

*Lee* MANSION  
NATIONAL MEMORIAL

VIRGINIA



*Lee Mansion overlooks the city of Washington. In the immediate foreground is the tomb of L'Enfant who laid out the plan for the Nation's Capital*

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COVER: Lee Mansion at Night. (Photo by Hordyczak.)	

## Information

The Mansion and slave quarters are open to the public daily from 9 a. m. to 4:30 p. m., in winter, and from 9 a. m. to 6 p. m., in summer. There is an admission charge of 10 cents for each person, except children 16 years of age or under when accompanied by adults or 18 years of age when in high school groups.

The mansion is reached by the Arlington Memorial Bridge which leads to the main gate of Arlington Cemetery.

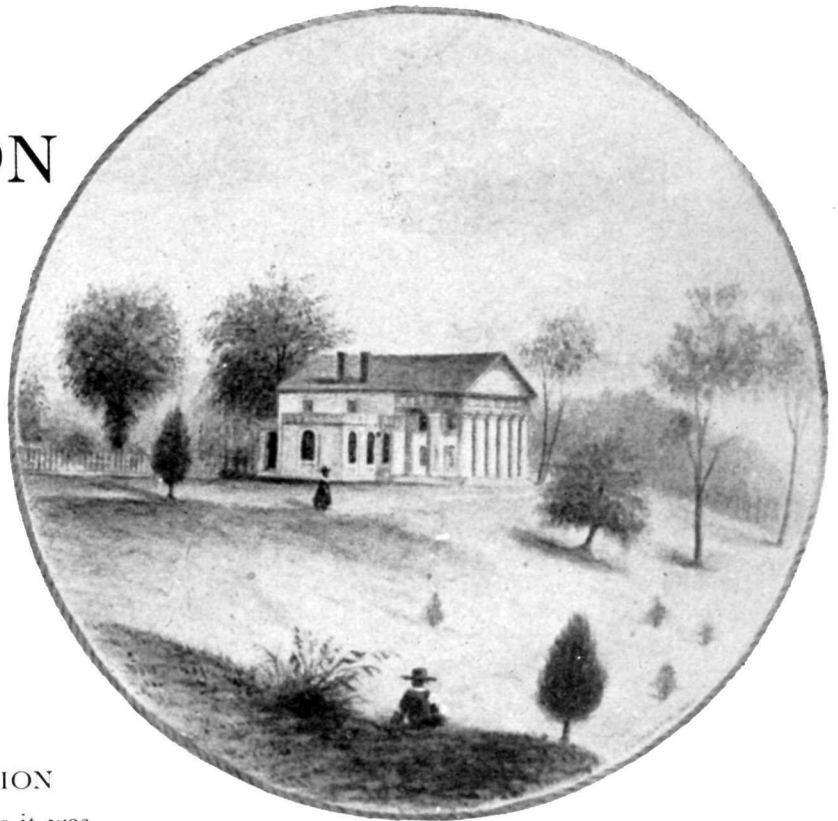
All inquiries concerning the mansion should be addressed to Irving C. Root, Superintendent, National Capital Parks, Washington, D. C.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
 HAROLD L. ICKES, *Secretary*  
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE · NEWTON B. DRURY, *Director*

# LEE MANSION NATIONAL MEMORIAL

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## EARLY HISTORY OF LEE MANSION

THE LEE MANSION, or Arlington House as it was originally known, distinctive through its associations with the families of Custis, Washington, and Lee, is located in Arlington National Cemetery on the picturesque heights of the Virginia side of the Potomac. Benson J. Lossing, historian and artist, who visited Arlington in 1853, has left a description of this historic home at that time:

"The mansion . . . occupies a very commanding site upon the brow of an elevation more than three hundred feet above the tidewater of the Potomac, and half a mile from its shore. The building is of brick, and presents a front, with the center and two wings, of one hundred and forty feet. The grand portico, which has eight massive Doric columns, is sixty feet in front, and twenty-five in depth. It is modeled after the Temple of Theseus, at Athens. In front, sloping toward the Potomac, is a fine park of two hundred acres, dotted with groves of oak and chestnut, and clumps of evergreens; and behind it is a dark old forest, with patriarchal trees bearing many centennial honors, and covering six hundred acres of hill and dale. Through a portion of this is the sinuous avenue leading up to the mansion. From the portico a brilliant panorama is presented. The Capitol, Executive Mansion, Smithsonian Institution, the growing magnificent Washington Monument, and almost every house in the Federal City, may be seen at a glance, from this point, while between them and Arlington flows the bright flood of the Potomac."

