

Discovery of the Hudson and the Power of Nature ~ 1600's

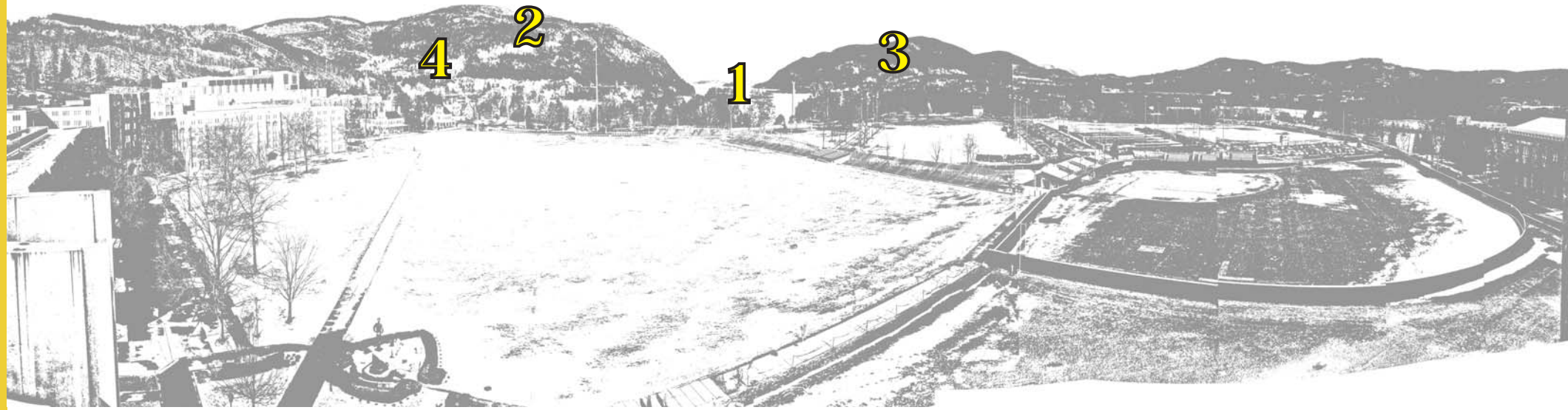
“World renowned, as West Point justly is, there is that in its scenery and associations more interesting to a poetic mind, than its famed Academy. Its green plain, hidden amongst its mountains; its craggy summits; its darker waters, flowing on forever;... all these and other memorable things, call up whatever is sublime in nature, or noble in history.”

Edward D. Mansfield, 1863



Landing of Henrik Hudson, Robert Walter Weir, 1842

For an in depth look at Robert Weir and his contribution to West Point, scan the QR code, or go to: www.urltobeprovided.org



When Henry Hudson, sailed up the Hudson River in 1609 and dropped anchor just north of Storm King Mountain, he and his ship, the Half Moon, became an iconic symbol of the discovery of an area that would inspire both artists and explorers.

The view through the (1) Wey Gat (the dutch word for “windgate”), and the imposing peaks of (2) Storm King and (3) Breakneck Mountain were often the subject of works from the famous Hudson River School of Painters.

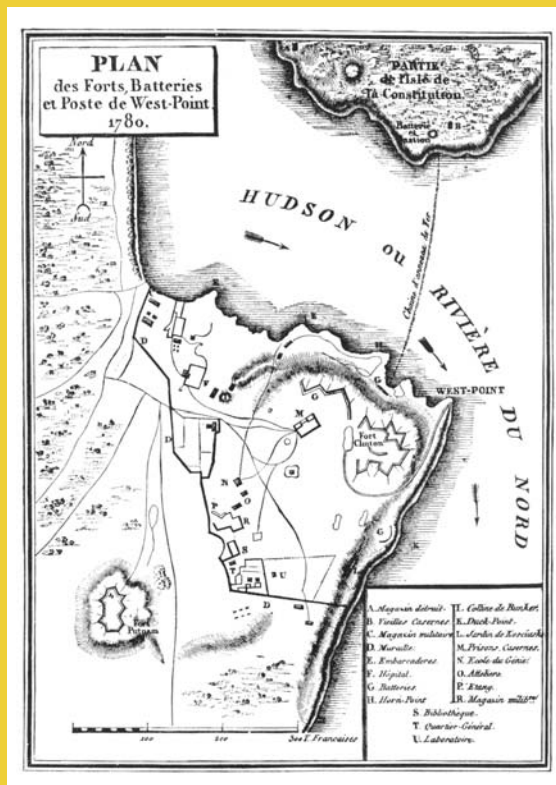
Robert Walter Weir, a Hudson River School painter and renowned educator, taught drawing at West Point for 42 years from 1834 to 1876. He is best known for his painting, *Embarkation of the Pilgrims*, which hangs in the Capitol Rotunda.

