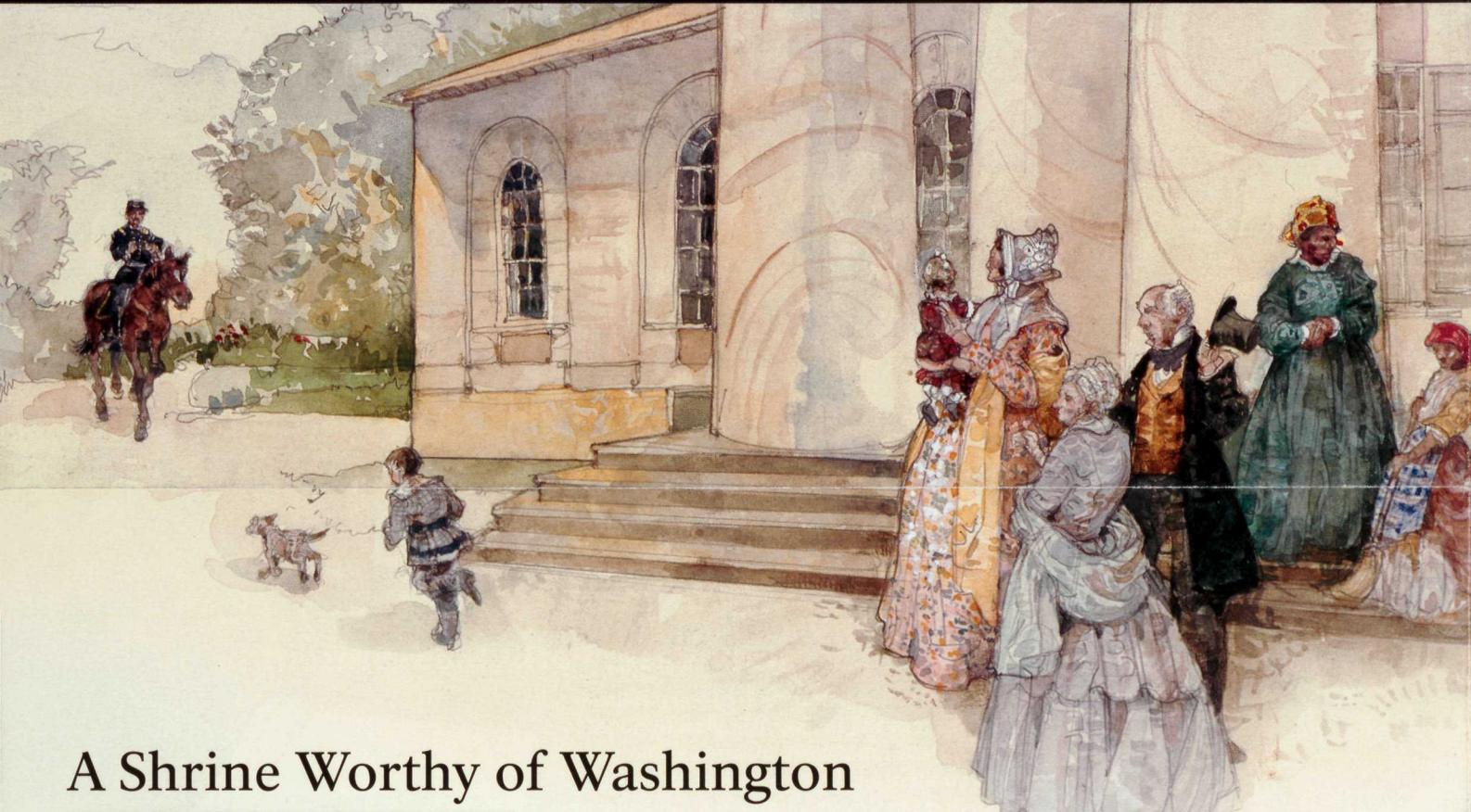


Arlington House

The Robert E. Lee Memorial

Arlington House
The Robert E. Lee Memorial
Virginia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