*Early view of Arlington House. An original water-color sketch by Benson J. Lossing, 1853, now hanging in Lee Mansion*

The Arlington estate was originally a part of a large tract of land given to Robert Howsen by Sir William Berkeley, Royal Governor of Virginia. Sold shortly thereafter to John Alexander for six hogsheads of tobacco, it remained in the Alexander family until 1778, when John Parke Custis, a son of Martha Washington by her first husband, acquired about 1,100 acres of the original tract and named it Mount Washington. His son later changed the name to Arlington for "an old family seat on the east shore of Virginia." Custis' death in 1781, caused by camp fever contracted during the siege of Yorktown, precluded the possibility of his building a home on the estate, and it passed to his infant son, George Washington Parke Custis. This boy and his youngest sister, Eleanor, better known as Nelly, were reared by the Washingtons and are known as the "Children of Mount Vernon."

George Washington Parke Custis lived at Mount Vernon until the death of his grandmother, Mrs. Washington, in 1802. In that same year he began





*Mrs. Robert Edward Lee*



*Robert Edward Lee*

the construction of the mansion on the Arlington estate. Two years later he was married to Mary Lee Fitzhugh of Chatham.

Rough clay bricks for the Mansion walls were manufactured on the place; and timbers cut from the nearby woods. Despite this, the completion of the mansion was slow of accomplishment, for although Mr. Custis was the lord of great properties, he was lacking in ready cash. The oldest part of the structure is the north wing, once a dwelling complete in itself. The two wings are identical, except that in the north wing the space corresponding to the state dining room in the south was divided into small rooms for the temporary accommodation of Mr. and Mrs. Custis, while the rest of the house was in process of construction. These they continued to occupy for the greater part of the next 50 years. The stately parlor intended for the north wing was never achieved, though a chimney breast juts into the narrow hall to testify to the architect's design.

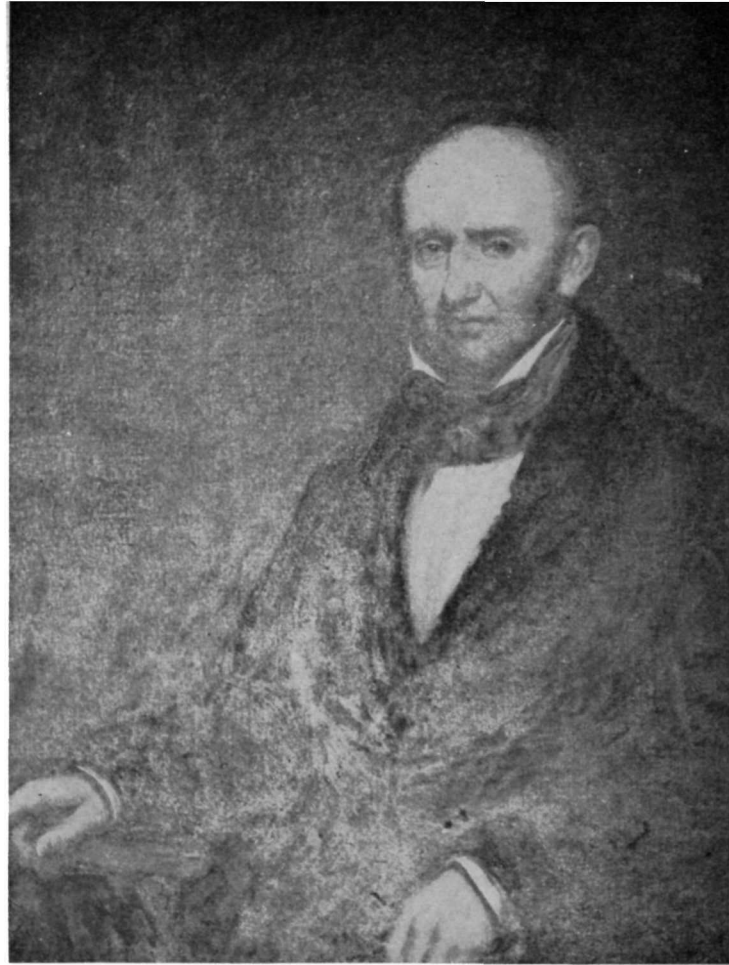
Once completed, Arlington House became an active social center and the hospitality of its master was

