

# THE HERITAGE OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA

By

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The documented history of Northern Virginia goes back to John Smith's written description of his exploration of the Potomac in 1608 that took him to Little Falls, the head of Tidewater at the upper boundary of Arlington County. Successive charters issued to the Virginia Company in 1609 and 1612 granted jurisdiction over all territory lying 200 miles north and south of Point Comfort, "all that space and circuit of land lying from the seacoast of the precinct aforesaid, up into the land throughout from sea to sea, west and northwest." The third charter of 1612 included Bermuda. The first limitations upon the extent of the "Kingdom of Virginia," as it was referred to by King Charles I, came in 1632 when he granted Lord Baltimore a proprietorship over the part that became Maryland.

The northeastern portion of Virginia included one of America's greatest land grants, the Northern Neck Proprietary of approximately six million acres. In 1649, King Charles II, a refugee in France because of the English Civil War, granted to seven loyal followers all the land between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. (Although the term, "Northern Neck" is usually applied to that portion south of Fredericksburg, the largest portion is in Northern Virginia.) Charles II, then in command of the British Navy, was about to launch an attack to recover the English throne. His power, however, was nullified by Cromwell's decisive victory at Worcester in 1650.

The restoration of Charles to power in 1660 revived the grant, and two years later he ordered the Governor and Council in Virginia to put it into effect. However, they believed it a threat to all previously existing land titles in that part of Virginia. Land had hitherto been granted on the basis of headrights (50 acres for each person brought into the colony) designed to promote the peopling and development of the country. Therefore, they delayed ratification of the royal grant until 1688 when a compromise settlement was reached.

In 1681, Thomas Culpeper bought out the interests of the other original Northern Neck grantees, and was, thereby, entitled to the quitrents which had hitherto been paid to the Crown by the existing landholders. All the unappropriated lands remaining in the area were his to grant on similar terms. Excluded was a 6,000 acre tract issued for headrights to shipmaster Robert Howson. Almost three miles in width, it extended along the banks of the Potomac from Great Hunting Creek south of what later became Alexandria to the northern boundary of what later became the Arlington Plantation (now the National Cemetery) near Rosslyn. Howson sold the entire tract a month later to John Alexander for six hogsheads of tobacco. The city of Alexandria, chartered in 1749, was named for the family.

Lord Culpeper died in 1689 and the proprietorship of the Northern Neck passed to his only child, Lady Katherine Fairfax. The manager of the estate was Robert Carter, called "King" Carter because of his imperious manner. He had been rather lax in the administration of Lady Fairfax's estate because of his rivalry with Governor Spotswood for domination of political power in Virginia. Lady Fairfax, living in London, turned for advice to Thomas Corbin, a prominent Virginia merchant. He recommended the brilliant twenty year old Thomas Lee who had just graduated from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg. In 1711, therefore, Lady Katherine sent her power-of-attorney to young Thomas Lee. "King" Carter, no doubt, was enraged to be replaced by such a stripling!

Lee undertook the task as resident manager of the Fairfax Proprietary with vigor and enthusiasm, and for the first time, put the affairs on a businesslike basis. It had been customary for land applicants, for example, to underestimate the acreage in order to reduce the quitrents. Lee required an accurate survey to accompany each application. Lady Katherine was highly pleased by the substantial increase in her income from Virginia. At her death in 1719, the proprietorship passed to her son, Thomas, Sixth Lord Fairfax and Baron of Cameron. "King" Carter seized the opportunity to lease the entire Fairfax Proprietary from the heir for a fixed annual rent, an action that terminated Thomas Lee's managerial position.

It is noteworthy that Lee avoided "conflict of interest" by refraining from applying himself during his term as resident agent. He later patented large tracts extending from Donaldson Run in Arlington County to near the future site of Leesburg, besides some in the Warrenton area. Stratford Hall\*, the magnificent home which he built (1725-'29) in Westmoreland County was on land which he had purchased in 1718, not on one of his grants.