Weir’s appointment as a West Point instructor afforded him the perfect setting for developing his reputation as a world class historical painter. His mural *War and Peace* can still be viewed in the old (4) West Point chapel located at the gate of the West Point cemetery.

“The Key to the Continent”

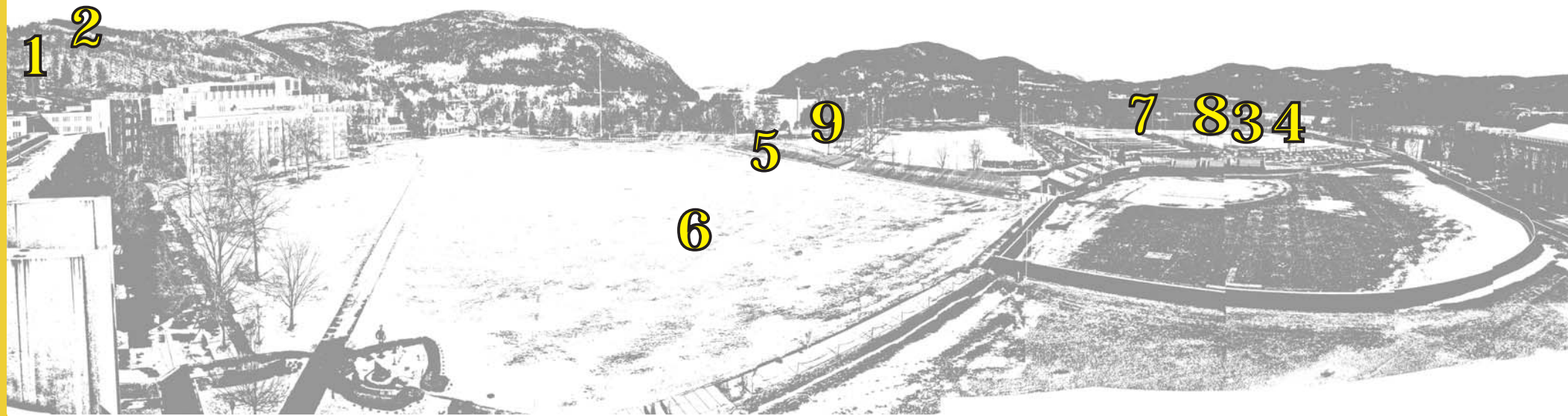
West Point and the Revolutionary War, 1775-1783

West Point’s future location was considered by both the Patriot and British armies as “The Key to the Continent” or strategic hub of Revolutionary military maneuvers. From the construction of the chain, to the fort and redoubt defenses that would help turn the tide of the conflict, this key position on the Hudson placed West Point in the hearts and minds of a new nation.



A french map of 1780 showing the position of the West Point defenses

For an in depth look at the Revolutionary War and West Point, scan the QR code or go to: www.urltobeprovided.org



Remnants of the fortification designs of Colonel Thadeusz Kosciuszko can still be seen from this vantage point. On the left, we can see the locations for (1) Fort Putnam and (2) Redoubt #4 that were instrumental in the Patriot’s overland defense. To the right along the river, the crumbling remnants of the (3) Chain battery can still be viewed along Flirtation Walk.

A (4) monument to Kosciuszko stands at the site of the former Fort Clinton. His designs began a tradition of engineering innovation that still exists at West Point today.

