

# Finding Aids to Personal Papers and Special Collections in the VMFA Archives



## Special Collection 21 (SC-21) R.E. Lee Camp, No. 1, Confederate Veterans Papers, 1885-1958

3 boxes (0.2 linear feet); 13 items

Processed by  
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2017

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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### **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

#### **Provenance**

The collection was created by the VMFA Archives in 2017 to bring together primary sources about the camp. The register and reunion ribbons were purchased by VMFA Library in November 2014 and July 2015. The postcards were donated by Elizabeth O'Leary in June 2015. The other materials were relocated from vertical files in the VMFA Library.

#### **Abstract**

The collection documents the history of R.E. Lee Camp, No. 1, Confederate Veterans, a large residential complex for poor and infirm Confederate veterans of the Civil War. Altogether a total of nearly three thousand veterans from thirty-three states called the camp home, and after the camp's closing, the Commonwealth eventually granted use of the buildings and land to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. The collection is comprised of photographs and postcards that document the changing landscape of the camp over 50 years, a rare guest register that includes thousands of guest signatures and a page signed by ten members of the Blackfeet Nation, and two extremely rare artifacts – reunion ribbons – provide material testimony to the reconciliation efforts of Confederate and Union veterans only twenty years after they faced each other as enemies during the Civil War.

### **Access Restrictions**

The collection is open for research.

### **Publication**

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### **Preferred Citation**

R.E. Lee Camp, No. 1, Confederate Veterans Papers (SC-21). VMFA Archives, Richmond, Virginia.

### **Historical Note**

In the 1830s through the 1850s, Anthony Robinson Jr. purchased over 170 acres in the center of what would become the city of Richmond, including the property on which VMFA now stands. The estate, comprised of woods and open countryside, was cultivated and improved, no doubt through the labor of the enslaved African Americans listed in Robinson's tax records and will. Little is known about the earliest Robinson residence, but the imposing farmhouse still standing on the museum property was built by Anthony Robinson Jr. in the mid-1850s. In April 1865, during the final weeks of the Civil War, Union troops occupied the house and grounds at the invitation of Robinson's widow, Rebecca, in exchange for protection from looting. In 1883, the couple's son Channing sold the residence and thirty-six surrounding acres to establish a Confederate soldiers' home.

Between 1885 and 1941 the property was the site of a large residential complex for poor and infirm Confederate veterans of the Civil War. Established by R. E. Lee Camp, No. 1, Confederate Veterans, the camp was built with private funds, including donations from former Confederate and Union soldiers alike. At peak occupancy, residents numbered just over three hundred; altogether a total of nearly three thousand veterans from thirty-three states called the camp home. For the next half century, Robinson House, renamed Fleming Hall during the soldiers' home era, served as the compound's administration building and war museum. After the camp's closing, the Commonwealth granted use of the building to the Virginia Institute for Scientific Research in the 1950s and to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts from 1964 to the present.

The green space in the central grounds of today's VMFA property was once the commons of the Confederate soldiers' home. Around the oak-filled park stood the administration building, barracks, dining hall, hospital, recreation hall, steam plant, and assorted outbuildings. The superintendent's house, nine residential cottages, and a chapel formed an arc to the west. With the exception of Robinson House and the Confederate Memorial Chapel, the structures were demolished or moved in the early 1940s. From the camp's earliest years, the Commonwealth of Virginia helped fund the institution. In 1892, Lee Camp No. 1 agreed that the property would revert to the Commonwealth in twenty-two years. A later agreement extended that transition to the time when the original purpose of the home was no longer needed. When the last resident

died in 1941, the Commonwealth gained ownership of the site. By that time, it had been designated as the Confederate Memorial Park.

Dedicated in 1887 to the Confederate war dead, the nondenominational Confederate Memorial Chapel (also referred to as the Pelham Chapel) served as a place of worship for the residents of R. E. Lee Camp, No. 1. Funded by donations from veterans and private citizens of the Commonwealth, it was designed by architect Marion J. Dimmock in the Carpenter-Gothic style. In the postwar era of reconciliation, Union veterans from Lynn, Massachusetts, donated the organ. By the time the camp closed fifty-four years later, the chapel had hosted approximately 1,700 funeral services for the former soldiers.

The monumental limestone building to the west of the present museum grounds was built in 1932 as a residence for destitute female relatives of Confederate veterans. After relocating the final inhabitants of the Home for Needy Confederate Women to a nursing facility in 1989, the Commonwealth set aside the property for use by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

*(The above information was taken from [History of the VMFA Grounds.](#))*

### **Scope and Content Note**

The collection's inclusive dates are 1885-1958, with the bulk of the material dating from 1885-1937. The collection is comprised of photographs, postcards, reunion ribbons, press clippings, and a guest register.

### **Arrangement**

The collection is organized into three series, and items are arranged chronologically within each series:

[Series 1: Images, 1907-1958, n.d.](#)

[Series 2: Publications, 1885-1914](#)

[Series 3: Realia, 1885](#)

### **Controlled Access Points**

[Lee Camp Soldiers' Home \(Richmond, Va.\)](#)

Soldiers' homes--Virginia--Richmond--19th century

[Soldiers' homes--Virginia--Richmond--20th century](#)

Home for Needy Confederate Women (Richmond, Va.)

