



# ARLINGTON HOUSE: The Home of Lee

By Edward Francis Rines

IT WAS built originally by George Washington Parke Custis, the grandson of Martha Washington, and into its rooms went many of the priceless heirlooms of Mount Vernon, but from the moment of his marriage to Mary Ann Randolph Custis, Arlington House was destined to become known as the home of Robert E. Lee. Today it is very plainly marked in the guide books as the Lee Mansion.

For many years, the empty shell of the house as it appeared at the close of the Civil War was all that stood there, and to the visitor the bareness of the rooms seemed pathetic, the very stateliness of the mansion strangely pitiful.

Now, however, with the help of a Federal appropriation, this lovely old home has been restored to its former richness and glory. Once more it is possible to see the drawing room very much as it must have looked the night the wealthy heiress of Arlington House and Lieutenant Robert E. Lee were married. It is no longer hard to imagine the crisp, rustling dresses of the women as they swept down the long stairway; the tall tallow candles glowing in crystal chandeliers, lighting up every room; the grinning ebony butlers passing around silver trays on which rested Washington's own decanter and wine glasses, or the happy voices of the wedding party.

Everyone knows about Robert E. Lee, but comparatively few know the whole story of Arlington Mansion where he lived for so many years. The house itself nestles in the trees lining the Virginia side of the Potomac, at the end of the new Arlington Memorial Bridge linking Washington and the Cemetery. Located on the heights overlooking the city, the beautiful facade of the mansion, said to have been modeled from the Temple of Poséum near Naples, is plainly visible from the Washington side, and it seems particularly appropriate that the home of Lee should, in a manner, crown the Southern end of the bridge.

The land upon which the house rests was part of the original tract of six thousand acres allowed by Sir William Berkeley, as a reward for bringing colonists to America, to Robert Hewson, who subsequently sold it for six hogheads of tobacco. In 1778, John Parke Custis, a son of Martha Washington by her first husband, acquired eleven hundred acres of the original grant, and named it Arlington for the earlier homestead of his Custis ancestors, on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. At his death, the estate descended to his son George Washington Parke Custis. Young Custis, however, continued to live at Mount Vernon until his grandmother died in 1802, at which time the home was broken up. It was then that he came to his new Virginia estate and commenced the erection of the Arlington Mansion.

The foundation stones came from land near by, and the bricks were burned of clay upon the place under Mr. Custis' own supervision. Eight massive white columns support the weight of the projecting roof. This grand old house with its noble portico is one of the very finest examples of Colonial architecture in existence.

IN the half century that George Washington Parke Custis and his wife, the former Mary Lee Fitzhugh, lived at Arlington, virtually all the famous men of America of that era came there as guests. In 1824, when Lafayette made his farewell visit to America, he was entertained at the mansion; and it was from there that he and Mr. Custis set out for Mount Vernon, to lay a wreath upon the tomb of the Father of His Country.

To the estate came people from Alexandria, from Georgetown, from Washington, to enjoy a holiday on the picnic ground. This picnic ground was located in a grove of beautiful trees, where there was a famous spring. It is still there today, and still known as the Custis Spring. Everyone was welcome, and dining rooms and kitchens were built for their convenience. A large dance pavillion was likewise erected, and many times hired musicians were furnished by the genial host to entertain his

guests. The halls and grounds to Arlington House rang with laughter.

But there was some sorrow; for although Mr. and Mrs. Custis had several children, all died in infancy except one, a daughter Mary Ann Randolph Custis

Robert E. Lee was accustomed to visit Arlington when a boy, and he had for his playmate there little Mary Custis. The two children spent many happy hours together, romping on the beautiful lawn which extends from the front of the mansion in a gentle slope down to the fertile low grounds lying along the historic river.

It was on June 30, 1811 that the wealthy Mrs. Custis and Lieutenant Robert E. Lee were married. Lee was a manly, handsome youth; but no one yet dreamed what an important part he was to play in the pages of history, or of the fame and honor that awaited him. In fact, there is a tradition to the effect that the bride's father disapproved of the marriage, probably thinking that no one was quite good enough for his Mary!

