



The Spectacle

Thanksgiving at House Arlington

By Michael Bruck

PROCLAMATION:

MAYOR'S OFFICE, November 16, 1859 - In compliance with the request of many of the business men and others of our community, I, William D. Massey, Mayor of the city of Alexandria, do hereby request the 24th instant, to be observed as a DAY OF THANKSGIVING to Almighty God, for his many blessings to us as a community; that all places of business be closed, and the Rev. clergy have Divine service in their various houses of worship, at some suitable hour during the day.

Signed
Wm. D. Massey, Mayor

The above is the manner in which Thanksgiving Day would have been celebrated in large parts of the south. The year 1789 marked the first national day of thanksgiving declared by the new federal government. E. Boudinot of New Jersey introduced a resolution that the President set aside a day of public thanksgiving and prayer for the new government. This resolution met with vigorous opposition from the South Carolina representatives who objected on the grounds that such proclamations were the prerogatives of the individual states. Even so the resolution passed and George Washington declared November 26, 1789 as the day when all citizens should offer thanks for the favorable conclusion of the war.

Since that first official Thanksgiving Day following Thanksgivings were proclaimed depending on the political party and the mood of the president or the region where one would have lived. In the middle of the Civil War,



President Abraham Lincoln, proclaimed a national Thanksgiving Day to be celebrated on the final Thursday in November 1863 and each year forward, marking the first time that Thanksgiving became an annual national holiday.

Perhaps the Custis/Lee Family celebrated Thanksgiving, as was done at that time in large parts of the south, with a family breakfast and then church services. They would have attended the services held in Alexandria at the Episcopal Church, giving special thanks and prayers for the past year or for any major crisis's that had past in the last year. Then they would return to Arlington and have a special dinner, with more prayers and bible reading; however, the dinner would not compare to the ones that would soon come with the celebration of the Christmas season.



November Special Events

November 2

Theater, "Civil War Voices," at The Barns at Wolf Trap, 1635 Trap Road, Vienna, Virginia. True stories from Civil War diaries. 8 pm. \$30. www.wolftrap.org.

November 5

Lecture, "Black Military Experience," with focus on the Civil War, at the Mount Claire Museum House in Baltimore, Maryland. Noon. \$5. www.mountclare.org.

Living history, "Elizabeth Keckly: My First Year in the White House," at the Surratt House Museum in Clinton, Maryland. 4 pm. Free. www.surratt.org.

Bus tour, "Winchester and area," includes Stonewall Jackson headquarters, Kernstown and Cool Spring battlefields. Begins at the Franconia Museum, 6121 Franconia Road, Franconia, Virginia, at 8 am. \$100. 703-971-4984.

November 6

Music, "Portrait of the American Civil War," performed by the Fairfax Choral Society Adult Chorus and the Washington Symphonic Brass at the Hylton Performing Arts Center in Manassas, Virginia. 3 pm. Reservations: www.fairfaxchoralsociety.org.

Living history, infantry and artillery demonstrations on Henry Hill in the Manassas National Battlefield Park, Manassas, Virginia. 11 am-2 pm. Free with park fee. www.nps.gov/mana.

November 11

Music/multimedia, "Spirit of the Civil War," special presentation of Civil War music and images at the singer Concert Hall, 3001 N Beauregard Blvd, on the NOVA

Alexandria Campus, Alexandria, Virginia. 7:30 pm. \$10/adult. 703-845-6252 or www.nvcc.edu.

November 12

"Georgetown Civil War House & Walking Tours," offered by Tudor Place Historic House and Garden, 1644 31st St NW, Washington, DC. Special house tour 10:30 am, Georgetown walking tour 12:30 pm. \$10/each, \$15 for both. 202-965-0400 or www.tudorplace.org.

"Years of Anguish II: Virginia Goes to War," featuring speakers Gary Gallagher and Peter Carmichael, at the Dodd Auditorium, University of Mary Washington, in Fredericksburg, Virginia. 1-5 pm. Free. www.nps.gov/frsp.

Conference, "The Civil War Comes to Fairfax County," local historians and authors speak at the Sherwood Community Center, 3740 Old Lee Highway, Fairfax, Virginia. 8:30 am-4 pm. \$20. Registration, more info: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/histcomm/event.htm.

