

Link to Revolutionary War earns Nokesville house recognition

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On Oct. 9, 1793, Colonel Thomas Lee, eldest son of Richard Henry Lee, signer of the Declaration of Independence, might have had a lot on his mind.

One thing he probably wasn't imagining was that 200 years later, the house he lived in would be marked a historic home by those dedicated to honoring his service and that of others like him in the Revolutionary War.

On Saturday, the Elizabeth McIntosh Hammill Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution will hold a ceremony to mark Park Gate, a house in Nokesville where Lee lived from 1790 to 1805, with a plaque.

Park Gate, built between 1735 and 1750, is a Tidewater style house that was home to Lee and his wife Mildred Washington, George's niece. It is one of the few pre-Revolutionary houses left in Prince William County.

During the war, Thomas Lee carried secret documents back and forth between his father and Arthur Lee, the American envoy in France.

He was also an aide-de-camp to George Washington. Lee was forced into early retirement toward the end of a the war when he contracted an illness that ultimately killed him.

Park Gate's grounds include slave quarters and a cemetery, believed to be the final resting place of Mildred and Thomas Lee and their infant son, according to Gail Niedemhofer who bought Park Gate in 1976 with her husband Dean.

Gail Niedemhofer became a member



Plaque donated by the Daughters of the American Revolution traces Park Gate's history.

of the Elizabeth McIntosh Hammill Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution nearly five years ago after promising her aunt and mother before they died that she would do so.

Only descendants of those who served in the Revolutionary War are eligible for membership in the NSDAR. Niedemhofer qualified since she is related to Captain Hananian Lincoln, first cousin of Abraham.

After years of holding DAR meetings at Niedemhofer's house, members approached her and suggested they mark her historic home.

HISTORIC SITE FILE: PARK GATE
PRINCE WILLIAM PUSHER-CHISHOLM SYSTEM
RELIC/Bull Run Reg Lib Manassas, VA



Photos by Keith Walker

Park Gate, a Nokesville house built between 1735 and 1750, was home to Colonel Thomas Lee, who fought in the Revolution. It was restored by its present owners, Gail and Dean Niedemhofer.

18th century home marked

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"I'm thrilled to death, [with] anything that brings more credibility to this house," Niedernhofer said.

One of the goals of the DAR, listed in the Article II, Section II of the bible of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, is "the acquisition and protection of historical spots and the erection of monuments."

Park Gate is registered with the Prince William County Historical Society, the Virginia State Register of Historic Places, the National Register of Historic Places and the National Park Service's Historic American Buildings Inventory.

The Niedernhofers looked for a historic house for two years all over Maryland and Northern Virginia. Their search ended with Park Gate, a house that not only fit their family of five, but was much older than the other houses they had looked at.

In addition, the Niedernhofers were pleased that Park Gate is "historically significant as well as architecturally. So few have that combination," Niedernhofer said.

The enormous undertaking to fix up Park Gate was exhausting for the Niedernhofers who bought the house with no heat, no water and no electricity.

The contractors hired to work on the house told the Niedernhofers they should bulldoze it.

"It would have been cheaper and it would have been a lot faster," laughed Niedernhofer.

Ordering special materials from British Columbia, chasing out a population of rats, and finding themselves on first-name basis with nail experts and people at the National Park Service were just some of the interesting aspects of their renovation experience.

Though the process was a gratifying one, Niedernhofer called it "insane" and said she couldn't do it again.

The thorough job was a once-in-a-lifetime challenge, and according to Niedernhofer, the house is good for another 200 years after the work they put into it.

"It's been very carefully done and very lovingly done," she said.

Getting the house designated was a difficult process — "a maddening, hair-pulling time," Niedernhofer said.

One reason it was hard to get the house designated on the state level was because, like Massachusetts, Virginia has so many historic homes.

The other reason was that the Niedernhofers researched and renovated on their own without any well-known people behind their project, so the process took longer.

In the end, Park Gate was designated on all levels, much to the satisfaction of the Niedernhofers.

"It's sort of the the trophy at the end of the race," Niedernhofer said.

Having the house recognized as a historic site and sharing it with others who appreciate history has brought much pleasure to the family and they feel blessed to live at such a landmark, Niedernhofer said.

"We feel as though we're simply time holders on a piece of county property."