Lee Family Member FAQs

Richard Lee, the Immigrant

Who was RL?

Richard Lee was the ancestor of the Lee Family of Virginia, many of whom played prominent roles in the political and military affairs of the colony and state. Known as Richard Lee the Immigrant, his ancestry is not known with certainty. Since he became one of Virginia's most prominent tobacco growers and traders he probably was a younger son of a substantial family involved in the mercantile and commercial affairs of England. Coming to the New World, he could exploit his connections and capital in ways that would have been impossible back in England.

When was RL Born?

Richard Lee was born about 1613.

Where was RL Born?

Richard Lee was born in England, but no one knows for sure exactly where. Some think his ancestors came from Shropshire while others think Worcester. Indeed, a close friend of Richard Lee said Lee's family lived in Shropshire, as did a descendent in the eighteenth century. Attempts to tie his ancestry to one of the dozen or so Lee families in England (spelled variously as Lee, Lea, Leight, or Lega) that appeared around the time of the Plantagenets have been unsuccessful.

When did RL come to Virginia?

Richard Lee apparently came to the Jamestown colony in late 1639 or early 1640. Tradition says he accompanied Sir Francis Wyatt (c. 1575–1644) who in 1639 was returning to the colony to serve a second term as governor.

Where did RL settle?

When Richard Lee first came to Virginia, he settled at Jamestown, as did almost all colonists. However, by 1640 he had acquired his first tract of land, at Tindal's Point in present-day Gloucester County. Tindal's Point is on the north side of the York River across from where Yorktown was later established. In 1642 Lee patented a 1,000-acre tract on Poropotank Creek, a tributary of the York about twenty miles above the river's mouth. The patent was obtained by Lee's paying for the transportation of seventeen indentured servants to the colony to work the tract. On Poropotank Creek Lee planted tobacco and opened trade with the Indians. Lee moved to the south side of the York after the Indian Massacre of 1644, staying there until 1653 when he moved back to Poropotank Creek. Although his Gloucester lands were declared off limits by a treaty with the Indians, Lee kept accumulating acreage until he had about 1,500 acres. Calling his estate "Paradise," Lee set up an Indian trading post and tobacco warehouse. Later he moved to present-day Northumberland County and, and he also acquired land in present-day Fairfax county. He was living on Dividing Creek near present-day Kilmarnock when he died. By then Lee owned more than 15,000 acres of land in Virginia, land in Maryland, and a large estate outside of London, at Stratford-Langton. He undoubtedly was more wealthy and held
more land than anyone in Virginia.

**What was RL's position in Virginia?**

Richard Lee was appointed to a number of offices in the Jamestown colony, including Clerk of the Quarter Court in 1641; Attorney General in 1643; Sheriff and Burgess of York County in 1646 and 1647, respectively; Secretary of State in 1649; and the Governor's Council in 1651. Lee kept the official records at Jamestown, issuing marriage and travel and hunting licenses, and recording wills and land titles. A royalist loyal to Charles I and a close ally of Governor Sir William Berkeley, Lee is said to have made frequent trans-Atlantic trips, some in the governor's name. On one of those trips, after Charle's execution, Lee purportedly met with Charles II to exchange Berkeley's old commission for a new one and to invite the exiled king to Virginia. When Berkeley was thrown out of office during the Interregnum Lee naturally lost his positions as secretary of state and Councillor, although the records later named Lee as a person "useful and faithful to the Commonwealth."

**Was RL in the military?**

Richard Lee held the office of colonel of the Northumberland militia, the militia being the only military force in the Virginia colony in the seventeenth century.

**Who was RL's wife?**

Richard Lee married Anne Constable (b. 1622), a native of London whom he met in England and who may have come to Virginia when he did. Little is known about Anne, and some have even questioned whether her surname was even Constable. However, if so, Anne was a daughter of Londoner Francis Constable who had connections with Sir John Thorowgood, one of King Charles I's personal attendants. It is unclear whether Richard and Anne married in London or at Jamestown. When Richard died Anne was given a life-right to their home on Dividing Creek, where she is said to be buried. Anne remarried, to Edmund Lister, and disappeared from the records.

**Did RL have children?**

Yes, between 1645 and 1656 Richard and Anne Lee had at least ten children, including two sets of twins. Six boys and two girls survived infancy. They were:

- **John (1645–1673)**, the founder of the Mount Pleasant line of the family. John Lee earned a medical degree from Oxford University.

- **Richard II, known as the Scholar (1647–1714)**, the founder of the Lee Hall line of the family. He was educated at Oxford University and after returning to Virginia held a number of public offices, including a seat on the Governor's Council, burgess, receiver of the Potomac River, colonel of the Westmoreland militia. He also was captured and held hostage during Bacon's Rebellion. Some of Richard Lee's sons also held prominent positions in Virginia, especially Thomas Lee, President of the Council, agent for the Fairfax Proprietary, founder of the Ohio Company, and the builder of Stratford Hall.

- **Francis (c. 1648–1714)**, the family business agent in London. Francis and his wife Tamar, whose surname is not known, had at least seven children, at least one of whom, daughter Anne, survived to adulthood and married Henry Watson. Francis became a successful merchant in England and later the family sent a nephew, Richard III (son of the Scholar) to apprentice with him.

- **William (born c. 1651–c. 1697)**, who died without marrying. William, to whom his father willed his Maryland lands, served as a family business agent in Virginia as well as a justice and a captain in the militia. Like his father, he was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. William caused some excitement when he left his entire estate to a young widow, Mary Heath, who after entering into the inheritance remarried, to one Bartholomew Schreever. William Lee's estate returned to the family after Richard the Scholar convinced the Virginia courts that the immigrant's will had limited his legacies to William for the term of his life only.

- **Hancock (1653–1709)**, the founder of the Ditchley line of the family. Hancock married twice, to Mary Kendall and to Sarah Allerton (b.1671), and was the father of seven children. President Zachary Taylor was the great-grandson of Hancock and Sarah Allerton Lee, and Taylor's daughter, Sarah, was the first wife of Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Another of Hancock's descendant was Supreme Court Justice Edward Douglas White.

- **Elizabeth (Betsy; 1654–1714)**, who married first Leonard Howson (b. 1648) of Northumberland County and after his death John Turberville (1650–1728) of Lancaster County. Betsy Lee and Leonard Howson married in 1670 and had at least five children, including: Elizabeth; William (1672–1702); Leonard, Jr. (b. 1673); Hannah (1677–1713); and John (1670–1714). One of Hannah Kenner's sons married the daughter of George Eskridge, who was Mary Ball's guardian and whom George Washington was
From these children descend the Lee Family, now numbering in the thousands.

**Did RL own slaves?**

Early on, Richard Lee's labor force consisted of white indentured servants who in exchange for seven years work in the tobacco fields had their passage paid to the New World. That changed by 1660 when Lee laid claim to 4,000 acres of land for bringing into the colony eighty black laborers, all of whom presumably were imported as slaves.

**Was RL a good businessman?**

Yes, Richard Lee excelled in business. From his first arrival, Lee sought out governmental and political offices that offered lucrative returns. Although he was extremely successful in acquiring land and settling plantations, which necessitated him bringing to Virginia dozens of indentured servants, he thought of himself as a merchant and trader. He carried on a vibrant fur trade with the Indians and invested in at least two cargo ships, the Susan and the Elizabeth and Mary, that ferried goods and people between England and the New World. In addition, Lee conducted business in London.

**Did RL take part in Bacon's Rebellion?**

Richard Lee was dead by the time Nathaniel Bacon led an army of planters against Governor Sir William Berkeley. Lee's son Richard Lee the Scholar was a strong supporter of Berkeley and hence became the object of the insurgents.

**How did RL die and where is he buried?**

Richard Lee died in 1664. Lee is buried at the cemetery at Cobbs Hall, near the original mansion built site of his grandson, Charles Lee. Lee had stipulated in his *Last Will and Testament* that his remains "be disposed of whether by sea or land according to the opportunity of the place."

**Richard Henry Lee**

**Who was RHL?**

Richard Henry Lee belonged to the famous Revolutionary generation of Virginia Lees that included brothers Thomas Ludwell, Francis Lightfoot, William, and Arthur.

**When and where was RHL born?**

Richard Henry Lee was born on 20 January 1732 at Stratford Hall in Westmoreland County, Virginia.

**Who were RHL's parents?**

Richard Henry Lee's parents were Thomas Lee, president of the Virginia Council of State and the builder of Stratford Hall, and his wife Hannah Harrison Ludwell (1701–1750), the daughter of Hannah Harrison and Philip Ludwell, Jr., of Green Spring. Perhaps the most wealthy and powerful individual in Virginia, Thomas Lee was the principal founder of the Ohio Company and the father of a Revolutionary dynasty that included not only Richard Henry but his brothers Arthur, Francis Lightfoot, and William Lee.

**Where was RHL educated?**

Not much is know about Richard Henry Lee's early schooling other than that he was tutored along with brothers Thomas and Francis, and sister Alice by Alexander White, an Anglican. In 1748 his father sent him to England, where he attended Wakefield Academy in Yorkshire. There he became fluent in Latin and Greek. His formal education ended at age 20, followed by a lengthy tour of northern Europe, and he returned to Virginia in 1753. Back at Stratford Hall he supplemented his education by studying law, government, history, and the classics.

**Did RHL have a physical handicap?**

Yes, Richard Henry Lee was severely wounded during a hunting accident in 1768. While hunting geese his gun exploded and took off the fingers of his left hand. His wound was cauterized with a white-hot iron and healed over a period of months. Subsequently, he wore a black silk cloth or glove to hide the scarred hand, which he used to great effect when giving public speeches. In addition, Lee suffered from gout and arthritis.

**Did RHL have a family?**

On 3 December 1757 Richard Henry Lee married Anne Aylett (d. 1768), a daughter of William and Anne Aylett of King William County, Virginia. Their children included Thomas (1758–1805), Ludwell (1760–1836), Mary (1764–1795), Hannah (1766–1801), and Marybelle (b. and d. 1768). Anne Aylett Lee of pluerisy in December 1768, at age thirty. In the spring or summer of 1769 Lee married widow Anne Gaskins Pinckard, with whom he had another seven children: Anne (1770–1804), Henrietta (Harriotte; 1773–1803), Sarah Caldwell (Sally; 1775–1837), Cassius.
Silas Deane (1779–1850), Francis Lightfoot (1782–1850), and two who died in infancy, born in 1784 and 1786.

**Where did RHL live?**

Richard Henry Lee and his family lived at Stratford Hall until 1763 when they moved to Chantilly-on-the-Potomac, a three-and-a-half-story house he had constructed on a bluff overlooking the Potomac River as it flowed into Currioman Bay. Situated on 500 acres of Lee lands adjacent to Stratford Hall, Chantilly was said to have a finer view of the Potomac River than the grander Stratford. At Chantilly Lee grew tobacco, corn, and wheat and raised livestock. Chantilly's outbuildings included a kitchen, a barn, a dairy, a blacksmith shop, and various stables. A boat dock constructed at nearby creeks was christened Chantilly Landing.

**Did RHL own slaves?**

Yes, as did most of his family. Richard Henry Lee inherited forty slaves at the death of father Thomas Lee in 1750. By his own death in 1794 that number had increased to sixty-three. Lee's slaves consisted of laborers and house workers and a few skilled craftsmen. Lee opposed the slave system, however, and his first motion in the Virginia House of Burgesses, in 1758, was one protesting slavery and the slave trade.

**Did RHL have an interest in western lands?**

Yes, his father Thomas Lee had been an original founder of the Ohio Company, and his shares had devolved to his children. In 1759 he became one of the founders of the town of Warrenton; the county seat of Faquier was situated on his lands. In 1763 Richard Henry Lee and four of his brother joined George Washington in organizing the Mississippi Adventure, a land company that hoped to secure a Royal grant of two and a half million acres along the Mississippi River. The Proclamation of 1763 squelched both the Ohio Company and the Mississippi Adventure, however.

**Did RHL have a military career?**

Richard Henry Lee raised a volunteer militia company during the French and Indian War. He offered his company's service to British General Edward Braddock in March 1755 but was turned down. He later served as captain of a volunteer company of light horse and as a colonel of the militia. Most of his early work in the House of Burgesses revolved around supplying the Virginia militia, and in 1779 and 1781 he took an active part in organizing the defense of the Potomac against British incursions.

**What did RHL's political career consist of?**

Richard Henry Lee's political career began in 1755 when he was appointed a justice of the peace in Westmoreland County. Three years later he was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses, and served in that body until its disbandment during the Revolutionary War. Afterwards he was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates in 1777, 1780, 1785.

Lee served in the Continental Congress from 1774 to 1779, 1784 to 1785, and in 1787. He served as president pro tempore during the Second Congress and as president of Congress from 1784 to 1785. He served in the United States Senate from 1789 to 1792.

Richard Henry Lee often found himself serving on important committees, some of which thrust him into the center of political controversy. In 1757 he joined forces with Virginia Governor Robert Dinwiddie in opposing the powerful speaker and treasurer of Virginia, John Robinson, who was misappropriating colonial funds to the advantage of his political cronies. Lee introduced the motion in the House of Burgesses to appoint a committee to inquire into the state of the treasury, leading to the separation of the two offices.

In 1764 Lee led Virginia resistance to the Declaratory Act and was the leading member of the special committee charged with drafting addresses to the king and the House of Lords protesting the Act.

The following year, 1765, Lee opposed the Stamp Act, and drafted the Westmoreland Articles of Association formed to oppose it.

Lee opposed the Townshend duties of 1767 that placed a tax on tea, and introduced a motion in the House of Burgesses calling for a petition to the king outlining the colonies' grievances.

In 1768 Lee suggested that the American colonies organize committees of correspondence as a way of facilitating colonial communication and coordinating colonial resistance against Great Britain.

Lee wrote a report for the House of Burgesses on the subject of opening up navigation of the Potomac River to Fort Cumberland, Maryland, in 1769.

When the first Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in 1774, Richard Henry Lee attended as one of the seven-man Virginia delegation. In congress he served on dozens of committees and earned a reputation as a fine orator and writer.

In 1776 Lee was appointed to the committee designated to draft a Declaration of Rights of the Colonies. Lee introduced the resulting bill, the Declaration of Independence, on 7 June 1776. The bill was adopted on 2 July and ratified on 4 July 1776.

At the same time that the declaration committee was considering its important work, Lee was with George Wythe drafting a new state constitution for Virginia. Immediately after the signing of the Declaration Lee departed for Virginia to lobby for their plan, and the Virginia Convention ultimately ratified a similar proposal.
The following year, Lee led the effort in Congress to recall and investigate the American commissioner in Paris, Silas Deane, entering a controversy that lasted for years.

That same year, Lee wrote the first national Thanksgiving Day proclamation, issued on 31 October 1777.

In 1777 and 1778 Lee was drawn into the controversy surrounding the so-called Conway Cabal, an effort to remove George Washington as commander of the Continental Army. Although Lee was a friend and avid supporter of Washington, Lee had to defend himself against charges that he was taking part in the plot when a series of forged letters was circulated purporting to show Lee's involvement.

