

# Alexandria Lees of the Federal Period<sup>1</sup>

By ELEANOR LEE TEMPLEMAN

This opening year of the Civil War Centennial seems particularly appropriate for a résumé of the Confederate Leader's family activities in Alexandria, which was, at that period, part of Alexandria County which was renamed Arlington County in 1920. But before I start on the main subject I should like to touch briefly on some of the bonds that tie me to Alexandria.

Among my forebears was John Alexander who purchased in 1669, for six hogsheads of tobacco, 6,000 acres which included the site of Alexandria and the future Arlington Plantation.

Then there was "Gentleman Justice George Johnston," America's first important ghost writer. To quote from my book<sup>2</sup> . . .

About 1750, when Johnston was practicing law in Winchester, he befriended the young surveyor, George Washington, and allowed him to use part of his law office. Young Washington's association with the middle-aged lawyer of strong character, high ideals, culture, and experience is credited with having influenced the formation of his character. In 1752, Johnston deeded his office to his young friend and moved to Alexandria. There he served as Presiding Justice of the Fairfax Court, Trustee of Alexandria, and then represented Fairfax County as a member of the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg. Thomas Jefferson credited him with the constitutional argument embodied in the famous resolution on the Stamp Act which Patrick Henry offered in Williamsburg May 30, 1765. Jefferson later wrote, ". . . the eloquence from Henry backed by the solid reasoning of Johnston prevailed. . . ." George Johnston died in 1766, but left two sons to take their part in the Revolution which resulted from this stand against British tyranny.

Ironically, a bronze plaque was in 1932 placed upon the building at the northwest corner of King and Lee Streets, erroneously identifying it as the "Site of George Johnston's Home," whereas his well-preserved house still stands half a block away at 224 South Lee Street. In 1757, George Johnston purchased the lot from Henry Fitzhugh who had acquired it in 1749 when the town was laid out. The 1757 record states that George Johnston "caused to have built in that year a brick house, a livery and a soigon (smokehouse)." All three buildings remain, and a portion of the original sea-wall is at the rear of the garden. The rear kitchen wing has the unusual roofline of the "flounder house" typical of early Alexandria, and a picturesque bake-oven beside the old fireplace.

On settlement of Johnston's estate in 1768, the property was deeded to Daniel Jenifer, President of the Maryland Senate. He had married the daughter of Dr. Craik, George Washington's physician. In 1772, the property was

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered to the Historic Alexandria Foundation at Gadsby's Tavern, Alexandria, Va., on the evening of March 13, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> *Arlington Heritage, Vignettes of a Virginia County*, 200 pp., 190 ills. Published by the author, 3001 N. Pollard Street, Arlington 7, Va. 1959.

resold to Johnston's daughter Sarah and her husband, Col. Robert Hanson Harrison, War Secretary to George Washington.

Also to be mentioned was John Roberts, who has a tie with two important events of Alexandria history. He was serving as mayor at the time of the goodwill visit of Lafayette. His home was the picturesque flounder-house at 317 South Saint Asaph Street. Although he was automatically the official host of the distinguished guest, his small home did not seem adequate for the entertaining and official dinner-party, and so his kind friend and neighbor at 301 offered the use of his more elegant abode which has come to be called "The Lafayette House." John Roberts also officiated at the breaking of ground of the Alexandria Canal, gave an address, and turned the first spade of earth. The Aqueduct and the Alexandria Canal were chartered by Congress in May 1830; actual construction began in 1833 with impressive ceremonies. Today, we have century-old Brady photographs of the Aqueduct, taken from both the Virginia and the District side of the Potomac. In my book is also a picture which I took of the picturesque old masonry culvert beneath the Alexandria Canal (now filled and used for the railroad siding at Rosslyn), to carry the waters of Rocky Run which formed the northern boundary of the Alexander estate to the river. This can be seen from the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

John Roberts's daughter, Matilda Roberts, my great-grandmother, married Alexandria druggist John J. Sayre, Jr., son of the first minister of St. John's Church, Georgetown, and Chaplain of the Senate. Reverend Sayre was buried in 1809 beneath the chancel, and his obituary was written by his close friend Francis Scott Key. Matilda was eight years old at the time of the burning of the Federal City in 1814, when many Alexandrians joined Washingtonians in refugeeing into Fairfax County. One evening at the dinner table at Salona, Dolley Madison's name was mentioned. The precocious Matilda Roberts turned to the strange lady sitting beside her and remarked that she knew something of interest about Dolley, "They say that she wears her dresses too low!" whereupon the lady replied, "Little girl, it is not kind to repeat gossip; I am Dolley Madison!"

