

## **ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY AFRICAN AMERICAN TOUR LED BY WILLIAM BLAIR**

When the Civil War casualties began to overflow hospitals and burial grounds near Washington, D.C., Quarter-master General Montgomery Meigs proposed in 1864 that 200 acres of the Robert E. Lee family property at Arlington be taken for a cemetery.

The Arlington House is the nation's first memorial to President Washington. The home was built in stages between 1802 and 1818 by George Washington Parke Custis, his slaves, and hired craftsmen. Custis was the grandson of Martha Washington and her first husband, Daniel Custis. Following the death of his father (Martha's son John Parke Custis), young Custis went to live at Mount Vernon where Martha and George raised him as their own son. Custis considered Washington as a father figure.

At Arlington, Custis wanted his home to be a living memorial to President Washington and filled it with "Washington Treasury". Such items included china, portraits, Washington's bed, etc. Arlington House was surrounded by an 1100-acre plantation. Slaves grew crops, tended gardens, cared for livestock, worked as cooks, maids, etc.

In 1804 George Washington Custis married Mary Lee Fitzhugh. The Custises had four children but only their daughter Mary Anna Randolph Custis survived infancy. In 1831, Mary and Lt. Robert E. Lee were married at Arlington. After G.W. Custis died in 1857 Lee took leave from active duty to administer the Arlington estate. Custis left Mrs. Lee a life interest in the estate with the property to pass to her son, George Washington Custis Lee, upon her death. It is important to note that Arlington was a working slave plantation. At Arlington today, only half of the story is told regarding the slave quarter's interpretation. It is told that the slaves were taught to read and many were manumitted in wills. However, slaves were the field laborers, workers and house servants who were responsible for running the Arlington plantation.

On April 19, 1861, Lee learned that Virginia had adopted an Ordinance of Secession. On April 20 Lee resigned his commission in the U.S. Army. Two days later Lee left Arlington never to return. Once a Confederate Officer, Lee's family left Arlington. Mrs. Lee placed her home in the care of Selina Gray, the enslaved housekeeper and daughter of Leonard and Sallie Norris. In May, 1861 Union troops occupied Arlington for security purposes (proximity to Washington, D.C.) and began looting the "Washington Treasury". The seizure was part of the Confiscation Act, which in the second part of the act stated that the government could seize anything for "military necessity". Selina Gray confronted the soldiers and through her bold efforts saved many of the priceless heirlooms.

In 1864 Mrs. Lee was unable to comply with a wartime practice requiring property owners in areas occupied by U. S. troops to personally pay their taxes. The act was called the Tax Act of 1862. Mary Lee owed \$96.00. According to the law, any master had to swear allegiance to the country and pay taxes in person. Mary could not and her husband was leading the Confederate Army. The Federal Government confiscated

Arlington, setting aside 200 acres as Arlington National Cemetery. Part of the estate included a Freedman's Village; a community established to house and educate former slaves. At the end of the Civil War, Lee wanted his property back and requested a pardon to get his rights reinstated. The Tomb of the Unknown was built in 1866 in Mrs. Lee's Rose Garden. The tomb contained the remains of 2111 remains of **federal soldiers** sending the message to Lee, not to come back to Arlington. This act did not keep Lee from coming back; he simply wasn't allowed. In 1882 Custis Lee won his lawsuit against the government for the loss of his property, and he received \$150,000 in compensation for Arlington.

**Section 27** of Arlington National Cemetery consists of an African American burial section, both soldiers and civilians. There are 1500 United States Colored Troops (USCT) buried at Arlington. At the top of the hill of Section 27, if you look to the left you will see many "Colored troops" buried and to the right of the hill, you will see citizens and civilians buried throughout. A citizen was defined as a non-combatant. Remember that dead black persons were not considered citizens. This was clearly defined in the Dred Scot Case and not until the Fourteenth Amendment were blacks defined as citizens. There are 4 Medal of Honor recipients buried in Sect. 27 including one African American named James H. Harris. A total of 16 African American soldiers won the Medal of Honor during the Civil War (the highest honor for valor). Black soldiers were not used during the first two years of the Civil War. Over 200,000 black soldiers served in 400,000 engagements and 34 major battles. African American soldiers served in every theatre of war except Sherman's March to the sea. Approximately 37,000 black soldiers died in the Civil War. There were approximately 250,000 freed blacks in the North at the time of the Civil War.

The term **contraband** was coined by James H. Harris as a way to keep blacks from being returned to their owners. Harris argued it was not right to return slaves because they are considered military property.

The Confederacy placed 80% of their men between the ages of 17 and 50 into the military. They could only do this because African Americans were running the plantations and farms while the white men were away at war.

One of the most successful experiments during Reconstruction could be found at Arlington. A suggestion was made to the Freedman's Bureau to employ blacks around the Washington, D. C. area by creating a self-sustaining village at Arlington. Over 100 former slaves settled here and began to work. They paid 10.00 a month that went for rent and maintenance fees. Sojourner Truth was sent to Arlington to advise and help freed people, as well as Harriet Jacobs who made her way to freedom. The village was operational until 1900 when the government decided to close the Freedman village and compensated the residents \$75,000.