November 13

Book Talk, "A Little Short of Boats: The Battles of Ball's Bluff and Edwards Ferry," at the Manassas Museum, Manassas, Virginia. 2 pm. Free. 703-257-8453.

Lecture, "The Women's Story during Civil War Day," focus on Mennonite and Brethren women in the Valley at Mt. Pleasant Church of the Brethren, 2788 Taylor Spring Lane, Harrisonburg, Virginia. 4 pm. 540-438-1275.

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Ranger talk, "They Also Served: Animals in the Civil War," at the Eastern Front visitor center, Petersburg National Battlefield, . 3 pm. Free with park admission. www.nps.gov/pete.

Walking tour, "Freedman's Farm and Confederate Winter Camp Site Walking Tour," at Montpelier, home of President James Madison. 2 pm. Free with admission. 540-672-2728 or www.montpelier.org.

November 19

Living history walking tour, "Courage! The Civil War in Washington, 1861, The Storm Begins." Meets 11 am at 10th and E Streets NW, Washington, DC. (Cosi Coffee). \$10/adult. No reservations necessary. www.historicstrolls.com or 301-588-9255.

Living history tours, "Thanksgiving in the Trenches," popular evening program at the Petersburg National Battlefield. Tours at 6, 7 and 8 pm. Reservation only (open Nov. 1): 804-732-3531 extension 205 or www.nps.gov/pete

Annual Remembrance Day parade, ceremony and illumination commemorating Lincoln's address in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Memorial service 10: 15 am at the Soldier's National Cemetery, parade beings 1 pm, illumination in the evening at the cemetery. Details www.nps.gov/gett or 717-334-1124 extension 8023.

November 30

Lecture, "1861: The Civil War Awakening" at the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond, Virginia. Noon. \$6.

Significant Historic Events in November

November, 1851

The 125-foot steam ferry, *George Washington Parke Custis*, was launched from a Washington shipyard. Expressly designed to navigate the shallow waters of the Potomac near Arlington, the *Custis* was flat-bottomed and drew only one foot of water. During the Civil War the Federal Navy stripped the ferry of its engines and boilers and transformed it into a floating ascension deck for observation balloons—the first such vessel in the world.

November, 1855

The renovation of the White Parlor was nearly complete, and Lee writing from Fort Riley, suggested that a view of (or from) West Point should be hung in that room.

November, 1858

The improvements at Arlington begun by Robert E. Lee were all under way despite his impatience at his lack of money. Many of the buildings, roads and fences had been repaired, and by winter there would be a new slate roof on the house and a new gravel one on the stable. The mill and the overseer's house were put back in repair, and stone foundations were laid for a new barn.

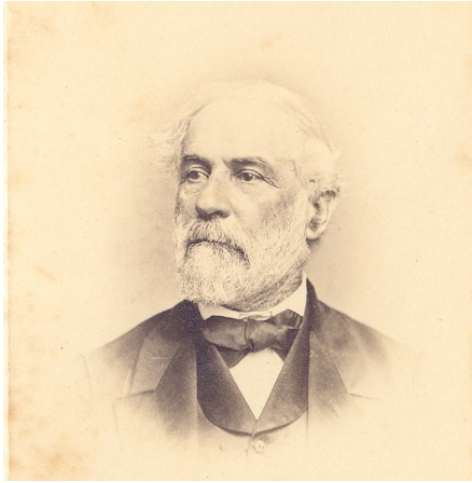
November, 1861

A federal Army surgeon wrote that after the vandalism he had witnessed, "it was a pleasurable relief to find [at Arlington House]... respect for the property and furniture...[T]he walls of almost every room in the immense old building are covered with the rich paintings and old family pictures."

November, 1845

Eight-year-old W.H.F. "Rooney" Lee cut off two of his fingertips—one down to the first joint—while playing with a straw cutter at the Lee's home in Fort Hamilton, New York.

Mrs. Lee postponed her planned trip to Arlington. Lee himself was gravely concerned that if the fingertips could not be



successfully reattached, Rooney would be maimed for life. Though the surgery was unsuccessful, the fingers eventually healed so well that they were virtually unnoticed and proved no handicap to Rooney's future careers.