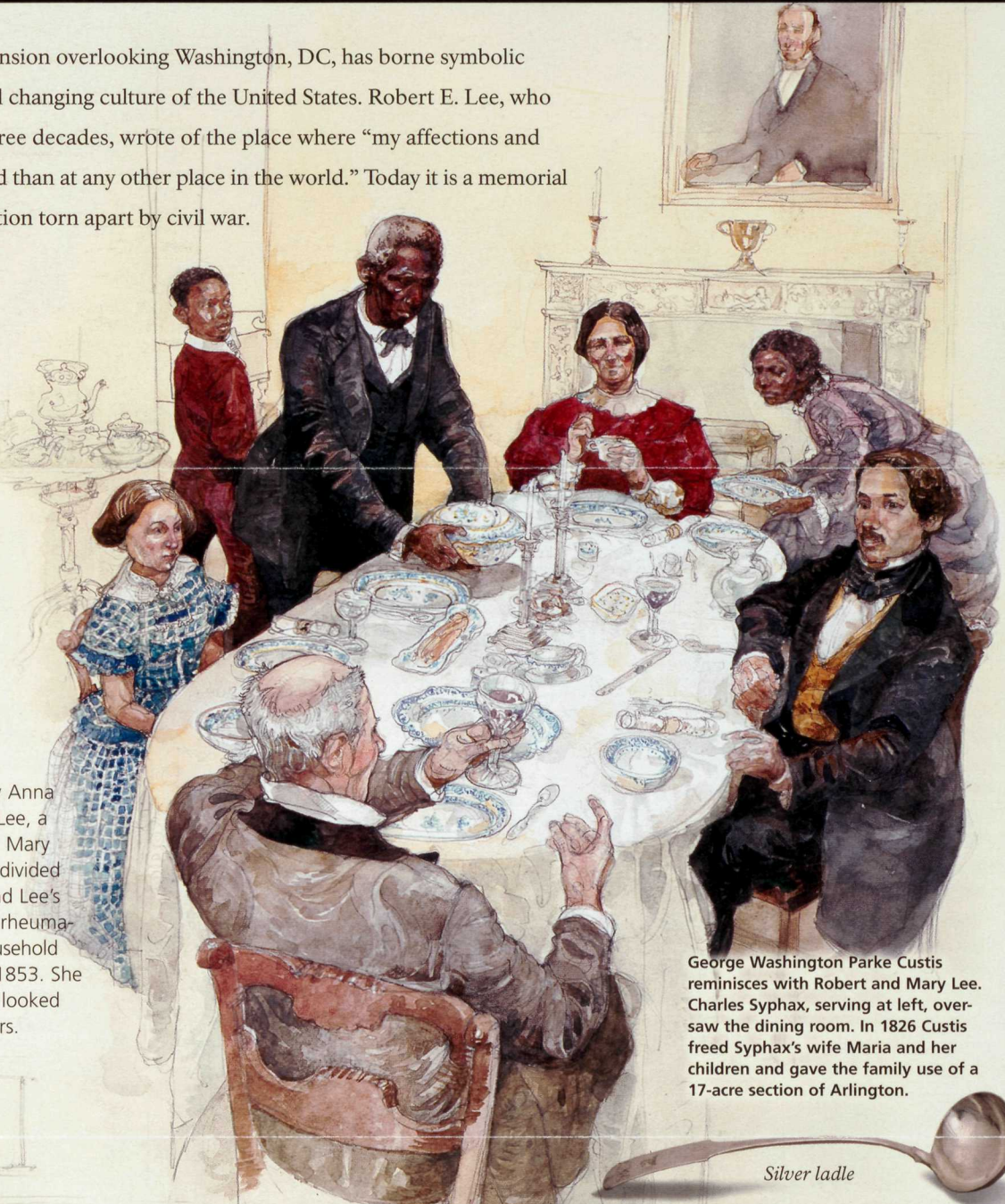


For two centuries this stately mansion overlooking Washington, DC, has borne symbolic meanings that reflect the history and changing culture of the United States. Robert E. Lee, who called Arlington House home for three decades, wrote of the place where “my affections and attachments are more strongly placed than at any other place in the world.” Today it is a memorial to Lee and to his efforts to heal a nation torn apart by civil war.

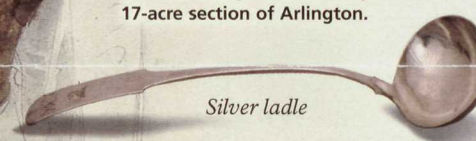


Silver gravy boat

Rob Lee runs to meet his father, returning in 1848 from the war with Mexico. Waiting are Lee's wife Mary, holding their daughter Mildred; her parents Mary and George Washington Parke Custis; and head housekeeper Selina Gray and her daughter Sarah.



George Washington Parke Custis reminisces with Robert and Mary Lee. Charles Syphax, serving at left, oversaw the dining room. In 1826 Custis freed Syphax's wife Maria and her children and gave the family use of a 17-acre section of Arlington.