Confederate Memorial Chapel

[United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Veterans](#)

Sons of Confederate Veterans (Organization) -- R.E. Lee Camp No. 1 (Richmond, Va.)

Grand Army of the Republic -- Seward Post No. 37 (Auburn, N.Y.)

[Virginia Museum of Fine Arts](#)

Leslie, Frank, 1821-1880

Frank Leslie's illustrated newspaper

## Related Materials

See further information in the VMFA Library:

### Subject Files:

- VMFA: Building History: Confederate Memorial Chapel
- VMFA: Building History: Confederate Home for Ladies
- VMFA: Building History: Robinson House: General
- VMFA: Building History: Robinson House: Robinson Family, 1840s-1880s
- VMFA: Building History: Robinson House: R.E. Lee Camp: Confederate Soldiers' Home (Fleming Hall)
- VMFA: Building History: Robinson House: R.E. Lee Camp: Confederate Soldiers' Museum (Fleming Hall)
- VMFA: Building History: Robinson House: "Confederate Memorial Park," Post 1934 and Controversy, 1954

## SERIES DESCRIPTIONS / ITEM LISTS

### Series 1: Images, 1907-1958, n.d.

*Box 1 (9 items)*

This series is comprised of photographs and postcards that document the changing landscape of the camp over 50 years.

The series is divided into two subseries:

**Series 1.1:** Photographs, 1937-1958

**Series 1.2:** Postcards, 1907-1934, n.d.

### Series 1.1: Photographs, 1937-1958

<i>Box</i>	<i>Item</i>
1	Aerial view of campus with Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Confederate Women's Home, Robinson House, Benedictine Catholic Church, Battle Abbey and Johnston Willis Hospital, taken by Dementi Studio, 1937 Certificate of Authenticity from the Baltimore Sun archives for the 1937 photograph, photo ID AEP-992-BS Confederate Chapel, Negative 3184, January 1958

### Series 1.2: Postcards, 1907-1934, n.d.

<i>Box</i>	<i>Item</i>
1	Aerial View, Confederate Women's Home, Richmond, Va., Capitol News Agency, [ca. 1934] Headquarters, The Soldiers Home, Richmond, Va., Hugh C. Leighton Company, [1907]

<b>Box</b>	<b>Item</b>
1	Soldiers' Home, Boulevard Ave, Richmond, Va., Louis Kaufmann and Sons, [ca. 1913] Soldiers' Home, Boulevard and Grove Ave., Richmond, Va., Southern Bargain House, [1914] Soldiers' Home (Boulevard and Grove Avenue), Richmond, VA, Southern Bargain House Soldiers' Home, Boulevard and Grove Ave., Richmond, Va., Southern Bargain House

**Series 2: Publications, 1885-1914**

*Box 1-2 (2 items)*

This series is comprised of publications created while the camp was still in operation, including a rare guest register from 1912-1914. The thousands of guest signatures include some well-known figures such as J.C. Penny, Minnie Sky Eagle and Chief Red Eagle of the Great Sioux Nation, and Sam Rayburn. The highlight of the book is a complete page signed by ten members of the Blackfeet Nation, including four chiefs. The contingent of Blackfeet leaders from Glacier National Park were likely in nearby Washington, D.C. on tribal business, and signed the register on May 19, 1914 with their pictographs: Chief Eagle Calf (also known as John Ground), Medicine Owl, Two Guns White Calf (Chief and best known as a model for the "Buffalo Nickel"), Lazy Boy (Chief), Mrs. Medicine Owl, Frank White Quiver, Fish Wolf Robe (Chief), Mrs. Two Guns White Calf, Mrs. Bird Rattle, Bird Rattle.

<b>Box</b>	<b>Item</b>
1	“The Home for Ex-Confederate Soldiers and Sailors at Richmond, VA,” Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, pages 5-6, August 22, 1885
2	Register: Lee Camp Soldiers' Home, May 17, 1912-Oct. 14, 1914

**Series 3: Realia, 1885**

*Box 3 (2 items)*

This series is comprised of two extremely rare artifacts, reunion ribbons that provide material testimony to the reconciliation efforts of Confederate and Union veterans only twenty years after they faced each other as enemies during the Civil War. The ribbons were created to commemorate the reciprocal visits of the veterans organizations – Seward Post, No. 37, GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) and R.E. Lee Camp, No. 1, CV (Confederate Veterans) – first to Auburn, NY, and then to Richmond. Each organization spared no expense or outlay of effort to wine, dine, and celebrate their counterparts. Among the festivities in Richmond was a special lunch given for the Union veterans at the Soldiers’ Home. Only the year before, GAR posts from all over the country were instrumental in helping to raise funds to establish the Soldiers’ Home.

<b>Box</b>	<b>Item</b>
3	Gray ribbon, July 4, 1885 Blue ribbon, Oct. 20, 1885