



Foundation Document Overview

Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial

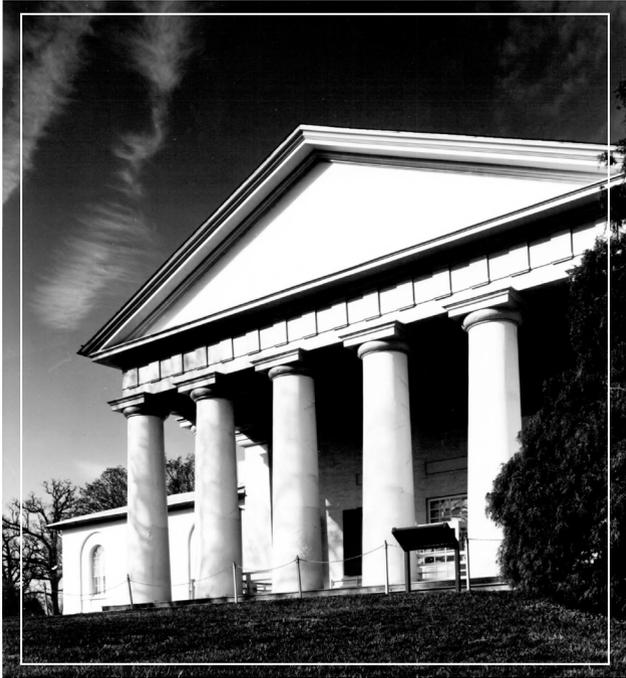
Virginia



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of ARLINGTON HOUSE, THE ROBERT E. LEE MEMORIAL, is to honor Robert E. Lee by recognizing his life, family, and accomplishments through the preservation, restoration, and interpretation of the historic home, furnishings, outbuildings, and grounds.



Significance

Significance statements express why Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Arlington House was designated by Congress as the first national memorial to Robert E. Lee, honoring him as a great military leader and educator who fervently devoted himself to peace and reunification of the nation after the Civil War.
- Arlington House and its surrounding plantation was the permanent home for Robert E. Lee, his family, and enslaved persons, from 1831, when he married Mary Anna Randolph Custis, great granddaughter of Martha Washington, until his resignation from the U.S. Army in 1861.
- Arlington House was built by George Washington Parke Custis, the step-grandson of George Washington, as the first memorial to President Washington and a showplace for the display of many family heirlooms, known as the “Washington Treasury.”
- At Arlington House, Robert E. Lee made his decision to serve Virginia and resign his commission from the U.S. Army at the onset of the Civil War, eventually becoming one of the most victorious and iconic generals in the Confederacy, and resulting in the loss of his family home.
- Arlington House and plantation became a strategic Union military headquarters in 1861 when the U.S. government occupied the site following the outbreak of the Civil War; three years later a large portion of the property was dedicated as Arlington National Cemetery, beginning a tradition of military burials that transformed the site into the nation’s most sacred military shrine.

Interpretive Themes

- The mature forest behind Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial has remained uncut since before George Washington Parke Custis established the plantation in 1802, providing a living link and backdrop to this historic landscape.
- Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial museum collections continue to grow with more than 41,000 artifacts, including original artifacts associated with George and Martha Washington and one of the largest collections associated with Robert E. Lee in the United States.



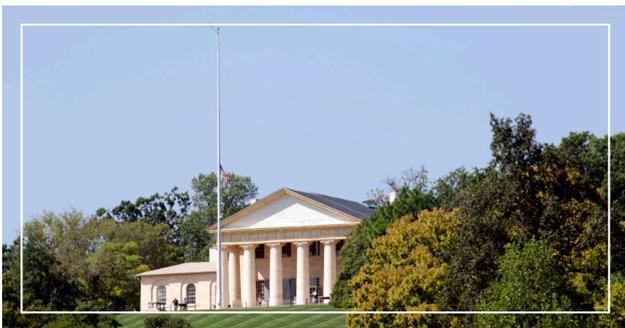
Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Arlington House
- Life and Career of Robert E. Lee
- Washington-Custis-Lee Family and Legacy
- Slavery and Freedom
- Arlington National Cemetery

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- Arlington House
- Sense of Reverence
- Slave Quarters
- Cultural Landscape of Arlington House
- Museum Collections