Richard Henry Lee was an antifederalist who tended to support the proposed Constitution, provided it could be amended before being voted upon. To that end he proposed amendments and supported the Bill of Rights, but he did not attend the Constitutional Convention. He did accept, however, the office of Senator under the new government, and in fact gained more votes than any other contender. In the Senate Lee guarded the antifederalist positions but was known as a moderate with whom one could compromise.

The above is a bare-boned outline Richard Henry Lee's political career. He was an energetic and important member of every body that he served in, and his oratory skills earned him the title of Cicero of the American Revolution.

**When and where did RHL die?**

Richard Henry Lee died at Chantilly, his estate in Westmoreland County, Virginia, on 19 June 1794. The last two years of his life he was greatly enfeebled, and for the last six months of his life he mostly was confined to his home.

**Where is RHL buried?**

In the so-called Burnt House Field Graveyard at the Lee Family estate, Mount Pleasant, in Westmoreland County, along with his parents and grandparents, and between his two wives.

**Is there a good biography of RHL?**


**William Lee**

**Who was WL?**

William Lee belonged to the famous Revolutionary generation of Virginia Lees that included brothers Thomas Ludwell, Richard Henry, Francis Lightfoot, and Arthur. After being trained for a career in business he successfully established himself as a merchant in London, where he became a keen observer of revolutionary politics and held public offices. Congress appointed him to various European diplomatic posts, and is most remembered for the role he and his brother Arthur played in the Silas Deane affair.

**When and where was WL born?**

William Lee was born in 1739 at Stratford Hall in Westmoreland County, Virginia.

**Who were WL's parents?**

William Lee’s parents were Thomas Lee, president of the Virginia Council of State and the builder of Stratford Hall, and his wife Hannah Harrison Ludwell (1701–1750), the daughter of Hannah Harrison and Philip Ludwell, Jr., of Green Spring. Perhaps the most wealthy and powerful individual in Virginia, Thomas Lee was the principal founder of the Ohio Company and the father of a Revolutionary dynasty that included not only William but his brothers Arthur, Francis Lightfoot, and Richard Henry Lee.

**Where was WL educated?**

Not much is known about William Lee’s schooling other than that he was along with some of his siblings tutored by a Scots clergyman named Craig. Instead of attending college he learned business from his elder brother Philip ("Colonel Phil") Ludwell Lee, the inheritor of Stratford, between 1763 and 1768. To supplement that training William for a while he served as secretary for a group of land speculators calling themselves the Mississippi Company.

**Did WL have a family?**
On 7 March 1769 William Lee married Hannah Philippa Ludwell (d. 1784), a rich cousin whose inheritance included Green Spring, the 7,000-acre estate of Governor Sir William Berkeley that had passed into the Ludwell family through the marriage of Berkeley’s widow, Lady Frances Culpeper Berkeley (b. 1634), to Philip Ludwell, the Virginia colony’s Secretary of State and later governor of Albemarle. Hannah and William had several children, three of whom survived to adulthood, William Ludwell (1775–1803), Portia (1777–1840), who married William Hodgson, and Cornelia (1780–1818), who married John Hopkins. In addition, while in London Lee brought into his family and educated the two eldest sons of his brother Richard Henry, Thomas and Ludwell. William and Hannah’s entire married life was spent in England, for she died there while Lee was making preparations in Virginia for their removal to Green Spring.

**Why did WL live in England?**

William Lee went to London in 1769 to open up a commercial house. He hoped to make his fortune, operating in part in the name of the Lee family, by handling trade for aristocratic Virginians. Once in England Lee entered into a tobacco trading partnership with Stephen Sayre and Dennys De Berdts, a father and son team that soon drew Lee into the political arena—all became ardent supporters of John Wilkes (1725–1798), the English radical, politician, and journalist. After a somewhat shaky beginning, Lee, with the assistance of his wife Hannah, built up a respected and lucrative business, operating out of their London home at 33 Tower Hill. While in England Lee left his Virginia estate in the hands of overseers, who were in turn loosely watched over by Lee’s brother Francis Lightfoot.

**Was WL elected Sheriff of London?**

Yes, William Lee and his business partner Stephen Sayre were both elected Sheriffs of London in July 1773. In 1775 Lee also was elected an Alderman of the City of London, a post granted for life. The only American ever to hold that distinction, Lee resigned the office in 1780. Lee made a bid for a seat in Parliament in 1774, but lost the election. After his return to Virginia in 1783 Lee was elected to the Virginia Senate.

**What was WL’s official role in Europe?**

William Lee represented the new U.S. government in several official capacities while in Europe. Early in 1777 Lee was named, along with Thomas Morris, co-agent for the Continental Congress’s European business interests. (Both Lee and Morris had brothers on the commercial committee, which made the appointments—Richard Henry Lee and Robert Morris.) William went to Paris (taking along his family) in June 1777 to look into Congress’s accounts, and after finding them in a state of confusion he, with the help of brother Arthur, succeeded in casting doubts about how Congress’s representative, Silas Deane, was handling his secret mission to France on behalf of Congress. Meanwhile, Congress had appointed Lee commissioner to Prussia and Austria, in May 1777, but Lee quickly discovered that neither country was receptive to diplomacy. Lee then turned to Holland hoping to negotiate a treaty of commerce, the draft of which eventually became the cause of hostilities between the Dutch and the British. Congress eventually dismissed William from all his diplomatic posts as a result of the fall-out from the Silas Deane affair.

**What was WL’s role in the Silas Deane affair?**

After being appointed the Continental Congress’s joint commercial agent for its European affairs, William Lee traveled to Paris in June 1777, where to his dismay he found the financial accounts a chaotic mess and Congress’s representatives unwilling to cooperate with him. William began to suspect foul play on the part of Silas Deane (1737–1789), a Connecticut lawyer and former delegate to the Continental Congress whom Congress had sent to France as a special secret ambassador charged with procuring men, arms, supplies, and loans for the American war effort. Lee accused Deane of profiting illegally from his mission and began to write home about it, directing his letters to his brother Richard Henry Lee, one of Congress’s most powerful members. William and his brother Arthur eventually went so far as to accuse Deane of treason and finally succeeded in stirring up so much trouble that Congress recalled Deane and held an official inquiry into his actions while in France. In his own defense Deane accused Lee brothers William, Arthur, Richard Henry, and Francis Lightfoot and others of malefeasance and drew further ire upon himself—including that of Tom Paine, who was immensely popular at the time and wrote an essay in defense of the Lees—although he did succeed in having Congress dismiss William and Arthur from their posts in 1779.

**Did WL start the Anglo-Dutch War?**

In a sense, William Lee could be said to have started the war between Great Britain and the Netherlands in 1780. Lee with Dutch merchant Jan de Neufville co-drafted a commercial treaty between the United States and the Netherlands that was discovered by the British when they captured a vessel carrying former Continental Congress president Henry Laurens to the Netherlands on a diplomatic mission. Although no treaty was ever ratified, or even seriously negotiated by the governments of the U.S. and the Netherlands, the draft treaty was used by Great Britain as an excuse for war in December 1780.

**Did WL own slaves?**

William Lee inherited no slaves from his father’s estate but when he married his cousin Hannah Philippa Ludwell in 1769 a number of slaves came under his control. After the Revolutionary War Lee’s attitude toward the slaves was to treat them “as human beings whom Heaven has placed under my care not only to minister to my luxury, but to contribute to their happiness.” As a result, Lee endeavored to apprentice his slaves to learn trades.

**When and where did WL die?**
After retiring to Green Spring in 1783 William Lee lived for about a dozen years, dying on 27 June 1795. Lee began going blind about 1785, and the last few years of his life he was completely dependent upon his son, William Ludwell Lee.

Where is WL buried?
William Lee was buried alongside his Ludwell ancestors at the Jamestown churchyard burial grounds.

Is there a good biography of WL?
Yes, William Lee: Militia Diplomat, by Alonzo T. Dill (Virginia Independence Bicentennial Commission, 1976) is a good short overview of William Lee's life and political career.

Arthur Lee

Who was AL?
Arthur Lee belonged to the famous Revolutionary generation of Virginia Lees that included brothers Thomas Ludwell, Richard Henry, Francis Lightfoot, and Arthur. After being trained for a career in business he successfully established himself as a merchant in London, where he became a keen observer of revolutionary politics and held public offices. Congress appointed him to various European diplomatic posts, and is most remembered for the role he and his brother William played in the Silas Deane affair.

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Arthur Lee was born in 1740 at Stratford Hall in Westmoreland County, Virginia.

Who were AL's parents?
Arthur Lee's parents were Thomas Lee, president of the Virginia Council of State and the builder of Stratford Hall, and his wife Hannah Harrison Ludwell (1701-1750), the daughter of Hannah Harrison and Philip Ludwell, Jr., of Green Spring. Perhaps the most wealthy and powerful individual in Virginia, Thomas Lee was the principal founder of the Ohio Company and the father of a Revolutionary dynasty that included not only Arthur but his brothers William, Francis Lightfoot, and Richard Henry Lee.

Where was AL educated?
Not much is known about Arthur Lee's early schooling other than that he was along with some of his siblings tutored at Stratford Hall. His formal education took place at Eton and Edinburgh, where he took a medical degree. He practiced medicine briefly in Williamsburg before returning to Enland, where he took a law degree, studying at Lincoln's Inn and the Middle Temple. After being admitted to the British bar he practiced law in London.

Did AL have a family?
Arthur Lee never married and had no children.

Why did AL live in England?
Arthur Lee went to London in 1769 to open up a commercial house. He hoped to make his fortune, operating in part in the name of the Lee family, by handling trade for aristocratic Virginians. Once in England Lee entered into a tobacco trading partnership with Stephen Sayre and Dennys De Berdts, a father and son team that soon drew Lee into the political arena - all became ardent supporters of John Wilkes (1725 - 798), the English radical, politician, and journalist. After a somewhat shaky beginning, Lee, with the assistance of his wife Hannah, built up a respected and lucrative business, operating out of their London home at 33 Tower Hill. While in England Lee left his Virginia estate in the hands of overseers, who were in turn loosely watched over by Lee's brother Francis Lightfoot.

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Where is AL buried?

Arthur Lee was buried alongside his Ludwell ancestors at the Jamestown churchyard burial grounds.

Is there a good biography of AL?


Light-Horse Harry Lee

What was LHHL's full name?

Henry Lee III, although as an adult Lee routinely signed his name Henry Lee, Jr. His earned his famous moniker "Light-Horse Harry" for his Revolutionary War cavalry exploits.

When and where was LHHL born?

Light-Horse Harry Lee was born on 29 January 1756 at Leesylvania, an estate of 3,500 acres in Prince William County, Virginia.

Who were LHHL's parents?

Henry Lee II (1730–1787) of Leesylvania, and Lucy Grymes (1734–1792), the "lowland beauty" who had enamfated a young George Washington.

Where was LHHL educated?

Light-Horse Harry Lee was tutored until age fourteen when he entered the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University). Lee, whose classmates included James Madison, James Monroe, and Aaron Burr, graduated from college in 1773. Although he planned to travel to London to study law, the threat of hostilities between the colonies and Great Britain caused Lee to abandon the idea.

Did LHHL have a family?

Light-Horse Harry Lee married his second cousin Matilda Ludwell Lee (1764–1790) in April 1782. The daughter of Philip Ludwell Lee (1727–1775) and Elizabeth Steptoe, Matilda was known as the "Divine Matilda" and called the "Queen of Stratford" by Lee. Three children were born to Light-Horse Harry and Matilda: Philip (1784–1794), Lucy (1786–1860), and Henry Lee IV (1787–1837). Three years after Matilda's death Lee married Ann Hill Carter (1773–1829) of Shirley. Residing at Stratford Hall, which Matilda had inherited before her death, Lee and his second wife had six children: an infant who was born and died in 1796, Charles Carter (1798–1871), Anne Kinloch (1800–1864), Sydney Smith (1802–1869), Robert Edward (1807–1870), and Mildred (1811–1856).

What did LHHL's military career consist of?

Although Light-Horse Harry Lee tried to enter the military in 1775, it was 1776 before he joined the Virginia Light Dragoons as a captain in the regiment of his kinsman, Colonel Theodorick Bland. His company was taken into the Continental line in September 1777. In 1778 he was
Did LHHL have any political service?

Light-Horse Harry Lee served in the Confederation Congress from 1785 to 1788. He also served three one-year terms as governor of Virginia, from 1791 to 1794. He was a member of the United States Congress from 1799 to 1801. Lee was an avid federalist and as a member of the Virginia Ratifying Convention supported the adoption of the United States Constitution. In 1808 and 1812 Lee unsuccessfully sought James Madison's assistance in finding him a federal appointment outside of the United States.

Did LHHL write the famous eulogy of George Washington?

Yes, immediately upon hearing of his former commander's death. John Marshall is sometimes mistakenly credited with writing the eulogy because he used Lee's famous words, "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen", when introducing a memorial resolution to Washington in the United States Congress on 16 December 1799. But Lee wrote the eulogy several days earlier and delivered it in person to a joint session of Congress in Philadelphia on 26 December.

Was LHHL a good businessman?

No. Light-Horse Harry Lee tended to be an overly optimistic visionary prone to take extraordinary risks that had little chance of success, especially given his inexperience in business matters. Lee's deficiencies in managing his financial affairs apparently did not go unnoticed by Lee's fathers-in-law, for although each made substantial bequeaths to their daughters, both excluded Lee from controlling those inheritances. Lee tended to speculate in land schemes at the expense of running the Stratford plantation. In 1790 Lee attempted to establish a community at the Great Falls of the Potomac River, named Matildaville in honor of his first wife, but a lack of capital and the slowness of constructing the Potomac Canal ultimately led to its failure. In 1795 Lee contracted to purchase George Washington's holdings in the Dismal Swamp Company and entered partnerships to purchase 200,000 acres of Potomac River land and a million acres of cheap backcountry land. Despite his unbounded optimism and energy, and another decade of enterprising land schemes, he ultimately defaulted. By April 1809 Lee was bankrupt and considered by many to be a cheat and swindler, and he was forced into debtors prison. He was placed in the Westmoreland County, Virginia, jail, and later transferred to the jail in Spotsylvania County, where he remained until March 1810.

Did LHHL take part in the War of 1812?

Not as a military officer, as Light-Horse Harry Lee's military commission had expired a decade earlier. Lee did, however, freely write letters to President James Madison filled with advice about the conflict. Lee spent most of the period of the war in the West Indies, and in 1813 he drafted a peace treaty which he sent to the British governor of Barbados, Sir George Beckwith, and to United States Secretary of State James Monroe.

Did LHHL get beaten by a mob?

Yes, while trying to protect his friend, Alexander Contee Hanson, editor of The Federal Republican, from a pro-war mob in 1814. Light-Horse Harry Lee received severe injuries from which he never recovered.

Did LHHL write a book?

Yes, while in prison for debt Light-Horse Harry Lee wrote his Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States (2 vols.; Philadelphia, 1812), considered at its publication and ever since to be one of the best military histories written by a Revolutionary War participant. Lee's work was republished by Peter Force in 1827, and in 1869 Confederate General Robert E. Lee prepared a new edition that included a biography of his father. In 1808 Lee also wrote a pamphlet, published anonymously the following year, attacking Thomas Jefferson's presidency, and in 1814 an account of the Baltimore riot in which he was injured was published under his name but apparently not authored by him.