The conflict, however, between "King" Carter and Thomas Lee was not over. In 1728, a son of "King" Carter discovered what he believed to be a rich deposit of copper ore near the future site of Herndon in Fairfax County, and immediately patented the tract. His father organized a family partnership to exploit the copper mine. In order to get the ore to navigable water, he planned a road to the mouth of Pimmit Run, just downstream from the Little Falls of the Potomac. Thomas Lee had already patented the site in 1719, and would have gladly permitted Carter to use his established landing upon payment of appropriate wharfage fees; however, the "King" demanded that Lee surrender his title to that land in exchange for land elsewhere. The old "King" was accustomed to having his own way and was infuriated when young Lee refused to give up his patent. He, therefore, built a longer road from his copper mine in the other direction to the mouth of the Occoquan River. That road exists today as Route 123 south of Fairfax, and is known as "The Ox Road." After all this, the famous mine was found to contain no copper ore! The final irony in the relationship between these two men was that when Thomas Lee was appointed to the Council in 1733, it was to take the seat vacated by the death of "King" Carter.

In 1744, Thomas Lee negotiated the Treaty of Lancaster with the Iroquois

Indians that opened up the westward frontier including the Ohio basin for settlement. When he died in 1750, he was president of the Council and acting governor of Virginia. Among his sons, born at Stratford Hall, were the only brothers who signed the Declaration of Independence (Richard Henry Lee and Francis Lightfoot Lee), and two others who were important diplomats. Three of them owned tracts in Northern Virginia. When the town of Leesburg was established in 1758, two sons were trustees of the new town named in honor of Thomas Lee. His grandson, Ludwell Lee, who was aide-de-camp to General Lafayette, built Belmont near Leesburg in 1799, and there he entertained Lafayette in 1825.

Robert E. Lee, although born at Stratford Hall (now owned and maintained by the Robert E. Lee Memorial Association as a public shrine honoring the birthplace of the Confederate General), was not directly descended from Thomas Lee. Robert's father, General Henry (Light Horse Harry) Lee, outstanding Revolutionary War officer and Governor of Virginia, was of the Leesylvania branch of the family of Prince William County in Northern Virginia. He first married Matilda Lee, his second cousin, the granddaughter of Thomas Lee. The young couple lived in Stratford, and following Matilda's early death, Henry married her friend, Ann Hill Carter of Shirley\*, the granddaughter of "King" Carter! She came to Stratford as a bride to care for her two stepchildren, and there she bore her own, including Robert Edward Lee. The family moved to Alexandria in 1810 when Robert was three-and-a-half.

Many are unfamiliar with Leesylvania Plantation at Freestone Point on the Potomac between Woodbridge and Dumfries because the home was destroyed by fire about 1790. As the birthplace of men of prominence in both state and national history, Leesylvania ranks next to Stratford in the nation! Although it had belonged to the family for nearly ninety years when Henry Lee II moved there with his bride in 1753, he was the first to reside on the estate. He served Prince William County as Presiding Justice, County Lieutenant (head of the Militia), was a Burgess and represented the county in the Virginia Revolutionary Convention. He and his wife (grandparents of Robert E. Lee) were buried at the far end of their garden. Leesylvania is surrounded on three sides by water, Neabsco Creek, Powell's Creek, and the palisades overlooking the Potomac, site of an important Confederate fortification.

(The beautifully forested and rugged terrain of the remaining 500 acres will soon be the first developed state park in Northern Virginia. Of the twenty-six state parks featured in the Commonwealth's booklet, the nearest to Northern Virginia is in Westmoreland County, forty miles below Fredericksburg. The historical importance of Leesylvania was the prime factor in the decision of the recent owner, Daniel K. Ludwig to contribute half of the appraised value of approximately four million dollars. It is hoped that it will soon be open to the public.)

Besides Light Horse Harry Lee, Leesylvania was the birthplace of Charles Lee who was George Washington's personal attorney and Attorney General of

\*An asterisk indicates that the house is open to the public.

the United States; Edmund J. Lee, Mayor of Alexandria; and Richard Bland Lee, the first representative of Northern Virginia and the person most responsible for choosing the site of the Federal City. Richard Bland Lee's Fairfax County home, Sully\* (near Dulles Airport) was built in 1794. When attending the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, he met and married Elizabeth Collins, Dolley Madison's most intimate lifelong friend. He sold his 3,100 acre plantation in 1811 and later moved to Washington when appointed as the commissioner to adjudicate claims arising from loss or destruction of property during the War of 1812. He also was one of the three commissioners to oversee the reconstruction of the Capitol, the White House, and the other public buildings destroyed by the British on August 12, 1814. Lee was appointed first judge of the Orphan's Court of the District of Columbia, a position which he held until his death in 1827.