Now, to get to the LEES . . . Robert E. Lee's family is usually associated with Stratford; hence some are puzzled as to why most of his closest relatives lived in Alexandria. This is because his branch of the family was not descended from the Stratford Lees although they were close cousins. Robert's ancestral home was Leesylvania, with Alexandria its nearest metropolis. It was mere happenstance that he was born at Stratford. Robert's father, General Henry (Light-Horse Harry) Lee of Leesylvania had first married Matilda Lee, his second cousin, the granddaughter of Thomas Lee, builder of Stratford. The young couple lived at Stratford, and following Matilda's early death Henry married her friend Anne Hill Carter. She came to Stratford as a bride to care for her two stepchildren, and there she bore her own children, including Robert Edward Lee.

Thomas Lee has been so strongly identified with Stratford Hall that we tend to overlook his family's associations with Jamestown and Williamsburg and his own activities in the northern part of Virginia. His emigrant grandparents, Richard Lee and Anne Constable, reached Jamestown on the same ship in 1639. Anne was a ward of the new governor, Sir Francis Wyatt, and it was to the governor's brick residence that Richard Lee came a-courting. They were married in the first brick church of Jamestown, on the site of the present picturesque ruins.

Their first home was on the north side of the York River, from which they fled with their infant son to escape the Indian Massacre of 1644. They built again on the safer south side of the river, where they lived for nine years before establishing their "Paradise Plantation" at Gloucester. Their final home was on Dividing Creek (near Kilmarnock) where they are buried.

Richard Lee was Clerk of the Quarter Court, Attorney General of Virginia, High Sheriff of York County, Burgess of York, Secretary of State, and member of the Council. His son, Richard Lee II, became a member of the Council when he was not yet thirty, and was appointed Naval Officer and Receiver of Customs of the Potomac. His son, Thomas Lee, was born in 1690. Another son, Henry I, was the progenitor of Robert E. Lee's branch of the family.

In 1711, when Thomas was but twenty-one years old, he was given power of attorney by Lady Fairfax as Resident Agent of the Northern Neck Proprietary, and administered her affairs for five years until the return from England of his brother-in-law, Edmund Jennings, who then took over the responsibility. Thomas Lee, who had become familiar with the entire area, then devoted his time to establishing his land grants. In 1718 he acquired 4,200 acres in Fauquier County, including the site of Warrenton. The following year he secured 3,700 acres at the Falls of the Potomac, extending down into present Arlington County to the mouth of Pimmit Run, where he built a tobacco warehouse. He eventually acquired 16,000 acres in Loudoun County. The town of Leesburg bears his name.

Thomas Lee succeeded his father as Naval Officer for the Potomac, served as Gentleman Justice of Westmoreland, and was elected Burgess in 1720. In 1722 he married Hannah Ludwell. They lived on the Machodoc Plantation of Richard Lee II in Westmoreland County, and three years later started construction of Stratford Hall, completed in 1729. On February 4 of that year, their Machodoc House was burned by felons whom Thomas, as Justice of the Peace, had condemned. Queen Caroline of England sent over several hundred pounds to lessen the loss which arose from Lee's performance of public duty. This money helped complete Stratford so that they were soon able to move into their new home.

Thomas Lee rose in public affairs, negotiated the Treaty of Lancaster with the Iroquois Indians which opened up the Ohio basin for settlement, and became President of the Ohio Company organized in 1748 for colonization. He later became President of the Council and Acting Governor of the Colony

until his death in 1750. Thomas Lee produced a fine crop of young rebels; five of his six sons were leaders in the rebellion against England.

