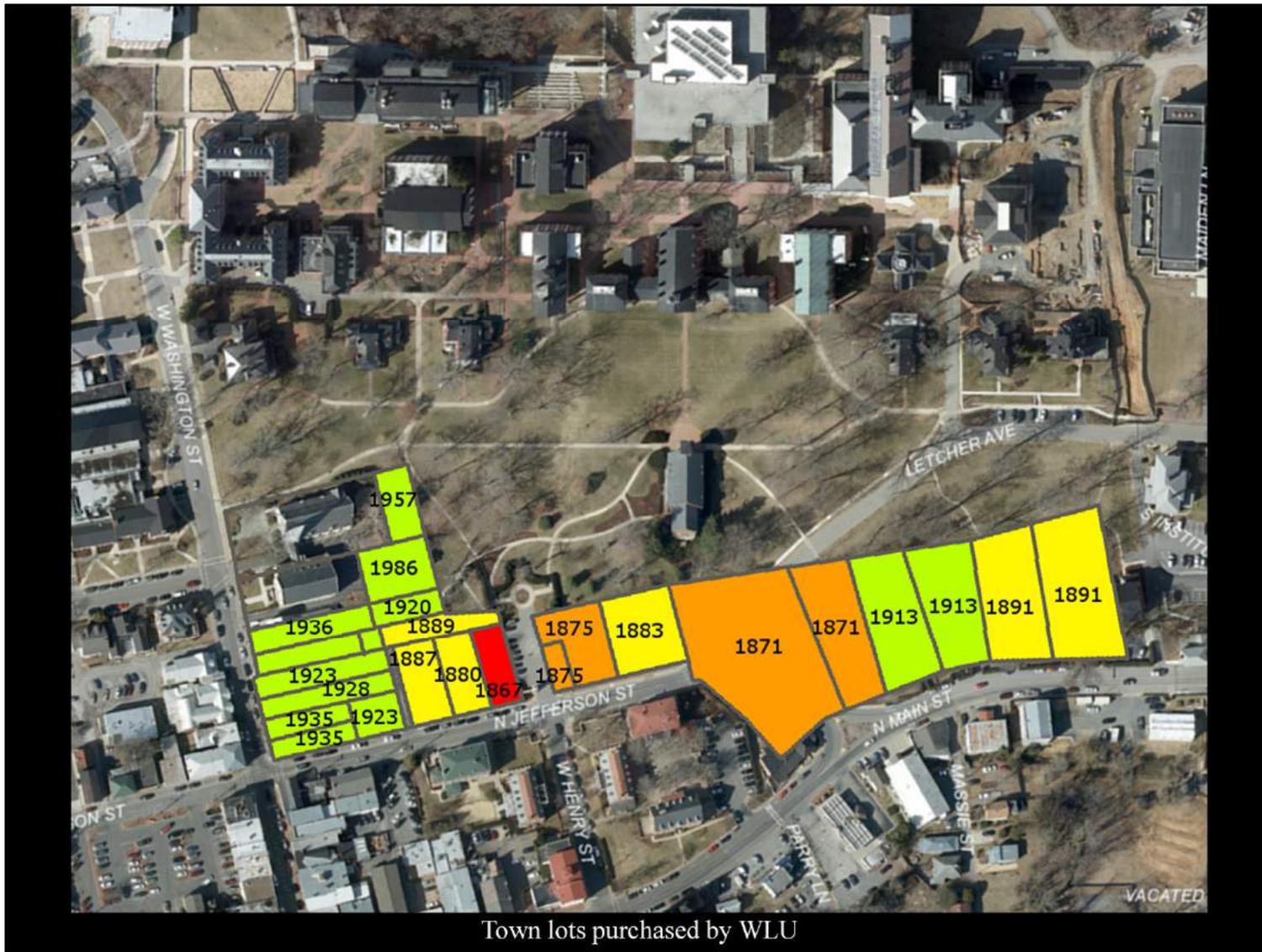
(print from website: http://www.colonialsense.com/Society-Lifestyle/Signs_of_the_Times/Tanning.php) (historic photo of Elite Glove Company, Fulton, New York)



Tannery operation in 1800s

Even Stonewall Jackson and J. T.L. Preston partner on a neighboring tannery.