widely acclaimed. Lafayette, during his visit to the United States in 1824-25, was an honored guest of Mr. Custis in each year. The heirlooms of the Custis and Parke families and the many treasured possessions of General Washington which graced the rooms of the mansion added to its attractiveness and recalled to the famous French officer his pleasant associations with Washington at Mount Vernon so many years earlier.

On June 30, 1831, an important social event occurred at Arlington when Mary Ann Randolph Custis, the only one of the Custis children to survive infancy, was married to Lieut. Robert E. Lee, scion of the distinguished Lees of Stratford. The ceremony uniting these two prominent families was performed under the center arch between the family dining room and parlor in the presence of a few house guests of the popular young couple and was followed by a week of merriment and festivity. In August of that year, after a round of visits, the Lees arrived at Fort Monroe, Va., where Lee resumed his military duties.

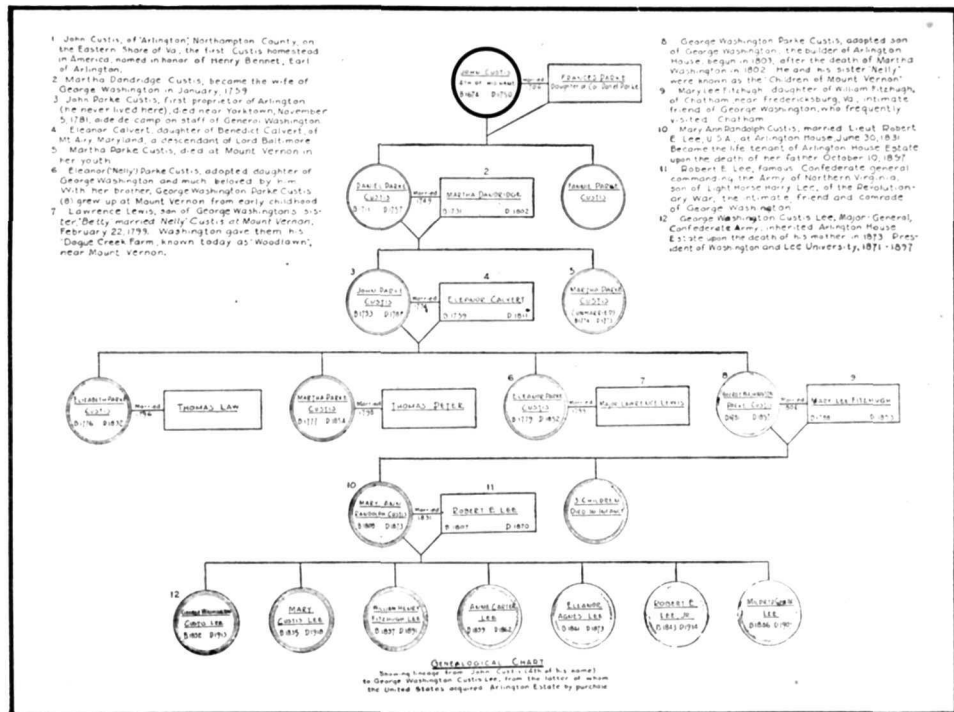
In the ensuing years, much of Mrs. Lee's married life was spent at Arlington. In marrying an army officer she had realized that it entailed many sacrifices, but she could not foresee that ill health and the variety of her husband's assignments would frequently make it impossible for her to accompany him. Yet she never complained or sought in any way to dampen his ardor for the career which he had chosen. Deprived of the constant companionship of her husband, she devoted her time and talents to the rearing of her children. Mrs. Lee performed her task well, considering the poor state of her health and the fact that her children were indulged by their adoring grandparents. Lee was conscious of the difficulties under which his wife labored so heroically and of the need of a father's stabilizing influence, and he sought through frequent correspondence to give sage advice and counsel to his children. When circumstances permitted he always endeavored to have his family with him, but as this was not always possible his homecoming was a joyful occasion for every member of the family.