November 1, 1829

Brevet Second Lieutenant Roberts E. Lee arrived in Savannah, Georgia. His assignment, his first since graduating from West Point, was to assist in the construction of a fort on Cockspur Island—later named Fort Pulaski—for the defense of the city. Lee worked at cockspur until April 21, 1831, when he was assigned to Old Point Comfort (Fort Monroe), Virginia.

November 5, 1781

John Parke "Jack(ey)" Custis died of "camp fever" at "Eltham" near Yorktown shortly after the British surrender on October 19. According to family tradition, General Washington said, "From this moment I adopt his two youngest children as my own"—GWP and Eleanor "Nellie" Custis.

November 5, 1873

Mrs. Robert E. Lee, 65, died at Lexington, Virginia, 92 years to the day after the death of her grandfather, Jack Custis. Her daughter Agnes had died on October 15, and according to Mildred Lee, she never "rallied from this blow."

November 6, 1850

GWP Custis "escorted Edmond Lafayette, grandson of the Marquis, to Mount Vernon, where he showed him about and told him the tales of the old days there."

November 6, 1860

Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States. His election was a catalyst for secessionist activity in the South. Commenting on the election, the *Charleston Mercury* said, "the tea has been thrown overboard, the revolution of 1860 has been initiated."

November 8, 1864

One of the last hopes for a negotiated settlement of the War and Confederate independence was dashed by the reelection of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States. Lincoln received more than 55% of the popular vote and ten times the electoral votes of his Democratic opponent, Major General George B. McClellan.

November 10, 1785

George Washington wrote in a private letter that both Nellie Custis, 6, and GWP Custis, 4, were "promising children" but that the boy was "a remarkable fine one, and my intention is to give him a liberal education; the rudiments of which, shall, if I live, be in my won family."

November 11, 1857

Robert E. Lee, having obtained leave from his command in Texas arrived back at Arlington, two and a half weeks after the death of his father-in-law, GWP Custis. In his memorandum book he wrote, "Found all sad, suffering and sick, and the chair of him who had always recd. me with kindness and affection—vacant."

Significant Historic Events in November

November 12, 1810

GWP Custis, writing to E.S. Logan, described his efforts to aid the “little farmer” raise a native breed of sheep.

November 15, 1796

George Washington wrote to his ward, GWP Custis a student at the College of New Jersey at Princeton: “It gives me pleasure to heart that you are agreeably fixed. I receive still more from the assurance you give of attending closely to your studies. It is you yourself who is to derive immediate benefit from there. Your country may do it hereafter.”

November 20, 1839

Lawrence Lewis, 73, died at Arlington. Mrs. Lee’s uncle had been taken ill on his way home to Woodlawn from Audley, where he and his wife had been visiting their son Lorenzo Lewis. He had been brought to Arlington and died there a few days later.

November 21, 1826

In an installment of his *Recollection of Washington* entitled “His Portrait,” GWP Custis described the General’s appearance and physique. “Most portraits of the General, he said, made him appear too bulky, instead of tall and lean. Describing Washington’s physical prowess as a horseman and athlete, he told how the General had once thrown a piece of *slate* the size and shape of a silver dollar across the Rappahannock River below Fredericksburg.”



November 22, 1857

Writing to Harriet Talcott, Mrs. Lee described her second child, Mary Lee Custis, as “a clear brunette with brown hair, very fine large black eyes, and a perfect little mouth and respectable nose and is perfectly fat and healthy.” She also mentioned, however, that she had been bedridden for almost four months after giving birth to Mary on July 12.

November 22, 1918

Mary Custis Lee, 83, died at Homestead Hotel, Hot Springs, Virginia eleven days after the signing of the Armistice which ended World War I.

November 24, 1860

From his post in Texas, Robert E. Lee wrote to his son Custis that the “Southern States seem to be in a convulsion and confidence in their securities shaken. It is difficult to see what will be the result, but I hope all will end well... My little personal troubles sink into insignificance when I contemplate the condition of the country, and I feel as if I could easily lay down my life for its safety. But I also feel that would bring but little good.”

In the same letter Lee expressed regret that Montgomery Meigs had been removed from his engineering position in Washington because of what Lee believed to be a feud between officers. “I know Meigs to be capable and qualified.”

November 27, 1855

Having finished court-martial duty at Fort Riley, Kansas, Lee received orders to sit on another court-martial board at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. Since he was coming back east, he had time to visit his family and arrived at Arlington on the 26th. For the first time, Lee saw how the “big room” had been transformed into the White Parlor.