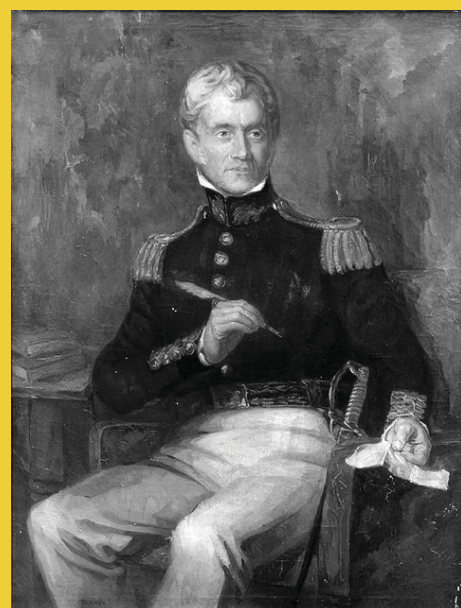
Located under the northern most bleachers on Parade Ground, (5) Execution Hollow, as its name implies, was used to deal with deserters, criminals, mutineers and spies.

The colorful Baron von Steuben was hired by General Washington to produce a disciplined corps of infantry out of the ragtag soldiers of the Revolution. In 1780, Steuben was sent to West Point where he implemented a program of well-ordered drilling practices conducted on (6) the Plain.

The famous chain fortification, which stretched between the tip of (7) Gee’s Point and (8) Constitution Island, served as the crown jewel of the Patriot defenses as it took great advantage of the deepest and most treacherous passage in the Hudson. Actual links of the great chain can be viewed up close at the (9) Chain Monument on Trophy Point.

The Founding of a National Military College 1784-1832

After the War of Independence, never again did the leaders in Washington want the army to have to rely on foreign military ingenuity. President Jefferson's decision to officially establish the Academy in 1802 would spark a national push to build a trained cadre of officers and engineers as the nation further expanded its western boundaries. By recruiting men from all strata across the nation, West Point made history by becoming the first national military and engineering college.



Portrait of Sylvanus Thayer, Robert Walter Weir, 1844

For an in depth look at
the early years of West Point
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Sylvanus Thayer, called the Father of West Point, served as the Superintendent from 1817 to 1833. Despite the many obstacles he faced in molding the Academy, Thayer's superintendency is marked by unparalleled achievement. He established both strict disciplinary standards and a standard course of academic study. Thayer's emphasis on honorable conduct gave rise to what became known as the Spirit of West Point, embodied in the hallowed words, "*duty, honor, country.*" The (1) Thayer monument can be seen at the far northwest corner of the Plain.

Along the western flank of the Plain stand the (2) Superintendent's (or "Supe's") House and the (3) Commandant's House (the oldest standing structure at West Point). These were both constructed under Thayer's command.

As the Academy grew in the first third of the 19th century, new buildings constructed to meet the needs of the growing staff, students, and other military personnel began to spring up and encroach upon the Plain. A (4) Cadet Mess, (5) Academic Building and (6) South Barracks were built in 1815 and stretched in a line across the front edge of what is now the Eisenhower Barracks. Another housing unit, called (7) North Barracks, was located perpendicular to the southern edge of the Plain, and a small brick portion of the original (8) West Point Hotel can still be seen.

(9) Mrs. Thompson's Boarding House, located on the western edge of Trophy Point and demolished in 1839, was a coveted dining spot for the lucky cadets who afforded a place at her table.

