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THE SOCIETY OF THE LEES OF VIRGINIA

Descendants of Richard Lee, the Emigrant

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Jan. 5, 1975



An important objective of the Society of the Lees of Virginia, which has never been fulfilled, is the preservation and appropriate marking of LEESYLVANIA, with its virgin forests and historical sites. Correspondence in our archives goes back to 1921, the year that this Society was formed. Inaccessibility, and a succession of ownerships have been major problems. For a resume of the history of LEESYLVANIA, please refer to the booklet, VIRGINIA HOMES OF THE LEES.

The four important sites are:- The Lee-Fairfax burial ground near the old railroad cut, the ridge-top site of the Lee home, the foundations and chimney of the Fairfax home which burned c. 1915, (& foundations of a bank-barn nearby), and the Confederate earthworks at "Freestone Point" where Neabsco Creek enters the Potomac.

According to Virginia law, the burial ground legally belongs to the direct descendants of those buried therein, and access thereto. The first burial (except for possibly servants) was of Lt-Col. Henry Lee II who died 1787; and his wife died five years later. The estate was sold in 1825 to Henry Fairfax. He and his wife were also buried in the Lee-established burial ground.

In December, Mr. Don Curtis alerted me to the interest of the Prince William Bicentennial Commission and the Historical Commis, in LEESYLVANIA. Within the past few years, I have had correspondence with officials of various groups, each involved in different facets of the problem. I therefore suggested that a representative of each group meet at my home for an informal round-table discussion, which would give all, a clearer understanding of the problems, and what we collectively could work out toward a mutual goal. As in all such affairs, some compromise is unavoidable, if a working basis is to be formulated. Obviously, the ideal situation would be for the entire acreage, from the railroad cut to the river, to be preserved as a wilderness area. However, that area uncompasses an acreage which would be valued at approximately five million dollars. Such funds are not available from Prince William County, nor any of the preservation groups. The owners, the American-Hawaiin Steamship Company, are not in a position to make such a tremendous gift to the County nor to the Commonwealth. Whereqs their main office is in California, their

local legal representative is George B. Hartzog, Jr., former Director of the National Park Service. He is therefore keenly interested in both wilderness preservation, and history.

The informal meeting took place in my home on the morning of December 27th, 1974. Present were Mr. Hartzog, Armistead Lee (President of the Lee Society), Bess Sundquist, (Assistant to the Director of the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority), and the representatives of the two Prince William county groups, Don Curtis, Jessie Curtis, Sue Coe, and Mrs. Tommie Burton.

The following facts had to be reckoned with:-

1. It is unlikely that the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority would be in a position to take any positive action regarding the acquisition of this particular property in Prince William County. Its present approved long-range program lists its priorities and commitments to its member jurisdictions. Prince William County is not a member.
2. The Society of the Lees of Virginia operates with a very limited budget; the income from membership dues barely covering operating expenses. Funds from its project account (interest on its Trust Account from Life Memberships) were limited to expenses related to the Lee-Fairfax burial ground.
3. The value of the entire tract had advanced beyond the budgets of Prince William County, the Commonwealth or any organization to purchase the area from the present owners, who, likewise would be unable to afford to give the property for park purposes.
4. Action of some kind should be undertaken immediately, as Leesylvania is of prime importance as a Bicentennial project. A letter of December 20th to me from Junius Fishburne, Jr., Executive Director of the VIRGINIA HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION, reads, in part:-"As the birthplace of Henry Lee III, Charles Lee, Richard Bland Lee, and Edmund Jennings Lee, all prominent Virginians and all noted public servants, this tract of land assumes special significance and certainly requires more than ordinary treatment. I feel its preservation as scenic open land would be an excellent Bicentennial project, and I unhesitatingly give my wholehearted endorsement to this effort. It is especially gratifying at long last to see emerge a real respect for not just the scenic beauty of our land, but its historical associations.... Do let me know the outcome of your meeting and we will work from there. With all good wishes for success, I am..."

CONSTRUCTIVE COMPROMISE SUGGESTIONS

Mr. Hartzog told us that his corporation had changed its original plan of selling one-acre lots to homebuilders, to the development of "cluster-groups" such as are at Merrywood, with the preservation of forest areas between the groups of homes.

The Lee Society will request the corporation to reaffirm the ownership of the cemetery area (as provided by Virginia Statute, that such, with access thereto, remain in the possession of the direct descendants of those buried therein),

by giving to the Lee Society (the membership includes said descendants) a deed to a specified footage. The exact footage shall be determined in the near future following an on-spot re-examination of the cemetery. Whereas the Lee tombstones disappeared long ago, and the Fairfax stones were illegally removed a few years ago and taken to the Leesburg Cemetery, it is understood that the Fairfax burials were in the previously established LeeFairfax burial ground, at the foot of the garden. The topography of the narrow ridge confines the burials within a given area. This would include filing a surveyor's plat.

It was recommended that a brick wall be erected, similar to that which encloses the cemetery near Kilmarnock at Cobbs Hall Plantation, wherein is buried the emigrant ancestor, Richard Lee, who came to Virginia in 1638 and died 1664. The representatives of the Pr. Wm. Co. Bicentennial Commission volunteered to have their Commission construct this wall as their project.

The Society of the Lees of Virginia will erect the base for the memorial tablet, the text of which has been previously approved by the Society.

The Society shall request the establishment of adequate access to the cemetery. Also, the protection of the house-site, in view of its historical value. In regard to the Fairfax ruins, it was suggested that, if it was deemed necessary to remove the chimney as a hazard, that the bricks be used in the construction of the cemetery wall. However, Mrs. Sundquist urged that the American-Hawaiian Steamship Company stabilize the chimney before further deterioration, as a historic and very picturesque and interesting monument, and the foundations of the house and adjacent bank-barn also be stabilized and protected. In this I heartily agree. In Arlington County, the ruins of ABINGDON above National Airport have been preserved by the Assoc. For the Preserv. of Va. Antiquities, and are very similar. Mrs. Sundquist also noted that the Corporation will receive certain benefits from the setting aside of these areas, in addition to enhancing the beauty and interest of their holdings.

The Pr. Wm. representatives assured us of the cooperation of the County in regard to the surveys necessary to carry out the above suggestions. The Confederate earthworks at the point should be included. The Lee Society is deeply grateful to all.

I urge that those who were present at our informal meeting, bring to my attention, any errors, with corrections, and additions, to this report. I feel extremely encouraged that at long last, a cooperative group will accomplish the proper preservation of this important symbol of our Virginia and American heritage!

Respectfully submitted,

Edward Lee Ingham