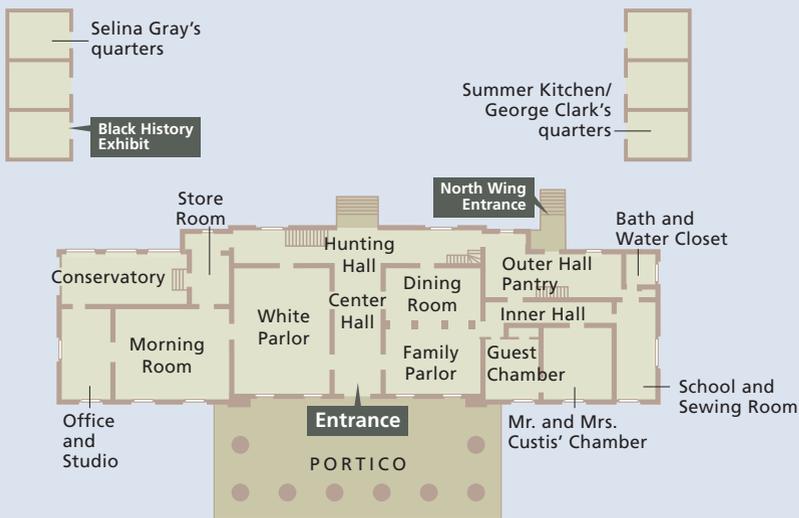
Other Important Resources and Values

Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial has the following other important resources and values:

- Archeological Resources
- Other Historic Structures
- Biological Diversity in Arlington Woods

Description



Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial, was formally designated by the federal government on June 29, 1955, through Public Law 84-107 to suitably memorialize Robert E. Lee. Robert E. Lee lived at Arlington House for 30 years with his wife, Mary Custis Lee, before resigning from the U.S. Army in 1861 on the eve of the Civil War. Today, the memorial consists of the Greek Revival mansion, the Robert E. Lee Museum, both flower and kitchen gardens, mature woodlots, and two slave quarter buildings. Prominently located on a ridge overlooking the Potomac River and Washington D.C., Arlington House is surrounded by Arlington National Cemetery and the two are connected by their shared history.

Arlington House was built between 1802 and 1818 by George Washington Parke Custis—the step-grandson of George Washington—and his slaves. When completed, George Washington Parke Custis intended the house to serve as not only a family home, but also a memorial to George Washington. The mansion served as a place to exhibit his collection of family heirlooms associated with the first president, and this collection became known as the “Washington Treasury.”

In 1831 Mary Anna Randolph Custis, the daughter of George Washington Parke Custis, married Robert E. Lee, a young U.S. Army officer from another prominent Virginia family. Arlington House became the family’s primary residency and they lived on the estate for 30 years, raising seven children. Arlington House functioned as a working plantation and consisted of owners, both the Custis and Lee families, and slaves, which numbered as many as 63 at one time. The Lee family lived at the estate until Robert E. Lee’s resignation from the U.S. Army in 1861.

Robert E. Lee’s decision to resign from the U.S. Army and serve his native state of Virginia in the Confederacy would forever change Arlington

House and profoundly impacted the course of the Civil War. Following his resignation, the Lee family left Arlington and Union forces occupied this strategic location on the Virginia side of the Potomac River. Arlington House served as a military headquarters for the Union Army throughout the Civil War. Portions of the Arlington estate were also selected as the site for Freedman’s Village, which was intended to be a model community for freed slaves who had descended upon Washington, D.C., following the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

In May 1864, the Army started burying soldiers along the northern border of the Arlington estate, approximately one-half mile from the mansion headquarters. During the height of the Civil War, the office of Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs set about the task of identifying an appropriate place for a new official military cemetery. In June of that year, the creation of a national cemetery was approved. By August, more than two dozen bodies had been buried within a few yards of the mansion in an effort to prevent the Lee family from returning home after the war. This tradition of military burials continued after the Civil War, transforming the landscape of the Arlington estate into Arlington National Cemetery, a place considered to be America’s most sacred shrine.

Today, Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial provides an opportunity for visitors to learn about the legacy of Robert E. Lee while immersed in the reverent surroundings of Arlington National Cemetery.