The wedding ceremony was performed by the Reverend Dr. Keith, of the Theological Seminary near Alexandria. It had rained on the way out, so that Dr. Keith arrived quite drenched and was forced to avail himself of one of Mr. Custis' suits. But while the Reverend Dr. Keith was tall and thin, the master of Arlington was short and plump, and there is a story to the effect that Dr. Keith grew nervous during the ceremony for fear that his surplice did not entirely hide his droll appearance.

Following the marriage ceremony, supper was served in the state dining room that has now been restored for our eyes.

In the coldest winter evenings the family would gather around the fireplace, the Lee youngsters clustered at the knees of the men sitting there in the firelight, with Mrs. Lee at the old harpsichord, playing the songs she loved so well, and Mrs. Custis joining the men in conversation.

THE mistress of Arlington House died in April, 1852, and four years later its gentle master followed her. Today their graves may be seen by the visitor, marked by simple marble shafts in an iron fenced enclosure. Lilies-of-the-valley carpet the ground in season.

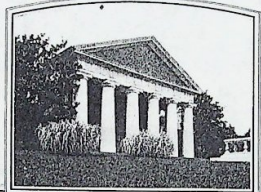
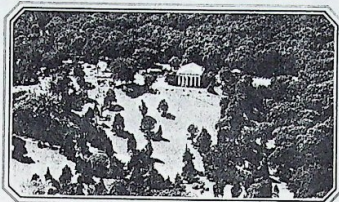
During the Lee regime, Arlington continued to be noted for its lavish hospitality. Mrs. Lee was always ready to show the Washington and Custis relics collected and preserved by her father, and to display Mrs. Washington's dresses, even to strangers, and to tell charming little stories about each one. In the mansion were to be seen the original portraits of General and Mrs. Washington, painted at the time of their marriage. There also was the last original portrait of General Washington, done by Sharpleas, a distinguished English artist who painted in crayons. Many other pictures and much of the fine furniture of Mount Vernon were there: Martha Washington's money chests, the tea-table at which she always presided, a bookcase made by General Washington's own direction, the camp tent used by him during the Revolutionary War, and the very bed upon which he died.

From the time of their marriage, Arlington House had been the only permanent home of Lee and his bride. Lee was away a great deal of the time, especially during the Mexican War, but his wife remained at Arlington, and he returned there whenever possible.

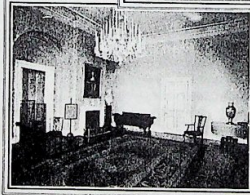
At the death of Custis, he had found affairs in a somewhat jumbled state. Custis was wealthy, and apparently had not bothered much about practical affairs. But Lee set in to change all this. He built fences, strengthened roads, improved outhouses, and put the negro quarters in better condition.

It was from Arlington that he rode in 1859 to suppress the raid of John Brown, and it was to Arlington that he returned when the flight was over. We can see Robert E. Lee clinging to that old house he had grown to love so well, in the days when the dark clouds of civil war were gathering.

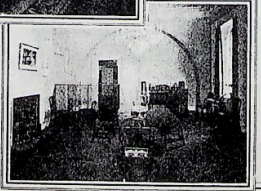
Then came the night



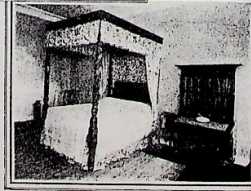
Arlington House: The Home of Lee  
Top of page—Arlington House from a distance



Left—State drawing room. It was in this room that Robert E. Lee was married



State dining room where many famous men of America were entertained



The great four-poster bed which occupied a corner in General and Mrs. Lee's room

## Confederate Heroes Praised

Two Virginians who turned adversity into advantage were compared in a talk Saturday at the annual Lee-Jackson-Maury luncheon of the Old Dominion Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

Judge William Whitney Sweeney spoke on "Common Characteristics of Two Uncommon Virginians" at the meeting in the Stewart Arms.

He declared that both Gen. Robert E. Lee and Gen. Thomas J. (Stonewall) Jackson rose above problems in childhood. "Lee's father, 'Lighthorse Harry' Lee, was a poor provider and was imprisoned for debt and later beaten half to death by a mob in Baltimore. Jackson was orphaned when he was a child. Both chose West Point for financial reasons, as much as anything else, and also because of family military tradition.