Richard Henry Lee in 1756 drafted the Westmoreland Resolves, pledging life and fortune to the cause of liberty. In 1759 he introduced legislation which, if passed, would have abolished the slave trade. He introduced the resolution for independence. He and his brother, Francis Lightfoot Lee, were the only brothers to sign the resulting Declaration of Independence. Another brother, Thomas Ludwell Lee, took an active part in the Virginia Convention, served on the Committee of Safety, and became a Judge of the General Court of Virginia.

The two youngest brothers, William and Arthur Lee, both served in important diplomatic posts for America, which caused each to lose a personal fortune. It is said that we would have lost the Revolution had it not been for Arthur Lee's diplomatic achievements in France. He obtained the first promise of French aid.

Stratford Hall therefore honors not only the beloved Confederate General who happened to be born there, but also his illustrious kinsmen who helped build our Nation and secure its liberty!

Few know the history of the ancestral plantation of Robert E. Lee's branch of the Lee family, "Leesylvania" in Prince William County between Woodbridge and Dumfries. More specifically, it lies between Neabsco and Powell Creeks, extending from the Potomac River on back inland to include lands west of U.S. Highway No. 1. The mansion house burned down in the 1790's, which accounts for this historic site being relatively unknown to the public.

Now all that remains marking the site of the home are traces of the foundations at the crest of the ridge overlooking the Potomac, and the graves of General Lee's grandparents on a moss-covered knoll at the end of the garden, overlooking Neabsco Bay. Later adjacent Fairfax family burials are marked by engraved stones protected by an iron fence, but the tombstones of the Lee graves disappeared over a century ago.

The vast acreage of the Leesylvania tract was patented in 1658 by Gervais Dodson, who shortly conveyed it to Councilor Henry Corbin of Pecatone Plantation in Westmoreland County. Corbin willed it to his daughter, Laetitia, in 1675, the year following her marriage to Richard Lee II, son of the emigrant. Young Richard, a graduate of Oxford, was already a member of the Governor's Council at the time of their marriage. They continued to reside in Westmoreland County. Laetitia Lee died in 1706. Her will left the distant plantation to their son Henry Lee I, who was then fifteen. When about thirty-two, he married Mary Bland of Williamsburg. They also lived in Westmoreland County.

It was not until their son Henry Lee II inherited Leesylvania, that a member of the Lee family resided on the plantation which had belonged to the family for four generations. Henry Lee II won the hand of Lucy Grymes, the auburn-haired "Lowland Beauty" who had been unsuccessfully wooed by George



THE PHILIP RICHARD FENDALL-RICHARD BLAND LEE HOME AT 614 ORONOCO STREET.



THE EDMUND JENNINGS LEE HOME AT 428 NORTH WASHINGTON STREET.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BOB TEMPLEMAN

Washington. They were married on December 1, 1753, in Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, and soon departed for their new home on Leesylvania Plantation. There Henry Lee II served as presiding Justice of Prince William, County Lieutenant, and member of the House of Burgesses. He also represented Prince William County in the Virginia Revolutionary Conventions. He died in 1787, followed five years later by his wife. Both were buried in the family graveyard at the far end of their garden, where daffodils still bloom in the springtime.

Among their children born at Leesylvania who established homes in Alexandria were Henry II (Light-Horse Harry), Charles Lee, Richard Bland Lee, Edmund Jennings Lee, and their sister Mary who married Philip Fendall.

The Lee home was probably similar to Rippon Lodge which stands at the crest of the ridge across Neabsco Creek.

Leesylvania was inherited by Charles Lee, whose son Alfred sold it in 1825 to Henry Fairfax. The Lee mansion had burned soon after the death of Lucy Grymes Lee, although there were other homes on the plantation mentioned in her husband's will.

The home in which the Fairfax family resided was half-way down the slope toward Freestone Point; it possibly predated the mansion. The Fairfax home burned down in 1910. At the extreme point of land, where Neabsco Creek enters the Potomac, there is a cliff upon which was a Confederate fort during the Civil War.

Surrounded on three sides by water, Leesylvania's rugged terrain, ancient forest, historic sites, and breath-taking views offer unlimited opportunity for a beautiful resort if properly developed with recognition of the desirability of preservation of these features. The peninsula was purchased in 1957 by a group of men with such a project in mind. It is hoped that future plans will create a recreation area worthy of Leesylvania's historic heritage.