(photo from website: <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/features/tannery1.htm>)



Lee initiated purchase of bordering town lots, thereby expanding the college's front lawn. (*Rivanna*, pp. 99-109)



The outcome? After Lee's passing William Ruffner writes:

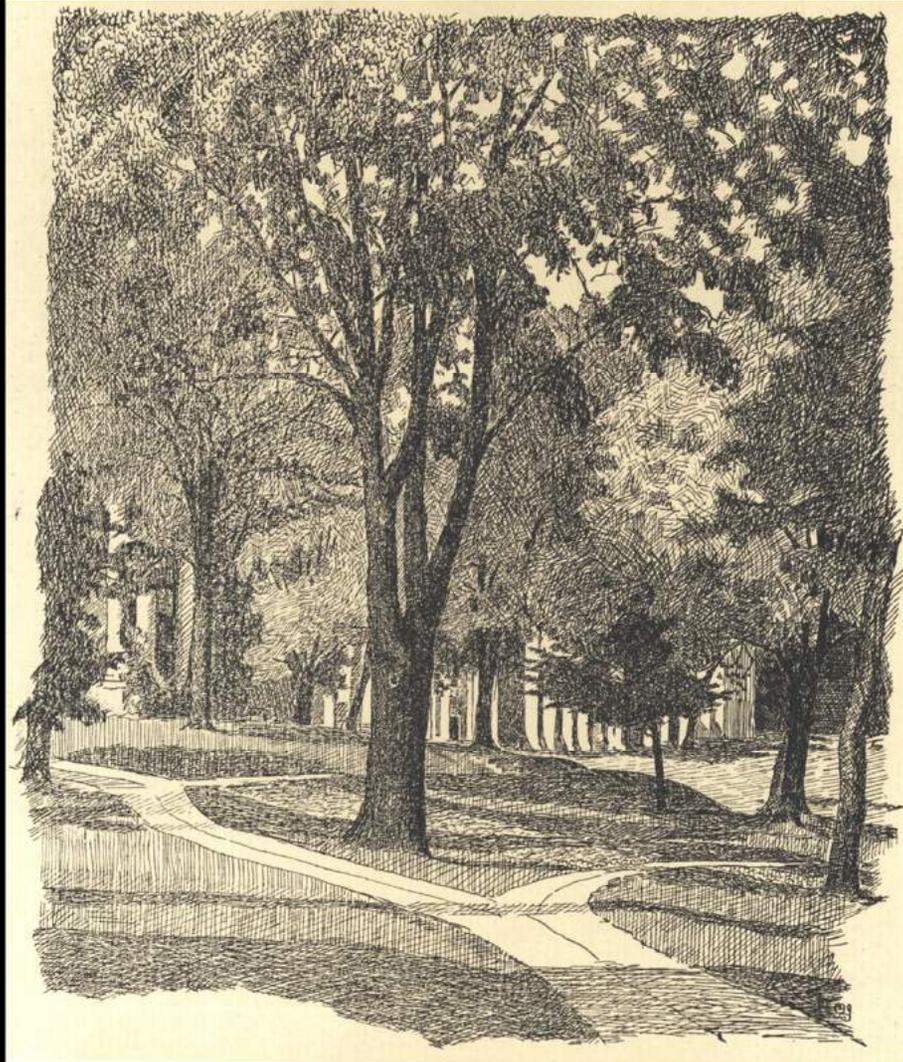
(photo from Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