When and where did LHHL die?

Light-Horse Harry Lee died on 25 March 1818 at Cumberland Island, Georgia, while visiting Dungeness, the home of the widow of his former Revolutionary War commander, Nathanael Greene. Lee was on his way home to Virginia from the West Indies, where he had been for several years.

Where is LHHL buried?

Light-Horse Harry Lee was buried on Cumberland Island, Georgia, with military honors provided by an American fleet stationed nearby. His remains were moved to the Lee Family crypt at the Lee Chapel, Washington and Lee University, in Lexington, Virginia, in 1913.

Is there a good biography of LHHL?


Robert Lee

What was REL's full name?

The name given to Robert E. Lee at birth was Robert Edward Lee. When Lee and his wife Mary gave the same name to their sixth child (and youngest son) at his birth in 1843, Lee became a Senior, although he continued to sign his name "R. E. Lee" — as he had done since his youth. Robert E. Lee, Jr., was called "Rob" by his family and friends.

When and where was REL Born?

Robert E. Lee was born on 19 January 1807 at Stratford Hall, the Lee Family estate on the Potomac River in Westmoreland County, Virginia. Robert was the last Lee born at Stratford Hall to survive infancy, as his family moved to Alexandria in 1810. Stratford Hall passed out of the Lee family in 1822 when Robert's half brother Henry Lee sold the estate to William C. Somerville of Maryland.

When did REL's ancestors come to Virginia?

On his father's side, Robert E. Lee's earliest ancestors were Richard Lee (c.1613–1664), a London merchant called the Immigrant, and his wife, Anne Constable, also of London. The young couple came to Virginia about 1639, and in 1640 Lee patented land at Tindal's Point in present-day Gloucester County, on the north side of the York River directly across from where Yorktown was later established. Two years later, in 1642, Lee patented a thousand-acre tract on Poropotank Creek, a tributary of the York about twenty miles above the river's mouth. Richard served as Secretary to Virginia Governor Sir William Berkeley.

On his mother's side, Robert descended from John Carter (d. 1669), an English immigrant who sailed to Jamestown in 1625 on board the Prosperous. Within a year of his arrival at James Fort, John Carter was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. In 1642 he settled Corotoman on a 13,500-acre tract of land that he patented in the Northern Neck. His son Robert "King" Carter (1663–1732), born to John and Sarah Ludlow (d. 1668), the fourth of his five wives, was during his lifetime the most wealthy and powerful man in the American colonies. King Carter, who ultimately owned some 300,000 acres of land, was Robert E. Lee's great-great-grandfather.

What was REL's coat of arms?

When looking to have a seal cut in January 1839, Robert E. Lee discussed the subject of the Lee Family coat of arms in some depth and according to him the coat and crest had by then deviated quite erroneously from its original 1660 grant. The crest most used by the Lee Family today depicts a shield with four quarter shields, a squirrel above the shield, and the Latin motto, Non Incautus Futuri (Not unmindful of the future) below the shield.

How tall was REL and how much did he weigh?

According to Lee biographer Douglas Southall Freeman, Robert E. Lee at age 54 was five feet, eleven inches tall and weighed 170 pounds. Two years later, in March 1863, a physician recorded that Lee was at that time five feet, ten and one-half inches tall and weighed 165 pounds.

Who were REL's parents?

Robert E. Lee's mother was Ann Hill Carter (1773–1829), a daughter of one of Virginia's most wealthy planters, Charles Carter of Shirley in Charles City County. Shirley had its origin in Shirley Hundred, settled in 1613 as the earliest plantation outside Jamestown. Ann's grandmother Elizabeth Hill of Shirley had married John Carter III, the son and heir to most of the lands of Ann's great-grandfather, Robert "King" Carter (1663–1732) of Corotoman.
Lee's father was Henry Lee III (1756–1818), popularly known as Light-Horse Harry because of his prominent service as a cavalry officer in the American Revolutionary War. Light-Horse Harry was born at Leesylvania near Dumfries in Prince William County, Virginia. A 1773 graduate of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) and first cousin to the famous Lee brothers of the Revolution, Richard Henry, William, and Arthur, Light-Horse Harry served in the Continental Congress (1785–1788), as governor of Virginia (1791–1794), as commander of the forces that put down the Whiskey Rebellion (1794), and as a member of the U.S. Congress (1799–1801). Light-Horse Harry was a great friend of George Washington, who after his retirement from the presidency called Lee the most capable military officer in America. When Washington died in 1799 Lee drafted for Congress the famous tribute "First in War, First in Peace, First in the Hearts of His Countrymen." While in prison for debt, Lee wrote a famous military history, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department (1812).

After their marriage at Shirley on 18 June 1793, Light-Horse Harry and Ann Hill Carter lived at Stratford Hall, which had come to Lee upon the death of his first wife, Matilda Lee (d. 1790). Robert was his parents' fifth child.

**What did REL think of this father?**

Robert E. Lee was 11 years old when his father Light-Horse Harry Lee died in 1818 and as a result he soon became his mother's confidante, and as a young adult Lee became a main source of support for his mother and his siblings. Robert was aware of his father's failures in business, his imprisonment for debt, and the resulting loss of the family estate Stratford Hall, and some have speculated that Robert's life-long attention to duty and avoidance of anything remotely scandalous were reactions to his perceptions of his father's weaknesses, or that he entered the military in an effort to emulate his father in the one role that Light-Horse Harry could be considered to have been a model.

Robert chose not to discuss his father's weaknesses and failures in writing, and this much is certain, that he respected and honored his father's memory. After the Civil War Robert prepared a new edition of his father's Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department (1869), introducing it with a biography of Light-Horse Harry that he wrote specially for the republication.

Robert twice visited his father's grave at the home of Revolutionary War General Nathanael Greene on Cumberland Island, Georgia, the first time in January 1862 when Robert was strengthening the Confederate defenses of Savannah, and the final time in the spring of 1870 when he toured the south to visit the grave of his daughter.

**Where did REL live as a child?**

Robert E. Lee lived at three different homes as a child. He was born at Stratford Hall, a Lee Family estate in Westmoreland County, Virginia, and lived there until 1810, when the family moved to Alexandria, Virginia. In Alexandria the family lived first at 611 Cameron Street, in Old Town. About 1811 or 1812 the Lees moved to 607 Oronoco Street, a house now known as the Boyhood Home of Robert E. Lee. The Boyhood Home had been purchased in 1799 by William Fitzhugh of Chatham, who was the grandfather of Robert's future wife, and in fact the wedding of Robert's future parents-in-law married took place in the home's parlor in 1804. (Fitzhugh was a prominent revolutionary and political ally of George Washington and in fact was the last person that Washington visited before his unexpected death in December 1799.) The Boyhood Home was across the street from a house built by Philip Richard Fendall, a cousin of Lee's father, known now as the Lee-Fendall House Museum and Garden (614 Oronoco Street).

**Where did REL go to school?**

About 1819 or 1820 Robert E. Lee entered Alexandria Academy, a small school that had been established in 1785 with George Washington among its first trustees. (In fact, Washington when making out his will in 1799 made a bequest to the school.) Situated in a one-story brick building on Washington Street, between Duck and Wolf, Alexandria Academy was a public school for white boys led by an Irishman, William B. Leary. The curriculum was classical and young Robert learned Greek, Latin, algebra, and geometry. He excelled in all, especially mathematics, and completed his study in 1823. Leary testified to his student's abilities when recommending Lee for an appointment to West Point:

> Robert Lee was formerly a pupil of mine. While under my care I can vouch for his correct and gentlemanly deportment. In the various branches, to which his attention has been applied, I flatter myself that his information will be found adequate to the most sanguine expectations of his friends. With me he has read all the minor classics in addition to Homer & Longinus, Tacitus & Cicero. He is well versed in arithmetic, Algebra & Euclid. In regard to what he has read with me I am certain that when examined he will neither disappoint me or his friends. W. Leary

Although Lee may have thought about attending medical school or entering the clergy, he apparently did not consider those options seriously, setting his sights instead on a military career. For that he needed an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, which was best won through the assistance of prominent persons. Accordingly, Lee sought and obtained letters of recommendation from not only his former teacher but from Congressman R. S. Garnett and one written by U.S. Representative Charles Fenton Mercer and signed by Mercer and other Congressmen: Virginia Representative George Tucker, Virginia Senator James Barbour (said to be John C. Calhoun's likely successor as Secretary of War), Kentucky Senator Richard H. Johnson (later Vice-President under Martin Van Buren), and Tennessee Senators William Kelly and Henry Johnson (soon after governor of Louisiana). Additionally, Robert's brothers Charles Carter Lee and Henry Lee wrote letters testifying to Robert's personal character. Finally, Lee presented these letters of support in person to Secretary Calhoun, armed with a letter of introduction from William H. Fitzhugh of Ravensworth. As a result, Robert was appointed to West Point on 11 March 1824, with admission scheduled for 1 July 1825. Lee's acceptance of the appointment is the earliest surviving letter of his to survive. Lee graduated from West Point in 1829.
Was REL first in his class at West Point?

No, Robert E. Lee graduated second in his class at West Point. Graduating ahead of Lee was Charles Mason (1804–1882), a New York native who resigned his commission in the engineers corp after two years and became a patent lawyer in Wisconsin. Watson served on the bench of the Iowa Territory Supreme Court until Iowa became a state in 1846. While an opponent of slavery, Mason was also a Copperhead (peace Democrat) who did not serve in the military during the Civil War.

Lee's son, George Washington Custis Lee, graduated first in his class in 1854, exactly twenty-five years after the graduation of his more famous father.

Did REL earn no demerits at West Point?

Robert E. Lee was a model cadet at West Point and attended the school for four years without earning any demerits or other infractions. He was not the only student in the school's history to do so, and in fact four others of Lee's class also went through their four years without earning demerits, but it was nevertheless a notable accomplishment.

When did REL first have his picture painted?

The earliest known portrait of Robert E. Lee was painted by William E. West of Baltimore, who painted portraits of Lee and his wife Mary Anna Randolph Custis in 1838. At that time Lee was a 31-year-old captain serving in the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers at Washington, D.C., and he posed in military attire. They portraits were considered wedding portraits although by that time the Lees had been married for several years. A portrait of Lee at the time he served as commander of Camp Cooper on the Clear Fork of the Brazos in Texas resemble the West pose.

Lee After the War, by Matthew Brady

When Lee became famous he was often photographed. Celebrated photographers Mathew Brady and Julian Vannerson (b. 1826), a Confederate Army officer, both made historic photographs of Lee, and Michael Miley (1841–1918) of Rockbridge County, Virginia, became the "official" family photographer after Lee moved to Lexington. Miley photographed not only Lee and his family but family artifacts as well as Lee's funeral in Lexington in 1870. Numerous carte de visites (CDV) of General Lee, many of which were signed by him, have survived. Measuring approximately two and one-eighth by three and one-half inches, such relics often fetch thousands of dollars.

Who was REL’s wife?

Robert E. Lee's wife was Mary Anna Randolph Custis (1808–1873), the great granddaughter of Martha Washington. Mary's father, George Washington Parke "Wash" Custis (1781–1857), was a few months old when he went to live with his grandparents at Mount Vernon following the death of his father John Parke Custis during the siege of Yorktown. Mary's mother was Mary Lee Fitzhugh "Molly" Custis (1788–1853), a daughter of William Fitzhugh (1741–1809) of Chatham, the grandson of Robert "King" Carter of Corotoman. Mary Custis was born at a Clarke County estate owned by relatives of her mother but she was raised at Arlington House, the Custis mansion high on the bluff across the Potomac River from the Federal City. As the only surviving of the four children born to her parents, Mary was heir to the Arlington estate.
As was the custom for young girls of standing in the early nineteenth century, Mary Custis was tutored at home. She was given a classical education and became proficient in several languages, including French, Greek, and Latin, and throughout her life she was a great reader and an inveterate letter writer. She also was, like her father, a self-taught painter, and late in life she often hand-tinted cartes-de-visite of famous husband before giving them to friends.

As a young lady, Mary Custis was courted by many acceptable suitors, including Sam Houston, the hero of Texas who ironically was born in Virginia a few miles away from where Mary would spend the last years of her life. It is not known exactly when Mary and her future husband began their relationship—they knew one another as children—but by December 1828 Mary and Robert were serious about one another and by the summer of 1830 Lee had made a proposal of marriage. The couple's wedding ceremony took place on 30 June 1831 in the family parlour at Arlington House, and their marriage, despite the sorrows of separation, illness, death, and war, was a successful one. Mary gave birth to seven children, all of whom lived to adulthood, and six of whom outlived she and Robert.

Mary Custis Lee was a devout Episcopalian, and her strong faith no doubt helped sustain her in her decades-long struggle with degenerative rheumatoid arthritis. She relied on crutches for as long as she could, but by the time war forced her to leave Arlington House in the spring of 1861 she was confined to a wheelchair. Arlington was confiscated by the federal government during the war and she returned only once, in the months before her death, for a brief visit. Unable to leave her carriage and go inside, she described the event in a letter to a friend:

_I rode out to my dear old home, so changed it seemed but as a dream of the past. I could not have realized that it was Arlington but for the few old oaks they had spared, & the trees planted on the lawn by the Gen'l & myself which are raising their tall branches to the Heaven which seems to smile on the desecration around them._

She died five months later, having survived her husband by almost three years.
Mary Lee assembled her father's memoirs published them in 1859 as Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington, by his Adopted Son, George Washington Parke Custis, with a Memoir of the Author by his Daughter. The book has been a mainstay for anyone interested in the family and personal life of George Washington.

**Was REL and his wife related?**

Yes, Robert E. Lee and Mary Anna Randolph Custis shared the same great-great-grandfather—Robert "King" Carter of Corotoman. Both Robert and Anna each descended from Carter through their mothers.

**Where did REL and his wife live?**

Robert E. Lee and his wife Mary Anna Randolph Custis always thought of Arlington, the home of Mary's parents, as their own home. However, because of Lee's military career as an engineer, they lived in many places over the course of their marriage, some for extended lengths of time. Beginning shortly after their wedding in June 1831 the young couple occupied a small house at Old Point Comfort, Virginia, where Lee had been ordered to assist in overseeing the construction of Fort Monroe. They lived at Old Point Comfort until 1834 when Lee was ordered to the Federal City, and they lived at Arlington.

After Robert E. Lee's stint in Washington, his pre-Civil War military destinations included Ohio, Michigan, St. Louis, Mexico, Texas, Baltimore, and New York, and his wife and children accompanied him when they could. During the Civil War, he was separated from his family as he saw service in South Carolina, Georgia, and in the field with the Army of Northern Virginia, and Mary lived mostly in Richmond. After the war, with Arlington confiscated by the federal government, Robert and Mary made their final home at Washington College in Lexington, Virginia.