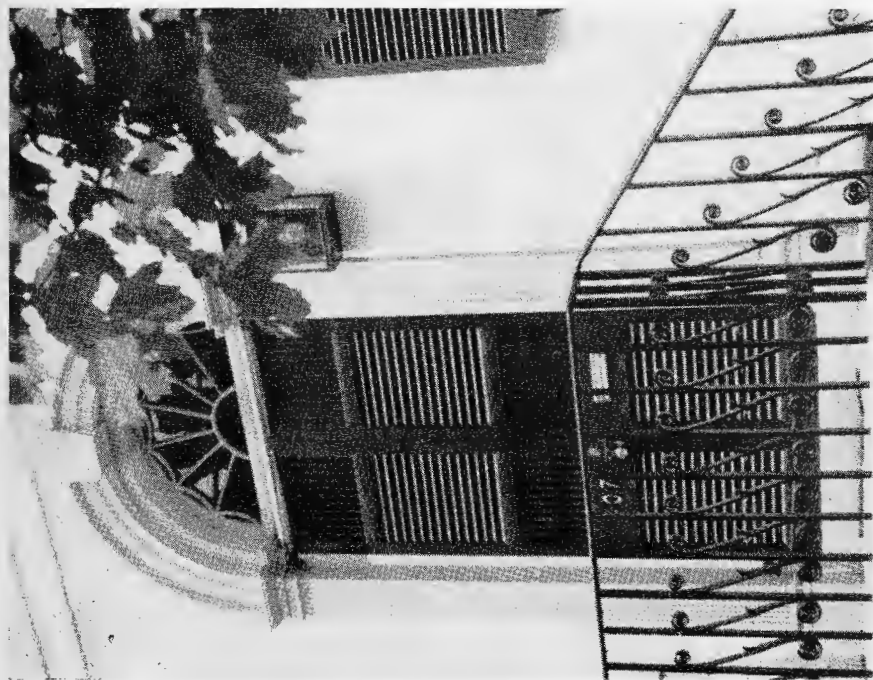
Now, about the Alexandria area. The first of the Lee family to reach this part of Virginia was the Emigrant himself. In 1660 he patented 4,000 acres on the upper Potomac, in three tracts. One, of a thousand acres, was the site of Mount Vernon. This estate was originally called "Eppsewasson," the Indian name of Little Hunting Creek which flowed through the tract. Another tract of 2,000 acres included the site of Belle Haven. The Old Gentleman certainly had a keen eye for valuable real estate! Unfortunately, however, these patents were forfeited because he was never able to establish a permanent settlement on any of them.

Enduring Lee family associations with Alexandria date only from about 1785. Between that date and 1811 a dozen members of the fifth generation made their homes there.

About 1782, Philip Richard Fendall, a distinguished attorney and a grandson of Philip Lee of Maryland, may have built the house at 614 Oronoco Street (at the southeast corner of Washington Street) for his bride, Elizabeth Step-



BOYHOOD HOME OF ROBERT E. LEE, WHICH BELONGED TO HIS FITZHUGH COUSINS, AT 607 ORONOCO STREET. PHOTOGRAPHS BY BOB TEMPLEMAN



THE HOME OF WILLIAM HODGSON WHO MARRIED PORTIA LEE, 207 PRINCE STREET.

toe, widow of Philip Ludwell Lee of Stratford (and mother of Matilda Lee who married Light-Horse Harry). She died in 1789 and in 1792 he married Mary Lee, a daughter of Henry Lee of Leesylvania.

In 1792, his brother-in-law Richard Bland Lee of Sully Plantation near Chantilly (Fairfax County), purchased this residence as a town house. He had served in the Virginia Assembly as early as 1784 when he was but twenty-three years old, and he was the first Representative in Congress for this part of Virginia, from 1789 to 1795. He achieved national importance when he became the person most responsible for selecting the site of the Federal City.