Silver ladle

A Shrine Worthy of Washington



George Washington Parke Custis (left) was raised by the nation's first president.

In 1802 the first memorial to George Washington began to take shape within sight of the Nation's Capital rising across the Potomac River. Built as the seat of a prominent Virginia family, Arlington House was also a public space, the realization of a dream by George Washington Parke Custis. Custis, grandson of Martha Dandridge Custis, was raised from infancy by Martha and her second husband George Washington. He grew to revere Washington as a father and military hero. On his grandmother's death in 1802 Custis inherited her estates and enslaved workers, including 1,100 acres on the Potomac.

Custis christened the estate Mount Washington, later renaming it Arlington after an early Custis family plantation. He modeled his house on a Greek temple and turned much of the mansion into a museum for his “Washington Treasures”—military paraphernalia and other Washington mementos. In 1804 he married Mary Lee Fitzhugh, a devout Episcopalian whose faith governed her treatment of enslaved workers. She gave them a basic education and lessons in her strong Christian beliefs. With her husband she anticipated their liberation from slavery.

In 1831 their only surviving child, Mary Anna Randolph Custis, married Lt. Robert E. Lee, a childhood playmate and distant cousin. Mary and Robert Lee had seven children and divided their time between Arlington House and Lee's duty posts. Despite increasingly severe rheumatoid arthritis, Mrs. Lee managed the household and its slaves after her mother died in 1853. She shared her mother's religious piety and looked after the welfare of the enslaved workers.

A Home Overrun by War . . .

When Custis died in 1857, Arlington had fallen into some disrepair. Lee took leave from the army to manage the estate, bringing to the task his customary sense of duty. “May God grant,” he wrote to his wife, “. . . that we earn the title of faithful servants.” Custis had provided for the emancipation of his slaves no later than five years after his death, if Arlington was solvent. Lee worked diligently to restore the estate, but progress was slow. In December 1862 he was obligated to carry out his father-in-law's wishes.

With the coming of civil war, Arlington House ceased to be a home to the Custis and Lee families. Lee left for Richmond in April 1861 and accepted command of Virginia's forces. Mrs. Lee left in May as Union troops prepared to occupy

Arlington Heights in defense of the capital. She entrusted her house keys to Selina Gray, who kept watch over the Lees' possessions. When items began disappearing Gray confronted the commanding officer, who moved many of the furnishings to Washington.

In 1863 the US government dealt with the growing number of freed and runaway slaves by creating a Freedman's Village on the grounds. The following year the government took possession of the estate when Mrs. Lee couldn't appear in person to pay property taxes. For reasons both practical and symbolic, the army then established a military cemetery on the grounds and began interring the rapidly mounting war dead.

On the morning of April 20, 1861, Robert E. Lee wrote a letter resigning his commission in the US Army. Within two days he left Arlington House forever.



Lee's lap desk



A Memorial to Lee

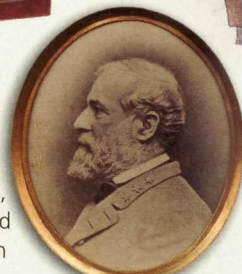
The establishment of Arlington National Cemetery ensured that Arlington would no longer be a private residence; Robert E. Lee would never return home. His son Custis accused the government in 1877 of unlawful confiscation of his inheritance, and in 1882 the Supreme Court ordered the government to compensate Custis for his loss. Once the United States had clear title to Arlington, the fate of Freedman's Village was sealed, as army regulations prevented civilians from living on a military reservation. The residents were compensated for the improvements they had made to land and buildings, and by 1890 all were gone. Arlington House and its immediate grounds became a small island amid thousands

of white headstones spreading over the surrounding hills. When Mary Lee visited Arlington shortly before her death in 1873, she wrote, “it seemed but a dream of the past.”

By the early 1900s Lee, long a hero to the South, was being embraced by the North. In a climate of reconciliation the nation now saw him as a great general who in the post-war years had by word and example helped to heal the country's wounds. In 1925 Congressman Louis Cramton of Michigan sponsored legislation to honor Lee by having the US Army restore the Arlington estate to how it looked when the Lee family left in 1861. The National Park Service acquired

Arlington in 1933 and continued the restoration of the house and grounds, which Congress designated the Custis Lee Mansion. In 1972 it was redesignated Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial.

In recognition of this site's enduring national significance, Arlington Memorial Bridge over the Potomac River was aligned to visually connect the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington House. Completed in 1932, the bridge is a powerful symbol of a divided nation once again made whole.



