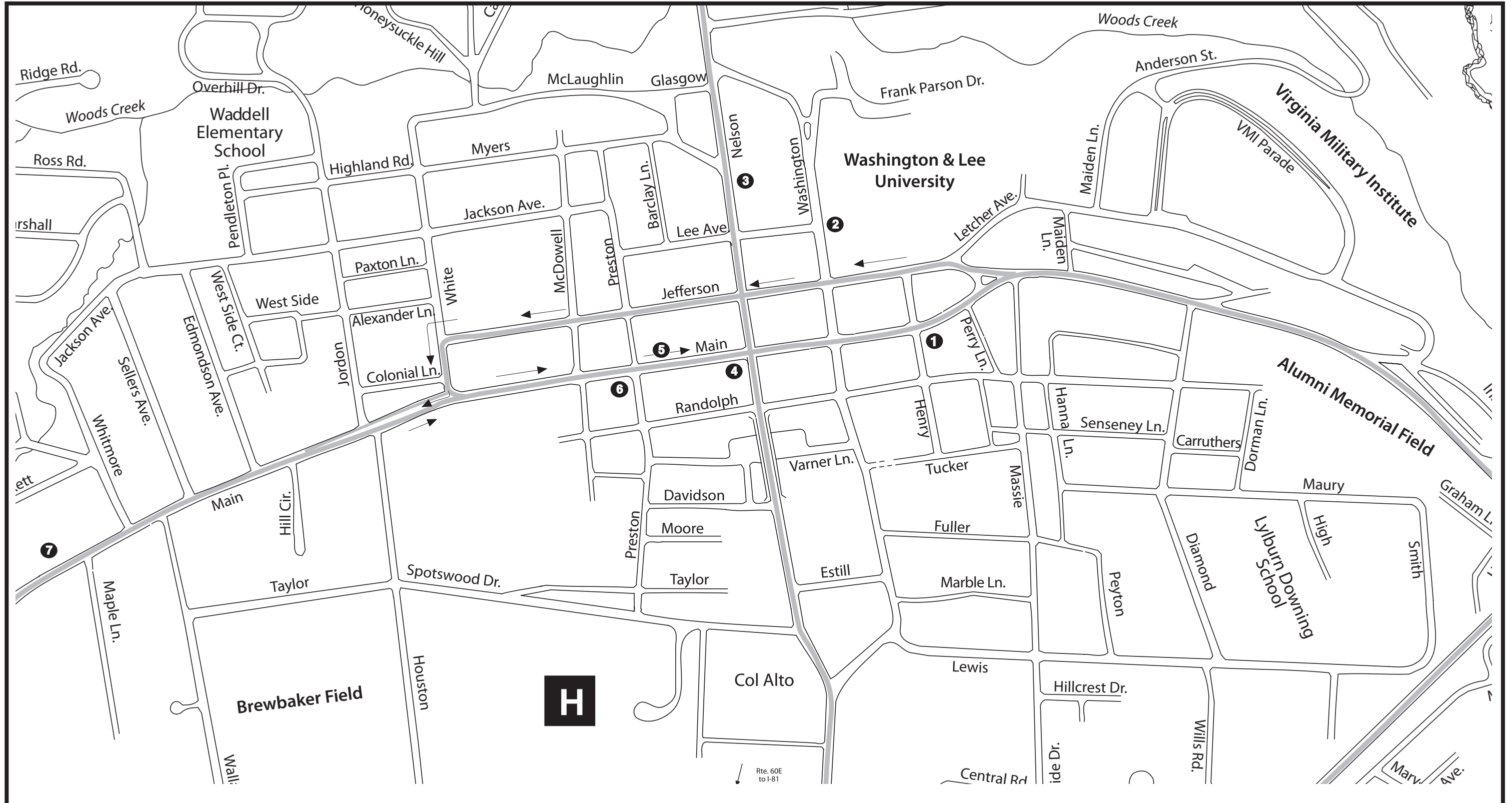


Sacred Places: Historic Churches of Lexington, Virginia Open-House

May 17/ 11am - 2 pm



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3. St. Patrick’s Catholic Church