November 28, 1862

General Lee asked his wife to “arrange for the people whom I wish to liberate the 31 December...Perry, Billy and such of those as are at the White House as wish it or who can support themselves, must be included. Indeed I should like to include the whole list at Arlington, White House, and c., if it can be done so as to finish the business.”

November 30, 1859

Robert E. Lee arrived at Harper’s Ferry about noon to command troops ordered to guard the arsenal from threatened attack during and after the scheduled execution of John Brown on December 2 at Charlestown, ten miles away. At Harper’s Ferry nothing more exciting happened than the arrival of Brown’s body and its transshipment to Philadelphia. Lee and the troops were returned to their respective stations on December 12. The country continued to debate bitterly the rights and wrongs of Brown’s attempt, but the affair seems to have affected Lee very little.



National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior

Arlington House was the home of Robert E. Lee and his family for thirty years and is uniquely associated with the Washington and Custis families. It is now preserved as a memorial to General Lee, who gained the respect of Americans in both the North and the South.

Arlington House
The Robert E. Lee Memorial
c/o George Washington Memorial Parkway
Turkey Run Park
McLean, VA 22101

Phone
703-235-1530

Web Site
<http://www.nps.gov/arho>

The Spectacle online
<http://www.nps.gov/arho/tour/spectacle.html>

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

November 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 Carter Vaden 9:30-12:30 Pat White 11:00-2:30 Carol Harvey 1:00-3:30	2 Jim Perlmutter 9:00-3:00 Amy Delery 10:30-2:45	3 Walter DeGroot 9:00-12:00 Meighan Foster 9:00-12:30 Sandy Newton 9:30-11:30 Elaine Street 10:30-12:00 John Michel 11:00-3:00	4 Martha Taylor 9:30-12:30 Matt Grant 10:00-2:00	5 Linda Cleveland 9:00-4:30 Vanna Lewis 9:00-5:00 Victoria Anthony(S) 9:00-12:00 Ivan Hodes(S) 9:30-12:30
6 Joe Wurzer 10:30-2:30 Jim Pearson 12:30-4:30	7 Matt Grant 10:00-2:00 Nancy Leedy 10:00-3:00 John Michel 11:00-3:00 Art Siddon 2:00-4:30	8 Carter Vaden 9:30-12:30 Pat White 11:00-2:30	9 Jim Perlmutter 9:00-3:00 Bobbie Jones 9:30-3:00 Judy Sherman (s) 10:30-1:30	10 Walter DeGroot 9:00-12:00 Meighan Foster 9:00-12:30 Sandy Newton 9:30-11:30 Elaine Street 10:30-12:00 John Michel 11:00-3:00	11 Martha Taylor 9:30-12:30 Matt Grant 10:00-2:00 Julia Oliver 10:30-3:00	12 Ivan Hodes(S) 9:30-12:30 Marci Seeger (S) 9:30-12:30 Marmie Ed-wards 10:00-3:00 Bonnie Mangan 1:00- 4:00
13 Meighan Foster 9:00-1:00 Marci Seeger (S) 9:30-12:30 Joe Wurzer 10:30-2:30 Jim Pearson 12:30-4:30	14 Matt Grant 10:00-2:00 Nancy Leedy 10:00-3:00 Art Siddon 2:00-4:30	15 Carter Vaden 9:30-12:30 Carol Harvey 1:00-3:30	16 Jim Perlmutter 9:00-3:00 Amy Delery 10:30-2:45 Judy Sherman (s) 10:30-1:30	17 Walter DeGroot 9:00-12:00 Meighan Foster 9:00-12:30 Sandy Newton 9:30-11:30 Elaine Street 10:30-12:00	18 Valerie Haeder 9:30-12:30 Matt Grant 10:00-2:00 Pat White 11:30-3:00	19 Victoria Anthony (S) 9:00-12:00 Ivan Hodes(S) 9:30-12:30 Linda Cleveland 9:00-4:30 Carol Harvey 1:00-3:30
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The Robert E. Lee Memorial
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Turkey Run Park
McLean, VA 22101

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA TM

The Spectacle is a monthly newsletter for the volunteers of Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial.

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH

