

Leesylvania Plantation

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 general 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 Richard Lee, 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 at their Machodoc plantation near The Hague. 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 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 wooed by George 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 (head of the

County militia), 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 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 and 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 churchman. His legal efforts saved from confiscation the "Glebe Lands" of Fairfax Parish (within present Arlington County), as related on page 174.

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. The ruins of the walls and a chimney can be seen today, and the foundations of the bank-barn. 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 breathtaking 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. Nearly one million dollars 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 create a recreation area worthy of Leesylvania's historic heritage.