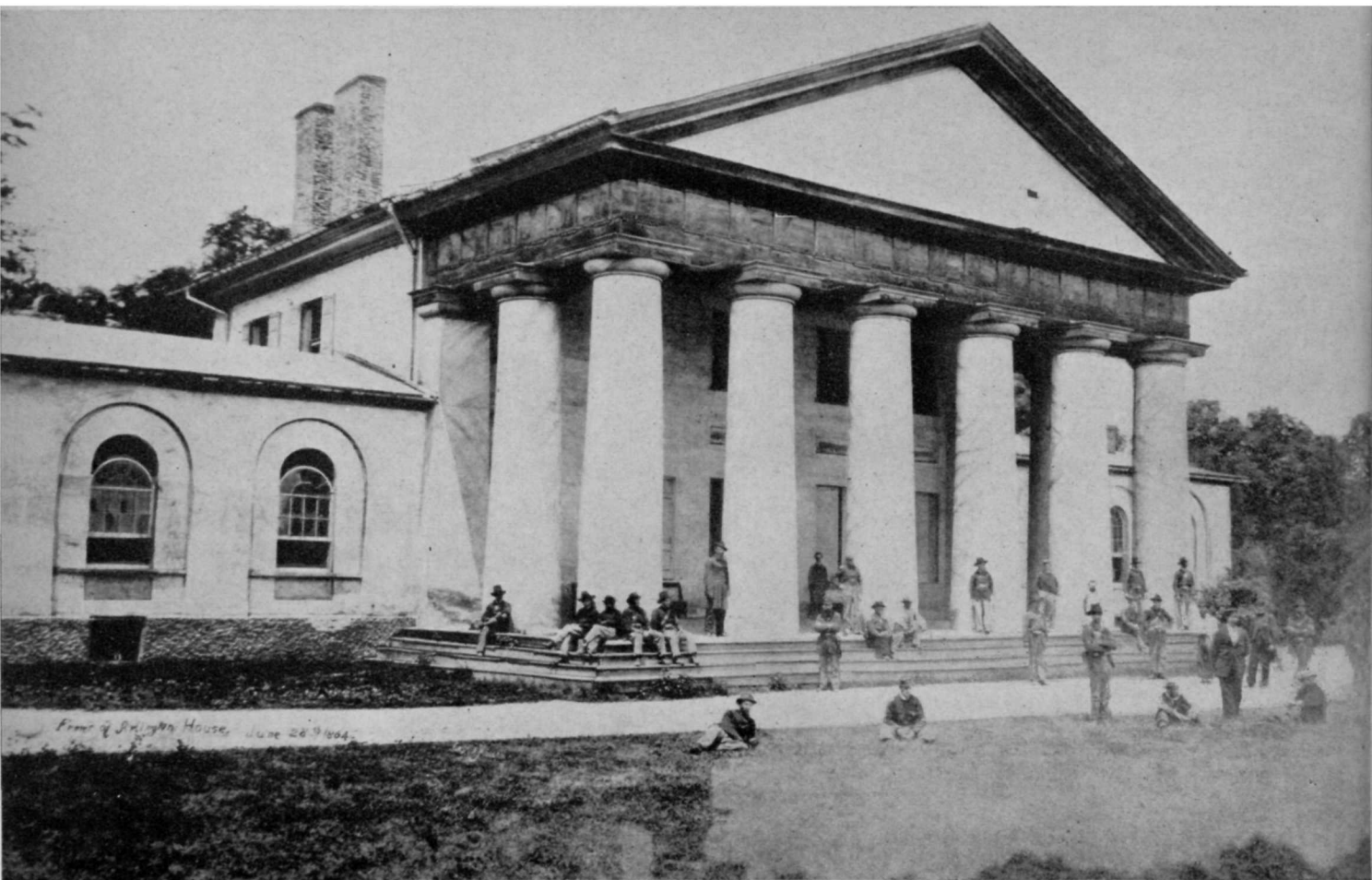
Arlington was an ideal home. Although luxurious in its furnishings and rich in traditions, it nevertheless housed a family simple in its tastes, whose members were devoted to each other, and deeply religious. In 1853, tragedy came to Arlington when



George Washington Parke Custis

## GENEALOGICAL CHART





*Wartime photograph of Arlington House, June 28, 1864*

*Signal Corps, U. S. Army*

Mrs. Custis died. The sudden death of her mother was a tremendous shock to Mrs. Lee, who hastened home from West Point, where Colonel Lee was Superintendent. It was imperative that she now remain at Arlington to comfort and advise her father and to assume her mother's responsibilities as mistress of the estate.

