

Appomattox

Court House



NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK • VIRGINIA

Appomattox Court House

NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK



Here General Lee surrendered the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia to General Grant. This brought the Civil War to an end

On Palm Sunday, April 9, 1865, Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered the most renowned and successful of all Confederate armies to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, Va. This assured the end of the 4-year Civil War between the North and the South. The subsequent reunification of the country was a profound historic event. It has had an enduring effect on the internal development and domestic life of our country. Equally great has been its effect of our country's place in world affairs and, accordingly, upon the destiny of other nations. For with the States reunited under one government, the United States of America grew to world power and leadership.

Prelude to Appomattox

For many long, dreary months from the late summer of 1864 to the spring of 1865, Grant's Union Army of the Potomac besieged Lee's Confederate Army of Northern Virginia at Petersburg, Va. Finally, a Union victory at Five Forks near Petersburg on April 1, 1865, compelled Lee to evacuate the besieged town if he were to save his army. On the night of April 2 the Confederate veterans marched out of Petersburg, headed west. Lee hoped to unite his force with General Johnston's in North Carolina. His route of escape was to the west by way of Danville. There he would turn south.

The retreating Confederates were to rendezvous at Amelia Courthouse, northwest of Petersburg. There they expected to receive supplies coming by rail from Danville. The supply train, however, had gone on into Richmond, and the weary, downhearted troops lost a day in foraging. Many soldiers left the ranks at this time and went home. They felt the war was about over. And their families needed them.

Grant pressed the pursuit hard. One of his columns followed the path of the Confederate Army. Another swung left and south and cut Lee's line of retreat at Jetersville, 7 miles west of Amelia. This effectively blocked the Confederate route to the railroad junction at Burkeville. Lee turned right and headed north toward Farmville. On the way, 6,000 Confederate soldiers fell prisoners to Union forces at Saylor's Creek on April 6. From Farmville, the remnant of Lee's army again turned west, wearily trudging ahead through the red mud of the rain-soaked roads. Close behind, pressing in from the sides, and striving to get in front, came the straining Union cavalry and infantry, sensing that their long labors and many hardships were near an end. This time they intended to close in for the kill. And every day, desertions left the Confederate force smaller in comparison to its pursuers.

Appomattox Station on the Southside Railroad was now Lee's immediate goal. There,

supplies from Danville awaited his exhausted and ragged men. He had to get to these supplies if he were to continue on. The desperate Confederates seemed on the verge of success on April 8 when they halted for the night just east of Appomattox Court House. But as darkness settled, they read their doom in the night skies. To the west they saw the flash of artillery and to the south the flicker of campfires. Again, and for the last time, they were cut off.

That night in a council of war, Lee and his generals decided they would try to break through in the morning if the enemy in front of them were cavalry. If daylight disclosed strong enemy infantry forces blocking the Lynchburg road in their front, then they felt that all plans most likely would fail. The morrow would tell.

The Surrender

Just after first light on Palm Sunday, April 9, Lee started his attack across the fields at the western edge of the village. The Confederate soldiery brushed aside a thin line of Union cavalry. Beyond, they came upon a more formidable foe—strong formations of blue-coated infantry. There was their answer! The Union turning column had by forced marches won the race to Appomattox Station. From there it had turned east to support the Union cavalry and meet the oncoming Confederates. In the skirmishing that followed, the Union infantry advanced to the outskirts of Appomattox Court House by 10 a. m.

General Lee now faced his last decision on

the field of battle. While an informal truce brought quiet along the battleline, General Lee sought to arrange a meeting to discuss the terms under which he might surrender his army. The alternative seemed to be more futile bloodshed and the destruction in battle of his diminished forces.

A messenger finally found Grant and his staff some miles away on a road. Grant turned his famous big black horse "Cincinnati" toward the village. Already his representative, Lt. Col. Orville E. Babcock, had joined Col. Charles Marshall, Lee's aide, and the great Confederate general himself in a house which Colonel Marshall thought suitable for the meeting. There they waited for the Union commander.

About 1:30 p. m., Grant reached the edge of Appomattox Court House. He paused to ask a group of Union officers assembled there if Lee were present. One of them replied, "Yes, in that brick house," pointing to a red-brick structure in a locust grove. Grant walked his horse to the house and dismounted. He wore the uniform of a common soldier, which had tacked on it the soiled shoulder straps of a lieutenant general. His boots and uniform were mud-spattered. As usual, he wore no sword—it was only an encumbrance and he had no use for it. Grant climbed the steps of the McLean House. Two years earlier, Wilmer McLean had left Manassas to escape the war; now the war was to end in his parlor.

Inside, Lee rose to meet the man whose armies he had fended off for nearly a year.



