

HISTORY OF WASHINGTON AND LEE

Washington and Lee University was established by Scotch and Irish settlers in Augusta County in 1749. The little school, about fifteen miles southwest of what is now the city of Staunton, was called the Augusta Academy.

On May 6, 1776, the name was changed to Liberty Hall and in 1780 the school was moved to the immediate vicinity of Lexington. Liberty Hall was incorporated by the Legislature of Virginia, in October, 1782, as Liberty Hall Academy.

The first important gift received by Liberty Hall Academy was conferred by George Washington. In recognition of his services in the revolution, the Virginia legislature, in 1784, presented to him a number of shares in a canal company. Washington refused to accept these for his own benefit, but after some years of delay his attention was called to Liberty Hall Academy, to which he soon afterward gave them.

An act of the legislature in January, 1798, changed the name of the school to Washington Academy.

In December, 1802, the academy building was destroyed by fire, and in 1803 the work of the school was conducted in rented buildings within the limits of Lexington. Before the end of 1804 a building was constructed on the present university grounds, from which the ruins of the old academy are still visible, a half-mile from Washington College, the name to which the school was changed in 1813.

Shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War the work of the college was discontinued, most of its students enlisting in the Confederate army under the name of the Liberty Hall Volunteers. The buildings were injured when Lexington was occupied by the Federal army in June, 1864. At the close of the war the college borrowed money for the repair of the buildings, and the work of rehabilitation was begun.

On August 4, 1865, General Robert E. Lee was elected president of the college. He was formally installed as President of Washington College, October 2, 1865, and he retained this position until his death, October 12, 1870.

During General Lee's administration of five years the growth of the college in the number of departments was considerable. Five new departments of study were added and the elective system was introduced in place of the ordinary curriculum.

In 1869 a practical and theoretical course in journalism, with 50 Press Scholarships, was established in connection with the College to encourage college-trained men to enter journalism as a profession. It is believed that this journalism course was the first of its type among the colleges in the United States.

In 1871, soon after the death of General Lee, the name of Washington College was changed to "Washington and Lee University," its present corporate title. The same year General G. W. Custis Lee succeeded his father as president.

In 1930 Dr. Francis Pendleton Gaines, then President of Wake Forest College, was called to the Presidency of Washington and Lee, a position he still occupies.

In 1949 the University celebrated its 200th anniversary. In connection with the Bicentennial a number of significant academic exercises were held during the 1948-49 session.

Doremus Memorial Gymnasium, a memorial to Robert Parker Doremus, was erected in 1915 by his wife, Jessie R. Doremus. The building serves as a center for student activity, athletic and social.

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The most significant phase of student government at Washington and Lee has been for generations the Honor System. This is a code of student living, under which it is assumed that every member of the student body is a gentleman and will act as such. The consideration of breaches of the Honor System is one of the specially designated functions of the Executive Committee of the Student Body. Any student found guilty by the members of this body of a dishonorable offense, such as lying, cheating, or stealing, is required by them to withdraw immediately from the University. General Lee put the matter simply to a student who asked for a book of rules: "We have but one rule: our students are gentlemen."

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There are 17 Greek-letter social fraternities on the campus with which approximately 80 percent of the members of the student body are normally affiliated. The number of professional fraternities total 5, including the professional journalism fraternity, Sigma Delta Chi. The other professional fraternities are for Pre-medical, Law, and Commerce students. There are also 5 honorary societies.

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The buildings of Washington and Lee University are situated for the most part upon a ridge of land 1,050 feet above sea level, and are all of brick in modified Greek Revival style. Porticoes supported by white columns constitute the architectural symbol of Washington and Lee on most of the buildings. The campus covers nearly 100 acres, with an adjoining tract of 215 acres for future development.

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The student body is a relatively small one, having ^{1,025} students. The University believes in remaining small in size. No more freshmen are accepted than can be accommodated in the freshmen dormitories. The students prize their own rule that men speak to each other as they pass on the campus. Faculty members act as advisers to students, and know the men in their classes. Because the college is small, a student can make his significant mark in whatever activity interests him: journalism, glee club, dramatics, sports, debating, photography, social service, or participation in such groups as the International Relations Club, the Christian Council, and the literary societies.