

Leesylvania May Have Future as

Editor's Note: Celebration today of the 152nd birthday anniversary of Gen. Robert E. Lee turns attention to Leesylvania, one of the lesser-known Northern Virginia memorials of the Confederacy's great military leader. In the following article the author of the SUN's Arlington Heritage series tells the story, past and present, of Leesylvania — the Lee ancestral homestead — which may have a 20th century revival as a resort center.

By ELEANOR LEE TEMPLEMAN

Two existing mansions are well-known memorials to Robert E. Lee.

The first in chronology is "Stratford Hall," the Lee Mansion in Westmoreland County where he was born. Contrary to general belief, this was not Robert's ancestral home, but the estate of his father's first wife, a Lee cousin.

America's national memorial to General Lee is Arlington House, the Curtis-Lee mansion where he resided after his marriage to Mary Ann Randolph Curtis and where they reared their children.

However, few know the history of the ancestral plantation of Robert's branch of the Lee family, Leesylvania at Freestone Point on the Potomac between Colchester (now Woodbridge) and Dumfries. More specifically, between Neabsco and Powell Creeks, from the Potomac on back inland to include lands west of U.S. 1 Highway.

The mansion house was burned in the 1790s. If it were standing today, it would probably be a national shrine and museum, not only as the home of the grandparents of the Confederate General who were historically prominent in their own right, but also as the birthplace of their many illustrious sons.

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

disappeared over a century ago. The Society of the Lees of Virginia is preparing to erect an appropriate bronze plaque, mounted on a "freestone" boulder, with the cooperation of the present owner, the Freestone Holding Company, when it completes landscaping plans.

THE VAST acreage of the Leesylvania tract was patented in 1658 by Jervis Dodson, who shortly conveyed it to Counsiler Henry Corbin of Pecastone Plantation in Westmoreland County. He willed it to his daughter, Laetitia, in 1675, the year following her marriage to Richard Lee II, son of Richard Lee, who had come to Virginia in 1639. 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 at their plantation Machodoc near Hague. Laetitia Lee died in 1706, and her will left the distant plantation to their son Henry Lee I, who was then fifteen. When about 32, he married Mary Bland of Williamsburg and the James River plantations. They also lived in Westmoreland County at 'Lee Hall', part of the Machodoc plantation.

It was not until their son Henry Lee II inherited Leesylvania, upon his father's death in 1747 that a member of the Lee family resided on the plantation which had belonged to the family for four generations, spanning nearly ninety years. Henry Lee II won the hand of Lucy Grymes, the auburn-haired "Lowland Beauty" who had been unsuccessfully courted by George Washington. They were married on December 1, 1753 in Williamsburg at Bruton Parish Church, and soon departed for their new home at Leesylvania plantation up the Potomac in Prince William County.

There he served as presiding Justice, county lieutenant (head of the County Militia), member of the House of Burgesses, and 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 springtime.

Among their children were Robert E. Lee, born at Leesylvania, III ("Light Horse" 1818), cavalry officer in the Revolution, Governor 1791-1794, and Robert E. Lee (1758-1815), Governor's personal secretary, Attorney General of the Commonwealth 1795-1801; Richard Lee (1761-1827), the man representing Virginia 1789-1795; Edmund Jennings Lee (1818-1843), Mayor of Alexandria 1818, eminent lawyer and diplomat. Most notable of his descendants saved the site of the plantation (within present Arlington County) of Fairfax Parish. Their funds, not only for

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Lee's Ancestral Plantation Future as N. Va. Resort

daffodils still bloom in the springtime.

Among their eight children born at Leesylvania were Henry III ("Light Horse Harry" 1756-1818), cavalry colonel in the Revolution, Governor of Virginia 1791-1794, and the father of Robert E. Lee; Charles Lee (1758-1815), George Washington's personal attorney, Attorney General of the United States 1795-1801; Richard Bland Lee (1761-1827), the first Congressman representing Northern Virginia 1789-1795; and the person most responsible for choice of the site of the Federal City; Edmund Jennings Lee (1772-1843), Mayor of Alexandria 1814-1818, eminent lawyer and chairman. Most notably, his legal efforts saved the "Glebe Lands" (within present Arlington County) of Fairfax Parish from confiscation. Their sale provided funds, not only for the purchase

of Charles Lee's Alexandria house at the northeast corner of Washington and Princess Streets as a rectory, but also for the erection of the steeple and churchyard fence at Christ Church, Alexandria.

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. This Lee-Fairfax home burned in 1910, but the ruins of the walls and a chimney can be seen today; also the foundations

of the bank-barn. At the extreme point of land, where Neabasco Creek enters the Potomac, there is a cliff upon which was a Confederate fort during the War Between the States.

Surrounded on three sides by water, "Leesylvania's" rugged terrain, ancient forests, historic sites and breath-taking views, offer unlimited opportunity for a beautiful resort of properly developed with recognition of the desirability of preservation of these features.

The peninsula was purchased two years ago by a group of men with such a project in mind. Nearly \$1 million has already been invested along the Potomac beach in swimming pools, board walks, picturesque picnic areas and other facilities. It is hoped that future plans of the Freestone Holding Company will carry out the finest potentials of creating a recreation area worthy of Leesylvania's historic heritage.

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