221 W. Nelson Street

St. Patrick’s Parish was established in 1873 largely by Irish immigrants, including John Sheridan who would later establish Sheridan Livery Stable on N. Main Street. In 1873-74, the parish built its first church on Henry Street where the Gothic-inspired brick building with center entry tower stands today. In 1948, the church acquired the Gassman property on W. Nelson Street as a building site (the 19th century Gassman House with its intricate vergeboards serves today as the Parish House). The Philadelphia architectural firm of Gleeson & Mulrooney was chosen to design the church. The design is almost identical to that of Huntington Court Methodist Church in Roanoke, which is cited in the architects’ specifications as the model for St. Patrick’s stonework. Construction began in 1952 and the building was dedicated in 1953. The stained glass windows, fabricated by the Lynchburg Stained Glass Company, were added in 1987 as part of a remodeling by Lexington architects Roberts & Kirchner.

St. Patrick’s understated Gothic Revival exterior is faced in light-hued Catawba sandstone. The steep slate-singled gable roof, the buttresses that flank the segmental-arched front entry and line the sides, and narrow lancet-arched windows recall the medieval parish church architecture of the British Isles. Inside, laminated Douglas fir trusses in the form of lancet arches span the simply appointed nave and focus the eye on the chancel and its rose window glazed in shades of blue, gray, and red.

4. Lexington Presbyterian Church

120 S. Main Street

Lexington Presbyterian Church is a monumental, temple-form structure of stuccoed brick with wooden detailing. The church was designed by Thomas U. Walter in 1843 and completed in 1845. The building has evolved through numerous additions, including a Sunday school built adjacent to the church in 1906. The Greek Revival church has six Doric columns across its temple porch with a soaring clock tower steeple above. Tragically, the church burned in 2000 leaving little but its walls and columns. The reproduction steeple one sees today was built off-site and hoisted in place.

Gen. Thomas Jackson worshipped at Lexington Presbyterian during his tenure at Virginia Military Institute. The Rev. William S. White was the minister of Lexington Presbyterian Church during this period and presided over Jackson’s funeral in the church. Rev. White was the first minister to reside in the 1848 Presbyterian manse located on today’s White Street. He is buried in Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery not far from the grave of Gen. Jackson. In 1873, the church also had constructed Beechenbrook Chapel above Jordan’s Point to serve as a place of worship for the workers at the Point.

5. Trinity United Methodist Church

147 S. Main Street

Methodism in the Lexington/Rockbridge County area dates back to the late 18th century, and the First Methodist Society was organized in Lexington by Rev. William “Billy” Cravens in 1793-94. According to the church’s website, Cravens was also a stonemason who came to Lexington in 1793 to participate in the rebuilding of the burned Liberty Hall Academy. In 1847, a division occurred within the church, and a large part of the congregation moved from Randolph Street to a location on Jefferson Street. The two congregations reunited in 1864. In 1889, the church acquired property on Main Street for a new church building. In 1890, the corner stone for this church was laid at this site.

The corner stone for today’s Trinity United Methodist Church was placed at the current location on June 17, 1926. The Architecture of Historic Lexington describes the architectural style of the church as Creative Eclecticism. Elements of Romanesque architecture can be seen on the Main Street entrance. According to the church’s historian, inspiration for this larger church was a result in part by the increased attendance of VMI cadets and W&L students. The seating capacity of the church today, including the balcony, amounts to slightly over 350 people.

