

Appomattox Court House

NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK • VIRGINIA

Here, on April 9, 1865, Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered the Confederacy's largest and most successful field army to Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. The surrender of the rest of the Confederate commands followed within weeks.

Lee's ragged and starving army had begun its long march to Appomattox on Passion Sunday, April 2, when Grant's Federal armies finally cracked the Richmond and Petersburg defense lines after 10 months of siege. It had been an exhausting march, filled with frustration and lost hopes. Deprived of their supply depots and rapidly losing the will to fight, Lee's veterans sought desperately to escape the pursuing Federals and keep their army intact. But everywhere they turned, it seemed, they were confronted by Grant's hard-marching soldiers.

Hundreds of Lee's men fell by the wayside, too tired to continue. On April 6, at Saylor's Creek, near Rice, Va., the Federals brought part of the Southern force to bay, killing, capturing, or wounding nearly one-third of the Army of Northern Virginia. Viewing the wreckage, an anguished General Lee cried out: "My God! Has the army been dissolved?"

Arriving in the vicinity of Appomattox Court House, the Southerners found themselves virtually surrounded. Lee realized that if Union infantry were across his path in strength, Grant had won the race, and that to further sacrifice the remnant of his army would not help the Southern cause. Nor could Lee, in conscience, disband his army to allow the survivors to carry on guerrilla warfare. Early on Palm Sunday, April 9, the Confederates ran head-on into the blue-coated infantry and were stopped. Grant had closed the gate. "There is nothing left for me to do but to go and see General Grant," Lee concluded, "and I would rather die a thousand deaths."

The two generals met in the home of Wilmer McLean at Appomattox Court House. Lee's face revealed nothing of his feelings and Grant could not decide whether the Confederate commander "was inwardly glad the end had finally come, or felt sad over the result...." Grant, jubilant when Lee agreed to the meeting, now felt sad and depressed. He later wrote, "I felt like anything rather than rejoicing at the downfall of a foe who had fought so long and valiantly, and had suffered so much for a cause...."

In a short time the surrender terms were agreed upon and the Army of Northern Virginia passed into history. As word of the surrender spread through the Union army, Federal artillerymen began firing a salute of 100 guns to celebrate the victory, but General Grant ordered it stopped. On April 12, the Confederate soldiers stacked their rifles, furled their flags, drew their rations, and started the long journey home. For them the war was over, and Appomattox became a symbol, not of victory or defeat, but of peace and a new beginning.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Appomattox Court House is on Va. 24, 3 miles northeast of the town of Appomattox. The park is open daily, except December 25. Uniformed interpreters are on hand to give information and directions.

Picnicking and camping are not permitted, but tables are available at an adjacent roadside picnic area and camping areas are nearby.



A GUIDE TO THE VILLAGE

Appomattox Court House, an obscure Virginia village when Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia, was typical of hundreds of hamlets throughout the South. A Federal soldier noted at the time that it consisted of only a handful of dwellings, a tavern, and a courthouse, "all on one street and that was boarded up at one end to keep the cows out." There were also law offices, blacksmith shops, stores, and a variety of other buildings.

Today the village closely reflects its 1865 appearance. For an orderly tour we suggest you begin at the visitor center (the reconstructed courthouse), where exhibits and illustrated talks recount the events of the surrender. This map and text will serve as a guide through the park.

1. The Courthouse, which served the residents of the county as a legal and political center, was used by the Confederates as a recruiting station. It did not play a role in the surrender.

2. The McLean House, where Lee surrendered his army, was a comfortable brick dwelling, built in 1848 and purchased by Wilmer McLean in 1863. McLean and his family had left their plantation near Manassas, the scene of the war's first major clash, and moved into the hill country "where the sound of battle would never reach them." Then, ironically, the armies had inexorably borne down on them again. Four years after the war, the McLeans moved to Alexandria, Va. In 1893, speculators dismantled the house intending to move it to Washington, D.C., but the project failed and the brick and wood, exposed to the weather and souvenir hunters, almost disappeared over the next half century. The present house is a reconstruction.

Like most homes of the period, the McLean house had numerous nearby outbuildings. The icehouse, with its deep pit, functioned much as the modern refrigerator does. From the kitchen, located just behind the main house, servants brought food into the warming kitchen and then served it in the dining room. The slave quarters building is one of the few log structures in the village.

3. Meeks General Store served as the village social center. Villagers gathered here to talk about hunting, politics, rising prices, and, of course, the war. The store's owner, Francis Meeks, also served as local druggist and postmaster. His son, a victim of the war, is buried in the field behind the store.

4. **The Woodson Law Office**, typical of the rural lawyer of the time, is plainly furnished. John W. Woodson was one of several lawyers practicing in Appomattox County during the war.

5. **The Clover Hill Tavern**, built in 1819 for stage travelers, took its name from a nearby farm. Outbuildings, such as the kitchen and guesthouse, served travelers on the Richmond-Lynchburg Stage Line. When the village site was chosen as the seat of government for the new county of Appomattox, circuit riders, farmers, and merchants became more frequent visitors. Most of the Confederate paroles were printed in the tavern. The building presently houses the park's administrative offices.

6. **The County Jail**, completed after the war, replaced the wartime jail that stood across the road. (Nothing remains of the earlier building, but the site is marked.) The sheriff had his office and quarters on the first floor; the prisoners were held on the upper two floors.

7. **Surrender Triangle**. On April 12 (3 days after the meeting in the McLean House and 4 years to the day after Fort Sumter was fired upon) the Confederates marched into the vil-

lage and stacked their arms in this area. Then began the long walk home.