**What was REL's first military assignment?**

Robert E. Lee's first assignment after graduating from West Point in 1829 was to report for duty at Cockspur Island, in the Savannah River, Georgia, to serve in the corps of engineers. Twelve miles down river from Savannah, the narrow mile-long island was little more than a flooded marsh but Congress had chosen to construct upon it a defensive coastal fortification, christened Fort Pulaski in 1833. Replacing Major Samuel Babcock (d. 1831) who was seriously ill, Lee's engineering duties centered on raising an embankment and digging a canal so that a one-hundred-and-fifty-acre site could be drained, and in the capacity he made surveys and drawings and determined the best location to build the fort. Additionally, Lee acted as assistant commissary of subsistence. Lee's assignment at Cockspur Island lasted until the spring of 1831, when he was ordered to report to Old Point Comfort, Virginia, much closer to home.

Lee traveled to Georgia by sea accompanied only by Nat, the elderly family coachman and house slave that Lee's recently deceased mother had willed to her granddaughter Mildred and who the family was sending south with hopes that the milder climate would restore his declining health. (Nat's health continued to decline and he died without returning to Virginia.)

Lee returned to Cockspur Island in 1861 as brigadier general of the Confederate Army in command of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. He arrived right at the moment that Federal forces were planting a foothold within sight of Fort Pulaski, having seized from the Confederates the nearby forts at Hilton Head and Bay Point. Lee inspected Fort Pulaski and redeployed its guns for better defense. It took several months, but the Federals eventually set up an effective blockade of Fort Pulaski, paving the way for a bombardment that led to Confederate surrender and Federal occupation in April 1862. When news of Lee's surrender at Appomattox reached Fort Pulaski in April 1865 the Federal commander ordered two hundred guns to be fired from the garrison's bulwarks, signaling the end not only of the war but of the military career that had its beginnings in Cockspur Island's muddy marsh some three and half decades earlier.
What did REL read?

Like many men of his day, Robert E. Lee catered his reading to works related to his business or career, in Lee's case the military. He also read newspapers regularly, and his frequent correspondence meant that he spent some time almost daily reading and answering correspondence. His biographer Douglas Southall Freeman made some interesting observations about Lee's reading habits while serving as superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point:

During the two years and seven months of his superintendence he drew from the shelves six magazines and forty-eight books, some of the latter in several volumes, and some of them taken out more than once. He got three volumes of fiction, two of travel, and five of poetry, all of them probably for Mrs. Lee or his daughters, inasmuch as he had no taste for novels and scanty time for verse, though he knew more poetry than most soldiers.

On his own account, he got six works on geography (including maps), one on forestry, eight on architecture, five on military law, two on non-military geography, one on French and Spanish grammar, and fifteen on military biography, history, and the science of war. The books on architecture and on forestry doubtless were to help him in his work of selecting new buildings and setting out trees at the academy. The studies in military law were for use in connection with courts-martial. Most of the others much represented a review of military operations.

Of the fifteen books specifically related to war, seven concerned Napoleon. His principal study was of Gourgaud's and Montholon's Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de France sous Napoléon, écrits à Sainte-Hélène, though he also used O'Meara and the Memoirs of the Duke of Rovigo. These are not now the most-esteemed books on Napoleon's campaigns, but they were, at the time, among the best that had been issued. The volumes Lee most frequently procured from the library dealt with Napoleon's Italian campaign of 1796 and with the Egyptian operations. There is every reason to assume that he read these volumes carefully and that he became reasonably conversant with Napoleon's military career through 1801. He seems also to have studied in detail the Russian campaign of the Corsican. In the editions he probably used, one of the volumes contained Napoleon's brief notes on Jomini's Traité des Grandes Opérations Militaires, and Napoleon's lengthy notes on Considérations sur l'Art de la Guerre, originally printed in Paris in 1816. These latter notes are almost a volume in themselves, and though dictated by Napoleon on the work of an officer he did not admire, they include many of the Emperor's most discerning observations on defensive war. Lee may have been particularly interested in this work because it was by an officer of engineers. . . . Analogies between his operation and those of Napoleon in 1796 readily suggest themselves. The probability that Lee studied carefully the Egyptian campaign might be explained by a natural curiosity to see how the Emperor met a situation similar in some superficial respects, at least, to that which Scott faced landing in Mexico.

Lee probably gave some study, also, to Hannibal's campaign, through Rollin, and to Caesar's battles as related in the pages of Jacob Abbott's biography, which was then a comparatively new book (1849). Lee's use of Russian and Turkish maps would indicate, further, that he followed at least some of the early movements of the Crimean War.

After his study of Napoleon, Lee's major military reading at West Point seems to have been of the American Revolution. He twice had from the library Sparks's life of Benedict Arnold, and he used, likewise, Spark's sketches of John Stark, Charles B. Brown, Richard Montgomery, and Ethan Allen, which together form the first volume of the Library of American Biography. He probably was interested in the third volume of the National Portrait Gallery because it contained a sketch and an engraving of his father. He twice drew from the library the second volume of the Field of Mars, a British encyclopaedia of battles, naval and military, "particularly of Great Britain and her allies from the tenth century to the present period." The volume contained brief, alphabetical accounts, with dispatches and reports, of many of the most famous battles of history from the letter M to the end of the alphabet. Most of the battles of the southern campaign in which Lee's father had a part were treated in this volume. Yorktown was not included, as the book seems to have been printed in 1781 before the final disaster of the Revolution reached Britain. The Field of Mars included, also, an essay on fortification, though this advanced no theories with which Lee was not already familiar.

Thus it will be seen that Lee's studies were not profound, in any instance, but that his reading of Napoleon probably was critical and detailed. His use of Kausler's Atlas would indicate that he studied the terrain of Napoleon's great movements as closely as he could.

The full list of Lee's withdrawals from the library at West Point during his superintendency, as given in the records, is as follows:

- Field of Mars, vol. 2.
- Brown's Domestic Architecture.
- London's Architecture.
- Gourgaud: Mémoires de Napoléon, vols. 1 and 2.
In addition to reading from the shelves at West Point, Lee was building up a small military library of his own. It is not possible to say when he bought the various items of his collection, except as the time of publication sets the dates, but prior to the war he possessed, among others, these works:

- Biot: *Traité Élémentaire d'Astronomie Physique* . . . 1841.
- Cormontaingne: *Mémorial pour l'Attaque des Places* . . . 1815.
- Emy: *Cours Elémentaire de Fortification* . . . 1834.
- Fallot: *Cours d'art Militaire ou Leçons sur l'art Militaire et les Fortifications*, editions of 1839, 1841, 1844, and 1846.
- Fonscolombe: *Résumé Historique des Progrès de l'Art Militaire* . . . 1854
- Jomini: *Précis de l'Art de la Guerre* . . . 1838.
- Laisne: *Aide-Mémoire Portatif à l'Usage des Officiers du Génie* . . . 1840.
- Merkes: *Résumé Général concernant les Différentes Formes et les Diverses Applications des Redoubtes Casematées* . . . 1845.
- Noizet-de-Saint-Paul: *Traité Complet de Fortification*.
- Perrot: *Le Livre de Guerre* . . . 1, 1832.

Most of these, it will be noted, are technical treatises for the engineer, and probably were acquired while Lee was serving with the board of
What did REL do in the Mexican War?

Lee at the time of his Mexican service

13 May 1846 the United States declared war on Mexico. In August Robert E. Lee received orders to proceed to San Antonio de Bexar, Texas, for service in Mexico. Once there, Lee put his engineering skills to work, building roads and bridges, mapping the territory, selecting sites for redoubts. Eventually he found himself among a six-thousand-man division some three hundred and sixty-five miles deep into Mexico, leading reconnaissance missions and laying out camps, and volunteering for scouting missions. Lee's zeal and successes did not go unnoticed and within a few months he was called to the headquarters staff of General, Winfield Scott, who was preparing an expedition to Vera Cruz, as an aide-de-camp. At Vera Cruz Lee went on more scouting missions and erected defensive works, and, importantly, he tasted combat for the first time, directing artillery counterfire against Mexican guns firing on American sailors. (Ironically, Lee's older brother Smith Lee was among the artillerists that he commanded.) His service in the seige of Vera Cruz won for Lee a commendation in orders, his first.

Next, General Scott joined U.S. forces pressing Mexican General Santa Anna at Cerro Gordo. At great personal peril, Lee reconnoitered Santa Anna's west flank to determine exactly whether American troops might be able to maneuver around the Mexican troops. Lee's answer was yes, and off marched an entire division, with Lee as its guide and trail cutter, to within seven hundred yards of the enemy. Once the division reached its destination Lee fixed a battery for the impending battle then left to guide a different brigade around Santa Anna's north flank, to cut off retreat. The American rout of Santa Anna's army was ensured, and when it had ended no individual emerged with more accolades from his superiors than Lee. In General Scott's words,

This officer, greatly distinguished at the siege of Vera Cruz, was again indefatigable, during these operations, in reconnaissance as daring as laborious, and of the utmost value. Nor was he less conspicuous in planting batteries, and in conducting columns to their stations under the heavy fire of the enemy.

Months later, Lee was brevetted major, effective the day of the battle, for "gallant and meritorious conduct" at the battle of Cerro Gordo.

Lee, as it turned out, was only beginning to earn a reputation. His exploits were to be repeated, or surpassed, in the performance of his duties as Scott, setting his sights on Mexico City, made assaults on Padierna and Churubusco. Lee produced accurate maps where none had before existed, and he found or made roads for the infantry and artillery when no one else could. And most important, he hand delivered critical messages between commanding generals when the officers themselves were unaware of to make contact with one another. Staying in the saddle for thirty-six hours straight, Lee emerged a hero worthy of comparison to his legendary father, Light-Horse Harry Lee. Again, no one earned more praise for their performance in the offensive. General Scott wrote of Lee that his service exhibited "the greatest feat of physical and moral courage performed by any individual, in my knowledge, pending the campaign." A navy auditor, Lieutenant Raphael Semmes, observed Lee at a council of war before the battle:

The services of Captain Lee were invaluable to his chief. Endowed with a mind which has no superior in his corps, and possessing great energy of character, he examined, counselled, and advised with a judgment, tact, and discretion worthy of all praise. His talent for topography was peculiar, and he seemed to receive impressions intuitively, which it cost other men much labor to acquire.

Chapultepec, the fortified height at Mexico City, followed. Lee again led reconnaissance, erected batteries aimed at the reduction of Chapultepec, and offered advice on strategy and tactics to General Scott. Before it was over, Lee was forty-eight hours without sleep, wounded in the saddle, and finally fainted from sheer exhaustion. After Santa Anna fled and the Americans waltzed into Mexico City, Lee spent his time surveying and making maps. He was ordered back to Vera Cruz and then to home, twenty months since he had left Virginia. Back home and across the country the public little knew of Lee's contributions to the American success in Mexico, but his fellow officers knew, and General Scott later referred to Lee as "the very best soldier that I ever saw in the field."
What lessons did REL learn in the Mexican War?

According to Robert E. Lee's biographer Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee learned some valuable lessons while in Mexico, lessons that would serve him well as commander of an army in the field during the Civil War:

Twenty months of service in Mexico had been ended when Lee saw the castle and the towers of Vera Cruz fade from view, never again to be seen by him. They were probably the twenty most useful months of his training as a soldier. Their effect on him can be seen during nearly the whole of the War between the States. The lessons he learned on the road to Mexico City he applied in much of his strategy. Warnings he read in that campaign he never forgot.

He carried home with him the highest admiration of his former commander and the good opinion of his brother officers. . . . Lee's Mexican experiences gave him, secondly, close observation of an army in nearly all the conditions, except those of retreat, that were apt to arise in the field. He had acquired his experience under an excellent, practical master, and in an army that, though small, was efficient and well-trained. All this helped him and made it easy for him in 1855 to transfer from the staff to the line. It so happened that while Lee was with Scott he had few dealings with the cavalry, which was little used during most of the battles in the valley of Mexico. This fact may account for the awkwardness that some critics have thought they observed in Lee's handling of that arm in 1862.

Even more valuable, in the third place, was Lee's training in strategy while in Mexico. As a member of Scott's "little cabinet," he sat in council when the most difficult of Scott's strategical problems were being considered by the General. His views, which were usually based on a better knowledge of the ground than his superiors possessed, were expressed fully and were received by Scott with real respect. More than once he had a part in planning operations that were executed where he could see the correctness or the errors of his reasoning—a very different matter from the blackboard studies of West Point.

Seven great lessons Lee learned from Cerro Gordo to Mexico City in strategy and in the handling of an army, seven lessons that were the basis of virtually all he attempted to do in Virginia fifteen years later:

1. Lee was inspired to audacity. This was, perhaps, his greatest strategical lesson in Mexico, for all the circumstances favored a daring course on the part of his teacher. The nucleus of Scott's army was professional; the forces that opposed them were ill-trained and poorly led. Scott could attempt and could achieve in Mexico what even he, bold as he was, would not have undertaken against an army as well disciplined as his own. Some of his actions were little more than sham battles with ball cartridges, and were, in one sense, about as good schooling as could be devised for a beginner in the practice of strategy. When it is remembered that the son of "Light-Horse Harry" received his practical instruction, in that particular campaign, under as daring a soldier as Scott, and followed that by a study of Napoleon, it will not be surprising that audacity, even to the verge of seeming overconfidence, was the guiding principle of the strategy he employed as the leader of a desperate cause.

2. Lee concluded, from Scott's example, that the function of the commanding general is to plan the general operation, to acquaint his corps commanders with that plan, and to see that their troops are brought to the scene of action at the proper time; but that it is not the function of the commanding general to fight the battle in detail. Lee's later methods in this respect are simply those of Scott. Whether he was right in this conclusion is one of the moot questions of his career.

3. Working with a trained staff, Lee saw its value in the development of a strategical plan. Scott was very careful on this score. Although he could not keep the administration from naming politicians to command some of his divisions, he could surround himself with men who had been well grounded in discipline, promptness, and accurate observation. He did not exaggerate when he said publicly in Mexico City that he could not have succeeded in his campaign had it not been for West Point. Scott relied on the young men who had been trained at the Military Academy, and they did not fail him. Lee kept this ideal of a trained staff and sought at a later time to build up such an organization; but he had become so accustomed to efficient staff work in the regular army that when he first took command in Virginia, in the great national tragedy, he did not realize how vast was the difference between trained and untrained staff officers.

4. The relation of careful reconnaissance to sound strategy was impressed on Lee by every one of the battles he saw in Mexico. Reconnaissance made possible the victories at Cerro Gordo and at Padierna, and it simplified the storming of Chapultepec. Failure to reconnoitre adequately was in part responsible for the heavy losses at Molino del Rey. Lee had shown special aptitude for this work and he left Mexico convinced for all time that when battle is imminent a thorough study of the ground is the first duty of the commanding officer. Reconnaissance became second nature to him.

5. Lee saw in Mexico the strategic possibilities of flank movements. Cerro Gordo had been passed and San Antonio had been turned by flanking the enemy. At little cost of life, positions of much strength had been rendered untenable. These, too, were lessons that Lee never forgot. Second Manassas was Cerro Gordo on a larger terrain; the march across the pedregal to San Antonio and the San Angel road found a more famous counterpart in Jackson's movement to the rear of Hooker's army at Chancellorsville.