WLU campus canopy, photograph by Miley

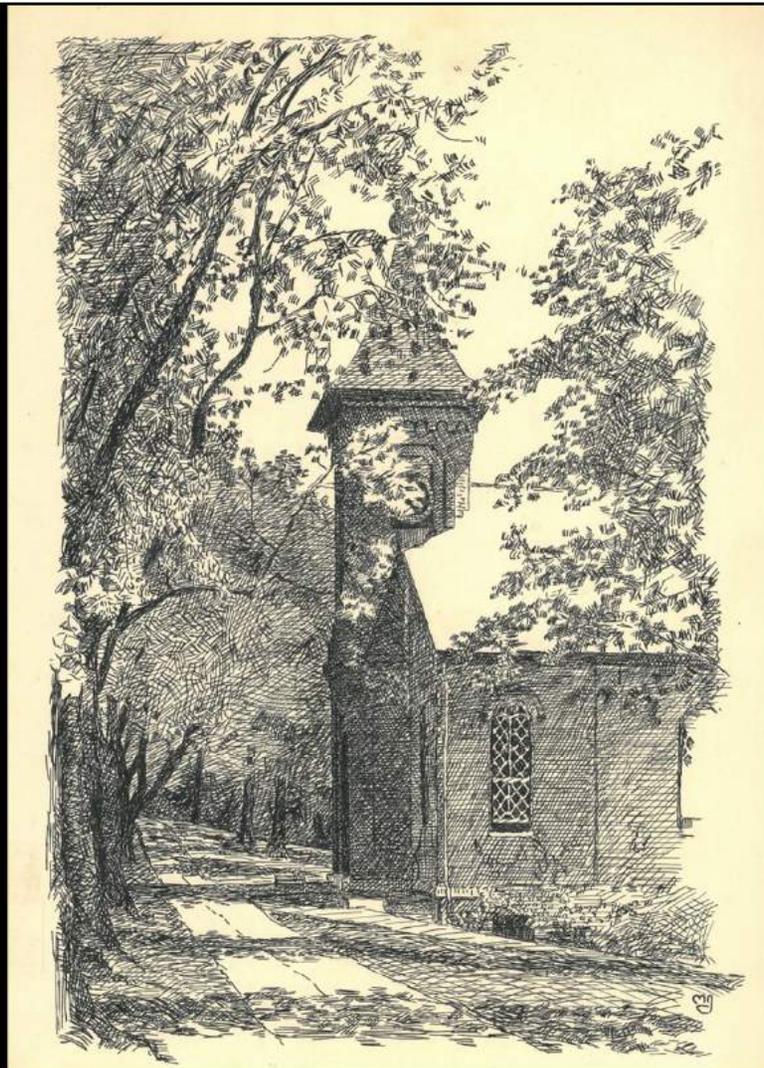
Numerous small additions have been made to the real estate owned by the institution. The observer may look from any part of the grounds upon such a scene as might naturally excite envy in the mind of a man from Harvard, Yale, or Johns Hopkins; but if he will ascend to the top of one of the University buildings he will behold a wider landscape, which called forth from the lips of the accomplished Professor Farnum the exclamation: "If this scene were set down in the middle of Europe the whole continent would flock to see it." (Historical papers, No. 4, p. 7)

(photo by Michael Miley from Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



Sketches of Washington & Lee by Marion Junkin, 1926

(illustration from collection of Marion Junkin sketches, Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



Sketches of Washington & Lee by Marion Junkin, 1926

Robert E Lee Junior sums up: *The grounds and buildings of the college soon began to show his (R.E. Lee's) care, attention, and good taste. In all his life, wherever he happened to be, he immediately set to work to better his surroundings. The sites selected for his headquarter camps during the war, if occupied for more than a day, showed his tasteful touch. When superintendent at West Point, the improvements suggested and planned by him were going on for the three years he remained there. Very soon after he assumed charge of Arlington, the place showed, in its improved condition, the effects of his energetic industry. The college at Lexington was a splendid field for the exercise of his abilities in this line. The neighboring Virginia Military Institute soon followed the example he had set, and after a year the municipal authorities of Lexington were aroused to the necessity of bettering their streets and sidewalks, and its inhabitants realized the need of improving and beautifying their homes. (Recollections, p. 204)*