FREEDMAN'S VILLAGE

Here former slaves, many of whom had suffered in crowded and unhealthy camps in Washington, began their lives anew. By 1864 over 1,000 African Americans lived in the settlement—including former Custis and Lee slaves. To pay the rent they farmed government fields on the grounds or worked in the cemetery or as military laborers. Many received a basic education and learned a trade.

. . . and the Moment of Decision

Born in 1807 into an old Virginia family, Robert E. Lee was the son of Revolutionary War hero Henry “Light-Horse Harry” Lee. Lee attended the US Military Academy at West Point, spending most of his career in the Engineer Corps before distinguishing himself in the Mexican War. After serving as superintendent of West Point, Lee transferred to the cavalry in 1855. He learned of his father-in-law's death in 1857 and returned home.

Though never a large slaveholder himself, Lee managed over 60 enslaved workers as executor of Arlington. He was ambivalent about slavery, calling it a “moral and political evil,” but he also believed that only “Merciful Providence” should determine the institution's fate. When Lee learned of Virginia's

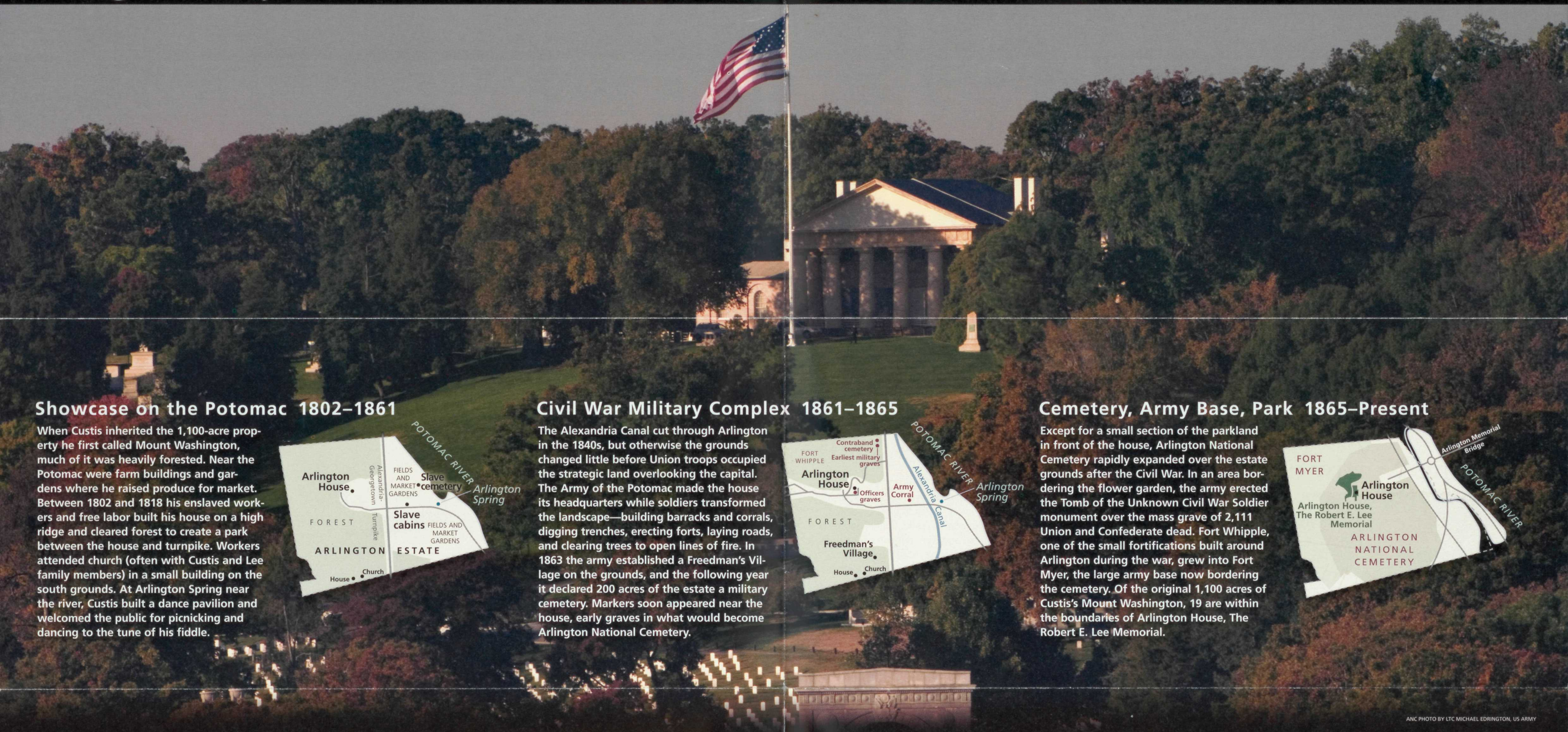
secession on April 19, 1861, he spent a long night agonizing over his future and that of his family. He deplored the idea of secession but realized he could not “raise my hand against my relatives, my children, my home.” He resigned from the US Army and sided with Virginia.

