

Works by a Prolific Postwar Artist at VMI



WILLIAM DICKINSON WASHINGTON (1833–79) was an American painter and art teacher, born in Loudoun County, a descendant of a cousin of

George Washington. He studied painting in Washington, D.C., and in Germany. He became known for his portraits and scenes of historical events, and his most famous painting

was *The Burial of Latané* (1864), which became a powerful symbol of the Lost Cause.

During the Civil War he worked for the Confederacy in Richmond as



6 Gov'r Jno. Letcher
7 Gen'l W.A. Richardson
8 Dr. R.L. Madison
9 Col. Scott Shipp
10 Capt. J. M. Brooke

1 Gen'l F. H. Smith
2 Col. J. W. Massie
3 Col. J. T. L. Preston
4 Gen'l T. H. Williamson
5 Commodore M. F. Maury

11 Col. W. B. Blair
12 Col. T. M. Semmes
13 Col. M. B. Hardin
14 Gen'l G. W. C. Lee
15 Col. Marshall McDonald

William D. Washington, *Faculty meeting after Civil War* [painting study]

a civilian, a deformed foot keeping him from active service. After the war Washington spent a year in England, but returned to New York in 1866, where he worked in a studio.

In July 1869 he was offered a teaching position at Virginia Military Institute, where he remained (with one interruption) until his death 17 months later. The institute lacked funds for a full-time arts professor, and Washington took a brief hiatus in order to earn money from portrait commissions back in Washington, D.C., and to seek a cure at Hot Springs for his poor health.

At VMI he was assigned by Superintendent Francis H. Smith to paint posthumous portraits of



William D. Washington, c. 1869

important Civil War and VMI people, working from photographs and survivors' recollections. He also painted a number of landscapes in Lexington

and Rockbridge County. Many of Washington's paintings can be seen in Preston Library on the VMI post.

He died suddenly at age 36 on December 1, 1870, and was greatly mourned. A battalion of cadets escorted his coffin to his grave in Lexington Presbyterian (now Oak Grove) Cemetery.

One unusual artifact Washington left behind was a study for an imaginary meeting in 1865 of the VMI faculty, when (he supposed) the participants planned the institute's post-war restoration. It is shown on the previous page; the numbers in red correspond to his notations.

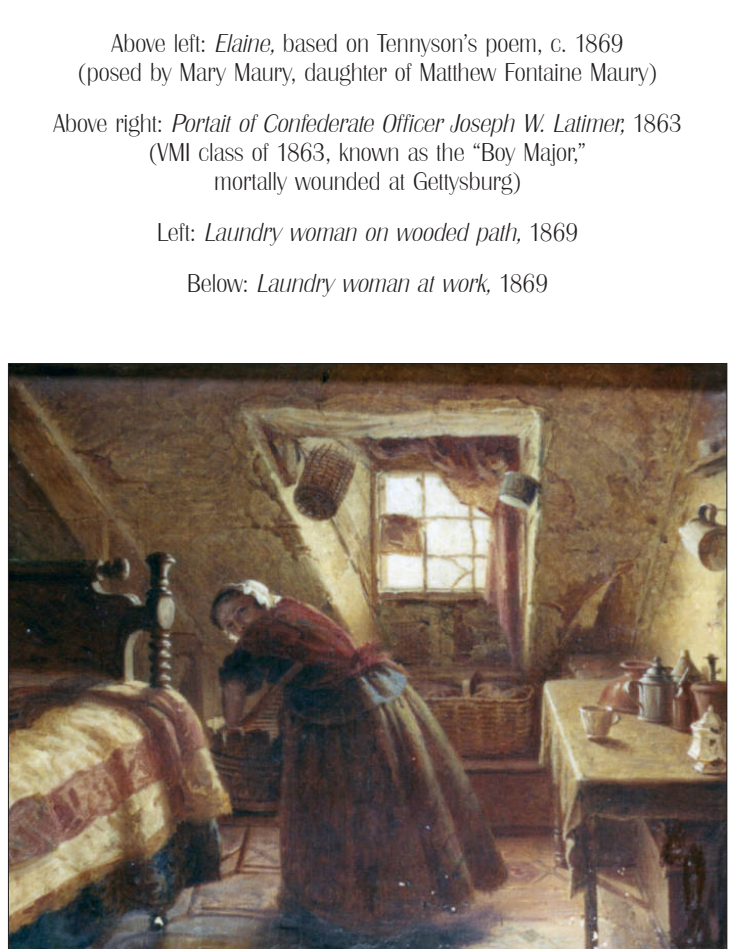
In addition, here are several of his other Lexington paintings.



Painting, House Mountain and VMI faculty quarters, c. 1869



Landscape, behind Washington and Lee University, 1869

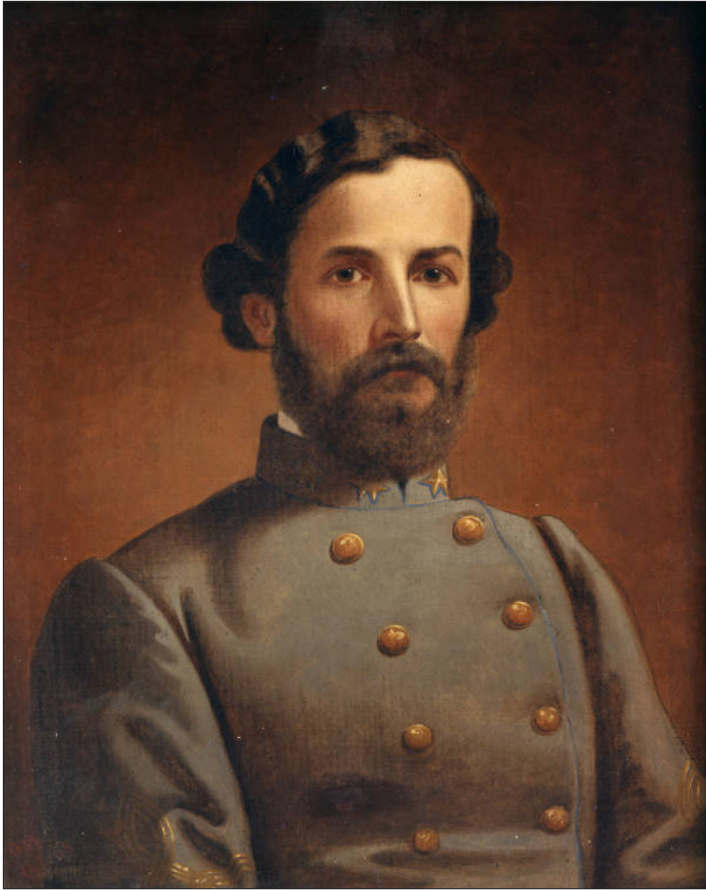


Above left: *Elaine*, based on Tennyson's poem, c. 1869
(posed by Mary Maury, daughter of Matthew Fontaine Maury)

Above right: *Portrait of Confederate Officer Joseph W. Latimer*; 1863
(VMI class of 1863, known as the "Boy Major,"
mortally wounded at Gettysburg)

Left: *Laundry woman on wooded path*, 1869

Below: *Laundry woman at work*, 1869



Top left: *Col. George S. Patton during Civil War*, c. 1861
(grandfather of Gen. George S. Patton Jr.)

Top right: *Old Mill*,
Rockbridge County, c. 1869

Left: *Landscape*, Rockbridge County,
c. 1869, showing cliffs over
the North (Maury) River