On June 19, 1794, he married Elizabeth Collins of Philadelphia and immediately erected a new home on his Sully Plantation. In 1815, they moved to Washington where he served on many important Federal assignments. Their most intimate friends were the Madisons; Elizabeth and Dolley had attended Quaker school together; and most of Dolley's biographies are based on the existing lifelong correspondence between them. Elizabeth was Dolley's bridesmaid at the Todd wedding. The Richard Bland Lee home at Sixth and N Streets, SW, is now the only remaining residence preserved on formerly fashionable Greenleaf Point. Their plantation home, Sully, is now a museum house under the administration of the Fairfax County Park Authority.

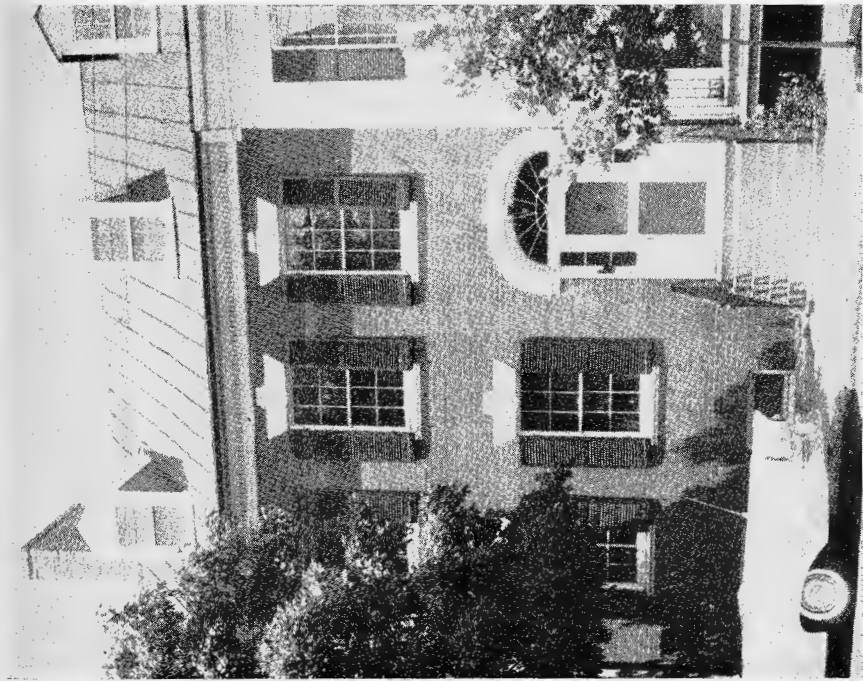
The second Lee to settle in Alexandria appears to have been Charles Lee, of Leesylvania. He was practicing law there in 1785. In 1789 he married Anne Lee, a daughter of Richard Henry Lee of Chantilly (below Stratford, for which Chantilly of Fairfax County was later named by Anne's sister Henrietta who married Richard Lee Turberville of Fairfax). Charles Lee's Alexandria home, its front somewhat altered, still stands at the northeast corner of Washington and Princess Streets.

Charles Lee was George Washington's personal attorney and was Attorney General of the United States, 1795-1801. Anne Lee died in 1804, and in 1809 he married Margaret Scott, the widow of Yelverton Peyton. They moved to "Leeton Forest," near Warrenton, in 1814.

Meanwhile, about 1790, Ludwell Lee, the second son of Richard Henry Lee and the brother of Charles Lee's wife, Anne, purchased Shuter's Hill, then on the outskirts of Alexandria, now the site of the National Masonic Memorial to George Washington. His wife was his first cousin, Flora Lee, the daughter of Philip Ludwell Lee of Stratford. She died in 1795, and in 1797 he married Elizabeth Armistead. He was president of the Virginia Senate 1792-1800. In 1799 he sold Shuter's Hill and moved to "Belmont" near Leesburg, newly built on lands which he had inherited from his uncle Francis Lightfoot Lee in 1797. The most brilliant occasion in the history of Belmont occurred in 1825, when General Lafayette came to visit his former aide-de-camp.

Edmund Jennings Lee, the fifth son of Henry Lee of Leesylvania (the brother of Charles and Richard Bland Lee), came to Alexandria in 1796 with his bride, Sarah Lee, a daughter of Richard Henry Lee and sister of both





THE FIRST ALEXANDRIA HOME OF ROBERT E. LEE,  
AT 611 CAMERON STREET.



