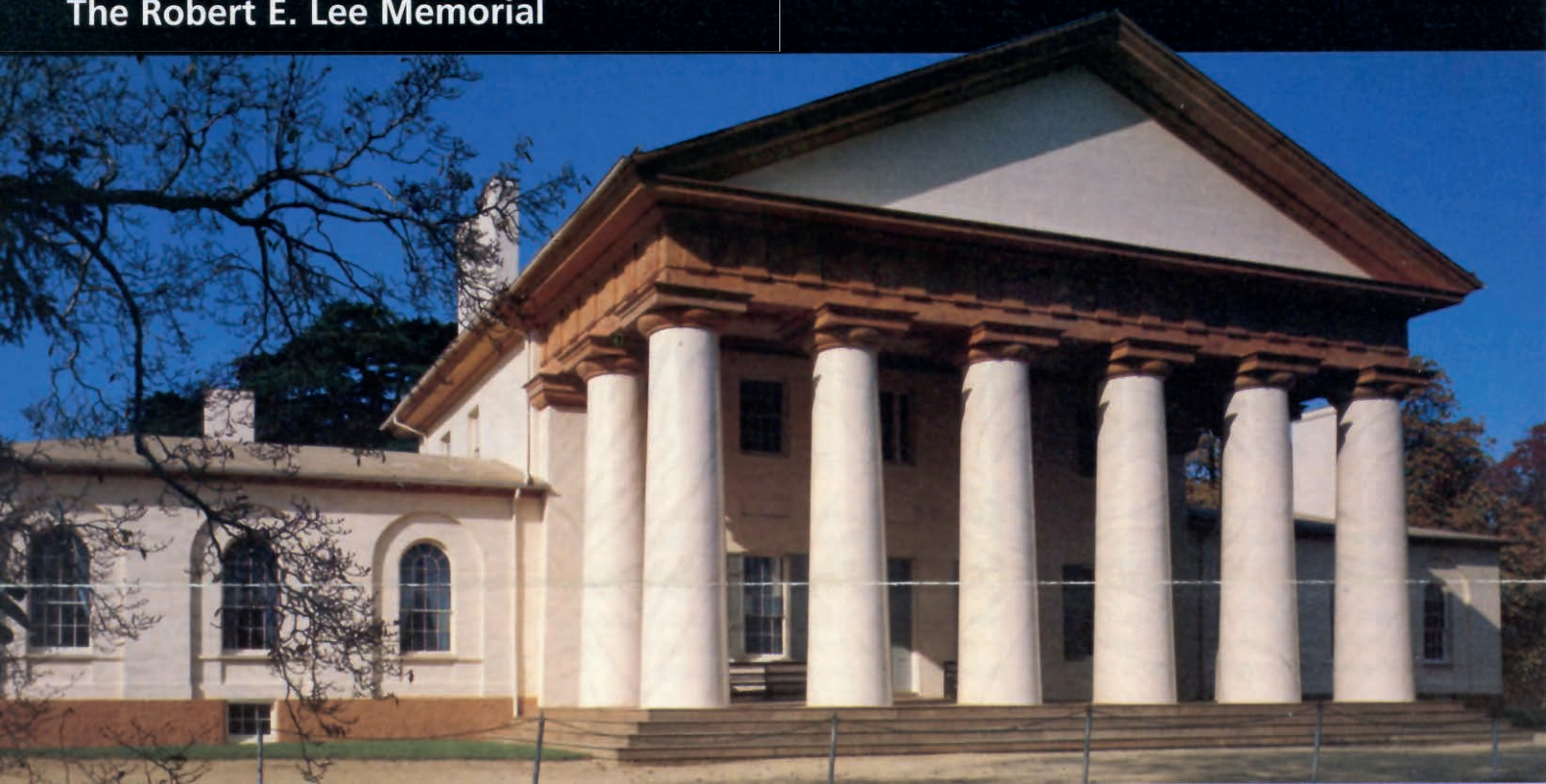


Arlington House

The Robert E. Lee Memorial

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Virginia



Robert Edward Lee, 1865. Photo by Mathew Brady.

Robert E. Lee once wrote that at Arlington House "my affections and attachments are more strongly placed than at any other place in the world." Lee considered Arlington his home and spent many of the happiest occasions of his life here. Today this house is preserved as a memorial to Lee in honor of his dedication to peace and reconciliation after the Civil War.