6. Lee acquired a confident view of the relation of communications to strategy. He saw Scott at Puebla boldly abandon his line of supply from the sea and live off the country. Within thirty-seven days Scott had battered his way into Mexico City. It is quite possible that this experience was one reason why Lee was emboldened to expose his communications in the Maryland campaign of 1862 and in the Pennsylvania campaign of 1863.

7. Lee acquired in Mexico an appreciation of the value of fortification. The proper location of the batteries at Vera Cruz and at Chapultepec had contributed to the American victory. Lee had a hand in placing them and had every opportunity of observing the effect of their fire. At Cerro Gordo and at Padierna, he had examined fortifications that had been poorly defended but had been well laid out by Mexican engineers who were much more capable, as a rule, than the generals under whom they served. On both these fields and at Mexico City, immediately preceding the attack on Chapultepec, Lee may well have told himself that a competent defending force could have added much to Scott's difficulties by intelligent use of
Along with these seven lessons in strategy, Lee had abundant opportunity during his months with General Scott to study human nature. The quarrels in the army, while distasteful and discreditable, were so much laboratory experience to Lee. He saw how dependent a commanding general was upon the good-will of his subordinates, and in Scott's failure to elicit that cooperation he read a warning that may have led him in the War between the States to go too far in the other direction. In addition, he had the most monitory of object lessons in the "political generals" whom Scott had to endure. Perhaps Scott's difficulties with Pillow gave Lee the clue to the handling of Wise and of Floyd in the campaign of 1861 in West Virginia, but his observation of Pillow's performances doubtless explains why Lee was so careful to keep politicians from holding important command in the Army of Northern Virginia. It is quite possible, indeed, that Pillow was in large measure responsible for the distrust of politicians that Lee exhibited later. From what he had seen of Pillow in Mexico and of Congress in Washington, he formed a poor opinion of the whole breed of politicians.

Lee's study of human nature in Mexico included men whom he was subsequently to meet as comrades or as enemies in the War between the States. Every one of the commanders of the future Army of the Potomac, except John Pope, served in Scott's expedition, though Meade did not get beyond Vera Cruz. Scores of the general officers of both the Confederate and Union armies were lieutenants or captains in the same campaign with Lee. He doubtless met many of these young soldiers in the field, or in Mexico City after the fighting was over. Most of them belonged, as did he, to the "Aztec Club," formed in the Mexican capital during the tedious weeks of waiting for the treaty of peace to be agreed upon. Grant was a member of this club. Lee did not meet him there, but he did see him one day when he went to visit Garland's brigade. He kept, however, no remembrance of the circumstances or of the untidy young captain who was one day to dictate the terms of surrender Lee had to sign. It is probable, on the whole, that the extent of Lee's intimacy with his future antagonists has been exaggerated. The army was small, to be sure, but Lee was a busy staff officer during active operations and subsequently was engaged in map work. He kept in touch with Joe Johnston and he saw Beauregard and Gustavus Smith daily and under conditions that gave him insight into the character and abilities of each of them. He may have been close enough to Captain Joseph Hooker of Pillow's staff to learn something of his qualities. George B. McClellan was the man of whom his knowledge was most detailed, and, in the event, most valuable. Lee encountered McClellan on reconnaissance work, labored with him in constructing batteries, observed him building roads and serving artillery, and, in so limited an engineering corps, could not fail to see both the strong qualities and the weakness of the officer he was to face at a time when his understanding of the man helped to compensate for many shortcomings of the Confederate staff. When these five are named—Joseph E. Johnston, P. G. T. Beauregard, Gustavus W. Smith, Joseph Hooker, and George B. McClellan—the list of those of whom Lee acquired useful "working knowledge" in Mexico is about complete. The general officers with whom he dealt most frequently and freely in 1861 and 1862 had almost passed off the stage of action by the time Lee took command in Virginia. Patterson and Shields both fought south of the Potomac for a time, but neither of them faced Lee. This was the case, also, with Irvin McDowell, whom Lee met on the Rio Grande before he joined General Scott.


What was REL's role in John Brown's Raid?

When John Brown (1800–1859) and his followers took the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (present-day West Virginia), in October 1859, U.S. Secretary of War John B. Floyd ordered Robert E. Lee to travel there and take command of the assembling force of armed citizens, Maryland militia, and U.S. marines. Lee and Floyd went to the White House, accompanied by Lieutenant J.E.B. Stuart who was at the War Department on business, to discuss the situation with President James Buchanan and his military adviser. Armed with a proclamation from Buchanan, Lee and Stuart at once set out for Harpers Ferry, where upon arrival they found the band of insurgents confined to the armory's fire-engine house. After learning that the numbers of insurrectionists had been greatly exaggerated, Lee decided that the situation did not warrant issuing the president's proclamation, and he sent a telegraph to Baltimore calling off reinforcements who were already on the way.

After gathering information about the layout of the fire-engine house and the number of hostages being held by Brown, Lee drafted a firm course of action. He decided to surrounded the building with militia as a show of force and to offer safety to Brown and his men in exchange for their unconditional surrender, and if Brown declined the terms to immediately storm the engine-
house. Out of courtesy, Lee offered the Maryland and Virginia militia the privilege of storming the building in the event Brown did not surrender voluntarily. After both declined, he turned to the marines, who put forth two dozen men for the task, half to enter the building and half to be held in reserve. In the event of an assault, Lee ordered, the marines were not to fire their guns but to use bayonets only, and they were to consider the slaves in the building as hostages, unless they resisted. J.E.B. Stuart volunteered to approach the engine house under a flag of truce to read Lee’s offer to the insurgents and to give a signal if it was declined. After a conference between Stuart and Brown, with hostages yelling in the background, Stuart gave the signal and the marines stormed the building. The assault lasted under three minutes; the marines suffered two casualties (one mortal) but no hostages were injured. After interrogation Lee sent Brown and the other prisoners under escort to the county jail at Charlestown. Lee then dismissed the marines and returned to Washington to make his report. The insurrection was over and Brown was tried and convicted of treason and murder and a date (2 December) was set for execution.

The Engine-House at Harpers Ferry and the Prison at Charlestown
For Lee, however, the drama had one more, albeit anticlimactic, scene. Two weeks later, amidst rumors that radical abolitionists in the north were threatening to rescue Brown or revenge his execution, Virginia Governor Henry A. Wise asked President Buchanan to send Federal troops to Harpers Ferry. The president ordered four companies of marines to Harpers Ferry, under Lee’s command. While at Harpers Ferry Lee met with Brown’s wife, Mary Ann Day Brown (1817–1884), who against her husband’s advice had come to see her husband one last time before his execution; Lee referred her to the commander of the Virginia forces overseeing the jail. Brown’s execution came and went without incident, and Lee and the troops were dismissed ten days later.

The Engine-House in 1862 and “Fort Brown” in the 1880s
Click images for larger view (opens new windows)
What were REL's military ranks?

Robert E. Lee's rise in the officer ranks was very slow, as the U.S. Army was small and career officers seldom relinquished their commissions except for reasons of retirement, severe illness, or death. When a cadet at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Lee was honored with the appointment of staff sergeant at the end of his first year because of his high standing in the class. After his third year he was named corps adjutant, according to his biographer Douglas Southall Freeman "the most coveted of West Point honors." When Lee was sent to Georgia to work as an engineer at Cockspur Island in August 1829 he went with the rank of brevet second lieutenant. It was July 1832 before he was named regular second lieutenant, backdated to the date of his first commission, 1 July 1829. It was November 1836 before Lee would be promoted to first lieutenant, and August 1838 before he received his captain's commission. Not until 1856 would he receive another regular rank promotion, to major, although his distinguished service in the Mexican War won him brevets of major after the Battle of Cerro Gordo (August 1847, backdated to the previous April), lieutenant-colonel following the taking of Padierna and Churubusco (August 1847) and colonel for his role at Chapultepec (August 1848). Thus as the superintendent of West Point, 1852 to 1855, Lee's regular rank was captain although he was drawing pay based on his colonelcy by brevet.

Lee's next regular promotion came in March 1855, when he was named lieutenant colonel of one of the two new cavalry regiments created by Congress to guard the American frontier against hostile Indians. When he was finally promoted to colonel, in March 1861, it was because secession in the deep south had made vacancies in the U.S. Cavalry. Although he had already made up his mind to stay with Virginia, however she might choose regarding secession, Lee accepted the colonel's commission, which incidentally was signed by Abraham Lincoln. Shortly afterward, U.S. officials made overtures to Lee that he might succeed General Winfield Scott himself as commander of the U.S. Army, while Confederate Secretary of War Leroy P. Walker offered Lee a brigadier general's commission in the new southern army, the highest rank then conceived. As expected, Lee resigned his commission on 20 April, upon learning that Virginia had seceded from the Union. The same day the Alexandria Gazette printed an editorial asking Virginia to rally around Lee if he should resign from the U.S. Army. The next day Governor John Letcher sent a messenger to Lee offering him supreme command of the Virginia military and naval forces, with the rank of major-general. Lee accepted, and his appointment was confirmed unanimously by the Virginia Convention. When Virginia formally allied with the Confederate government in May Lee was given command of Confederate troops within the state, on 14 May, and days later he was authorized to act as a Confederate brigadier-general. By June the Confederate government had moved to Richmond and begun to take over the Virginia forces, leaving Lee without rank or authority. On 31 August 1861 the Confederate Congress commissioned Lee major-general, to date from 16 May.

Lee's Letter of Resignation
Addressed to U.S. Secretary of War Simon Cameron, 20 April 1861
Click image to read letter (opens new window)
How much was REL’s army pay?

After thirty-one years in the army, at age 53, Robert E. Lee’s pay was $1,205 per year; when food, lodging, and traveling expenses were included, it amounted to $4,060. On this salary Lee was supporting himself, an invalid wife, four unmarried daughters, and the education of his sons.

Did REL favor secession?

No, Robert E. Lee opposed secession. “Secession is nothing but revolution,” Lee wrote to a son, echoing the words of President James Buchanan.

As an American citizen, I take great pride in my country, her prosperity and institutions, and would defend any State if her rights were invaded. But I can anticipate no greater calamity for the country than a dissolution of the Union. It would be an accumulation of all the evils we complain of, and I am willing to sacrifice everything but honor for its preservation. I hope therefore, that all constitutional means will be exhausted before there is a recourse to force. Secession is nothing but revolution.

As the threat of disunion began to heat up after the election of Lincoln, Lee wrote from Texas his observation that the "Southern states seem to be in a convulsion." Nevertheless, although he also believed strongly that the Union should be preserved, Lee thought individual states held the right to self-determination. His loyalty was to Virginia—and to the Union so long as Virginia remained in the Union. How strongly Lee opposed disunion is apparent in a letter that he wrote home in late January 1861:

I received from Major Nicholls Everett’s life of Washington, you sent me and enjoyed its perusal very much. How his spirit would be grieved could he see the wreck of his mighty labors! I will not, however, permit myself to believe till all ground of hope is gone that the work of his noble deeds will be destroyed, and that his precious advice and virtuous example will so soon be forgotten by his countrymen. As far as I can judge by the papers, we are between a state of anarchy and civil war. May God avert from us both. It has been evident for years that the country was doomed to run the full length of democracy. To what a fearful pass it has brought us. I fear that mankind will not for years be sufficiently Christianized to bear the absence of restraint and force. I see that four states have declared themselves out of the Union; four more will apparently follow through their example. Then, if the Border States are brought into the gulf of revolution, one-half of the country will be arrayed against the other. I must try and be patient and await the end, for I can do nothing to hasten or retard it.

To another relative he wrote,

God alone can save us from our folly, selfishness and short sightedness. The last accounts seem to show that we have barely escaped anarchy to be plunged into civil war. What will be the result I cannot conjecture. I only see that a fearful calamity is upon us, and fear that the country will have to pass through for its sins a fiery ordeal. I am unable to realize that our people will destroy a government inaugurated by the blood and wisdom of our patriot fathers, that has given us peace and prosperity at home, power and security abroad, and under which we have acquired a colossal strength unequalled in the history of mankind. I wish to live under no other government, and there is no sacrifice I am not ready to make for the preservation of the Union save that of honour. If a disruption takes place, I shall go back in sorrow to my people and share the misery of my native state, and
Lee was on assignment in Texas when that state seceded, and he half expected to be held prisoner after he refused a Texas Convention delegation's strong urging that he resign his U.S. Army commission and join the Confederacy. Although Lee feared that Virginia too might pull out of the Union if some means could not be found to avert war, he insisted that his first allegiance was due to his mother state and that as long as she stood with the Union, so would he. The delegation did not attempt to detain Lee or prevent his traveling to the coast to sail for Washington, where he had been ordered, but it did prohibit him from transporting his personal effects out of Texas. Lee stored his belongings with a staunch Federalist friend, Charles Anderson, who later recalled that Lee was quite angry at the Texans. Lee described his thinking on the subject to Anderson:

I think it but due to myself to say that I cannot be moved by the conduct of those people from my sense of duty. I still think, as I then told you and Doctor [Willis G.] Edwards, that my loyalty to Virginia ought to take precedence over that which is due the Federal Government. And I shall so report myself at Washington. If any stands by the old Union, so will I. But if she secedes (though I do not believe in secession as a constitutional right, nor that there is sufficient cause for revolution), then I will still follow my native state with my sword, and if need be with my life. I know you think and feel very differently, but I can't help it. These are my principles, and I must follow them.

Lee had declared many times that he could never lift his sword against his native state, but if forced would lift it in her defense. In the end Virginia seceded, and with her went Lee. It was his duty and he was bound by honor to do his duty. As his biographer Douglas Southall Freeman observed, when the time came, for Lee,

There was no questioning, no holding back, no delay. The road from Arlington, though lit with glory, led straight to Appomattox. But Lee never regretted his action, never even admitted that he had made a choice. With the war behind him, with the South desolate and disfranchised, and with her sons dead on a hundred battlefields, he was to look back with soul unshaken and was to say: "I did only what my duty demanded. I could have taken no other course without dishonor. And if it all were to be done over again, I should act in precisely the same manner."

As with many of his countrymen, Lee's heart lay with Virginia.

**Did Lincoln offer REL command of the Army?**

According to John Nicolay and John Hay, two of Lincoln's presidential secretaries, Lincoln only asked Francis Preston Blair, Sr., co-publisher of the Washington Globe, to sound out Robert E. Lee on the subject. But Blair recalled, ten years after the fact, that Lincoln and Secretary of War Simon Cameron had "expressed themselves as anxious to give the command of our army to Robert E. Lee. I considered myself as authorized to inform Lee of that fact." Blair, who had served in Andrew Jackson's Kitchen Cabinet, not only thought himself empowered by both Lincoln and Cameron to actually offer the command to Lee, if he found Lee receptive to the idea, but he told Lee as much. Lee, at the time still a Federal officer, heard Blair out at length but made it clear that the proposal was unacceptable if meant that he would take command of an army that would be placed in the field against Virginians. "Lee said he was devoted to the Union," recalled Blair. "He said, among other things, that he would do everything in his power to save it, and that if he owned all the negroes in the South, he would be willing to give them up and make the sacrifices of the value of every one of them to save the Union. We talked several hours on the political question in that vein. Lee said he did not know how he could draw his sword upon his native state."