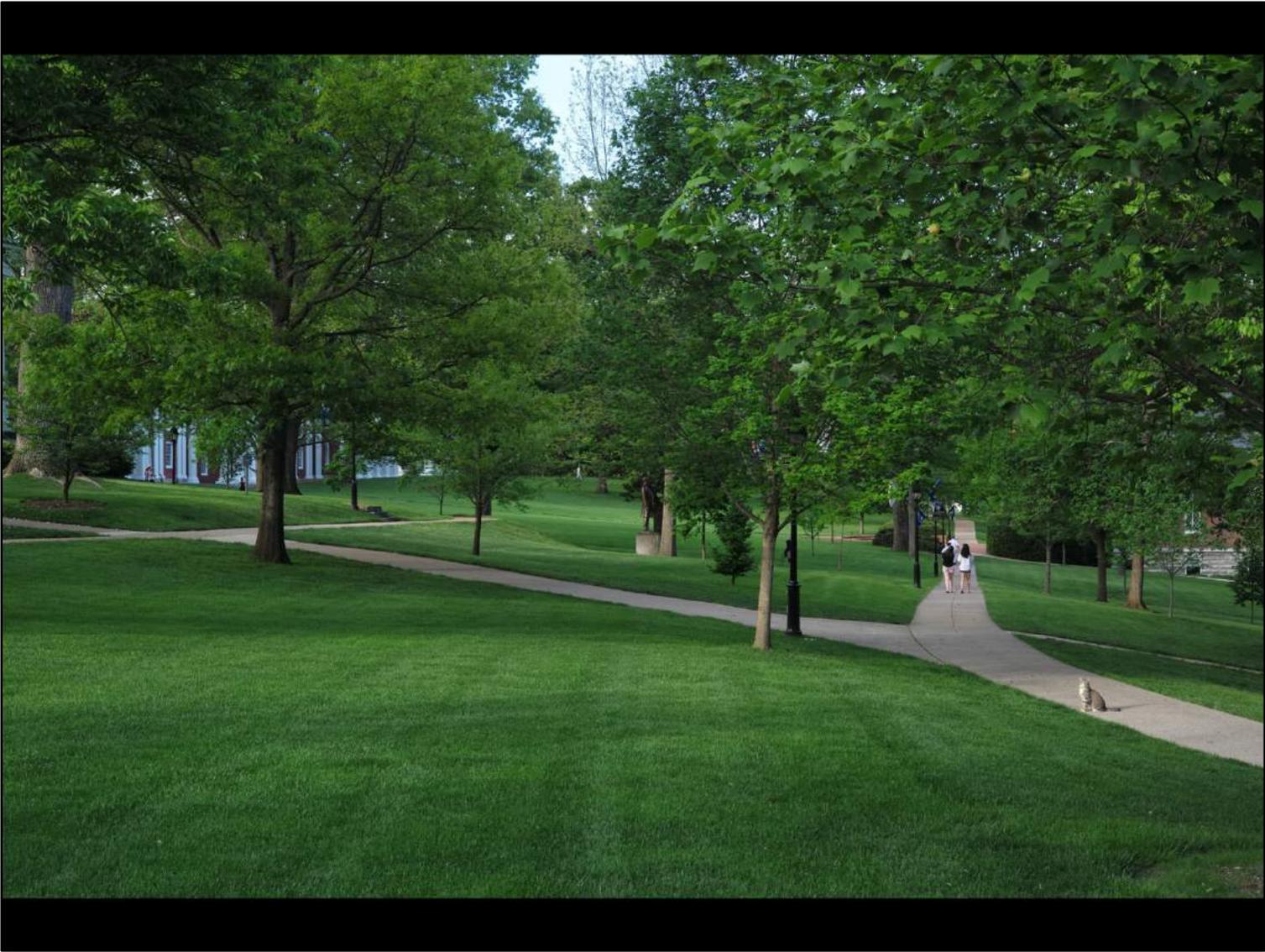
(illustration from collection of Marion Junkin sketches, Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



Robert E Lee's Funeral, photograph by Miley

Note newly planted tree saplings surrounding Lee Chapel.

(photo by Michael Miley, Washington and Lee University Library Special Collections)



(photo by author)



(photo by author)



(photo by author)



(photo by author)



