

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY

A Building's History

The pre-visit activity will give students a brief introduction to the history of Lee Chapel and Museum. Robert E. Lee's original purpose for the building was to give students a place to gather. Since its completion in 1868, Lee Chapel has expanded and completed several renovations to accommodate its role at the university and the growing visitor population.

The second portion of the activity will give students the opportunity to investigate the history of their school. By using resources available to them, students should answer the questions listed on the sheet. Learning about the story of their school can help secure memories they make there, give them an appreciation for architecture and help develop pride in their school.

What You'll Need:

- **Writing Utensil**
- **Research resources: school website, yearbooks, teachers, principle, news articles, etc.**



Lee Chapel and Museum

Washington and Lee University

What is Lee Chapel's history?

In the fall of 1865, Robert E. Lee traveled to Lexington, Virginia, to become the 11th president of Washington College, now Washington and Lee University. Known for his leading role during the Civil War, Lee saw this as an opportunity to help rebuild and reunite the country. He presided over the college for five years. In 1866, Lee asked the board of trustees to consider building a chapel. He argued that the students needed a larger gathering space, because they were outgrowing the classroom they were currently using.

In January 1867, construction on the Romanesque-style chapel broke ground. Lee, his oldest son, George Washington Custis Lee, and Colonel Williamson of Virginia Military Institute's engineering department are given credit for Lee Chapel's design. The building's main level was to seat 500 students for chapel services, college events and lectures. The lower level was to hold administrative offices for the president and the treasurer, as well as a student center. The chapel was completed in 1868 just in time for commencement activities.

Since it's original construction, Lee Chapel has undergone many needed renovations. In fact, in the 1920's the building was in such bad shape, that the college, now Washington and Lee University, wanted to build an entirely new university chapel. While the decision to construct a new chapel was vetoed, the lower level of Lee Chapel was converted into a museum and Lee's office, left untouched, continued to stand as a reminder of his hard work and dedication.

In 1961, Lee Chapel finally received a complete restoration. The Ford Motor Company granted Washington and Lee University \$370,000 for the restoration of the chapel. The building was closed for fourteen months while it was made structurally sound. Each floor board and roof slate was taken up, numbered and then replaced. Steel beams and concrete were laid to strengthen the building. The Erben pipe organ was restored, the pews were redone and light fixtures more historically accurate to the building were installed.

Lee Chapel went through smaller modifications in the 1990's and in 2007. In 2007, the building's current museum exhibit, *Not Unmindful of the Future: Educating to Build and Rebuild a Nation*, was installed. In 2015, fire suppression and a new lighting system was installed to provide better care for the building and it's objects. Lee Chapel will continue to go through changes as we continue to preserve the building's legacy for many more visitors to see.

What is your school's history?

Lee Chapel's history isn't just something we knew, we had to investigate its past. Using resources available to you, learn about the history of your school and answer the questions below.

Investigate



When was your school built? _____

Who or what is your school named after? Why is it named what it is?

Does your school have a symbol or mascot? If so, why was that particular mascot selected?

Has your school ever been through renovations? If so, when and what was renovated?

Is there something particular your school is known for? (Example: Does it have the best football team?)