Arlington House is the nation's first memorial to President Washington. The home was built in stages between 1802 and 1818 by George Washington Parke Custis, his slaves, and hired craftsmen. Custis was the grandson of Martha Washington and her first husband, Daniel Custis. Following the death of his father, John Parke Custis, young Custis went to live at Mount Vernon where Martha Washington and her second husband, George Washington, raised him as their own son. Custis considered Washington a father figure.

At Arlington Custis pursued his greatest passion: perpetuating the memory and principles of President Washington. He intended his home to be a living memorial to the President

and filled it with his "Washington Treasury," which included china, portraits, Washington's bed, and other Mount Vernon heirlooms.

Arlington House was surrounded by an 1,100-acre plantation. Slaves grew crops, tended gardens, cared for livestock, and worked as cooks, maids, and valets. The enslaved community included several large, extended families. Custis emancipated a number of slaves, including the Burke family that immigrated to Liberia. Several slaves ran away from Arlington.

In 1804 George Washington Custis married Mary "Molly" Lee Fitzhugh. Mrs. Custis devoted herself to her family, home, and endeavors of the Episcopal Church. She worked to provide a rudimentary education for the slaves and to bring about their eventual freedom. The Custises had four children, but only their daughter Mary Anna Randolph Custis survived infancy. In 1831 Mary and Lt. Robert E. Lee were married at Arlington. They spent much of their married life traveling between Army posts and the plantation. After Custis died in 1857 Lee took leave from active duty to administer the Arlington estate. Custis left Mrs. Lee a life interest in the estate, with the property to pass to her son, George Washington Custis Lee, upon her death.

The Civil War forever altered Arlington and those who lived there. On April 19, 1861, Lee learned that Virginia had adopted an Ordinance of Secession. That night Lee faced "the most difficult decision of his life." He criticized secession and believed in the eventual abolition of slavery. His loyalty to the Union was strong: two cousins had signed the Declaration of Independence, and his father was an American Revolutionary War hero. Yet Lee was devoted to his native Virginia, where his family had lived since the 1600s. Lee wrote, "Virginia is my country."

Early on April 20 Lee resigned his commission in the U.S. Army. He wrote to his sister, "With all my devotion to the Union and the feeling and loyalty and duty of an American Citizen, I have not been able to make up my mind to raise my hand against my relatives, my children,

my home." His decision would cost his family their beloved Arlington. Two days later Lee left Arlington never to return. After he became a Confederate officer, the family left Arlington. Mrs. Lee placed her home in the care of Selina Gray, the enslaved housekeeper. In May 1861 Union troops occupied Arlington and began looting the "Washington Treasury." Selina Gray confronted the soldiers—and through her bold efforts saved many priceless heirlooms.

The war brought vast changes to the estate. In 1864 Mrs. Lee was unable to comply with a wartime practice requiring property owners in areas occupied by U.S. troops to personally pay their taxes. The Federal Government confiscated Arlington, setting aside 200 acres as Arlington National Cemetery. Part of the estate included Freedman's Village, a community established to house and educate former slaves. In 1882 Custis Lee won his suit against the government for the loss of his property, and he received \$150,000 in compensation for Arlington.

After the Civil War Robert E. Lee served as president of Washington College in Lexington, Va. "I believe it is the duty of every one to unite in the restoration of the country, and the reestablishment of peace and harmony," he stated in 1865. Lee urged Southerners to rise above the bitterness of the war.

In recognition of Lee's dedication to reuniting the country, Arlington House "Lee Mansion" was set aside as a memorial in 1925. "There was no man in the South who did more by his example to help bring about our reunited country," stated Congressman Louis Cramton, the son of a Union veteran. Restoration was begun in 1927 by the War Department. In 1934 the National Park Service acquired the house and continued the preservation. In 1972 Congress designated Custis-Lee Mansion as Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial. Today the National Park Service continues to restore Arlington House to its pre-Civil War appearance and recreate the home so loved by the Lee family.

A Lee Chronology

1807 Robert E. Lee born at Stratford Hall, Westmoreland County, Va., January 19.

1808 Mary Anna Randolph Custis born at Annefield, Clarke County, Va., October 1.

1825-29 Lee attends U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.; graduates second in class.

1831 Lee marries Mary Custis at Arlington House, June 30.

1832-46 The Lees' seven children born: George Washington Custis (1832), Mary

Custis (1835), William Henry Fitzhugh (1837), Anne Carter (1839), Eleanor Agnes (1841), Robert Edward Jr. (1843), and Mildred Childe (1846).