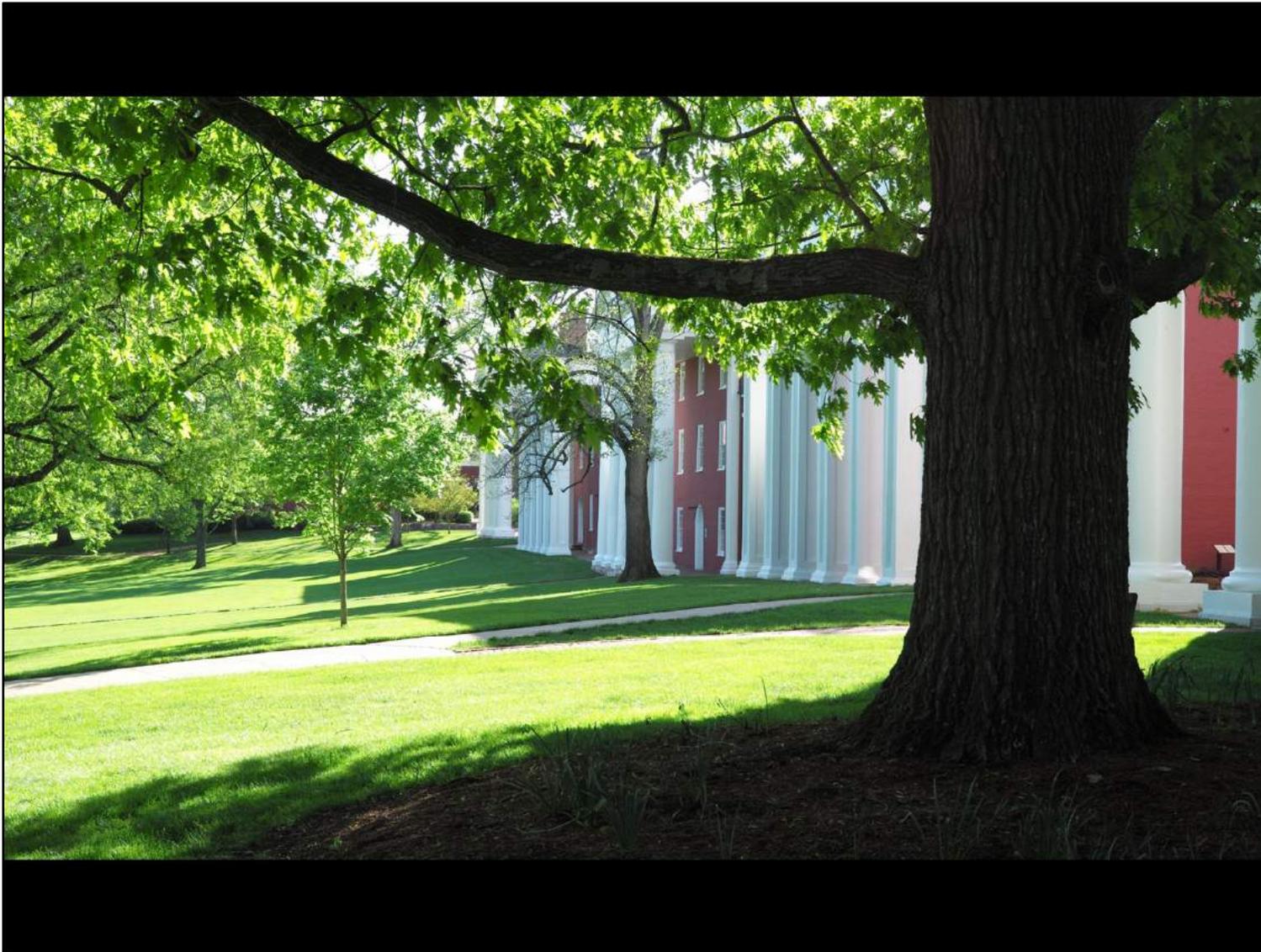
In a Letter to Markie Williams, the final year of his life, Lee writes: *The memories and principles of the men of the earlier days of the Republic should be cherished and remembered, if we wish to transmit to our posterity the Government in its purity, they handed down to us. Who can ever rival Washington in our esteem and affections?* (*Letters to Markie*, p. 84)

(photo by author)



For Lee, I believe, this was largely all a tribute to George Washington, literally achieved beneath his towering visage. The Lee's had lost George Washington Parke Custis's tribute to George Washington – Arlington. The landscape principles followed are those of George Washington – the simple lawn bordered by randomly planted, native tree groves; “shrubberies”.

(photo by author)



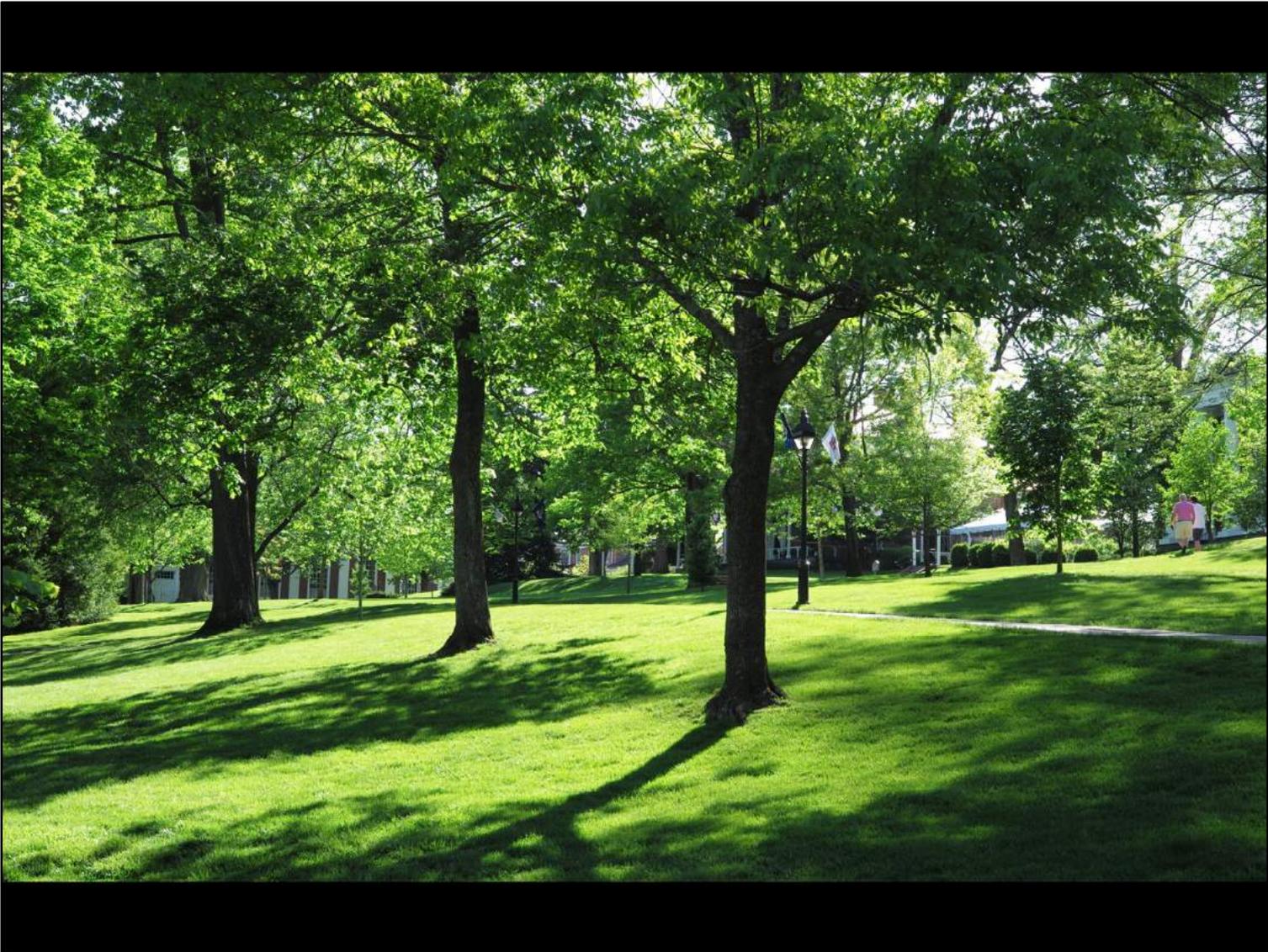
In her classic *Landscape Design, A Cultural Landscape History*, Betsy Barlow Rogers credits George Washington as also being father of the American front lawn – given the magnificent beauty, fame, and influence of Mount Vernon. (*Rogers*, p. 229)



(photo by author)



(photo by author)



(photo by author)



(photo by author)

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Arthur Bartenstein's career has focused on adaptation of historic landscapes to contemporary goals. Graduate of Harvard University Graduate School of Design, Bartenstein returned to Virginia following 15 years with San Francisco based landscape architecture firms the SWA Group and Peter Walker and Partners. Bartenstein established Lexington, Virginia based ABL Landscape Architects in 2008. <http://ablscape.com/>