1. First Baptist Church

103 N. Main Street

First Baptist Church was built 1894-96 in the Gothic Revival style and features a gable-fronted nave with towers at its front corners. At the base of the shorter left-hand tower is a limestone cornerstone inscribed “1st Baptist Church/July 4, 1884/W.T. Johnson, D.D.”. The right-hand tower is topped with an octagonal spire that is sheathed in its original shingle-pattern pressed metal. Each side elevation has six lancet-arch windows. The second window on the southwest side is a memorial window with a stylized palm tree design and a bottom panel with the inscription “Presented by/J.A. Pettigrew/Thomas Evans/John Fleming”.

First Baptist Church was organized in 1867 as Lexington African Baptist Church. That year the black membership of Lexington Baptist Church (now Manly Memorial Baptist) petitioned for “letters of demission” in order to form a separate congregation in Lexington. The first church is said to have been a log chapel, followed in 1871 by a frame church. The present church was erected by black masons and carpenters according to a design by architect E.N. Bolger.

2. R . E. Lee Memorial Episcopal Church

123 W. Washington Street

In 1843, the Lexington Episcopalians chose Greek Revival for their new church, Grace Episcopal, which stood on the site now occupied by R.E. Lee Memorial Church. Following the death of Washington College president R.E. Lee, the church decided to construct a new church on the site. As noted in The Architecture of Historic Lexington, the new church (1872-83), by Baltimore architect J. Crawford Neilson, is a late form of ecclesiastical Gothic. Built of limestone, its metal steeple sits prominently above Washington Street. Neilson’s work in Lexington brought him in close contact with G.W. Custis Lee, president of the newly renamed Washington and Lee University. He would design a number of the prominent post-Civil War buildings on the campus, including the Mausoleum of Lee Chapel.

The church’s interior is especially noteworthy for its vaulted wooden ceiling and its stained glass windows. The five-panel stained glass window behind the altar is in memory of Robert Edward Lee. Windows on the east side of the sanctuary honor the memory of church founder and first superintendent of VMI Francis H. Smith and Alexander “Sandie” Pendleton, staff officer to Gen. Thomas Jackson, who was killed September 25, 1864, at the Battle of Fisher’s Hill. On the west wall can be seen what remains of the original decorative painting scheme funded in part by Custis Lee in the 1880s.

6. Manly Memorial Baptist Church

202 S. Main Street

What is now known as the Manly Memorial Baptist Church was founded by 16 members on May 9, 1841, as the Lexington Baptist Church. Its first pastor was Cornelius Tyree, and its most prominent member at the time was builder John Jordan, who served as one of the first deacons. He built a brick building on a Nelson Street lot between Main and Randolph Streets to serve as the first house of worship for the congregation.

The current sanctuary, at the corner of Main and Preston Street with its distinctive dome, was built on the Standard Akron Plan and dedicated on May 9, 1920. The church changed its name in March of 1925 to honor a former past pastor, Dr. Charles Manly. Dr. Manly had served the church for 11 years, and when he left he was known as the “most universally beloved man in Lexington.” In 1967, two floors of classrooms and a ground floor fellowship facility were added and named “Jordan Hall”. In 1990, the church installed a Shantz three manual organ in the sanctuary.

7. Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church

617 S. Main Street

The church building was designed by Virginia architect Milton Grigg (1905-1982), known for his restoration work at Colonial Williamsburg and Monticello. In his career as an independent architect in Charlottesville, he worked as a modernist within the Jeffersonian tradition. The church was constructed in 1961. It boasts a 24 foot tall wooden cross at the entrance and a sanctuary with wood arches that form the warped plane wood roof. Multi-colored block windows help lighten the sanctuary. The sanctuary and choir loft will comfortably seat 100 worshippers.

The other structure on the property is “Boxwoods”, a 1850 brick Gothic Cottage style building that served as an inn for travelers on the “Plank Road” through Lexington. On the front gable, there is intricate bargeboard carving and a handsome quatrefoil. The front doorway has a Tudor arch transom. The original front veranda has been removed. Inside, the stair has a graceful curved walnut handrail that is typical of the era.