1846-48 Lee serves in U.S.-Mexican War.

1852-55 Serves as superintendent of U.S. Military Academy.

1857-59 Acts as executor of father-in-law's estate, taking two-year leave from active duty.

1859 Commands U.S. Marines sent to put down John Brown's raid

at Harpers Ferry, Va. (now West Virginia).

1861 Virginia secedes April 17; Lee resigns from U.S. Army April 20; receives command of Virginia's military forces April 22; Arlington House occupied by Union forces May 24.

1862-65 Commands Army of Northern Virginia.

1864 Arlington Cemetery for Union dead is established on grounds of Arlington House.

1865 Named general-in-chief of the armies

of the Confederate States, February 6; surrenders to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, April 9.

1865-70 Serves as president of Washington College, Lexington, Va.

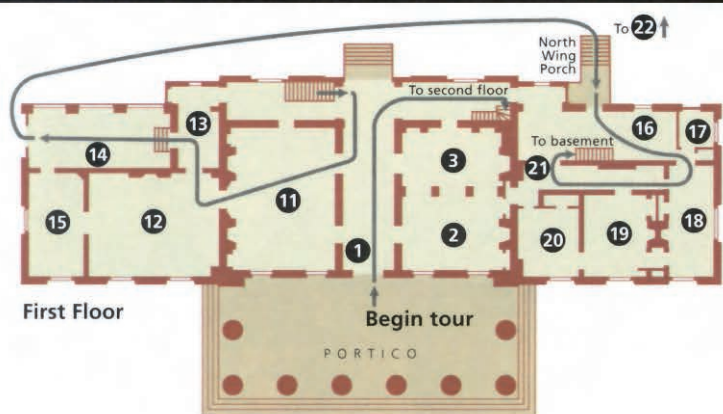
1870 Dies at Lexington, Va., October 12; buried in chapel of Washington College (now Washington and Lee University).

Lt. Robert E. Lee in 1838.
WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

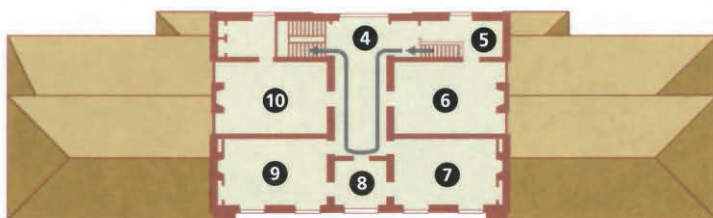
Mary Anna Randolph Custis in 1831.
THE LEE FAMILY



A Tour of Arlington House



First Floor



Second Floor

Follow the numbers to tour the house and slave quarters. Park rangers and volunteers are stationed throughout the house to answer questions. About one third of the furnishings belonged to the Custis and Lee families; the rest are period antiques. Copies of the original family portraits are displayed on the first floor.

You enter Arlington House from the large portico as guests did before the Civil War.

1 In 1824 the Marquis de Lafayette described the scene from the **Center Hall** across the Potomac as the "finest view in the world." This hall was the scene of happy homecomings for Lee. On the walls at the west end are hunting scenes painted by George Washington Parke Custis about 1818.

2 On June 30, 1831, Lt. Robert E. Lee and Mary Custis were married in the **Family Parlor**. Mrs. Custis, and later Mrs. Lee, conducted family prayers twice each day in this room. The engagement portrait of Mary Anna Randolph Custis hangs over the fireplace. The door on the left leads to the oldest section of the house.



View of Family Parlor from Center Hall.

3 According to family tradition, Lee proposed to Mary Custis in the **Family Dining Room**. Lee often gathered roses, placing one at the plate of each woman present for breakfast. Original pieces include china, silver, and the twin serving tables.

At the end of the hall, turn right and go up the rear staircase to the second floor. Before 1861 these steps would have been used primarily by slaves. **Caution—steep staircase.**

4 The Lee family's chambers were accessed from the **Upper Hall**.

5 The **Girls' Dressing Room** connects to the girls' bedchamber. It also served as a playroom. Here, Annie Lee conducted Sunday school for the slave children.

6 Annie, Agnes, and Mildred shared the **Girls' Chamber**. Agnes noted in her journal, "Arlington with its commanding view, fine old trees, and luxuriant woods can favorably compare with any home I've seen!"