Lee, according to his own recollections in 1868, declined the offer, "stating, as candidly and courteously as I could, that, though opposed to secession, and deprecating war, I could take no part in an invasion of the Southern states." Although the testimonies of the two men largely agreed, Blair seems to have gone away from their meeting thinking that Lee had not outright rejected the proposal and wanted to discuss it with General Winfield Scott. Whatever the misunderstandings, the offer of command of the U.S. Army had been, in the name of the commander in chief, and rejected.

**What were REL's major battles?**

**Seven Days Battles, 25 June–1 July 1862,**

**General George McClellan**

The series of battles that took place outside of Richmond, Virginia, over seven days, was actually the culmination of Federal Major General George B. McClellan's Peninsula Campaign, which began when Union forces began to move up the Virginia Peninsula in March, 1862. It was the first time that Robert E. Lee commanded the army in the field and although his army suffered heavier casualties and failed to cut off McClellan's retreating army, it was Lee's first display of the battlefield audacity that would make him famous. Lee's willingness to go on the offensive unnerved McClellan and saved Richmond, and not until 1864 did Federal forces again come so near the Confederate capital. The battles and skirmishes of the Seven Days included:
Second Manassas (Bull Run), 29–30 August 1862

General John Pope

This battle was the culmination of the Northern Virginia Campaign, a series of battles in which General Lee attempted to follow up on his success of forcing General McClellan to withdraw the Federal forces from the Virginia Peninsula. In it Lee showed himself even more bold than he had in the Seven Days Battles, by splitting the Army of Northern Virginia and maneuvering it into a surprise attack on Major General John Pope's larger Federal force. The result was one of Lee's most decisive victories of the war; the Federal army retreated all the way back to Washington and Pope, humiliated, was immediately dismissed by Lincoln. The overwhelming Confederate success gave Lee the confidence to take the war into the north.

Antietam (Sharpsburg), 17 September 1862

Captain John Hope, Artillery Hell

The Advance of the 9th New York Infantry, by Edwin Forbes

Fredericksburg, 13 December 1862

General Ambrose Burnside

Another decisive victory for General Lee, his first against a more aggressive Federal officer, Major General Ambrose E. Burnside, Lincoln's replacement of McClellan. Burnside's suicidal sacrifice of his men while trying to take the well-protected Confederates on Marye's Heights earned his quick dismissal, too, by Lincoln.

General "Fighting Joe" Hooker

This is considered by many to be Lee's greatest victory. The Federal army, under "Fighting Joe" Hooker, Burnside's replacement, outnumbered the Confederates by more than two to one, 130,000 to 60,000. Lee again split his army, surprising and defeating Hooker. Unfortunately for Lee, the Confederate victory was tempered by the accidental fatal shooting of General Stonewall Jackson. Hooker, like his predecessors, was dismissed after the battle.

Gettysburg 1–3 July 1863

General George C. Meade

Lee's decision to carry the war into the north for a second time culminated at the Battle of Gettysburg. Commanding the Federal troops was Major General George C. Meade, who had taken command of the Federal Army the day before battle. On the first day of battle the lines were drawn, the Confederate stretching for five miles, and the Union occupying a two-mile defensive "fishhook" formation. The fighting at Little Round Top took place on the second day and Picket's Charge on the final day. Altogether, the battle was the bloodiest of the war, and a costly defeat for the Confederate Army.

Four and a half months after the battle President Abraham Lincoln traveled to Gettysburg to dedicate the cemetery at the battlefeild, making his famous address there on 19 November 1863:

> Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

> But in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to
Wilderness, 5–7 May 1864

This was the opening battle of Federal Army General U. S. Grant's Overland Campaign. Lee's army, greatly outnumbered, fought to a draw, but afterwards Grant did what no other Union general had done before: instead of retreating he pressed Lee by moving closer to Richmond, forcing Lee into a defensive posture.

Spotsylvania Court House, 8–21 May 1864

General U. S. Grant

Recognizing that Spotsylvania Courthouse would become Grant's objective after the fighting at the Wilderness stopped, Lee set up trench works in the area, known as the Mule Shoe because of its shape. What ensued was two weeks of probing, skirmishing, and fighting that culminated in a stalemate which Grant broke by sending his army toward Richmond. The fighting at the Mule Shoe included the Bloody Angle, twenty hours of the longest hand-to-hand combat of the war, on 12 May. At Spotsylvania the casualties amounted to 28,000—18,000 Federal and 10,000 Confederate.

Cold Harbor 31 May–12 June 1864

After leaving Spotsylvania, General Grant entered upon what turned out to be the second phase of his Overland Campaign. The Federals occupied Old Cold Harbor on 31 May, driving out the Confederates. Lee attempted to retake Old Cold Harbor on the following day, but was repulsed. Federal counterattacks culminated on 3 June without dislodging Lee's firmly entrenched army. An ensuing week-long standoff ended with Grant shifting his army south of the James River toward Petersburg.

Petersburg, 9–17 June 1864

The initial Federal attempts to capture Petersburg resulted in the loss of 10,000 men and forced General Grant to lay siege to the city, which lasted until the spring of 1865.

The Crater, 30 July 1864

After weeks of tunneling more than 500 feet underneath the Confederate earthworks the Federals exploded 8,000 pounds of black powder, blasting a hole in the Confederate battery some 170 feet long, 60 to 80 feet wide, and 30 feet deep. The blast caused 278 immediate Confederate casualties. Federal troops rushed into the hole but became trapped when the Confederates mounted a quick counterattack. The result was a massive slaughter of Federal troops and a complete Confederate victory. Grant characterized the Crater as "the saddest affair I have witnessed in the war." Union General Ambrose E. Burnside was relieved of his command as a result.

The Crater in 1865

Beefsteak Raid, 14–17 September 1864

With Lee's army near starvation, a Confederate cavalry force of 4,500 led by Major General Wade Hampton captured a heard of 2,500 beef cattle from the Federals at Coggins Point, about five miles down the James River from City Point and not far from Petersburg. The majority of Confederate cavalry were from the cavalry division of Lee's son, William Henry Fitzhugh "Rooney" Lee.

Five Forks, 1 April 1865

The Federal victory at Five Forks (in Dinwiddie County) cut off Lee's final line of supply, the South Side Railroad, and led to the Confederate evacuation of both Petersburg and Richmond. Led by Major General George Pickett, Confederate casualties amounted to 5,200.

Union Major General Philip H. Sheridan

Petersburg, 2 April 1865

After several Federal attacks weakened Lee's army considerably in March 1865, General Grant's final assault on Petersburg was made as Lee was evacuating the city. Even then victory did not come easy; the Federals suffered 3,500 casualties. Confederate casualties amounted to 4,250,
Sailor's Creek, 6 April 1865

This Federal victory destroyed nearly one-fourth of Lee's retreating army. Lee lost 7,700 men, including eight generals (one of whom was Lee's son, Rooney Lee, captured), and signaled the death knell of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Appomattox, 9 April 1865

With the Army of Northern Virginia severely weakened, surrounded, and cut off from supplies, Lee decided that it was useless to fight another battle and formally surrendered to U. S. Grant.

Where did REL surrender?

Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, on 9 April 1865. Originally a stop on the Richmond-Lynchburg Stage Road and the county seat by the 1850s, the small town of Appomattox Court House was three miles east of the South Side Railroad, the 132-mile line running from City Point to Lynchburg and the main supply route for Lee's army. When Grant's forces broke the supply route at the Battle of Five Forks (in Dinwiddie County) on 1 April, the fate of Lee's army was sealed and the Confederates were forced to evacuate both Petersburg and Richmond. By the time Lee's army reached Appomattox, continued fighting was pointless and Lee began formal negotiations to surrender.

The surrender signing took place at Appomattox Court House, at the house of Wilmer McLean, the man who owned the house at the battlefield of First Manassas, where the war in Virginia started.

The McLean House at Appomattox, 1865

Did REL have children?

Yes, Robert E. Lee and his wife Mary Custis had seven children, all of whom lived to adulthood.

George Washington Custis Lee (Custis, "Boo"; 1832–1913)

Mary Custis Lee (Mary, "Daughter"; 1835–1918)
William Henry Fitzhugh Lee ("Rooney"); 1837–1891

Anne Carter Lee (Annie; 1839–1862)

Eleanor Agnes Lee (Agnes; 1841–1873)

Robert Edward Lee, Jr. (Rob; 1843–1914)
All of the Lee daughters died unmarried and Custis Lee married but had no children. Robert and Mary Lee had four grandchildren that survived to adulthood, however, all children of Rooney and Rob by each's second marriage, and as a result more than twenty direct descendants of Robert E. Lee are living today. All of the Lee children are buried with their parents in the crypt of the Lee Chapel at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.

Lee's three sons served as officers in the Confederate Army, Rob as a captain in the Rockbridge Artillery, Rooney as a major general in the cavalry, and Custis as a brigadier general and aide-de-camp to President Jefferson Davis.

Was REL pardoned?

Yes, Robert E. Lee was pardoned, but posthumously. When Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia on 9 April 1865 he was with the soldiers in his army placed on parole by General U. S. Grant. On 29 May, after Lincoln's assassination, President Andrew Johnson issued a proclamation of amnesty and pardon to any former Confederate who would take an oath to support the Constitution and uphold the laws of the United States, excepting some fourteen classes of persons, of which Lee fell into several. The proclamation provided that any person belonging to any of the excepted classes could apply to the president directly, however, and that "such clemency will be liberally extended as may be consistent with the facts of the case and the peace and dignity of the United States." Although he was protected by the terms of his parole as a prisoner of war, Lee was heartened by how the president's proclamation could positively affect the south and made the decision to apply for pardon as an example to former Confederate officers.
Before Lee could discern how to make application, however, he learned that a Federal grand jury might indict him and some other Confederate leaders for treason. Not wanting it to appear that by applying for pardon he was attempting to escape a possible trial, Lee decided to submit the application contingent on the non-prosecution of the charges against him; if he was indicted and brought to trial he would face the charges. He also determined to submit his application through General Grant, to whom he was paroled, and whom, Lee learned, endorsed Lee’s application and held that paroled prisoners could not be prosecuted as long as they did not violate their parole. The government failed to act on Lee’s application, even with Grant’s support, however. Lee took the oath of allegiance on 2 October 1865 and sent it to Washington but it apparently was set aside, only to resurface in the National Archives in 1970. A resolution introduced in Congress to restore Lee’s full rights of citizenship was signed into law by President Gerald Ford at a ceremony at Arlington House on 5 August 1975.

Did REL own slaves?

Yes, Robert E. Lee owned slaves, mostly house servants that he inherited from his mother. In the 1830s and 1840s, he owned a slave named Gardner that he rented to his mother's relatives at Shirley Plantation. In 1846, when making his last will and testament before heading west on military orders, Lee still owned a slave woman named Nancy and her children, who were at the White House plantation in New Kent County. The schedule of property attached to the will directed that upon his death they be "liberated as soon as it can be done to their advantage and that of others." No evidence has surfaced that Lee ever purchased or sold any slaves although while in Texas he did contemplate buying a body servant when he had trouble hiring one. By the time of the Civil War Lee had liberated his slaves, some of whom he reputedly sent to Liberia, or, depending on the sources, all of whom remained at Arlington until after the war.

Lee did not inherit slaves from his father-in-law George Washington Parke Custis, Martha and George Washington's grandson and adopted son. Lee, in fact, was left nothing other than one lot in Washington and the burden of managing Custis's sprawling legacy (tracts of land in a dozen Virginia counties)—a burden made even heavier after Lee became the only one of the four executors to qualify to serve. Custis left to his only child Mary, Robert's wife, the lifetime use and benefit of the Arlington House estate and the mill on Four-Mile Run, which after her death would pass to a grandson. The rest of his plantations and lands Custis divided between his seven grandchildren, along with cash payments of $10,000 each to four granddaughters. After payment of the cash legacies, "and my estates that are required to pay the said legacies, being clear of debts, then I give freedom to my slaves, the said slaves to be emancipated by my executors in such manner as to my executors may seem most expedient and proper, the said emancipation to be accomplished in not exceeding five years from the time of my decease." Here was the rub, for Custis died so deep in debt that there was no money with which to either pay the cash legacies or free the slaves. Under Lee's management the Custis estate became financially viable and the slaves were freed during the winter of 1862–1863. The deed of manumission was made in late December 1862 and recorded in Richmond on 2 January 1863. Sixty-three names were on the list, some of whom were rumored to have been fathered by Custis and thus, if so, were half-siblings of Lee's wife Mary. When northern newspapers ran stories of Lee's supposedly having runaways soundly flogged at the Arlington House plantation on the eve of the war it made him unhappy but there was nothing he could do, save complain to his son, Custis. "The N. Y. Tribune has attacked me for my treatment of your grandfather's slaves, but I shall not reply. He has left me an unpleasant legacy."

Lee's stated views on slavery are well-known, having been set out in correspondence and post-war interviews. Reflecting the prevailing aristocratic and Christian values of his class, the following passage, written to his wife in December 1856, reveals his attitude:

There are few, I believe, in this enlightened age, who will not acknowledge that slavery as an institution is a moral and political evil. It is idle to expatiate on its disadvantages. I think it is a greater evil to the white than to the colored race. While my feelings are strongly enlisted in behalf of the latter, my sympathies are more deeply engaged for the former. The blacks are immeasurably better off here than in Africa, morally, physically, and socially. The painful discipline they are undergoing is necessary for their further instruction as a race, and will prepare them, I hope, for better things. How long their servitude may be necessary is known and ordered by a merciful Providence. Their emancipation will sooner result from the mild and melting influence of Christianity than from the storm and tempest of fiery controversy. This influence, though slow, is sure. The doctrines and miracles of our Saviour have required nearly two thousand years to convert but a small portion of the human race, and even among Christian nations what gross errors still exist! While we see the course of the final abolition of human slavery is still onward, and give it the aid of our prayers, let us leave the progress as well as the results in the hands of Him who, chooses to work by slow influences, and with whom a thousand years are but as a single day.

Although many in the country held views similar to Lee, others did not, and the states plunged into civil war. Late in the war Lee attempted to persuade his compatriots to allow slaves to enlist in the Confederate Army. If admitting slaves into the Confederate Army subverted the institution of slavery, said Lee, then it would be done by southerners themselves and any ill effects of the measure would be less than the contrary, as the Federal Army already was employing both northern and southern slaves in its ranks.

I think therefore we must decide whether slavery shall be extinguished by our enemies and the slaves used against us, or to use them ourselves at the risk of the effects which may be produced upon our social institutions. My own opinion is that we should employ them without delay. I believe that with proper regulations, they
For Lee and the Confederacy, and for the slaves, his proposal came too late.

When interviewed after the war by a visiting Englishman, Herbert C. Saunders, Lee freely discussed his feelings about slavery and emancipation:

On the subject of slavery, he assured me that he had always been in favour of the emancipation of the negroes, and that in Virginia the feeling had been strongly inclining in the same direction, till the ill-judged enthusiasm (amounting to rancour) of the abolitionists in the North had turned the Southern tide of feeling in the other direction. In Virginia, about thirty years ago, an ordinance for the emancipation of the slaves had been rejected by only a small majority, and every one fully expected at the next convention it would have been carried, but for the above cause. He went on to say that there was scarcely a Virginian now who was not glad that the subject had been definitely settled, though nearly all regretted that they had not been wise enough to do it themselves the first year of the war.