Sully was purchased by a cousin, Francis Lightfoot Lee II, namesake nephew of the Signer of the Declaration of Independence. Among his children born there was Admiral Samuel Phillips Lee who married Elizabeth Blair. Her father, Francis Preston Blair, was the advisor and confidant of Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln and a member of a family which, for many decades, helped shape the destiny of the nation. In 1943, the Blair home and the adjacent Lee home were combined into one residence to become the Blair-Lee House, Guest House of the President. It is across Pennsylvania Avenue, one block west of the White House.

In early youth, George Washington came to live at Mount Vernon\* with his older half-brother, Major Lawrence Washington. The latter had married Anne Fairfax, daughter of William Fairfax whose Belvoir Plantation was just south of Mount Vernon. George Washington, like his close friend (Light Horse Harry) Lee, considered Alexandria his home town. Much of the great charm of "Old Town" lies in the fact that most of the colonial and early Federal architecture has been preserved. The town was chartered in 1749 on the site of a tobacco inspection warehouse authorized by Governor Gooch in 1730. Seventeen year old George Washington helped to survey the streets, having been on a survey of the Fairfax Proprietary the previous year. He acquired title to Mount Vernon in 1754 from his uncle's widow when he was but twenty-two years old. The following year he was present at Carlyle House\* (erected in 1752) where five colonial governors met with General Braddock to plan financing the ill-fated campaign against the French and Indians at Fort Duquesne. Washington had already been recruiting his first troops at Gadsby's Tavern,\* which would later be the scene of Washington's Birthnight balls.

In 1759, he married Martha, widow of Daniel Parke Custis, and adopted her two children. "Patsy" died when only seventeen. John Parke Custis (called "Jackie"), when twenty-one, married sixteen-year-old Eleanor Calvert, granddaughter of the Fifth Lord Baltimore. Jackie died at Yorktown in 1781, whereupon Washington adopted two of his four children, George Washington Parke Custis and Eleanor Custis (called "Nelly"). On Washington's last birthday, February 22, 1799, Nelly married Washington's nephew, Lawrence

Lewis, at Mount Vernon. Washington presented to them the two thousand acre Woodlawn\* plantation, cut from his estate. The Georgian mansion, designed by William Thornton, first architect of the Capitol, was completed in 1805.

Because George Washington, George Mason and Justice George Johnston were co-workers for many years in the causes of justice and freedom, they have often been referred to as "The Three Georges." George Johnston, who built his home in Alexandria in 1757 at 224 South Lee Street (now a private residence), is credited by Thomas Jefferson with having worded 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 of 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 his stand against British tyranny.

Washington's military and political careers are too well known to be repeated. He maintained his town house in Alexandria, where he was very much involved in all civic matters. When he left Virginia for New York to become the first President of the United States, the citizens of Alexandria asked (Light Horse Harry) Lee to write their farewell address to him. Lee was visiting his sister Mary and her husband, Philip Richard Fendall at the time. He wrote the address in the Lee-Fendall House\* which was the residence of members of the Lee Family continuously from 1785 until 1903.

Harry Lee was one of Washington's most intimate friends. He was honored as a recipient from Congress of a gold medal awarded in recognition of his bravery, gallantry and outstanding military genius. Yet no other man has been so unfairly and outrageously slandered by careless modern writers. Like Robert Morris, he served two years in debtor's prison and has been pictured as an irresponsible spendthrift. Instead, his financial problems were largely due to having invested his patrimony in outfitting his famous cavalry troops, for which he was never repaid, and also from having invested in the western lands, because of his faith in the new nation's expansion. Harry Lee earned the deep respect and friendship of George Washington who knew him well. When Washington died in 1799, it was the eulogy written by Harry Lee which immortalized the phrase, ". . . first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his fellow-countrymen . . . ."

### A NARRATIVE MAP

Alexandria: So many things to see in Alexandria! In the grounds of the Presbyterian Meeting House (1767-1774) lies the body of the "Unknown Soldier of the Revolutionary War." The old warehouses near the river were constructed in the early 1760's. Quaint houses in "Captains' Row" front on an original cobblestone street, in contrast to elegant town houses of the aristocracy. The George Washington Bicentennial Headquarters is housed in the Greek Revival Lyceum\*, erected about 1840 as a lecture hall and to house

the Alexandria Library which had been established in 1790. The Apothecary Shop\* was established in 1792. The Friendship Fire Company\* was organized in 1774 and possesses the hand-pumper fire engine presented by George Washington in 1794. The George Washington Masonic National Memorial\* houses memorabilia of the Alexandria-Washington Lodge of which George Washington was a Charter Member. Christ Church\* was erected in 1767-1773 with George Washington and George Mason on the building committee.