8. **The Kelly House** was owned by the village carpenter and handyman, Lorenzo D. Kelly, who died before the war came to Appomattox Court House. His mother continued to live here and may have watched the stacking of arms in front of her house.

9. **The Peers House** was owned in 1865 by George T. Peers, wartime clerk of Appomattox County. From the front porch, Peers watched the Confederates lay down their arms and battle flags on April 12.

10. **Lee-Grant Meeting, April 10**. On the little knoll before you, overlooking the Appomattox River, Lee and Grant met on the morning of April 10. While sitting on horseback, the two generals talked informally for half an hour about paroles and the chance for further resistance by the South.

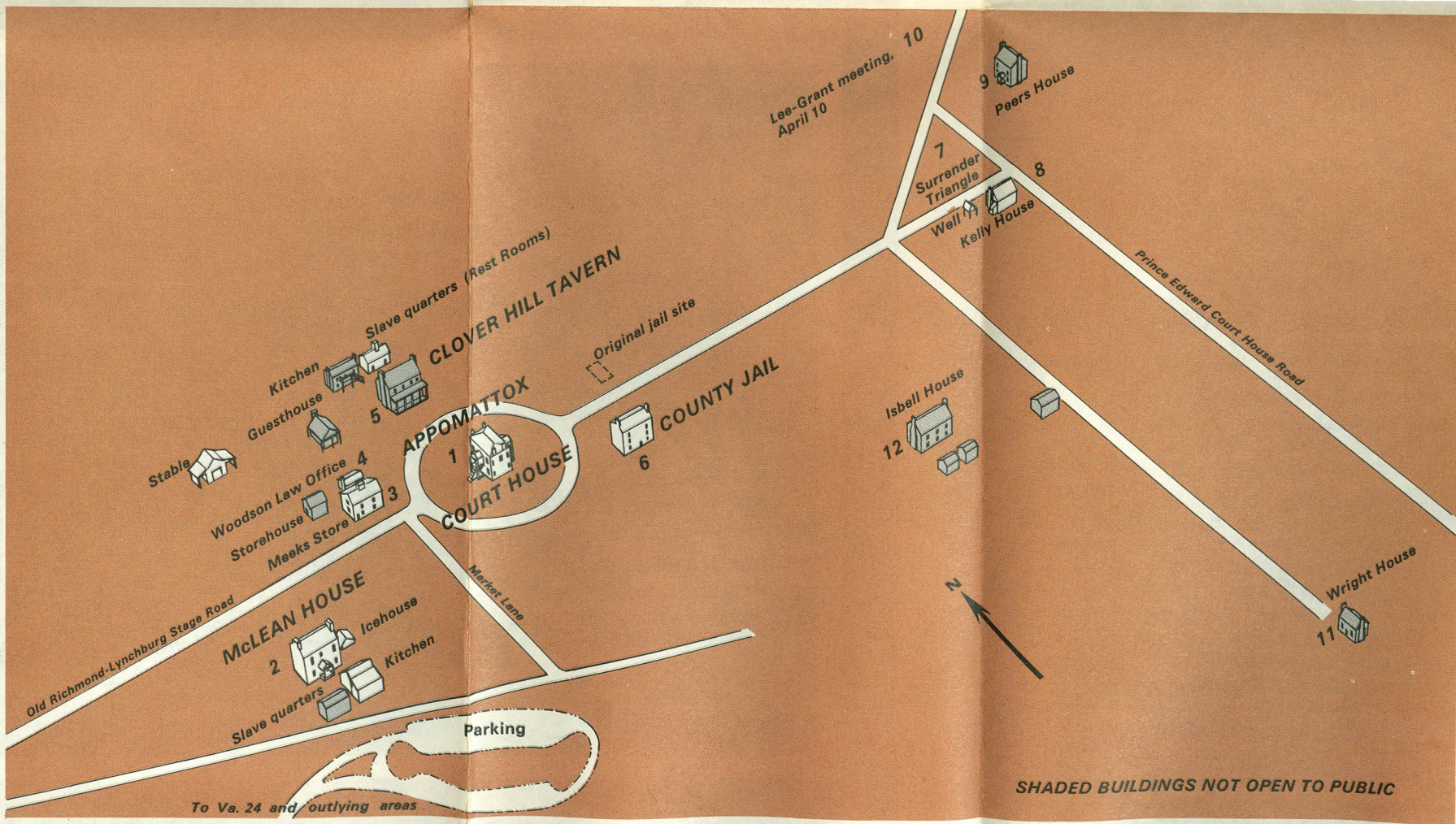
11. **The Mariah Wright House**. The broad-chimneyed house at the end of Bocock Lane belonged to the widow Mariah Wright. Shortly before the flags of truce were sent out, Federal sol-

diers took over the house and camped there for the night.

12. **The Isbell House** was owned in 1865 by Commonwealth Attorney Lewis D. Isbell. The night before the surrender, Lt. Col. Augustus Root, 15th New York Cavalry, led a raid on the village. Fierce Confederate musketry brought him down, mortally wounded, in front of the house.

Outlying Areas. Northeast of the village is the site of General Lee's headquarters. Lee returned to this area to tell his men that he had surrendered them. A leisurely 20-minute walk from the parking lot (1.7 miles east on Va. 24) will take you to the headquarters site and return.

West of the village is the Confederate cemetery. Most of the soldiers who died at Appomattox were taken home for reburial. A few were left behind, among them these 18 Confederates and one unknown Union soldier who were reburied here in 1866. About 1 mile west of the cemetery is the site of Grant's headquarters. The Union commander camped in the field the night of April 9.



ADMINISTRATION

Appomattox Court House National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 218, Appomattox, VA 24522, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

U. S. Department of the Interior

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