THE LATER FITZHUGH HOME WHERE ROBERT E. LEE VISITED  
"COUSIN MARIA" IN MAY 1869, AT 215 NORTH WASHINGTON  
STREET. PHOTOGRAPHS BY BOB TEMPLEMAN

Ludwell Lee and Mrs. Charles Lee. In 1801 he purchased from Charles Lee the lot at the southwest corner of Washington and Oronoco Streets. The home which he built there, 428 North Washington Street, remained in the family until about 1870.

Edmund Jennings Lee was Mayor of Alexandria and an eminent lawyer and churchman. Most notable, his legal efforts saved the glebe lands of Christ Church from confiscation (as detailed on page 174 of *Arlington Heritage*). Their sale provided funds, not only for the purchase of Charles Lee's house as a rectory, but also for the erection of the present steeple and churchyard fence.

The two daughters of William Lee of Green Spring (near Jamestown Island) also came to Alexandria, as the wards of Richard Bland Lee. In 1799 Portia, the elder, married William Hodgson and went to live at 207 Prince Street (presently owned by Mrs. Charles Beatty Moore). In 1806 Cornelia, the younger, married John Hopkins and went to live at the northeast corner of Washington and Oronoco Streets, directly across the street from the Richard Bland Lee house. The present site is the vacant lot adjacent to 609 Oronoco Street, which was the school opened in 1824 by the Quaker schoolmaster Benjamin Hallowell. Robert E. Lee attended the Hallowell School in 1825 to prepare for his entrance to West Point.

Finally, in 1811, Light-Horse Harry Lee came to live in Alexandria, by then a broken man. The family lived at 611 Cameron Street. To four-year-old Robert his father seemed a stranger, having been confined for two years in debtor's prison. It was during this period that he wrote his *Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States*, in two volumes. I had a very strange and revealing experience regarding my recent purchase of an original set of these two books from a London dealer. The book plates therein show the Napier coat-of-arms, crest, and motto, beneath which is engraved, "This book belongs to Lord Napier." Douglas Freeman in *Lee's Lieutenants* refers to Mosby's men studying *History of the War in the Peninsula (Spanish)* by Sir Charles James Napier, the famous British General of the mid-1800's, to learn his methods of strategy, apparently patterned upon those which Light-Horse Harry Lee employed in the American Revolution!

Lee had become hopelessly involved financially, having overextended his credit in his endeavor to establish Matildaville near the Great Falls of the Potomac, furthering a project in which George Washington had been a prime factor. This was the man who had been Governor of Virginia twenty years earlier. His business judgment had been overbalanced by his enthusiasm in the development of this new nation for which he had fought so valiantly as George Washington's honored Cavalry Leader.

Light-Horse Harry Lee did not return to Stratford; for his son by his first marriage (with Matilda Lee) had come of age and claimed Stratford as his inheritance from his mother. The subsequent loss of Stratford involves a scandal, which was made a political football by those who gloried in gossip. In some of the many books on the Lee family, such as Burton Hendrick's

*The Lees of Virginia*, this scandal is detailed. Yet no one made an effort to publish the documented heart-breaking tragedy which preceded and led to this disaster, until 1955. Then, Louise Davis, a young journalist from Nashville, wrote an article for the *Nashville Tennessean Magazine*, which compassionately explains the great tragedy of the man who became known as "Black-Horse Harry Lee." The Stratford couple's adored and only child, two-year-old Margaret, fell to her death down the steep flight of stone steps; the bereaved parents and the mother's young sister, Elizabeth, mourned her together in the isolation imposed upon them by the accepted code of mourning, coupled with late winter storms. The young mother was so inconsolable that she began to depend on morphine. Soon she became a complete addict, shut in her room and quite beyond the reach of her household. Thus, the single tragedy became a double grief for the heart-broken young husband and his sister-in-law, who in their months of isolation and mutual sympathy brought about the scandal which wrecked three young lives.