Upon the establishment of the ten-mile square District of Columbia, a survey was made under the direction of George Washington in 1791. Two-thirds lay on the Maryland side of the Potomac, and a third in Virginia, which included Alexandria and Arlington County. "Jurisdiction Stones" were placed at one mile intervals. Washington officiated in the placing of the first stone on April 15, 1791 at Jones Point in Alexandria where Great Hunting Creek enters the Potomac. The Virginia portion of the District of Columbia was retroceded to the Commonwealth in 1846.

Another important shrine in Alexandria is the boyhood home of Robert E. Lee\*. Built in 1795, it was purchased four years later by William Fitzhugh as a town house during construction of a home on his Ravensworth estate in Fairfax County, inherited from his great-grandfather. He had sold his Fredericksburg home, Chatham\*, because of the strain, financial and time-wise, of constant entertaining, since his home was on the main road from Williamsburg to Alexandria. At the Alexandria home on July 7, 1804, his only child, sixteen-year-old Mary Lee Fitzhugh married George Washington Parke Custis. Young Custis had inherited from his father an eleven hundred acre tract purchased from the Alexandria family. Upon the death of his grandmother Martha Washington in 1802, Mount Vernon reverted to the Washington family. Custis then started construction of his own home, Arlington\* on the heights overlooking the new capital city. When the Fitzhughs moved to their Ravensworth plantation, the Alexandria town house was leased to the family of their kinsman, Harry Lee. From there, young Robert left in 1825 for West Point, from which he graduated with high honors in 1830.

Arlington: Arlington House\* was the scene the following year of Lee's marriage to Mary Ann Randolph Custis. As an only child, upon her father's death in 1857, Ann received a life interest in the estate, in trust for the namesake grandson, Custis Lee. However, the estate was lost to the family through confiscation for taxes during the Civil War. At that time, Mrs. Lee was a semi-invalid refugee in Richmond. She had sent the \$92.07 tax money to a cousin in Alexandria who presented it to the tax collector who refused to accept it from the hand of any other than the legal owner. Two decades later, the federal courts termed the confiscation illegal and awarded some compensation to Custis Lee. The mansion could no longer be used as a residence, as the plantation was then a national cemetery. During the Civil War, twenty-two Union forts in Arlington County had protected Washington from attack from the south. In 1955, Arlington House was officially designated as the National Memorial to Robert E. Lee. Even though he never owned it, he referred to it,

“... as where my affections and attachments are more firmly placed than at any place in the world.”

In 1923, Lee Highway, a national memorial to the Confederate general, was officially dedicated by the President and cabinet officers in an elaborate ceremony at Zero Milestone back of the White House, to reach to the Pacific Milestone in San Diego, California. Virginia and Alabama are the only states which retain the name of the first completed trans-continental highway.

Throughout Northern Virginia are many charming villages rich in antiquity and history. Many are off the main highways and should be explored in a leisurely manner. Limited space makes it impossible to mention them all. At Great Falls are the picturesque ruins of George Washington's "Powtownmack Canal" and Matildaville.

Falls Church: Adjacent to Arlington County to the west is the city of Falls Church. The first documented building there at the crossroads of the route from Alexandria and "the Road from the (Little) Falls" was the Big Chimney Tavern. Its chimney, with twenty-foot base, bore the incised date of 1699 on a base-stone, destroyed after 1900. By 1733, there were enough settlers in the area for the erection of what was the northernmost house of worship in Virginia, the Falls Church, which gave the village its name. The wooden structure was replaced in 1767-69 by one of brick, the present Falls Church\* with George Washington and George Mason on the building committee. In 1775, it was used as a Revolutionary War recruiting station, and during the Civil War by the Federals as a hospital, later by the officers as a stable for their horses.

Prince William County: Prince William County was cut from Stafford County in 1731, with the patents bordering the Potomac going back into the 1650's. By the mid 1700's, Scottish merchants had established the towns of Dumfries, Colchester and Occoquan. The inland Piedmont area of Prince William County is of great historical importance as the site of the Manassas Battlefield Park\*, commemorating the two great and tragic engagements. At the time of the First Battle of Manassas, Washingtonians had packed picnic baskets and driven out to watch the Union Army chase untrained "Rebels." Instead, the Union troops fell back; the retreat turned into a rout, then panic for the terrified sightseers who were stunned by the bloody carnage. It was there that General Jackson acquired the nickname of "Stonewall," when another General shouted, "There stands Jackson like a stonewall. Rally behind the Virginians!"