"Instead of giving into hardship in early years, they strengthened their bodies and character by rising above it," Judge Sweeney continued. He suggested that required reading of the adolescent years of Lee and Jackson might be good therapy for some young people of today who plead that their poor family relationships during childhood invited their entry into crime.

"During the month of January," Judge Sweeney said, "The UDC salute three famous Americans whose birthdays occurred in the same month: Lee, who was born in Westmoreland

County, Jan. 19, 1807; Jackson, born in Clarksburg, now West Virginia, Jan. 21, 1824, and Matthew Fontaine Maury, born in Spotsylvania County, Jan. 14, 1806. These three men have earned reputations of enduring greatness in their fields; Lee and Jackson in the military and Maury in naval history and ocean science. The purpose of this talk is to show that while we usually think of these men as being entirely different; in truth, they had much in common, and often walked the same path through life. This is particularly true of Lee and Jackson, even though Lee died at the age of 63 and Jackson at the age of 39."

Each left his profession to join the Confederate cause and all three devoted part of their lives to the field of teaching. Maury and Jackson taught at Virginia Military Institute and Lee was president of Washington College, now Washington and Lee University. All have buildings named in their honor at military and naval academies.

Both Lee and Jackson leaned heavily on their religious faith and both men were influenced by other great men, Judge Sweeney recalled. Neither Lee nor Jackson shared the traditional Southern views about slavery and both were experts of military strategy. Both Lee and Jackson were anxious to preserve the Union and both were highly respected by their enemies. During their careers they were sometimes criticized

and misunderstood, but both men were natural field generals and each had a high code of honor.

Judge Sweeney was introduced by Mrs. John H. Davis, former president of the chapter, now vice president. Ruth Burgess, president, presided and welcomed special guests among whom were Mrs. J. M. Holston, president of the Kirkwood Oley Chapter of the UDC and Mrs. Sweeney. Mrs. Robert Pullin offered the invocation and Mary Kline Hawkins, autoharpist and vocalist, gave a program of music.

Mrs. G. C. Wood, chairman Patriotic Service Committee, gave a brief report. Mrs. W. Cabell Garbee was chairman in charge of decorations and Mrs. D. W. Cheatham was luncheon chairman. Mrs. Davis was in charge of reservations.

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DAILY ADVANCE, Lynchburg, Tues., Jan. 23, 1973.



**RECIPIENTS WITH DONORS**—Three men honored with Military Crosses at the annual Lee-Jackson-Maury luncheon of the Old Dominion Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy Saturday at the Stewart Arms are with the donors, from left, Andrew Watts Wil-

son, Mrs. Van Buren Knick of Danville, Andrew W. Williams, Ruth Burges, chapter president, and E. L. Musselwhite III of Lynchburg. Mrs. Knick is Virginia Division Recorder of Crosses for the UDC and gave the citation. A. W. Williams Jr. and Musselwhite were recipients of Vietnam Crosses and Williams, the World War II Cross for Military duty overseas. (Lib Wiley Photo)

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## Crosses of Military Service given

Three Crosses of Military Service were awarded and a talk on "Lee - A Leader of Youth" was given at the annual Lee-Jackson-Maury luncheon of the Old Dominion Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy Saturday in the Stewart Arms Hotel.

The Rev. George Wesley Jones, slated speaker, was unable to be present because of duties at Court Street United Methodist Church of which he is pastor. Katharine Gilbert, chapter historian, introduced Mrs. Jones, who gave her husband's paper.

"In a time when we are reminded constantly of 'the generation gap,' a time when college presidents are frequently resigning their positions, and a time when higher education is confronted with great challenges, let me turn your attention to what I consider some of the greatest years in the life of General Lee, the years of

his presidency of Washington College, from his inauguration of Oct. 2, 1865, to the day of his death, Oct. 12, 1870 . . ."

A student himself Lee quickly learned the names of the students, "delicately inquired into their financial condition, their home affairs, and made memoranda of their war records, if they had served in the Army.

"When young students would ask for a copy of the rules, he would say, 'Young sirs, we have no printed rules. We have but one rule here, and it is that every student must be a gentleman.' As a president, Lee relied on the principles of truth, honor and courtesy to maintain order . . ."