Four years later Mr. Custis passed away and Mrs. Lee became the owner of the property. By the terms of her father's will the estate was bequeathed to her for her lifetime and at her death to become the property of her eldest son, George Washington Custis Lee, the namesake of Mr. Custis. This bequest was not as great as it would appear today, for Mr. Custis was land- and slave-poor, and Lee was hard pressed to maintain this stately mansion on his small income.

Fate decreed, however, that the Lees would not

enjoy for long the beautiful home at Arlington. Threats of secession were rife, and the dark clouds of war soon hovered over the Nation. Then in April 1861, came the attack on Fort Sumter and war between the North and South became an actuality. This unfortunate state of affairs found Lee torn between devotion to his country and to his native State. Virginia seceded and Lee was forced to make a decision. The proximity of Arlington to the Capital and his career in the army dictated that he should remain loyal to the Union. But Lee was a Virginian, and his sense of honor decreed that he should follow his native State in whatever course she might pursue. After heart-rending hours of prayer and deliberation the choice was made and Lee cast his lot with the South. He longed for peace and sought to avoid the horrors of what he knew must come for as he said in his letter



*Arlington House after restoration*

*Signal Corps, U. S. Army*

of resignation to General Scott, "Save in defense of my native State, I never desire again to draw my sword." This fateful decision was made on April 20, and 2 days later he left Arlington, never to return. Mrs. Lee remained behind to superintend the removal of her possessions to another family home at Ravensworth, but haste compelled the abandonment of much.

Overlooking the Capital and situated on the line of fortifications guarding Washington, Arlington occupied a strategic position. In May, Federal troops moved onto the estate and it soon became an armed camp. Mrs. Lee left before the advancing army and many of her possessions which were left behind disappeared. Ever solicitous for the welfare of her faithful servants who had been left behind, Mrs. Lee dispatched a note to the commander of the Federal forces at Arlington and

received a courteous reply from General McDowell who had just been appointed to the post:

Headquarters, Department Northeastern Virginia,  
Arlington, May 30, 1861.

Mrs. R. E. Lee,

MADAM:

Having been ordered by the Government to relieve Major General Sanford in command of this Department, I had the honor to receive this morning your letter of today addressed to him at this place. With respect to the occupation of Arlington by the United States troops I beg to say it has been done by my predecessor with every regard for the preservation of the place. I am here temporarily in camp on the grounds, preferring this to sleeping in the house under the circumstances which the painful state of the country places me in with respect to these properties. I assure you it will be my earnest endeavor to have all things so ordered that on your return you will find things as little disturbed as possible. In this I have the hearty concurrence of the courteous, kind-hearted gentleman in the immediate command of the troops quartered here who lives in the



lower part of the house to insure its being respected. Everything has been done as you desire with respect to your servants, and your wishes, so far as they have been known or could have been understood, have been complied with. When you desire to return, every facility will be given you to do so. I trust, Madam, you will not consider it an intrusion when I say I have the most sincere sympathy for your distress, and so far as compatible with my duty, I shall always be ready to do whatever may alleviate it.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully,  
 Your most obedient servant,  
 I. McDowell.

P. S. I am informed it was the order of the General in chief of the troops on coming here should [they] have found the family in the house, that no one should enter it, but that a guard should be placed for its protection.

General McDowell sent the Washington relics to the Patent Office for safety. Mrs. Lee never returned to Arlington to live and eventually the collection was restored to George Washington Custis Lee. Some of the articles were returned to Mount Vernon, while others were permitted to remain in the National Museum. Of the pictures and furnishings saved by Mrs. Lee, part are at Washington and Lee University, part are the property of her descendants, and some few articles have been returned to the mansion. It is hoped that eventually others may find their way back to this historic shrine.

#### THE LEE MANSION, 1861-65

ARLINGTON was occupied by Federal troops from 1861 to 1865, and following the First Battle of Manassas, or Bull Run, in July 1861, it was used as a base hospital.