Fairfax County: Fairfax County was cut from Prince William County in 1742 with the first Court House at what is now Tysons Corner. It moved ten years later to a more convenient location in Alexandria. There it remained until it became necessary to seek a new location when Alexandria became part of the District of Columbia. The site selected was at the crossing of the Little River Turnpike (Route 236) and the Ox Road (Route 123) at what is now the city of Fairfax. On display in the well-preserved original Court House are the wills of both George and Martha Washington.

George Mason was the author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights on

which were patterned the Constitution's first ten amendments. His home, Gunston Hall\* is one of the most beautiful in Virginia. It was built between 1755 and 1758, with the interior detailing by the famous indentured architect, William Buckland. The Palladian parlor and the Chinese Chippendale dining room were probably the first in America. The boxwood alley in the garden is famous.

Between Mount Vernon and Gunston Hall is Pohick Church\*, erected in 1769 to replace an earlier wooden structure. George Washington, George Mason and George William Fairfax were members of the building committee. The tombstone of their first pastor, the Reverend Lee Massey, is beneath the pulpit as are his remains.

Loudon County: In 1757, Loudoun County was cut from the western part of Fairfax County, with its northwestern tip extending to Harpers Ferry\* where Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland meet at the junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers. Settlement of Loudoun County started in the early 1700's when Governor Gooch's administration, which began in 1727, ushered in a new era of religious tolerance in Virginia. Many of the first settlers were Quakers from Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York states. On a secondary side road, the milltown of Waterford is "The Village that Time Forgot," hence has retained its rustic charm. It was settled in about 1730 by Pennsylvania Quakers who organized the "Society of Friends" in 1733. The handsome stone Friends' Meeting House, built in 1775, is now a private residence, with gravestones in the garden.

Other new denominations were also attracted to Loudoun County. The nation's first Methodist church was erected in Leesburg in 1766, a fine stone edifice which was demolished in 1900. William Waters, the first native American itinerant Methodist preacher, attended the Sixth Conference of American Methodism (and the first in Virginia) at Leesburg in 1778. He died at his home in McLean, Fairfax County near the Arlington County line in 1827 and is buried nearby.

Middleburg, in lower Loudoun County near the Fauquier County line, was settled in the 1720's, incorporated in 1787. It is noted for its fine early architecture and antiques as well as for its identity with fox hunting and steeplechasing.

During the Civil War, Loudoun County was a rendezvous for Colonel White's "Laurel Brigade" and John S. Mosby's "Grey Ghosts." North of Leesburg just off Route 15 the Battle of Ball's Bluff was fought in October, 1861. It resulted in the killing or wounding of almost a thousand Federal troops and less than two hundred Confederates in a poorly supported offensive by the Union on an almost impregnable objective. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. was wounded there but lived to become a great jurist of the Supreme Court. The National Park Service maintains its smallest national cemetery at the site.

Throughout Loudoun County are a number of picturesque villages with ancient log cabins and stone houses: Hillsboro, Hamilton, Purcellville,

Lovettsville, Round Hill and Lincoln, to name a few. But Loudoun also has a goodly share of handsome and historic mansions on the estates of descendants of colonial Virginia families. The Oatlands\* plantation was cut from a 63,000 acre tract granted in 1776 to Robert "Councillor" Carter. His son, George, built the stately mansion about 1800 and laid out the famous gardens. Morven Park\*, another mansion, was erected about 1825 by Thomas Swann who married Ann Byrd Page. Their son was Governor of Maryland during the Civil War. It was purchased in 1903 by Westmoreland Davis who later became Governor of Virginia. It is now maintained as his memorial. Here is the famous Windmill Antique Carriage Museum; it is also the site of important equestrian events. Another famous mansion, Oak Hill, south of Leesburg, was built by President James Monroe about 1818, designed by Thomas Jefferson and James Hoban. Trees were given by Congressmen of each state and two of the marble mantels were gifts from Lafayette whom Monroe entertained there.

Northern Virginia's heritage is linked with every important event in America's past. Our heritage is the foundation for our future.