

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

For days and hours of operation, please check with the mansion staff. Bus service is available from Washington via Arlington Memorial Bridge. Parking is available at the Arlington Cemetery Visitors Center. From there visitors may reach the mansion by walking or by riding the tourmobile. These concessioner-operated, guided tourmobiles have unlimited reboarding privileges. They stop at Arlington House, President Kennedy's Gravesite, Tomb of the Unknowns, and the visitor center from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., April to October; and from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., November to March. An express tourmobile to Arlington House only is also available. Call 638-5371 for rate information.

Park guides are on duty to answer your questions and to interpret the mansion. Guided tours for groups are available by appointment.

ADMINISTRATION

Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Inquiries should be addressed to the Superintendent, George Washington Memorial Parkway, Turkey Run Park, McLean, VA 22101.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

national park service
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Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial

Arlington, Virginia



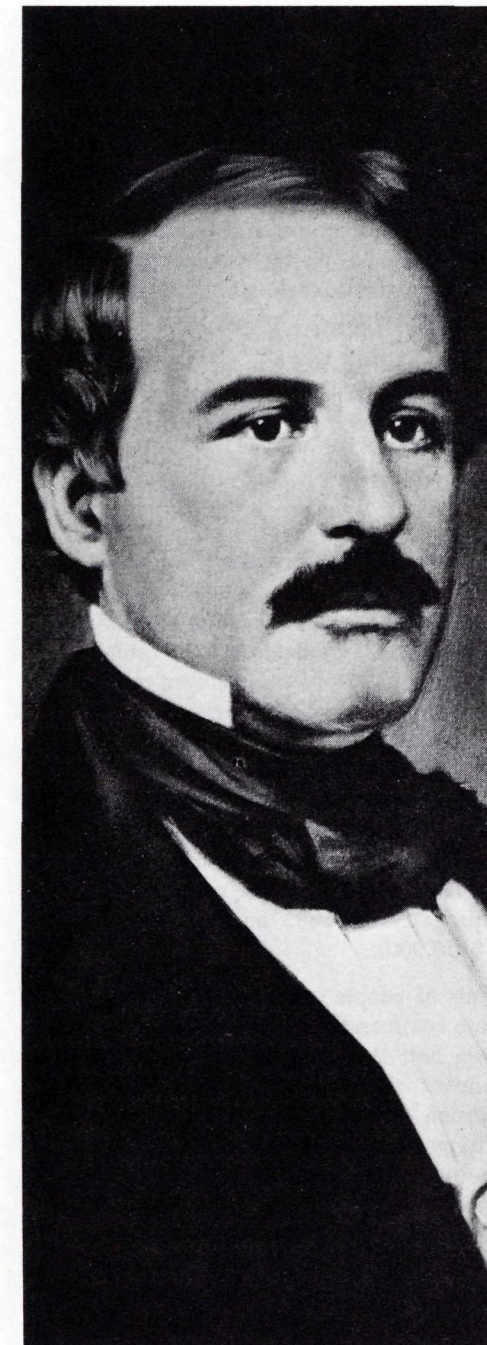
George Washington Parke Custis

Arlington House, an outstanding landmark for more than a century and a half, is unique in its association with the families of Washington, Custis, and Lee. Its builder, George Washington Parke Custis, was the adopted son of George Washington and later the father-in-law of Robert E. Lee. Custis thus stands as a link between two of America's great men.

Custis married Mary Lee Fitzhugh in 1804. Her charm, simplicity, and religious ardor were an inspiration both to him and to their only surviving child, Mary Anna Randolph, born in 1808. Custis, a far-sighted agricultural pioneer, painter, playwright, and orator, was most interested in perpetuating the memory and principles of George Washington. He planned their house, begun in 1802 but not completed until 1817, to be a "treasury" of Washington heirlooms and a place where the Washington tradition of warm hospitality would be continued.