Division and Conflict

West Point and the effects of Civil War

1833-1890

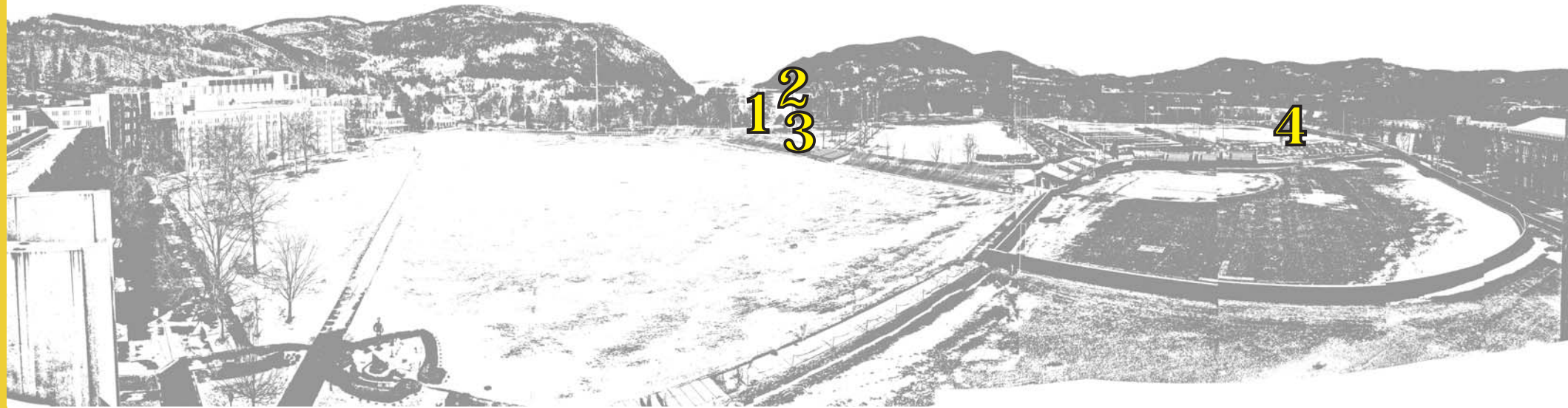
In the periods leading up to, during, and in the aftermath of the Civil War, West Point faced some of its greatest challenges. Regional biases between Northern and Southern men led to escalating clashes, the first black cadets arrived, confronting prejudicial barriers, and the Academy faced its first real threat of closure by Congress. The Academy was pushed to its breaking point as the war placed a drain on both men and resources. Ultimately, the "Long Gray Line" would prevail when West Point graduates on both sides, including Ulysses S. Grant, William Tecumseh Sherman, Robert E. Lee and George Pickett, shone brilliantly on the battlefield.



Cadets from the Class of 1863

** (Archives staff is finding a clean digital copy)

For an in depth look at
West Point and the Civil War
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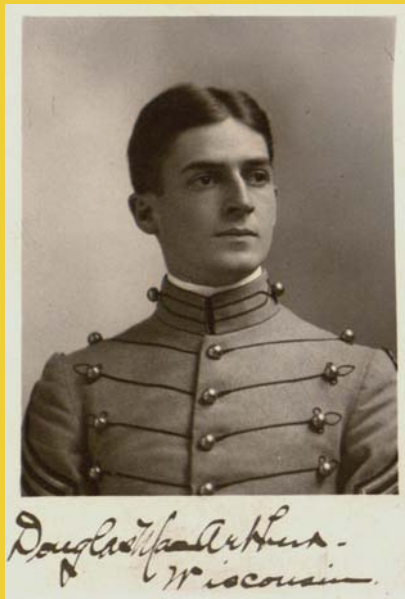
Poised on the scenic overlook directly north is (1) Trophy Point, former site of West Point graduation ceremonies before they were moved to the Plain. Deriving its name from the captured pieces of artillery from various conflicts, it's best known for the towering granite column of (2) Battle Monument, designed by architect Stanford White. Inscribed with 2,230 names, the monument is dedicated to the men and officers of the Regular Army who lost their lives in the Civil War. Conceived as a tribute to their fallen comrades, army officers of the time contributed a portion of their pay to finance the monument, which ranged from \$1 for enlisted men to \$27 for Major Generals. It is reputed to be one of the tallest monoliths in the Western hemisphere.

Across the street from Battle Monument stands the (3) Sedgewick Monument, dedicated to Major General ("Uncle") John Sedgewick. One of the top corps commanders of the Union army, Sedgewick was killed in 1864 during the battle at Spotsylvania. The monument is cast from the cannon of Sedgewick's corps, and legend holds that if a cadet spins the statue's spurs, it will bring good luck during final exams.

It was during this era that the Plain lost most of its buildings to demolition or fire. These were rebuilt in the current locations for Grant, Bartlett and Thayer Halls and Pershing and Bradley Barracks. The Plain became a site used for training maneuvers, ceremonies and even a (4) Cadet Summer Encampment, a respite from academic work, located just south of the ruins of Fort Clinton.