In 1812, just a year after Light-Horse Harry Lee had come to live in Alexandria, he underwent a horrible experience which left him a disfigured invalid. He was nearly killed in a Baltimore riot in which he was not intentionally involved, having come by at the crucial moment to visit the son of an old army friend. The riot was one of the most infamous episodes in American politics: the result of arguments regarding the "Freedom of the Press," fired by passions inflamed over the war. Lee, trying futilely to save the life of his friend Gen. James Lingan, was clubbed and beaten into unconsciousness, stabbed twice deeply in the face, and aroused by the efforts of a rioter to cut off his nose with a penknife. Hot wax had been poured in the eyes of the helpless men. After three hours of mayhem the rioters abandoned the unconscious forms, believing them dead. A humane physician rescued the survivors and nursed them back to partial recovery and sent them to their homes.

Following several tortured months at Alexandria, Lee decided to seek restoration of his health in a warmer climate, away from his debts and sorrows. He spent five years wandering from island to island in the West Indies, until, realizing that his emaciated pain-racked body would soon succumb to the internal injuries of the riot, he sought a ship Virginia bound. One day in February 1818, realizing that he could not last to reach home, he asked to be put on Cumberland Island, off the Georgia coast, the plantation of the daughter of his deceased comrade in arms, Gen. Nathaniel Greene. He died within two weeks, and an American Fleet in the harbor lowered its colors and fired a military salute as he was lowered into the grave, where he rested for a century until his remains were placed beside those of his famous son in the chapel at Lexington, Va.

Meanwhile, the Fitzhugh cousins offered the widow and her children the use of their town house at 607 Oronoco Street. William Fitzhugh of Chatham Plantation had purchased this house in 1796, where his family resided while completing the Ravensworth mansion. Here, on July 7, 1804, his daughter

Mary Lee Fitzhugh, at the age of sixteen, married George Washington Parke Custis and became the mistress of Arlington House. When Robert E. Lee, a lad of eight, moved to this home in 1815, he was already the childhood playmate of the Fitzhugh's granddaughter whom he would marry upon his graduation from West Point.

I am confining my account to those members of the fifth generation of the family who came to live in Alexandria. Obviously, young Robert Lee grew up among a swarm of young cousins, not to mention his own brothers and sisters. All of them were interesting people in their own right, but they are too numerous for me to include here. Perhaps an exception should be made regarding the Hooe-Lloyd House at 220 North Washington Street, which has recently been preserved from destruction by philanthropist Robert V. New. Erected in 1793 by John Wise, who also built Gadsby's Tavern, it later was owned by James Hooe, whose widow rented it to Benjamin Hallowell. Here he privately tutored Angela Lewis of Woodlawn. It was later sold to John Lloyd who married Anne Harriotte Lee, daughter of Edmund Jennings Lee; their descendants lived there almost a century. The Arlington carriage was often parked at its door when the Custis-Lee family attended Christ Church.

Robert E. Lee's first visit after the war was in May 1869. He arrived by boat. Enroute to visit Mrs. Maria Fitzhugh, the daughter-in-law of the builder of Ravensworth, at her Alexandria town house at 215 North Washington Street, he was discovered peering over the back fence into the garden of his boyhood home on Oronoco Street. Slightly embarrassed, he explained that he only wanted to see if the snowballs he so well remembered were in bloom. At Mrs. Fitzhugh's, he found his sister-in-law, Mrs. Sydney Smith Lee, and his nephew Fitz, of the cavalry. His brother Sydney soon came up from his farm on the Potomac to meet him. Then followed three happy days.

General Lee said, "There is no community to which my affections more strongly cling than that of Alexandria, composed of my earliest and oldest friends, my kind school-fellows, and the faithful neighbors." The devoted townspeople called upon him in such numbers that it became necessary to hold an impromptu reception at a local hotel, Green's Mansion House, on the southeast corner of Cameron and Fairfax Streets. The *Alexandria Gazette* reported the next day, "It was more like a family meeting than anything else, for we regard General Lee as one of our Alexandria boys . . . We have never seen a more lovely exhibition of the grateful and unbought homage of the heart to worth and high character than was exhibited last evening . . . Of all the fine and great men who have called Alexandria 'home,' this man will always be closest to our hearts."