The same sentiment was indicated to another interviewer, John Leyburn, who visited Lee in Lexington in 1869. Lee was adamant that the war was not fought on the southern side with a view to perpetuate slavery.

On this point he seemed not only indignant, but hurt. He said it was not true. He declared that, for himself, he had never been an advocate of slavery; that he had emancipated most of his slaves years before the war, and had sent to Liberia those who were willing to go; that the latter were writing back most affectionate letters to him, some of which he received through the lines during the war. He said, also, as an evidence that the colored people did not consider him hostile to their race, that during this visit to Baltimore some of them who had known him when he was stationed there had come up in the most affectionate manner and put their hands into the carriage-window to shake hands with him. They would hardly have received him in this way, he thought, had they looked upon him as fresh from a war intended for their oppression and injury. One expression I must give in his own words.

"So far," said General Lee, "from enacting in a war to perpetuate slavery, I am rejoiced that slavery is abolished. I believe it will be greatly for the interests of the South. So fully am I satisfied of this, as regards Virginia especially, that I would cheerfully have lost all I have lost by the war, and have suffered all I have suffered, to have this object attained." This he said with much earnestness.

In 1918 the Reverend Mack Lee (b. 1835), a former slave once owned by Lee who served as his body servant and cook, published a pamphlet, History of the Life of Rev. Wm. Mack Lee Body Servant of General Robert E. Lee Through the Civil War, Cook from 1861 to 1865, to raise money to build black churches. Characterizing his former master as "one of the greatest men in the world," Mack Lee claimed that all of Lee's slaves were freed ten years before the war but remained at the Arlington House plantation until after the surrender—Mack himself returned to Arlington after the war and lived there for eighteen years—and that Lee at his death had left him $360 for the purpose of earning an education, which he did, entering the ministry.

**Did REL take communion with a Black man?**

Probably, but recent scholarship on the subject questions traditional interpretations of the event. As related by Thomas L. Broun, an ex-Confederate who had played a role in Lee's purchase of Traveller from Broun's brother, the incident supposedly took place at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, in June 1865. When an unnamed black man approached the communion table before or among the white communicants, it caused a stir in the congregation. Lee ignored the man's actions and went to the alter, thereby paving the way for others. For a discussion of Broun's account and what it may have meant, see General Lee and Visibility, by Professor Philip J. Schwarz.

**Did REL have nicknames?**
Yes, Robert E. Lee had many nicknames. The more popularly known ones are:

Marble Model, earned at West Point from fellow cadets who noticed his exemplary attention to his studies and obeying the rules.

Granny Lee, bestowed upon him by the Richmond Examiner in the fall of 1861 because of the perception that Lee was an aged paper-pushing general after he withdrew his troops in the face of the arrival of Federal reinforcements at Cheat Mountain in western Virginia.

King of Spades (and Prince of Spades), given because of his strategy of digging entrenchments, first at Charleston, South Carolina, and later at Richmond.

Evacuating Lee (and Retreating Lee), bestowed upon him by the Richmond Examiner announcing Lee’s appointment to command the Army of Northern Virginia in June 1862: “Evacuating Lee, who has never yet risked a single battle with the invader, is commanding general.”

Audacity, given by Colonel Joseph Ives, a member of the staff of President Jefferson Davis, shortly after Davis had named Lee commander of the Army of Northern Virginia: “He will take more desperate chances and take them quicker than any other general in this country, North or South. . . . His name might be Audacity.”

Great Tycoon, affectionately so-called by Walter H. Taylor, who was only 23 years old when he joined Lee’s staff as an adjutant in 1861, because of Lee’s tendency to overburden him with work.

Uncle Robert, used affectionately by the public and his troops after the Seven Days Battles, as later at Sailor’s Creek: “It’s General Lee! Where’s the man who won’t follow Uncle Robert?”

Marse Robert, slang for Master, used affectionately, as in Armond Carroll’s Invocation on the Dedication of the Mountain (Gutzon Borglum’s Stone Mountain in Georgia), in May 1916, whose first line reads “Come on, Marse Robert, throw yourself into the saddle.”

Old Grand Pa, affectionately called so by his men.

Old Man, respectfully spoken by those who fought under him—with tears streaming down his cheeks Leonard Gee, staff courier to Texas Brigadier General John Gregg, said it best, if not first, at the Battle of the Wilderness in May 1864: “I would charge hell itself for that old man.”

Bobby Lee, endearingly used by his troops and by Federals as well, as when General McClellan proclaimed upon the discovery of Special Orders No. 191 (Lee’s battle plans) before the Battle of Antietam: “Here is a paper with which if I cannot whip Bobby Lee I will be willing to go home.”

Marble Man, 20th-century appellation signifying Lee the icon, based largely on Lost Cause veneration of Lee and his character and dignity, reflected in Edward Valentine’s recumbent statue of Lee at the Lee Chapel at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, exemplified in Douglas Southall Freeman wrote in the last paragraphs of his monumental biography of Lee: “There he lies, now that they have shrouded him, with his massive features so white against the lining of the casket that he seems already a marble statue for the veneration of the South.”

What was REL’s favorite song?

Reputedly, Robert E. Lee’s favorite song was a Christian hymn of assurance, "How Firm A Foundation,” written about 1787 and variously attributed to John Keene, Kirkham, and John Keith. The hymn was song following the concluding prayer at Lee’s funeral.

Lee also is said to have been partial to a piano waltz, "Come Dearest, The Daylight Is Gone," written in 1852 by Welsh composer Brinley Richards (1819–1885), most famous for "God Bless the Prince of Wales" (1862), honoring the future King Edward VII of Great Britain.

"Come Dearest” Sheet Music

Was REL very religious?

Yes, Robert E. Lee was a devoted Christian, and increasingly so as he aged. His mother, Ann Hill Carter Lee, was responsible for the religious training of young Robert and his siblings. Her less pious husband, Light-Horse Harry Lee, deferred to his wife on the subject. To Light-Horse, his wife’s piety arose from "love to Almighty God and love of virtue, which are synonymous; not from fear of hell—a base, low influence." Lee's biographer Douglas Southall Freeman wrote of Ann’s labors over her children, that "physically it overtaxed her, but spiritually she was equal to it."

Not only did Ann attend to prayers and religious instruction at home, once the family moved to Alexandria she carried her children to the Episcopal Church (Christ Church, Alexandria) not far from her home, where George Washington himself had worshipped. The minister of the church during Lee’s youth was William Meade (1789–1862), son of one of Washington’s Revolutionary War aides-de-camp and later bishop of Virginia and president of Virginia Theological Seminary. Meade’s presence impacted everyone who came into his sphere, and Robert Lee was no exception. Many years later, when Meade was dead and Lee himself had lost the great war, Lee wrote his appraisal of Meade: “Of all the men I have ever known, I consider him the purest.”

At West Point Lee with the other cadets attended morning chapel five days a week. During Lee’s first year at the academy a young new chaplain came to the school, Charles P. McIlvaine, also professor of ethics, history, and geography. Whether his age, his charisma, his zeal, or his eloquence, or a combination of them all, McIlvaine proved an likable and effective minister and role model to the impressionable young men, many of whom, like Robert, would become the country’s leading military figures.

When his military service took Lee to New York in the 1840s, he was sufficiently serious about church life to serve as a vestryman at the garrison church at Fort Hamilton, but not terribly interested in a religious squabble that developed among the parisoners over the high-church theology of Oxford’s Edward Bouverie Pusey. Lee leaned toward the low-church view but confided his beliefs to only a few trusted friends. Likewise, Lee was
Lee's religious life took on more serious overtones on 17 July 1853, the day he was confirmed, along with daughters Annie and Mary, at Christ Church, Alexandria. According to Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee up to that time had led a moral and pious life and had felt and verbalized his dependence on God, and he had not gone through any period of questioning or testing or experienced any "sudden spiritual upheaval" although he believed in Christian conversion experiences. "Rather," said Freeman, "his decision reflected a progression of religious experiences." Perhaps those experiences included his escape from almost certain capture while on a reconnoitering mission during the Mexican War, after which Lee took time, he wrote his wife, to "give thanks to our Heavenly Father for all his mercies to me, for his preservation of me through all the dangers I have passed, and all the blessings which he has bestowed upon me, for I know I fall far short of my obligations." Perhaps he recognized the example that he was setting for the cadets at West Point, now that he was their superintendent and responsible for their well-being. Or maybe the upcoming confirmation of his daughters signaled to him weaknesses in his personal example. His wife's unhalted physical decline, which eventually made her an invalid, and the death of his mother-in-law, with whom he had been particularly close, could not but have given him pause. In any event, Lee had decided, at age 46, to make a formal public profession of belief and allegiance to Christ. The vows he made, he kept.

While on the frontier, as a cavalry captain, after the expiration of his term at West Point, Lee's religious life was apparent to all, so much so that one of his men asked him to perform the funeral rites over his dead child.

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He was as handsome a little boy as I ever saw—the son of one of the sergeants, about a year old; I was admiring his appearance the day before he was taken ill. Last Thursday his little waxy form was committed to the earth. His father came to me, the tears flowing down his cheeks, and asked me to read the funeral service over his body, which I did at the grave for the second time in my life. I hope I shall not be called on again, for, though I believe that it is far better for the child to be called by its heavenly Creator into his presence in its purity and innocence, unpolluted by sin, and uncontaminated by the vices of this world, still it wrings a parent's heart with anguish that is painful to see. Yet I know it was done in mercy to both—mercy to the child, mercy to the parents. The former has been saved from sin and misery here, and the latter have been given a touching appeal and powerful inducement to prepare for hereafter. May it prove effectual, and may they require no further severe admonition.

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Many such examples of Lee's religiosity could be cited from his letters.

While on the frontier, in San Antonio, Texas, Lee found time to assist in bringing to fruition the construction of an Episcopal church building. He also learned, and was overjoyed, that his youngest son, Rob, had begun to prepare for confirmation. Like his countrymen, he also began to express concerns for the sectional crisis that was heating up, although he believed God would not let the United States be rent asunder after so blessing the country with its formation. "May God rescue us from the folly of our own acts," was his plea, "save us from selfishness and teach us to love our neighbors as ourselves." Alas, it was not to be, but Lee trusted all to the heavenly mercy. "I am not concerned with results. God's will ought to be our aim, and I am quite comforted that his designs should be accomplished and not mine."

Lee's wartime prayer that "the Great Ruler of the Universe will continue to aid and prosper us, and crown at last our feeble efforts with success," was not answered in the affirmative. Despite the Confederate loss, however, it left no ill effects on Lee's religious faith. As president of Washington College, Lee preferred to have his office in the chapel that the school constructed, and remained active in church affairs until his death. In fact, his last deed before suffering the stroke that led to his death was to attend a meeting of the vestry.

As usual, Douglas Southall Freeman made some keen observations about Lee's religiosity:

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His manners reflected his spiritual life. It has been in vain that some of his biographers have asked if his calm dignity did not cover some deep spiritual conflict. It was not so. His was a simple soul, humble, transparent, and believing. Increasingly through the years prior to that historic railway journey to Richmond, religion had become a part of his very being. So far as may be judged from his letters, he had not passed through a single period of doubt as to the existence of a personal God. The religious controversies of his mature years never touched him. Creeds meant little to him. Reading daily his Bible and his prayer book, spending much time on his knees, he believed in a God who, in His wisdom, sent blessings beyond man's deserts, and visited him, on occasion, with hardships and disaster for the chastening of the rebellious heart of the ungrateful and the forgetful. As Robert E. Lee viewed it, on the eve of his plunge into the bloody tragedy of a war among brothers, life was only a preparation for eternity. Whatever befall the faithful was the will of God, and whatever God willed was best. In every disaster, he was to stand firm in the faith that it was sent by God for reasons that man could not see.

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Prayerbook of Robert E. Lee
Yes, Robert E. Lee occasionally drank wine. Lee considered it his duty to live a life of moderation and restraint, and that included personal habits of eating, drinking, language, dress, etc. As a cadet at West Point Lee studiously avoided the revelries indulged in by some of the other students, although he managed to do so without coming across as a prude. As an officer and as a father he thought it incumbent to set an example for those looking to him. Nevertheless, the wine cellar at Arlington House was fully stocked, as evidenced by his wife’s relaying to him of its contents being removed with other family valuables to Ravensworth in the spring of 1861, in anticipation of the Federal occupation of their home. During the Civil War Lee sometimes shared wine at his table when it was sent to him as a gift—to have not done so would have given the appearance, at least in his eyes, of scorning a sacrifice made by impoverished supporters of the Confederate war effort. After the war, in 1869, when Lee was conscious of his example to his students at Washington College, Lee wrote of his thoughts about the use of hard liquor: "My experience through life has convinced me that, while moderation and temperance in all things are commendable and beneficial, abstinence from spirituous liquors is the best safeguard of morals and health." To a son he wrote, "I think it better to avoid it altogether, as you do, as its temperate use is so difficult." Another statement attributed to him is completely in character: "Whiskey — I like it, I always did, and that is the reason I never use it." Those statements seem to sum up Lee’s attitude toward intemperance.

Ironically, the National Anti-Saloon League in 1912 renamed its pledge movement the Lincoln-Lee Legion in honor of two men considered to have best set an example of temperance. The LLL’s pledge read:

**Whereas, the use of intoxicating liquors as a beverage is productive of pauperism, degradation and crime; and believing it our duty to discourage that which produces more evil than good, we therefore pledge ourselves to abstain from the use of intoxicating liquors as a beverage.**

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How was REL related to George Washington?

Robert E. Lee’s wife Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee was the daughter of George Washington Parke Custis, George and Martha Washington’s grandson and adopted son. Robert’s grandfather, Henry Lee II, had married a cousin, Lucy Grymes, with whom the youthful Washington had been enamored. Their son and Robert’s father, Henry Lee III, as a child knew Martha and George Washington as “Aunt Martha” and “Uncle George.” Henry came of age on the eve of the Revolutionary War, secured a commission as a cavalry officer, and won fame and a new name—Light-Horse Harry—as one of the great heroes of the war. Washington even invited Harry, twenty-four years his junior, to serve in his military family, but Lee declined. After the war, however, Light-Horse Harry became one of Washington’s closest political allies and a vocal proponent of the Constitution, which Washington also strongly supported. In that matter Light-Horse Harry broke with another famous cousin, Richard Henry Lee, with whom Washington was also closely allied, along with Richard Henry’s brothers Francis Lightfoot, William, and Arthur. Later, when President John Adams asked Washington to help arrange the Provisional Army in preparation for a possible war with France in 1798, Washington made an annotated list of officers, their strengths and weaknesses, and named Light-Horse Harry as the best among the all. When Washington died, it was Light-Horse Harry who penned the famous words about his former commander-in-chief, “First in War, First in Peace, First in the Hearts of his Countrymen.” It was a tribute reflecting his own feelings, and one that Lee reiterated in stories and letters to Robert’s older brother Charles, who was instructed to pass them on his younger siblings. In addition to all this, Washington was namesake and godfather to a son of Light-Horse Harry, who died in infancy, Robert’s half brother. What was more, Washington’s heir, nephew Bushrod Washington, to whom the Mount Vernon estate passed, raised the grandchildren of Richard Henry Lee, who intermarried with the
Washington family. In the end, the final Washington owners of Mount Vernon were also Lee descendents. Ironically, George Washington himself had first leased the estate from his half brother's widow Ann Fairfax Washington (d. 1761) and her second husband, George Lee, (1714–1761), first cousins to Robert's father and Lee uncles. Lee's biographer Douglas Southall Freeman very aptly summed up Lee's reverence for the Father of His Country: "In the home where Robert was trained, God came first and then Washington."