In 1864 Arlington became a National Cemetery. Prior to that, the question arose, "What do you do with blacks who died on this land"? The answer was to bury blacks in Section 27, intermingled with others. It was not until after the Civil War that the cemetery was

segregated. The founder of Arlington Cemetery was Montgomery Meigs. Meigs was the Quarter Master General of the Army in charge of burials. He also helped to finish the 34-year renovation of the U.S. Capital and helped to put the dome in place. Meigs' son was killed in the Civil War in October, 1864. In June, 1864 the cemetery was created. Washington, D.C. had a space problem due to the 3,000 casualties occurring per day. Meigs started putting bodies in Sect. 27 along with other bodies already buried there. On May 13 and 14, 1865, military burials began at Arlington.

Section One is the location of Abner Doubleday's grave. He did not invent the game of baseball; a friend from West Point fabricated this story. Doubleday was present at Fort Sumter when the first shots were fired upon the federal soldiers. Doubleday asked for and received permission to fire the first shots back.

The grave of James Parks can be found at Arlington. He was born in 1843 to Lawrence and Patsy Parks who produced 22 children. James Park was a slave that belonged to George Washington Park Custis. His headstone at the cemetery reads: "An interesting respectful, kindly old Negro: Born a slave at Arlington House Estate". He died on August 21, 1929. The inscription on his headstone represents the "Lost Cause" mentality that became popular in the 1890's as the South began to reclaim its side of the story. Their message was clear: slavery had nothing to do with the Civil War. Thus the creation of the faithful slave image is reborn.

The Confederate Monument at Arlington was established in 1914. It was put up by the United Daughters of the Confederacy and is the largest monument in Arlington (32 feet high). The corner stone was laid in 1910 and President Woodrow Wilson dedicated the monument on June 4, 1914. This monument also represents the Lost Cause interpretation of the Civil War. The reason why the South fought was not for fame or reward but for obedience to duty. The monument contains vignettes that reinforce happy race relations in the Old South. The message on the monument reads: "Not lured by ambition or goaded by necessity, but in simple obedience to duty as they understood it these men suffered all sacrificed all dared all and died".

Some of the symbols on the monument include:

- a. Mammy—the soldier goes off to war and turns his child over to the kind Negro (trust and faith). a slave follows his master into war
- b. Black soldier—the south claims that 50,000 blacks fought for the Confederacy. this is wrong; it is not known how many were a part of the Confederacy but none were deployed in battle.
- c. woman on top—represents the south.
- d. laurel wreath, pruning hook, Biblical passages at the feet, four urns (four years of fighting)
- e. coat of arms of each of the eleven Confederate States
- f. mythical gods represent the southern soldiers
- g. goddess Minerva
- h. constitution representing each branch of government

The Election of 1896 was the last time the north waved “the bloody shirt” to help Republicans get elected. The north no longer needed the south to keep winning. Up until 1898, the government would not spend federal money to tend to the graves of Confederate soldiers. President McKinley made a famous speech suggesting that for closure, the U.S. should share in the care of graves of Confederate Soldiers. McKinley also visited Tuskegee Institute and honored Booker T. Washington. McKinley hoped to win over the south in exchange for his imperialistic goals of expanding American borders and acquiring overseas possessions.

Lincoln Park is home to an **Emancipation Statue**. It is one of the most famous statues for historians to examine. Lincoln is standing and a slave is kneeling. It is one of the only public recognitions of emancipation. Many countries have either public recognitions of slavery or emancipation days. In America, there is no recognition of the end of slavery.

Only since 1992 does the United States display the Emancipation Proclamation a couple of times a year. What does represents Emancipation Day? June 19, 1865, Jan. 1, 1863, Sept. 22, 1862. April 16, 1862 was celebrated in D.C. as Emancipation Day.

How did the statue in Lincoln Park begin? Charlotte Scott, a Virginia former slave took \$5.00 of her own money to begin the fund raising following Lincoln’s death. Colored Troop veterans raised \$20,000. An agency was needed to push the project forward. The Western Sanitary Commission, with strong ties in St. Louis, took on the project. Thomas Ball designed the statue. What is this a statue to?? Lincoln or emancipation?? Is it paternalistic and condescending? The slave’s face is a real slave from Missouri named Archer Anderson. Missouri was a border state. On April 14, 1876, Fredrick Douglass was selected to speak at the dedication of the statue. Douglass was very conflicted by the statue. He said, “it showed the negro on his knees”. “Lincoln was neither our man or our model; we are Lincoln’s stepchildren.”

A statue of **Mary McLeod Bethune** entitled “**Let Her Works Praise Her**” 1875-1955 was dedicated on July 10, 1974. Ms. Bethune was an educator and opened the first school for girls in Florida. She founded the National Council of Negro Women and was President of it as well. She was born in Maysville, S.C. in 1875 and was one of seventeen children. She was the daughter of a former slave. Women overall became the spokespeople for the black race because it was safer for women to speak out about injustice than men. Does this statue also represent paternalism??

An African American Civil War memorial entitled “The Spirit of Freedom” can be found in Washington, D.C. on U Street. Ed Hamilton is the sculptor of the statue. It includes the names of 209,145 African American soldiers who served in the Union army and navy during the Civil War. Is this a statue to celebrate emancipation??

It began as an idea in 1991 by Counselman Frank Smith. Pres. Bush recognized the idea in 1992. Smith did not want the monument placed on the mall. He selected U Street, an vibrant African American neighborhood and cultural center. Over 20 designs were

submitted but Hamilton's proposal, the Louisville, Kentucky sculptor who designed the Amistade memorial was selected. It was dedicated in 1996 and black reinactors marched down Pennsylvania Avenue to celebrate.