

Sully Historic Site
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Resource Management Division
 Fairfax County Park Authority



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Revised 9/2014

Sully Historic Site A Self-Guided Walking Tour



Richard Bland Lee



Elizabeth Collins Lee

Sully is the late 18th century home of Richard Bland Lee, northern Virginia's first congressman and an uncle of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Richard Bland Lee and his wife, Elizabeth Collins Lee, lived here with their children from 1794 to 1811.

John and Alice, Ludwell and Nancy and their children, along with over thirty other enslaved African Americans, overseers, and tenant farmers resided here as well. Many of the African Americans worked in the kitchen/laundry, smokehouse and dairy, while others worked the fields and gardens. Like other progressive farmers of his day, Lee used the labor of slaves to transform a single crop tobacco farm into a diversified crop operation. During his ownership the estate included extensive fields of grains and grasses, pasture for livestock, orchards, a two acre kitchen garden and acres of woods.

Situated north of Cain's Branch, Sully consists of five surviving original buildings (the main house and four small outbuildings), one relocated historic structure, a representative garden, a representative slave quarter, and archaeological sites. Together they give a multi faceted view of the customs and culture of gentry class northern Virginians in the early years of our nation.

1. South Lane and Representative Slave Quarter

"Mark out the ground for the avenue of cherry trees, which I wish to lead to my new buildings in a convenient manner..."

Richard Bland Lee, March 2, 1792

This very early lane may be the original cherry tree-lined entrance to Sully, and probably led southeast to a point along Frying Pan Road (now Centreville Road).

Aside from having *"ever necessary house for labourers"* with *"brick or stone chimnies,"* little is known about the living space of the enslaved African Americans. Archaeology revealed remnants of a small cluster of buildings along the South Lane. Their arrangement, along with artifacts, correspond to known information about slave dwellings on other 18th century Virginia farms.

The log dwelling (built on the 18th century "footprint") and communal yard make up a portion of the representative quarter. A garden would also have been present. Constructed in 2000, the structure provides a more comprehensive view of the enslaved African American presence at Sully.

2. Log Schoolhouse

This structure was moved to Sully in the 1960s for preservation. The building dates from the first half of the 19th century and was originally a schoolhouse in Haymarket, Virginia.

This structure is not open for view.

Restrooms are located below this structure.

3. Stone Dairy

"Our dairy is an elegant apartment and answers our most sanguine expectations."

Richard Bland Lee, June 5, 1802

Built circa 1801, the building housed the dairy operations: cooling milk, eggs and barrel-churned butter. The red Seneca sandstone structure is embellished with galleting, a decorative technique using stone chips set in the mortar. Two-foot thick stone walls ensure cool temperatures. On the east side, crocks of milk and cream were stored in vats recessed in the floor that were filled with natural underground water.

A dairy annex was built and connected through the east

garden represents Elizabeth's fondness for gardening, what she called a *"propensity to be digging in the dirt."* Mrs. Lee grew sweetbriars, tuberose, convolvulus, morning glory, and quamoclit (cardinal climber or cypress vine).

11. "Office" or "Lumber House"

A companion in age and size to the smokehouse, the original use of this building has not been determined. Possibilities include grain and tool storage or as a farm office.