Arlington, named after the family's homestead on Virginia's Eastern Shore, was built on a hill overlooking the capital city on a 1,100 acre estate Custis' father purchased in 1778. The house was designed by George Hadfield, a young English architect in charge of the construction of the capitol. The north and south wings were built first and completed in 1804. The large center section and the portico, presenting an imposing front 140 feet long, were finished 13 years later. It was, as Robert E. Lee once remarked, "a house anyone might see with half an eye." The house attracted much attention and Custis enthusiastically welcomed all who came to visit, entertaining them with stories of the Washington relics. Among the many visitors were the Marquis de Lafayette, Daniel Webster, and Andrew Jackson.

Young Robert E. Lee, whose mother was a cousin of Mrs. Custis, frequently visited, too, and it is said that he and Mary Randolph Custis planted trees near the house when they were children. On June 30, 1831, after his graduation from West Point, Lieutenant Lee and Miss Custis were married here. Lee's military assignments kept him away for long periods, and Mrs. Lee spent much of her married life awaiting his return and raising their seven children, for whom Arlington was a cherished home. Lee shared their strong attraction to the house, once writing a young cousin that here "my affections and attachments are more strongly placed than at any other place in the world."



Robert E. Lee

When George Washington Parke Custis died in 1857, he left the Arlington estate to Mrs. Lee for her lifetime, and afterwards to her oldest son and Custis' namesake. The estate needed much repair and reorganization, and Lee, as executor, took a leave of absence from the Army until 1860 to begin the necessary agricultural and financial improvements. Before he returned to his regiment, then stationed in Texas, the Lees extended Arlington's hospitality to numerous friends and relatives.

Lee, opposed to the dissolution of the Union, was deeply distressed when he learned that Virginia had seceded. Loyal to his native state, however, he resigned from the U.S. Army on April 20, 1861, and the next morning left Arlington to offer his services to Virginia. He never returned to the house.

About a month later, with Union occupation imminent, Mrs. Lee also left, sending most of the family valuables off to safety. After Arlington became headquarters for the general superintending the nearby defenses of Washington, many of the remaining family possessions were moved to the Patent Office for safekeeping. Some items, however, including a few of the Mount Vernon heirlooms, had already been looted and scattered. In 1864, after Mrs. Lee could not appear in person to pay property taxes, the Federal Government confiscated the estate and a 200-acre section was set aside as a national cemetery. Later, through a Supreme Court decision, Custis Lee, the general's son, regained title to the property. In 1883 he sold it to the U.S. Government for \$150,000.

After the war thousands of people came to see the home of the great Confederate commander whose military genius and qualities had made him the hero of the South. For decades the superintendent of the cemetery and some of his staff used the mansion as offices and living quarters. On March 4, 1925, Congress empowered the Secretary of War to restore the house to its appearance prior to the Civil War, procuring for it, when possible, the mansion's original furniture, replicas of that furniture, or other pieces of a style suitable to the first half of the 19th century. The house now contains some of the original furnishings, and where originals could not be obtained, similar period pieces and a few copies have been substituted. In 1933 Arlington mansion was transferred to the U.S. Department of the Interior, and in 1955 Congress designated it a permanent memorial to Robert E. Lee.

For an orderly tour of Arlington House, we suggest that you follow the numbered route below, keyed to the accompanying plan of the mansion.

1 Entrance is through the GREENHOUSE, also called the "camellia house" by both the Custis and Lee families.

2 THE OFFICE AND STUDY can be seen through the doorway immediately to the right of the greenhouse entrance. From this room Mr. Custis, and later Robert E. Lee, managed the 1,100-acre estate. The traveling chess set belonged to Colonel Lee.

3 THE FORMAL DINING ROOM, completed in 1804, was used for all formal dining and entertaining in the 15 years before the huge central part of the house was built.

4 THE FORMAL PARLOR was decorated by Colonel and Mrs. Lee in 1855. Left unfinished when the rest of the house was completed about 1817, it served as a store-room for almost 40 years. Colonel Lee selected the marble mantels and purchased the Victorian parlor suite. Portraits in the room, include one of the Lee daughters, George Washington, Mrs. Martha Custis, before her marriage to Washington, and the Marquis de Lafayette.

5 CENTER HALL. In 1824 Lafayette described the view across the Potomac as the "finest view in the world." The 37-foot hall with its extra tall doors was designed for ventilation and used as a parlor in the summer. The lantern is a replica of the original from Mount Vernon which hung here for many years. In the west alcove is a portrait of "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, hero of the Revolution and father of Robert E. Lee. High on the walls are still visible the animal scenes painted on wet plaster by Mr. Custis when the house was new.

