

William Edward West  
December 10, 17888 – November 2, 1857

Section 11.1 # 110028

William Edward West was born on December 10, 1788, in Lexington, Kentucky, to Edward West Jr. and his wife Sarah Creed Brown West. His father was a silversmith. Lexington was an important trade center. The town could boast of having the first college, theater and library west of the Alleghany Mountains.

West was a person who enjoyed travelling in the United States and overseas. He had an artist's studio in Philadelphia from 1809 to 1817. Then he lived in New Orleans and Natchez before sailing to Italy in 1819 where he studied at the Academy in Florence. He was asked to paint a portrait of the Lord Byron in 1822. Two years later Byron would be dead at age 36.

In 1823 he moved to Paris and then to England. West became well known for his portraits of Americans living abroad. But living in Europe, in the manner in which West enjoyed, was very expensive. By 1837, he was bankrupt and returned to America to live in Baltimore. The next year he was invited by Mrs. Robert E. Lee to paint a portrait of her young husband, Lieutenant of Engineers Robert E. Lee. Mrs. Lee persuaded her husband to travel to Baltimore and to wear his full dress uniform for the portrait. During the Civil War, when Mrs. Lee had to flee from her home "Arlington," she took this portrait with her. Later West moved to New York and became friends with a number of prominent people. He renewed his friendship with Washington Irving whom he had met in Paris in 1823. He received many commissions for portraits during the years after he returned to America.

In 1855, with his health declining, he accepted an invitation to live in the home of his sister Jane West Woods. Jane and her husband Joseph Woods lived on High Street (6<sup>th</sup> Avenue North) in Nashville. He continued to paint portraits especially of family and friends in the city. William E. West died on November 2, 1857. His obituary proclaimed that "Most of his artist-life was spent in Europe where he stood at the head of his profession... He painted a portrait of Lord Byron from life, which the artist sold for \$2,000." On November 5, 1857, the local newspaper announced that the Artists of this city had meet in the studio of W. B. Cooper, Esq. and decided they would "as a last tribute follow, in a body, West's remains to their last resting place." The burial took place in the Woods lot at City Cemetery.

#### Sources

Portrait of Lord Byron., Estille Curtis Pennington. On-line  
William West. The Johnson Collection. Spartanburg, South Carolina. On-line  
Lord Byron Portrait. Scotland National Portrait Gallery. Online  
Robert E. Lee Portrait. Washington & Lee Chapel and Museum. On-line  
Obituaries. *Republican Banner*, November 3 & 5, 1857. City Cemetery website

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