Jones wrote, "The president had no patience with meanness or persistent falsehood; and with perpetually defiant youths he took swift action, terminating their connection with the school immediately. But on the other

hand, he had infinite patience with most forms of youthful indiscretion, and often when the faculty recommended that a student be 'sent home,' if he recognized the fundamental character as sound, he would say, 'Gentlemen, don't you think it would be better to bear with him a little longer? Perhaps we may do him some good.'

Neither Lee's administration nor his form of discipline remotely resembled the military. On the contrary, the distinguished graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point, felt that military discipline was unnecessary for training for civil life. He said he had observed the failure in business pursuits of men who had resigned from the Army.

The president's chief concern was not for the student who excelled. "Always observe the stage driver's rule," he said to a new professor. "Take care of the poor horses."

Lee's knowledge of human nature, his sympathetic tolerance of the foibles of both youth and adult; and above all his sense of humor gave him the key to almost perfect relationships with students and faculty alike.

In closing a story was recounted which "best sums up Lee's character. A sophomore was called to his office because of inattention to his work. "If you do not improve, you will fail your work," Lee pointed out. "But General, you were a failure," the young man said brashly.

"Yes, but let us hope you will be more fortunate than I," I replied quietly.

Math Burgess, president,

bestowed the Crosses of Military Service and Mrs. Van Buren Knick of Darville, Virginia Division Recorder of Crosses for the UDC gave the citation.

Recipients were: Andrew Watts Williams of Chesterfield, the Cross of Military Service for Overseas duty during World War II; his son, Andrew Watts Williams Jr., the Vietnam Service Cross and Emory Lawrence Mussewhite III of Lynchburg, the Vietnam Service Cross.

Mrs. John H. Davis, first vice president, offered the invocation and Katharine Gilbert, chapter historian, introduced the speaker.

Franklin Woolard was soloist and Mrs. Mildred H. Dennis, accompanist. Woolard is choir director at Beulah Baptist Church and Mrs. Dennis is organist at that church.

Miss Burgess introduced guests present including Mrs. Archer H. Overbey of Chatham, past Virginia Division president, and Mrs. Knick.

Mrs. Joseph Kent, Mrs. E. C. Coleman, Mrs. Nowlin Puckett, and Mrs. D. W. Chestham were chairmen in charge of the luncheon.

Virginia Room  
Jones Memorial Library  
Lynchburg, Virginia

2/16

June 18, 1953

THE DAILY ADVANCE



**BUGLER REMEMBERED**—Ever hear of Junius Fitz-James Tinsley? He's the bugler whose notes the morning of June 18, 1864, signaled the start of the Battle of Lynchburg. Here, in Presbyterian Cemetery, are members of Old Dominion Chapter UDC, placing a Cross of Honor on his grave. Left to right: Mrs. John H. Davis, chapter president; Mrs. Raymond Callaham, Lutie Jennings, Mrs. Fred W. McWane, Annie Lind Forsberg, Mrs. Walter Preston Tyree, Josephine Yeatman, holding a Confederate lily; Mrs. William F. Holt and Mrs. C. E. Finnannon.—(Staff Photo by Lib Wiley).

## Honor Cross Placed On Hero's Grave

The man who sounded the bugle call that started the Battle of Lynchburg 89 years ago today was remembered this morning.

He was Junius Fitz-James Tinsley of Louisiana.

His lonely grave in Presbyterian Cemetery was decorated by members of Old Dominion Chapter, UDC, of which Mrs. John H. Davis is president.

Tinsley died in the battle.

To commemorate the death of the Stonewall Brigade member, Old Dominion UDC placed the Confederate Cross of Honor on the grave.

Mrs. Raymond Callaham, chairman of Confederate Grave Markers, unveiled the cross.

Mrs. Walter Tyree, historian, placed the Confederate flag at the head of the grave, and Mrs. Fred W. McWane, chairman of the Memorial Committee, placed a spray on the grave.

Mrs. William F. Holt read from the Scriptures.

Mrs. Davis gave a sketch of Tinsley's life and read the names of the nine circles of the chapter. As she did so, a representative from each circle placed a flower upon the grave.

Miss Josephine Yeatman brought the most appropriate of all flowers, the Confederate lily.

The brief ceremony ended with a prayer.