Walk to the end of the Center Hall and turn to the room on the left.

6 THE FAMILY PARLOR is the room in which Robert E. Lee and Mary Randolph Custis were married on June 30, 1831. Original pieces here include Lee's writing chair and the small Bible he carried throughout his military career. A portrait of Nellie Custis, Mr. Custis' sister, of Woodlawn Plantation, hangs over the fireplace.

7 FAMILY DINING ROOM. It was Colonel Lee's custom to gather rosebuds in the garden each morning and place one beside the plate of each of his daughters. Original pieces include china, silver, and glassware, the twin serving tables, and the five Empire side chairs which date to about 1830. A portrait of G. W. P. Custis, the builder of Arlington House, hangs over the fireplace.

From the Family Dining Room please walk upstairs. Upon entering the second floor hallway, begin with the bedroom on the right.

8 COLONEL AND MRS. LEE'S BEDROOM. Here on the night of April 19, 1861, while anxious family and friends waited below, Lee faced the grim choice of honoring family ties in Virginia dating back six generations or accepting command of the Union forces. From his long night of solitude, Lee emerged with a letter of resignation, thus ending a brilliant 30-year career of service to his country. Two days later he left Arlington, never to return. "I did only what my duty demanded," he later said.

9 THE LEE BOYS' BEDROOM was shared by Custis, William Henry Fitzhugh (Rooney), and Robert.

10 MISS MARY'S ROOM. Mary, the oldest of the four Lee daughters, occasionally shared this room with Martha Williams. "Markie," as Martha was affectionately called, was one of the Lees' cousins and a frequent guest.

11 THE LEE GIRLS' ROOM, a large and sunny bedroom, was shared by Annie, Agnes, and Mildred.

12 THE PLAYROOM connects with the girls' bedroom, and was also used as a dressing room. A badminton set and wooden ice skates dating to 1849 hang from coat pegs along the north wall. The secretary was used by Eleanor Custis at Mt. Vernon and later given to her niece, Mrs. Robert E. Lee.

From the playroom, please walk down the stairway and turn right. Caution—narrow staircase.

13 OUTER HALL PANTRY. The china and glassware in the corner cupboards are original pieces. The original walnut cupboard standing at the end of the room is where Colonel Lee is said to have come each night for a glass of milk.

Walk to the end of the Pantry and turn right.

14 THE SCHOOL AND SEWING ROOM, where clothing was made and where the children and servants received their education from Mrs. Custis and later Mrs. Lee, is at the far end of the pantry. Mrs. Custis felt a strong obligation to prepare Arlington's slaves for a useful life as free men. They had been promised their freedom by the terms of Mr. Custis' will. **Caution—low doorway.**

15 MR. AND MRS. CUSTIS' BEDROOM. This wing of the house, finished in 1803, was to have been one large banquet room, but when Mr. Custis married in 1804, he partitioned it to provide bedrooms and a sitting room until the rest of the house was finished. Though the Custises later had a bedroom on the second floor, the growing Lee family eventually made it necessary for the Custises to reoccupy their old bedroom. The wooden mantelpiece is the oldest in the house.

16 GUESTROOM. Many of the visitors to Arlington were accommodated overnight in this room. Under the window is a small candle stand owned by Martha Washington and later part of the Arlington furnishings.

Please walk downstairs from here and exit through the basement. Caution—low doorway.

WINTER KITCHEN (not shown on plan). Equipped with utensils typical of the period, this kitchen, with its huge center fireplace, helped to warm the upstairs rooms in winter. The area beyond the chimney was used as a laundry.

WINE CELLAR (not shown on plan). Wine and brandy made from fruit grown at Arlington and on other Custis farms were stored in this room.

You may also see the servants' quarters on the south side of the circular drive. The museum is just beyond the flower garden north of the mansion.

Please do not let an accident spoil your visit. Use caution on all stairways; watch out for low doorways, and be especially careful on brick walkways, which may be slippery when wet.

A Self-guiding Tour of Arlington House