His wealth of family lore and connections and a childhood in Alexandria where ghosts of Washington appeared on every street corner were not enough to endear Robert E. Lee to George Washington, Lee's own temperament was. He had an innate sense of duty and honor and a rigid self-control. Even his religion was the same–Episcopalian–although Lee, reflecting the times in which he lived, tended less toward the high church than Washington. And Lee loved horses, as did the great man whom Jefferson described as the "best horseman of his age, and the most graceful figure that could be seen on horseback." (Lee's famous horse, Traveller, bore the name of one of Washington's stud horses.) Most obvious, of course, was the similar bent for the military, especially their deep respect for civil authority and the audacious manner in which they attempted to wage war, albeit to different ends.

What were the names of REL's horses?

Lee astride Traveller

Robert E. Lee rode many horses. The most famous of all, of course, was Traveller, the iron gray made famous by photographers during and after the Civil War. Lee purchased Traveller for $200 from Captain Joseph M. Broun (b. 1835), quartermaster of the 60th Virginia Infantry, which in December 1861 accompanied Lee to South Carolina to shore up the Confederate defensive works. Traveller was sired by Grey Eagle, a famous Kentucky race horse that also produced many fine thoroughbred saddle horses. Traveller's mother was Flora, a grade mare apparently sent to Maysville, Kentucky, for the purpose. Born in the spring of 1857 near Blue Sulphur Springs in Greenriver County, Virginia (present-day West Virginia), Traveller had one owner before Broun, Captain James W. "Dick" Johnson who had raised him, calling him Jeff Davis. As a colt, Jeff Davis took first prize in the horse shows at the Lewisburg fairs in 1859 and 1860. According to Broun, who paid $175 for the horse in September 1861, Traveller was greatly admired in the Confederate camp for "his rapid, springy walk, his high spirit, bold carriage, and muscular strength."

Lee took a fancy to Traveller the first time he saw him and inquired about him from time to time and when he saw Broun's brother riding the horse in South Carolina he offered to buy him. After trying him out for a week, in February 1862, a deal was struck, and Traveller had its third owner. Lee renamed Jeff Davis Traveller, after a stud horse belonging to Lee's role model and great-grandfather-in-law, George Washington. Traveller weighed 1,100 pounds and stood sixteen hands high. Lee gave a lengthy description of Traveller to his wife's cousin Markie Williams, who had requested it in preparation of making a painting of the horse, set forth in his Recollections and Letters of General Lee, by Lee's son Rob:

If I were an artist like you I would draw a true picture of Traveller—representing his fine proportions, muscular figure, deep chest and short back, strong haunches, flat feet, small head, broad forehead, delicate ears, quick eye, small feet, and black mane and tail. Such a picture would inspire a poet, whose genius could then depict his worth and describe his endurance of toil, hunger, thirst, heat, cold, and the dangers and sufferings through which he passed. He could dilate upon his sagacity and affection, and his invariable response to every wish of his rider. He might even imagine his thoughts, through the long night marches and days of battle through which he has passed. But I am no artist; I can only say he is a Confederate gray. I purchased him in the mountains of Virginia in the autumn of 1861, and he has been my patient follower ever since—to Georgia, the Carolinas, and back to Virginia. He carried me through the Seven Days battle around Richmond, the second Manassas, at Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, the last day at Chancellorsville, to Pennsylvania, at Gettysburg, and back to the Rappahannock. From the commencement of the campaign in 1864 at Orange, till its close around Petersburg, the saddle was scarcely off his back, as he passed through the fire of the Wilderness, Spottsylvania,
According to Rob Lee, Traveller was “never known to tire, and, though quiet and sensible in general and afraid of nothing, yet if not regularly exercised, he fretted a good deal, especially in a crowd of horses.” During the Maryland Campaign Traveller was the cause of a somewhat serious injury to his owner. After dismounting, Lee was “sitting on a fallen log, with the bridle reins hung over his arm. Traveller, becoming frightened at something, suddenly dashed away, threw him violently to the ground, spraining both hands and breaking a small bone in one of them.” The result was that Lee could not get in the saddle for part of the campaign. Rob Lee also related his own experience riding Traveller, which took place when he first joined the Confederate cavalry:

The general had the strongest affection for Traveller, which he showed on all occasions, and his allowing me to ride him on this long march [from Orange Court House to Fredericksburg] was a great compliment. Possibly he wanted to give me a good hammering before he turned me over to the cavalry. During my soldier life, so far, I had been on foot, having backed nothing more lively than a tired artiller horse; so I mounted with some misgivings, though I was very proud of my steed. My misgivings were fully realised, for Traveller would not walk a step. He took a short, high trot—a buck-trot, as compared with a buck-jump—and kept it up to Fredericksburg, some thirty miles. Though young, strong, and tough, I was glad when the journey ended. This was my first introduction to the cavalry service. I think I am safe in saying that I could have walked the distance with much less discomfort and fatigue.

Traveller died of lockjaw in June 1871 and was buried by Lee’s son Custis along Wood’s Creek behind Washington and Lee University. In 1907 his skeleton was disinterred and put on public display, and in 1971 Traveller was re-buried outside the Lee Chapel.

Although Lee's affection and respect was greater for Traveller than for his other horses, because of his nervousness Lee did not think Traveller his best horse under fire during battle. After Lee was injured by Traveller during the Maryland Campaign, cavalry general J.E.B. Stuart discovered a “low, easy moving, and quiet sorrel mare” owned by Stephen Dandridge of the Bower, a country estate in Jefferson County where Stuart and his staff sometimes quartered. Thinking the mare...
presented her as a gift to Lee. When Lee returned to the saddle it was not upon Traveller but upon the back of the new mare, christened Lucy Long. Lee rode Lucy Long until she got in foal two years later, during the siege of Petersburg. Lee sent Lucy Long to the rear of the lines and took to riding Traveller again. Before the war ended Lucy Long disappeared, stolen, but was returned to its owner as a Christmas present in 1867 when Rob Lee discovered her in the eastern part of Virginia. Lucy Long lived in Lexington until leg injuries in the late 1870s forced Custis Lee to send her to the country. Lucy Long was still living in 1891, in her thirty-fourth year, described as being "thin in flesh, though her eye has not lost its wonted brightness and her health apparently is good. She eats dry food with difficulty, hence her present condition. During the grazing season she fattens on the soft grasses of the pasture."

Lee's correspondence is full of references to other horses. Some of the ones known by name include Grace Darling, Santa Anna, Richmond, Brown Roan, Ajax, and Grace Darling. Grace Darling was a chestnut mare "of fine size and great power" that Lee had bought in Texas after her owner died on the march to Mexico. Named after the heroine of Northumberland who rowed out in a storm to save survivors of the steamer Forfarshire in 1838, Grace Darling bore Lee throughout the campaign, despite being shot seven times, and was his favorite mare. She was sent to the White House on the Pamunkey River for safekeeping during the war but confiscated by a Federal quartermaster McClellan occupied the plantation during the Peninsula Campaign. Santa Anna was a pure white 5-year-old mustang that Lee acquired in Vera Cruz and sent to Baltimore as a gift for his son Rob. Rob described him as "a very miserable, sad-looking object" because of his long sea voyage. Over time Santa Anna's worth became apparent to Rob and the pony remained with the family until one morning in the winter of 1860—1861, when he was "found lying cold and dead in the park at Arlington."

Richmond, a bay stallion, was aptly named, for he was presented to Lee as a gift when he went to Richmond in the spring of 1861 and he bore Lee as he rode through the camps and defensive works around the capital city. "He is a troublesome fellow and dislikes to associate with strange horses," wrote Lee of Richmond. "He expresses it more in words than acts, and if firmly treated becomes quiet at last." Richmond died in 1862 after the battle of Malvern Hill. Brown Roan (or simply, the Roan) was purchased by Lee in western Virginia when he was ordered there in the 1861. Brown Roan accompanied Lee to South Carolina in 1862 but went to pasture with a farmer after going blind. Ajax was a fine chestnut gelding sent to Lee by friends in southwest Virginia. Lee like the horse but seldom mounted him because of his size. Ajax went with Traveller to Lexington after the war but was killed when he accidently ran into an iron gate-latch prong in the mid-1860s.

How did REL die?

Robert E. Lee most likely died of complications following a stroke. For some years he had complained about chest pain and numbness in his right arm—probably angina pectoris—and may have even suffered a heart attack during the war, in March 1863. To all who knew him the signs of physical decline were readily apparent from that time on. For more than a year before his death Lee had been in almost constant pain, and had even made a trip in the spring of 1870 to the southern climes of Carolinas and Georgia upon the advice of his physicians. He came home even more tired than before he left, and despite treatment, rest, and visits to the springs, his condition did not improve materially.

On the evening of 28 September 1870, when his final decline suddenly came upon him, Lee had been going about his work routinely when he went in to dine with his family. He sat down to table and attempted to say grace as was his habit, but this time words failed and although he wanted to answer remarks made to him by his wife, he could not. Physicians were sent for, Doctors H. T. Barton and R. L. Madison, who had a few minutes before been with Lee at a church vestry meeting. Upon examination the doctors diagnosed "venous congestion" and prescribed medicine and rest. Over the next few days Lee seemed to drift in and out of consciousness and paralysis, and was mostly speechless except for occasional monosyllabic answers to questions put to him. In this state he remained, with periods of seeming improvement until 10 October when he began to slip away. He refused medicine, drifted in and out of consciousness, and made references to hard-fought battles and soldiers. His final utterance, whether conscious of the words or not, was "Strike the tent." Lee's physicians said at the time that his cause of death was "mental and physical fatigue, inducing venous congestion of the brain, which, however, never proceeded so far as apoplexy or paralysis, but gradually caused cerebral exhaustion and death."

Where is REL buried?

Edward Valentine's Recumbent Lee

Robert E. Lee is buried in the family vault beneath the Lee Chapel at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. The Virginia General Assembly desired of the family to consider burial in Richmond's famed Hollywood Cemetery, but the family settled on Lexington as the final resting place. Lee's parents, wife, and seven children are also interred in the burial vault, along with a number of other relatives. The funeral took place on 15 October 1870, and memorial meetings were held across the south and in New York.

The Funeral of Robert E. Lee
Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee

Who was MARCL?

Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee was the great-granddaughter of Martha and George Washington and the wife of Confederate General Robert E. Lee.

When and where was MARCL born?

Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee was born on 1 October 1808 at Arlington House, the mansion that her father had begun building in 1802 on lands that he inherited from his father in present-day Arlington County, Virginia.

Who were MARCL's parents?

Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee's father was George Washington Parke Custis, the grandson of Martha and George Washington, and Mary Lee "Molly" Fitzhugh (1788–1853). An infant when his father, John Parke Custis, died of campfever during the Yorktown Campaign, Custis was raised by the Washingtons at Mount Vernon.

Did MARCL have siblings?

Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee was the third of her parents' four children but the only one that survived infancy.

Did MARCL receive an education?

Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee received a classical education from private tutors. She learned Latin, Greek, and French, enjoyed English literature, and kept abreast of changes in the country's political climate through newspapers. After her father died she edited for publication a series of essays that he had written for the National Intelligencer that appeared in 1860 under the title Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington by His Adopted Son, George Washington Parke Custis, with a Memoir of the Author by His Daughter. Mary also taught slave women to read and write and gave Bible lessons to black children.

Did MARCL have a nickname?

As a child, Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee was called Molly, after her mother. As an adult she was usually known as Mary.

Is it true that MARCL was an artist?

Yes, Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee was, like her father, a painter. Self-taught, she especially liked to paint landscapes, and in later years, when handicapped by debilitating rheumatoid arthritis, she often color tinted portraits of the family. Mary also was adept at sewing and knitting handiwork.

Was MARCL very religious?

Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee

Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee was quite religious, as her mother was before her. She was a life-long Episcopalian, attending when at home Christ Church, Alexandria, and when away whatever local Episcopal church that was nearby. At Mary's home family prayers were repeated every morning and evening, and she chronicled her spiritual life in a prayer journal that she wrote in regularly. Mary became even more reliant on her faith when she became deathly ill in the fall of 1830. After her marriage to Robert E. Lee in 1831 she sometimes instructed others in the gospel, including black children to whom she gave Bible lessons. In the years following the Civil War, when her husband served as president of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, Mary Lee became actively involved in the local church.

Did Sam Houston court MARCL?

Yes, Sam Houston (1793–1863), future president of Texas and later U.S. Senator, courted Mary Anna Randolph Custis while he was living in the Federal City as a member of Congress from Tennessee. At the time Mary was about 16 years old and Houston about 31.

When and where did MARCL marry?

Mary Anna Randolph Custis and Robert E. Lee wed on 30 June 1831 at Arlington House. The ceremony took place in the so-called Family Parlor, said to be the favorite room in the house and the site of several other weddings, which was adjacent to the dining room. The couple, who had known each other as children and began courting as early as 1824, became engaged in 1829 after Robert's graduation from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

Did MARCL have children?

Robert E. and Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee had seven children, six of whom were born at Arlington House. They included three boys and four girls.

Where did MARCL live during the Civil War?

Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee

Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee
Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee and her family were forced to leave her life-long home, Arlington House, early in the Civil War. Fearing that the high bluff on which the house was situated was a perfect place from which to stage a Confederate assault on the Federal City, Federal troops occupied the area after the Confederate victory of First Manassas. By then, Mary had overseen the packing and moving of the family heirlooms and other valuables to sites considered to be out of the reach of the Federal Army. (Later, in January 1864, the U.S. authorities illegally confiscated Arlington House for back taxes, and not until 1882 was it returned to the family.) Mary visited relatives and friends, but spent much of the war at a small house in Richmond, on East Leigh Street.

**Did MARCL ever return to Arlington House?**

Yes, in June 1873, a few months before her death, Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee made a brief visit to Arlington House, a final pilgrimage during which she was unable to leave her carriage. Some of her old servants came out to greet her while she gazed upon her “dear old home, so changed,” she wrote, “it seemed but as a dream of the past.”

**Was MARCL an invalid?**

As she grew older, Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee developed rheumatoid arthritis, a crippling and painful disease that worsened with age. Despite constant medical attention and numerous visits to the Virginia springs in search of relief, she found little relief. Mary increasingly found it difficult to walk, and by the end of the first year of the Civil War she was confined to a wheelchair.

**When and where did MARCL die?**

Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee died on 5 November 1873 at her home at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. She was 66 years old.

**Where is MARCL buried?**

Mary Anna Randolph Custis Lee is buried along side her husband in the Lee Family crypt at the Lee Chapel at Washington and Lee University, in Lexington, Virginia.