The Maturing of the Academy 1890-1990

As the 20th century commenced and marched forward, West Point expanded rapidly, responding to the new pressures of world conflicts and changing social climates. During this era of change, West Point rediscovered its architectural roots. Its “rising walls of granite” built mostly in the Gothic tradition established in the 1840s, came to embody its solidifying army pride. The nation saw men such as Patton, MacArthur and Eisenhower emerge first as West Point grads, and then as national heroes. It also saw increasing diversity in its populace, including the first women to graduate from the Academy.

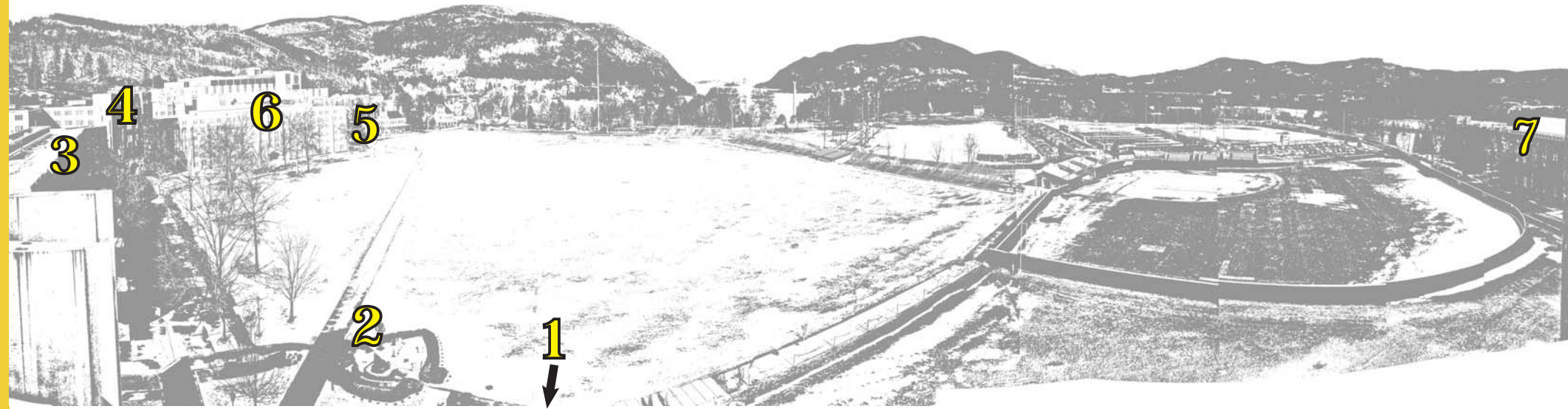


Cadet portrait of Douglas C. MacArthur



Cadet portrait of Dwight D. Eisenhower

For an in depth look at the maturing of West Point scan the QR code or go to: www.urltobeprovided.org



Three of the past century’s greatest military minds are immortalized from this view. (1) General George Patton’s monument can be seen if you peek over the edge of the terrace. Patton, Class of 1909, went on to establish himself as a legendary, hard-driving WWII commander. Directly to the left and in front of the Patton Monument stands the (2) Eisenhower Monument. A member of the class of 1915 (“the class the stars fell on”), Eisenhower is, of course, a beloved son of West Point, being one of only five men to ever hold the rank of five-star General of the Army and elected to the office of President of the United States. The (3) Eisenhower Barracks stand directly to the left of the library terrace, built in 1965. Next to the Eisenhower Barracks stands (4) Washington Hall, the current cadet mess. Built in 1926, it feeds the entire Corps breakfast and lunch at the same time in less than 25 minutes.

By strolling down the northwest path towards the western edge of the plain, one can view the (5) MacArthur Monument which stands on the north end of (6) MacArthur Barracks. MacArthur graduated in 1903, top of his class, and went on to serve as Superintendent from 1919-1922 -- the youngest since Sylvanus Thayer. In a career that spanned four wars and five decades, MacArthur is one of the most important, if controversial, figures in U.S. military history.

In contrast to the walls of granite of the barracks and academic buildings, stands the impressive (7) Cullum Hall, designed by McKim, Mead & White and built in 1896. This austere, classical structure is a repository of memoria for deceased graduates, and features a grand ballroom.