On January 6, 1864, by executive order of the President of the United States, the entire Arlington tract of 1,100 acres more or less was "selected for Government use for war, military, charitable, and educational purposes" under the provisions of the Acts of Congress, June 7, 1862, and February 6, 1863. Ordered sold for taxes, the property was bid in for the United States at a price of \$26,800.

Shortly after this the estate was first used as a cemetery. Available space at the Soldiers Home being nearly exhausted, the Quartermaster's Department, soon after the Battle of the Wilderness (May 5-6, 1864), made a careful survey of all the eligible sites for a national cemetery near Washington and reported in favor of Arlington. At this juncture Quartermaster General Meigs ordered burials begun here, and on June 15, 1864, the



PLAN OF THE ARLINGTON ESTATE BEFORE 1860





*The family parlor*

*View of family dining room from parlor. Under arch on left Mary Ann Randolph Custis was married to Lieut. Robert E. Lee*



Secretary of War designated 200 acres of the estate, including the Mansion, a military cemetery.

The first recorded burial, May 13, 1864, was Pvt. William Christman, 67th Pennsylvania Infantry. At the present time (October 1941) there are 408 acres in the Cemetery and 50,814 buried here, comprising dead of all wars beginning with the Revolution; 4,717 of them unknown

#### THE LEE MANSION, 1865 TO ACQUISITION BY THE GOVERNMENT

AT THE CONCLUSION of the war, the troops were withdrawn from Arlington and the mansion which had once resounded to the strains of music, the gleeful shouts of children, or the clank of saber and the heavy tread of soldiers, now stood forlorn among the host of the dead buried around it, a silent tribute to its vanished glories.

Upon Mrs. Lee's death in 1873, she having outlived her husband 3 years, a suit contesting the legality of the tax sale was instituted by the residuary legatee, G. W. C. Lee. His cause was heard in the United States Circuit Court and judgment rendered in his favor. Upon appeal, the Supreme Court of the United States confirmed the decision, December 4, 1882. Mr. Lee then offered to sell the estate to the United States for \$150,000. Congress, by Act of March 3, 1883, appropriated the money and on March 31, Lee conveyed title to the United States, relinquishing all claims.

#### THE LEE MANSION, FROM ACQUISITION TO RESTORATION

FOR MANY YEARS following the purchase of the property by the Government, one wing of the house was used as offices for the cemetery, the other rooms standing vacant. Later these were used as living quarters by the superintendent of the cemetery and the landscape gardener.

During these years there had been a gradually growing sentiment for the restoration of the mansion as a memorial to Robert E. Lee. Success was finally attained when by Act of Congress, approved March 4, 1925, the Secretary of War was empowered to undertake the restoration of Arlington House to the condition in which it existed immediately prior to the Civil War, and to "procure, if possible, articles of furniture and equipment which were then in the mansion and in use by the occupants thereof." He was also authorized "in his

discretion, to procure replicas of the furniture and other articles in use in the mansion during the period mentioned, with a view to restoring, as far as may be practicable, the appearance of the interior of the mansion to the condition of its occupancy by the Lee family."

#### RESTORATION

IN 1929, the Quartermaster Corps of the United States Army began the work of rehabilitation. The structure was in an alarming state of decay. Foundations had settled, brickwork was crumbling, beams and joists were giving away, floors and ceilings were unsafe. With the greatest care all was restored to strength and beauty. Through concealed outlets, heat was provided from a plant outside the building. An invisible, automatic, fire-alarm system was also installed. Equal pains were taken to restore the two cottages just in the rear of the mansion, which were the house servants' quarters and smokehouse.

Structural repairs being completed, the Quartermaster Corps proceeded as rapidly as consistent with its task of refurnishing the mansion. Of the present contents, part was purchased with Government funds, part presented by patriotic societies, and part by equally patriotic individuals. The aim of the restorers was to present Arlington House as a home, and not as a museum.

At a little distance among the trees across the ravine back of the mansion stood the brick stable, ornamented with a portico of columns like those of the house. The original structure having been destroyed by fire, a similar building replaces it, containing the offices of the cemetery.

Eventually it is hoped that the vegetable and flower gardens which were located to the north and south of the mansion will be restored. These were always a source of pride to both Mrs. Custis and Mrs. Lee.