*Courthouse building,
April 1865. Courtesy
Signal Corps, U. S.
Army.*



Clover Hill Tavern, April 1865. Courtesy Library of Congress.



McLean House, 1865. Courtesy Signal Corps, U. S. Army.

Memories of those desperate, bloody battles that followed the meeting engagement in the Wilderness on May 5 the preceding year must have raced through his mind as he faced the northern general. Lee was dressed in an immaculate uniform. His sword was buckled to his side. Standing there poised and outwardly calm, Lee left an imperishable picture of a gentleman-soldier.

Grant had his own grandeur, too, as the ensuing moments were to bring out. The two men sat in McLean's parlor, talking of the Mexican War and old army days. Grant's staff officers who had entered with him remained at a respectful distance, lining the walls of the room. After a time, Lee turned the conversation to the business at hand. Grant with quiet humility offered surrender terms generous in every way. Officers could keep their sidearms and horses. Men in the rank and file who owned horses or mules could keep them, Grant said, "to work their little farms."

"This will have the best possible effect upon the men," replied Lee. "It will be very gratifying and will do much toward conciliating our people."

The terms of surrender were drafted in final form and Lee and Grant signed them. The business was completed by 4 p. m.

Afterward, waiting for an orderly to bring his horse, Lee stood on the porch gazing eastward. He seemed lost in reverie and unconscious of the yard full of Union officers stand-

ing respectfully with bared heads. Manassas, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness—all had but led to this. Sergeant Tucker brought up "Traveller," the big iron-gray horse. Rousing himself suddenly, Lee swung into the saddle, raised his hat, and rode out of the village. Back across the Appomattox River he went to tell his soldiers that he had surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia.

Paroles were printed and other necessary arrangements made to receive the surrender of the Confederate Army. Three days after the meeting in McLean's house, Lee's veterans marched for the last time as a unit of the Confederate Army. On April 12 the men in gray filed across the shallow ford at the Appomattox River and up the steep hill past lines of blue-clad infantry. At the eastern edge of the village they laid down their arms. There were 28,231 Confederates paroled at Appomattox Court House. Approximately 80,000 Union soldiers watched silently the stacking of arms or stood guard in the vicinity of the little country village. Elsewhere, other Confederate forces were yet to surrender; but it was all over.

Back in McLean's yard, Union soldiers picked violets and daffodils to send to their sweethearts in the north where the flowers bloom later than in Virginia. For the first time in years these veterans could have ease of mind about the morrow. There would be no more battles for them. They would soon go home to their firesides and longed-for families.



Village of Appomattox Court House, 1954.

The Village

The village of Appomattox Court House, also formerly known as Clover Hill, developed around the Clover Hill Tavern. This tavern was built in 1819 as a stop on the Richmond-Lynchburg Stage Road. When Appomattox County was established in 1845, Clover Hill became the county seat. By the time of the Civil War, the town consisted of the tavern and two brick annexes, the courthouse, law offices, blacksmith shops, stores, and several residences. The McLean House was built in 1848 by Charles Raine. Wilmer McLean purchased it in 1863.

In 1892, fire destroyed the courthouse, and the county seat soon moved to the nearby growing town of Appomattox. The following year, the McLean House was dismantled for reerection in Washington, D. C., as a war museum. The project never came to fruition. Gradually, the wood and brick stored at the site of the house disintegrated or disappeared.

The present McLean House is a faithful reconstruction on the original site. Eventually, it is hoped the village can be brought to resemble its 1865 appearance.

The Park

An act of Congress, approved August 13, 1935, authorized the establishment of Appomattox Court House National Historical Monument to commemorate the end of the

Civil War. The monument, established on April 10, 1940, became a historical park in 1954. It comprises approximately 968 acres of Federal lands, including the old village of Appomattox Court House.

Location

Appomattox Court House is 3 miles north-east of Appomattox, Va., on State Route 24.

About Your Visit

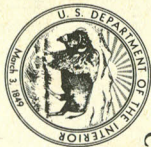
The park office and museum are open daily from 8:30 a. m. to 5 p. m. Park personnel will gladly discuss any aspect of the park development of special interest to you. There are markers at points of interest, which we suggest you visit by following the route on the map at the back of this folder. Those who plan to visit in a group may receive special service if advance arrangements are made with the superintendent.

An illustrated 16-page booklet is available at the park or from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington 25, D. C., for 15 cents a copy.

Administration

Appomattox Court House National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Appomattox, Va., is in immediate charge.

The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of its people.



REPRINT 1956

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • Conrad L. Wirth, Director
Fred A. Seaton, Secretary

Cover: From the painting "Lee's Surrender at Appomattox," by J. L. G. Ferris,
in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



APPOMATTOX COURT HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK VIRGINIA