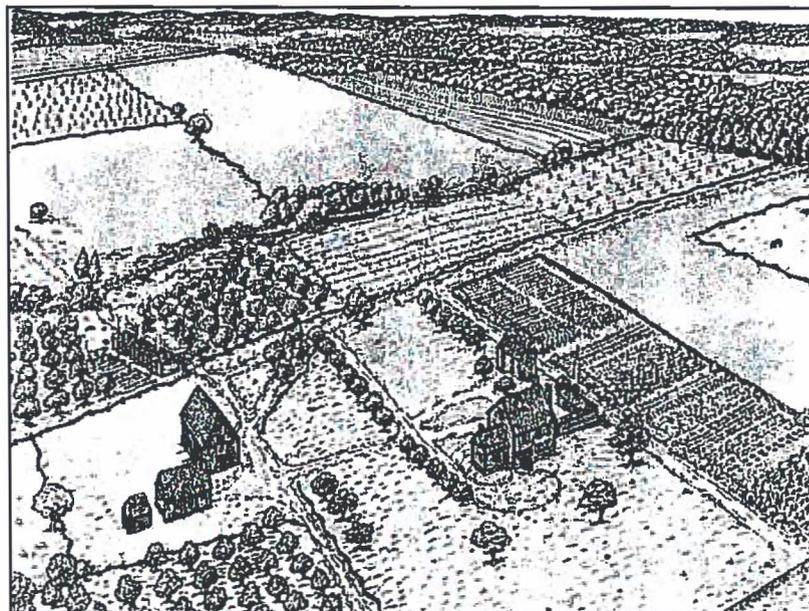
12. Piazza and South Side of the House

"The Piazza on the front, it is a very clever house..."

Stephen Collins, September, 1794

Graced with a "piazza" (porch) and curved trim, this entrance is the present day visitor entrance to the house. The Lee family and guests used it as an extended room for enjoying tea, needlework, conversation, games, and more.

From here, one could see the barn, stables, and carriage house looking east. Pastures of cattle and horses, cultivated fields, and woods were visible south and west. Beyond the barnyard was the slave quarter.



A depiction of the Sully farm, house, and outbuildings in 1801 based on modern interpretive evidence.

7. Covered Walkway

Using the original stone supports, the covered walkway was restored in 1975 to its early appearance. This feature provided a sheltered link between the laundry and kitchen to the main house. An early 18th century writer observed that the practice of having a detached kitchen kept Virginia dwellings "more cool and sweet."

8. Cistern and Wine Cellar

On the west side of the house, below the double chimneys is a circular wooden covered cistern. In the 1840s, it captured rainwater for the laundry, garden, and livestock.

There is a door to the left of the cistern that leads to a two-roomed cellar beneath the house. Root vegetables and preserved food were stored in one of the rooms. The other may have contained barrels of wine, cider, and Mr. Lee's home-made brandy, produced from the fruit of his twelve hundred peach trees.

These structures are not open for view.

9. Gravesite

"I indulge myself a thousand times a day, in viewing the spot that contains two of the loveliest Babes that ever breathed..."

*Elizabeth Collins Lee at Sully
August 8, 1796*

Reflecting upon her grief, Mrs. Lee described the graves of her first-born child Mary and Algernon, eldest son of "Light Horse Harry" (Henry Lee III) and Anne Hill Carter. Markers commemorate these graves and that of a second Lee daughter.

In 1978, the remains of Richard Bland Lee and Elizabeth Collins Lee were moved from Congressional Cemetery and reinterred here.

10. Flower Garden

"Often do I think of you so busily and happily employed in attending to the garden..."

*Cornelia Lee in Alexandria to Elizabeth Collins Lee
at Sully, April 4, 1800*

The revival-style flower garden was dedicated in 1978 to Robert Edward Wagstaff, benefactor and Sully's first curator. Located in part of the original two-acre garden, the flower

wall for additional space in the mid-19th century. The south doorway leads to a two-store work or dwelling space, possibly for domestic slaves or an overseer. A fireplace is located on each level.

South side is not open for view.

4. Well

The "well in the kitchen yard" provided water for drinking, cooking, washing, and cleaning. To accomplish these tasks every day, enslaved African Americans drew bucket after bucket of water. The well measures 36 feet deep.

Please do not sit or stand the well.

5. Smokehouse

Built circa 1794, the structure has the same flush bead siding as the main house. After meats were salted, they were suspended from crossbeams and smoked for several weeks to cure and flavor them. Barrels containing salted pork or herring may have been stored here as well. Meats were eaten by the Lees and some were distributed to the enslaved community.



The stone dairy, well, smokehouse, laundry and kitchen.

6. Laundry and Kitchen

"The kitchen...is a finer one than is in twenty miles square and it is in fact a Kitchen and Landrey with very handsom chimney with cranes in them."

Stephen Collins (September, 1794)

A massive stone chimney with double fireplace divides this 1794 structure. Original cranes for hanging pots and cooking utensils extend across the stone hearths. Thornton, a skilled African American cook, prepared all the family meals. Foods ranged from baked breads, roasted meats, fowl, and boiled vegetables, to elaborate pies, cakes, and jellies.

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