With Arlington lost, the Lees were without means of support after the war, so Lee accepted a job as president of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia. He spent his last years helping to bridge the divisions still scarring the nation, counseling those who harbored animosity that it was “the duty of every one to unite in the restoration of the country . . .” Lee died at the school on October 12, 1870, and was buried there.

ILLUSTRATIONS—NPS / © JERRY PINNEY.
ARTIFACTS—NPS, “THE WASHINGTON FAMILY”
BY EDWARD SAVAGE—ANDREW W. MELLON
COLLECTION, COURTESY BOARD OF TRUSTEES,
NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, D.C.



Arlington Transformed



Showcase on the Potomac 1802–1861

When Custis inherited the 1,100-acre property he first called Mount Washington, much of it was heavily forested. Near the Potomac were farm buildings and gardens where he raised produce for market. Between 1802 and 1818 his enslaved workers and free labor built his house on a high ridge and cleared forest to create a park between the house and turnpike. Workers attended church (often with Custis and Lee family members) in a small building on the south grounds. At Arlington Spring near the river, Custis built a dance pavilion and welcomed the public for picnicking and dancing to the tune of his fiddle.



Civil War Military Complex 1861–1865

The Alexandria Canal cut through Arlington in the 1840s, but otherwise the grounds changed little before Union troops occupied the strategic land overlooking the capital. The Army of the Potomac made the house its headquarters while soldiers transformed the landscape—building barracks and corrals, digging trenches, erecting forts, laying roads, and clearing trees to open lines of fire. In 1863 the army established a Freedman's Village on the grounds, and the following year it declared 200 acres of the estate a military cemetery. Markers soon appeared near the house, early graves in what would become Arlington National Cemetery.



Cemetery, Army Base, Park 1865–Present

Except for a small section of the parkland in front of the house, Arlington National Cemetery rapidly expanded over the estate grounds after the Civil War. In an area bordering the flower garden, the army erected the Tomb of the Unknown Civil War Soldier monument over the mass grave of 2,111 Union and Confederate dead. Fort Myer, one of the small fortifications built around Arlington during the war, grew into Fort Myer, the large army base now bordering the cemetery. Of the original 1,100 acres of Custis's Mount Washington, 19 are within the boundaries of Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial.