#### NATIONAL MEMORIAL

FOLLOWING the completion of the restoration, the Mansion was administered by the War Department until 1933. In that year, jurisdiction passed to the Department of the Interior, and it is now administered by the National Park Service through the office of National Capital Parks.

Each year over half a million people visit this historic shrine.



↑ Drawing room.

*This room was used on occasions by Mr. Custis as a studio. The mantels are of Carara marble, of the same design ordered by Mr. Custis for this room*

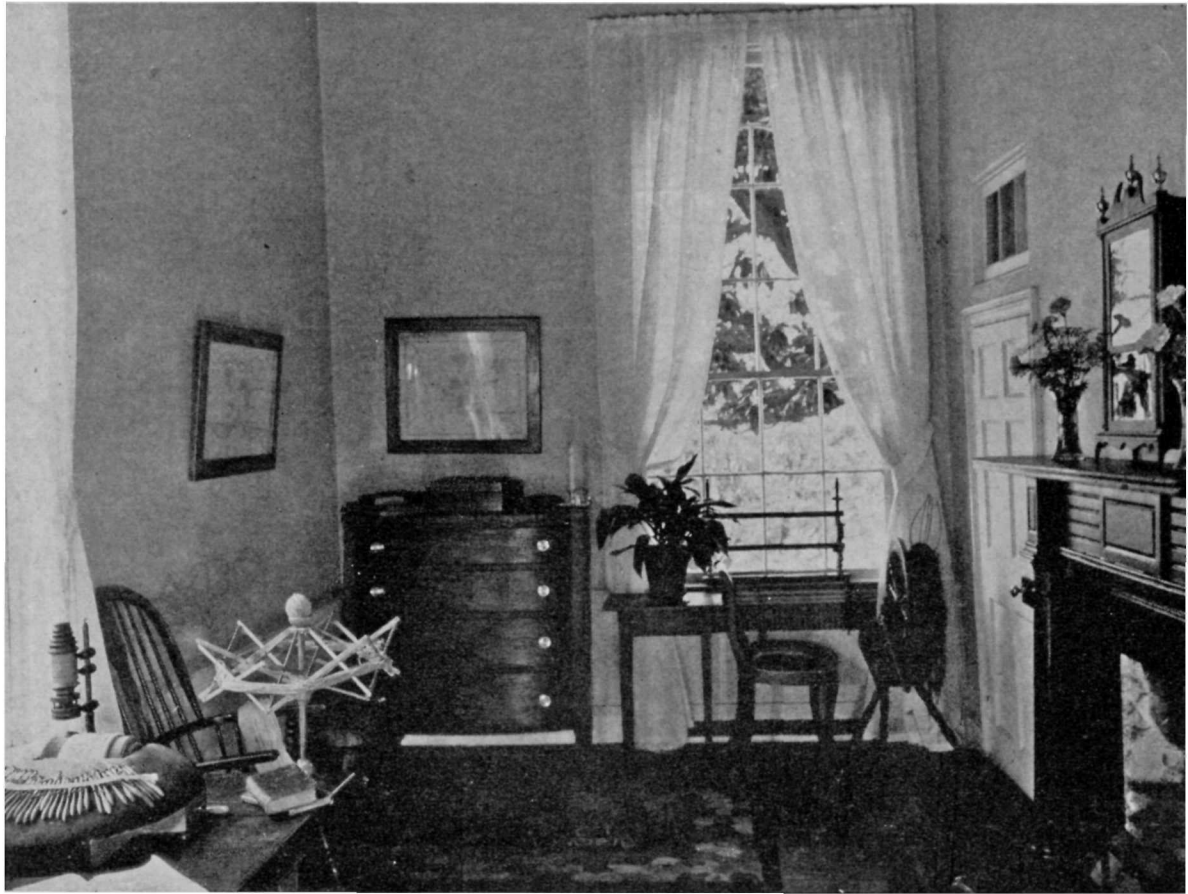


← State dining room





↑ *Office and study*



*School and* →  
*sewing room*



↑ Bedroom of General and Mrs. Lee. Six of their children were born in the little dressing room to the right



← Bedroom of the Lee boys

Winter kitchen. →  
The summer kitchen is  
located in the basement  
of the north slave quar-  
ters



↓ Wine cellar