7 According to an acquaintance, Mary, the eldest of the Lee girls, was "as unrestrained in speech as she was unconventional in her conduct." She often shared this room, **Mary's Chamber**, with her cousin Martha Williams.

8 In the 1850s Mrs. Lee had two dressing rooms converted into this one **Small Chamber** with a new doorway cut into the upper hall. Guests often stayed in this room.

9 The **Boys' Chamber** belonged to Robert Jr., Custis, and William Henry Fitzhugh (Rooney). Robert Jr., observed, "My mother I could sometimes circumvent; I always knew it was impossible to disobey my father." Custis, originally a U.S. Army officer, joined the Confederate States Army with his brothers.

10 On April 19, 1861, in **Colonel and Mrs. Lee's Chamber**, Lee faced the grim choice of honoring six generations of family ties in Virginia or supporting the Union his family had helped create. Only the day before he had been offered command of the army being raised to invade the South. From his long night of solitude Lee emerged with a letter of resignation, thus ending a 32-year career of service to his country. "I did only what my duty demanded," he said later. The door leads into the dressing room, where Mrs. Lee gave birth to six of their seven children.

Walk down the adjoining main staircase and turn right.

11 A storeroom for nearly 40 years, the **White Parlor** was finished and decorated by the Lees in 1855. They purchased the Victorian parlor furniture, and Lee chose the hand-carved marble mantels. Agnes Lee remembered, "In our childish days, we rode round and round on stick horses making stables of the niches in the Arches."

12 The **Morning Room** was first used as a parlor. Mrs. Lee converted it in 1855 after arthritis restricted her mobility. Her father used it as his painting studio. He painted American Revolutionary War scenes, including the Battle of Monmouth, New Jersey.

13 This hallway was originally the **Store Room**, where female slaves made and stored rosewater in tall glasses.

Walk down the small staircase on your left.

14 The **Conservatory** was originally an open porch. Mrs. Lee grew plants here during the cold seasons. Gardening was a favorite pastime of the Custis and Lee women.

15 Just off the conservatory is the **Office and Studio**. Here Custis, and later, Robert and Mary Lee, managed the 1,100-acre estate.

To see the north wing, turn right as you leave the house. Walk along the rear of the house to the north wing porch.

16 In the **Outer Hall Pantry** slaves completed preparations before they served food in the dining room.



Housekeeper Selina Gray and family lived behind the house in the south slave quarters. It has exhibits on Arlington slaves and Freedman's Village.



Morning Room and painting studio of George Washington Parke Custis.

17 Lee probably installed this **Bath and Water Closet** in the 1850s. A large overhead cistern supplied the indoor plumbing.

Turn right and step up into the oldest section of the north wing.

18 The Lee children and the slaves began their education in the **School and Sewing Room**. Mrs. Custis, and later Mrs. Lee, held lessons for the slaves in preparation for their eventual freedom. Mrs. Custis persuaded her husband to include a provision for the emancipation of his slaves in his will, just as George Washington had done. Workers discovered the globe in the attic in the 1920s; it has never left the house. **Caution—low doorway.**

19 This room served as **Mr. and Mrs. Custis' Chamber**. Both Custises died here. Agnes and Annie Lee were reciting the Lord's Prayer with their grandmother when she died on April 23, 1853. The mantle is the oldest in the house.

20 Many visitors and the Lee children's governess used this **Guest Chamber**. Here, Lee dressed for his wedding on June 30, 1831.

21 Step down from the **Inner Hall**. Turn right to go downstairs to the **basement**. **Caution—low doorway.**

Note: The basement rooms are not shown on floor plan.

Slaves washed clothes and prepared meals in the **Winter Kitchen**. Cook George Clark was renowned for his biscuits and asparagus. Another kitchen was in the north slave quarters.

The **Wine Cellar** held wine and brandy made from fruit grown in the garden. Mrs. Lee took the wine when she left Arlington in 1861.

22 Two slave quarters, exhibits, a bookstore, and restrooms are behind the house.

Planning Your Visit

Arlington House is open daily from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (closed December 25 and January 1). Contact the park or check the website for directions (subway, Tourmobile), accessibility, activities, and a virtual tour.

For More Information

Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial
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Turkey Run Park
McLean, VA 22101
703-235-1530
www.nps.gov/arho

Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. To learn more about national parks visit www.nps.gov.

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