ANC PHOTO BY LTC MICHAEL EDINGTON, US ARMY

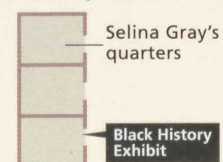
Arlington House and Grounds Today



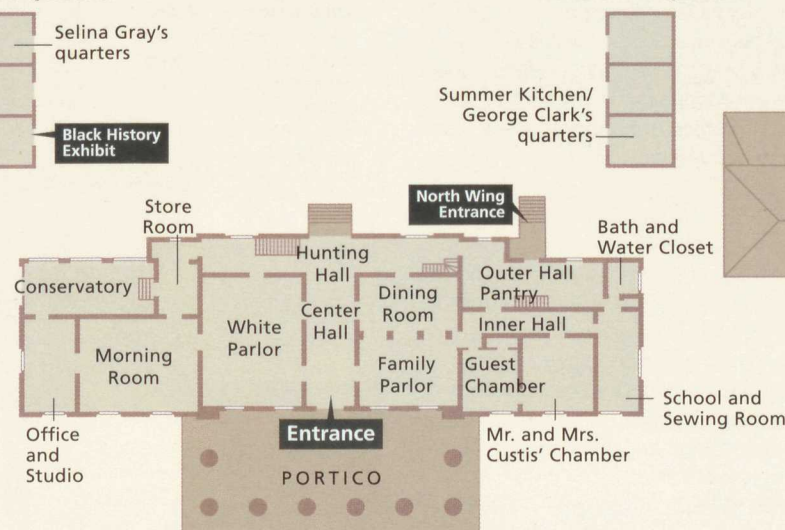
BASEMENT



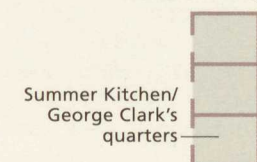
South Slave Quarters



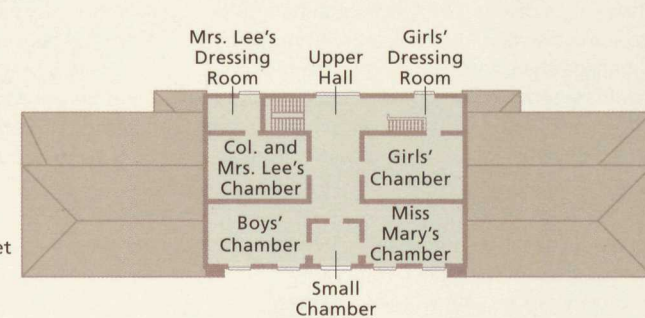
FIRST FLOOR



North Slave Quarters



SECOND FLOOR



Visiting Arlington House

Start your visit in front of the house, overlooking the Potomac River and Washington, DC. This vista was one of the reasons George Washington Parke Custis chose this site. Just as important, the huge columns of his memorial to Washington would be visible from the city named after the man who raised him.

Arlington House is open daily except December 25 and January 1. Hours vary seasonally. Please check our website or contact staff for hours, tours, programs, and directions. We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. Service animals are permitted in the house and around the grounds. For firearms regulations check the park website.

FIRST FLOOR

Family Parlor Mary Custis and Robert Lee were married in this room, also the scene of morning prayers for family and household slaves.

Family Dining Room According to family tradition, Lieutenant Lee proposed here to the Custis's only surviving child, Mary Anna Randolph Custis.

White Parlor The Lee children favored this room. Agnes Lee remembered how they "rode round and round on stick horses, making stables of the niches in the arches."

Morning Room Here amateur artist George Washington Parke Custis painted grand, historically accurate scenes of Washington's battles.

SECOND FLOOR

Colonel and Mrs. Lee's Chamber Because it overlooked the flower garden, Mary Lee selected this bedroom as a child. Robert E. Lee spent a sleepless night here as he agonized over his decision: remain a US Army officer or follow Virginia?

Boys' Chamber George Washington Custis (Custis), William Henry Fitzhugh (Rooney), and Robert Edward Jr. (Rob) slept here. Custis was later compensated by the US government for the wartime confiscation of Arlington.

Miss Mary's Chamber Mary, who shared this room with her cousin Markie Williams, was characterized as "unrestrained in speech as she was unconventional in her conduct."

BASEMENT

Winter Kitchen In cold weather, enslaved workers prepared meals here with produce from the kitchen garden and meat from the estate's livestock. This was a central room for the household slaves, where they laundered clothes, washed dishes, tended their small children, and took their meals.

Wine Cellar Here the Custis and Lee families stored wines, some inherited from Martha Washington, and brandy made from fruits grown at Arlington.

Dairy Milk and eggs were stored in a naturally cool drywell in this room. Field slaves also brought produce here for extended storage in the drywell.

SLAVE QUARTERS

Household slaves lived in twin buildings designed to echo the architectural elements of Arlington House. Selina Gray, Mary Lee's head housekeeper and personal maid, lived with her family in one room of the **South Slave Quarters**. The other two rooms were used for storage. One now houses exhibits on Arlington's enslaved workers and on Freedman's Village.

North Slave Quarters When it was too hot to cook in the main house, slaves prepared meals in the summer kitchen, a split-level building that also contained the cook's quarters.

GARDENS AND MUSEUM

The **Kitchen Garden** and fruit trees provided the Custis and Lee families with fresh produce—including peas, beans, potatoes, corn, asparagus, strawberries, cherries, and pears. In the formal **Flower Garden** opposite the kitchen garden, Mary Lee and her daughters grew roses and other flowers they sold to help the American Colonization Society send freed slaves to Liberia.

Learn more about the Robert E. Lee family in the **Museum** located in the old potting shed at the end of the kitchen garden. Exhibits focus on Lee's family, and a diorama depicts Lee's resignation from the US Army after the secession of Virginia from the Union.

More Information

Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Visit www.nps.gov to learn more about parks and National Park Service programs.

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Lee's travel chess set
ALL ARTIFACTS NPS



Arlington slaves carved this kitchen mortar and pestle.



The Lees taught geography and other subjects to the children on the estate.

