



February 12, 2024

United States House of Representatives  
Washington D.C. 20515

United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

H.J. RES. 76 / S.J. RES. 35

Redesignating the Robert E. Lee Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery as  
the “Arlington House National Historic Site”

Dear Members of Congress:

We, descendants with a history at Arlington House, endeavor to see this nationally significant National Park Service (NPS) site interpreted fully, precisely, and inclusively. We seek your support to redesignate the Robert E. Lee Memorial, located inside the boundaries of Arlington National Cemetery, as the “Arlington House National Historic Site.” The Arlington House, constructed between 1802 and 1818, was built for George Washington Parke Custis using enslaved labor and located on a 1,100-acre working plantation overlooking Washington, D.C.

Custis was the grandson of Martha Washington and step-grandson and adopted son of George Washington. In 1831, Robert E. Lee married Custis’ daughter, Mary. Upon Custis’ death in 1857, the Arlington House plantation was willed to his daughter, Mary Custis Lee, and Robert was named executor of the estate. Due to his service in the U.S. Army, Robert E. Lee resided at Arlington House periodically for only eight of the 30 years before resigning his commission at the beginning of the Civil War, deciding his loyalty was to the Confederacy.

Congress, in 1955, designated the site as a memorial to Lee and, in 1972, renamed it for him.

Since 2021, with the help of the NPS, descendants of Custis and Lee, and families who were once enslaved on the plantation, have come together after more than 160 years to repair, heal, and find our collective voice. We have coalesced as a “Family Circle.” In April 2023, for the first time, we came from across the U.S. to gather for an in-person reunion of individuals with similar, but different histories to share collectively.

As descendants of the Arlington House, we respect and understand that this place is truly unique in representing the broad, complicated, and interwoven history of our nation. This history

includes, but is not limited to Robert E. Lee's time here or as a Confederate general who led the South's attempt at secession during the Civil War.

Our goal is that the public use the re-designated Arlington House National Historic Site as a site of conversation, education, healing, and repair. This is not an effort at erasing history. In fact, the families' pursuit is just the opposite. We endeavor to expand our understanding of Arlington House and all those who lived, worked (enslaved and free), and struggled there. Lee has a very important history, as do formerly enslaved people, some of whom were directly related to Lee's wife and family.

The NPS works tirelessly to follow the established legal principle that our historic and cultural assets should be preserved for public benefit and also strives to ensure that the heritage it protects is reflective of the vast and complex nature of the American experience. The descendants of Arlington House endorse these missions.

Many notable individuals and organizations support this effort, including people from every state and 428 Congressional Districts who have signed an online petition to redesignate Arlington House as a National Historic Site.

We enthusiastically support H.J. Res.76 and S.J. Res. 35, by Virginia Congressman Don Beyer and Senator Tim Kaine. The House version of the legislation is currently cosponsored by more than 90 members, to whom we are very grateful.

We strongly urge your cosponsorship and support of H.J. Res.76 and S.J. Res. 35.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,  
Arlington House Descendants' Family Circle

## Arlington House descendants Family Circle members

<b>Alvin Gillem</b> Gray-Norris descendant	<b>David Lucas</b> Branham descendant	<b>Lee Crittenberger-Hart</b> Custis-Lee descendant	<b>Stephen Hammond</b> Syphax descendant
<b>Andrea Syphax</b> Custis-Syphax descendant	<b>Donna Kunkel</b> Custis-Syphax descendant	<b>Leni Fleming</b> Lee descendant	<b>Susan Vogel</b> Custis-Lee descendant
<b>Carol Weaver</b> Syphax descendant	<b>Inez Parks</b> Parks descendant	<b>Mary Lee Fleming Kowalski</b> Lee descendant	<b>Tamara Moore</b> Parks descendant
<b>Cecelia Torres</b> Gray-Norris descendant	<b>Jocelind Julien</b> Branham & Henry descendant	<b>Rob Lee IV</b> Custis-Lee descendant	<b>Tracey D. Syphax</b> Syphax descendant
<b>Craig Custis Syphax</b> Custis-Syphax descendant	<b>Karen Page</b> Custis-Syphax descendant	<b>Sarah Fleming</b> Lee descendant	<b>Tracy Crittenberger</b> Custis-Lee descendant
<b>Custis Glover</b> Custis-Lee descendant	<b>Ken Jensen</b> Syphax descendant	<b>Scott Syphax</b> Custis-Syphax descendant	<b>Zsun-nee Miller-Matema</b> Branham descendant

## Notable individuals and supporting organizations

**David M. Rubenstein** – business leader, philanthropist, author and interviewer

**Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.** – professor, historian, TV show host, documentary filmmaker

**Brig. Gen. (ret.) & Dr. Ty Seidule** – professor, Civil War & reconstruction historian and author

**Nancy Ukai** – Japanese American incarceration camp descendant and member of the Wakasa Memorial Committee advocating for the preservation of the WWII Topaz (UT) site and Wakasa Monument

**Dr. Clint Smith** – educator, journalist, poet and author

**Sally Jewell** – former Secretary, Department of the Interior

**Department of the Interior**  
Washington, DC

**National Park Service**  
Washington, DC

**National Park Conservation Association**  
Washington, DC

**Rob Nieweg, Senior Vice President**  
**National Trust for Historic Preservation**  
Washington, DC

**Ending Racism USA**  
Hudson, OH

**Arlington Historical Society**  
Arlington, VA

**League of Descendants of the Enslaved at Mount Vernon**  
Sterling, VA

**Quander Historical and Educational Society, Inc.**  
Washington, DC

**Gracing the Table** – a northern Mississippi racial healing group, Holly Springs, MS

**Montpelier Descendants Committee**  
Orange, VA

**NAACP Arlington Branch**  
Arlington, VA

**The Glisson Group** – a consulting firm that cultivates healing and fosters fairness related to racism and difference, Oxford, MS

**The Welcome Table Collaborative** – a network of committed bridge-builders devoted to creating welcoming, equitable and prosperous communities, Oxford, MS

More detailed information can be found here: *(include links and/or QR codes below)*

[Legislation establishing the Robert E. Lee Memorial \(1955\)](#)

<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-69/pdf/STATUTE-69-Pg190.pdf>

[Legislation renaming the Custis-Lee Mansion as the Robert E. Lee Memorial](#)

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-86/pdf/STATUTE-86-Pg401-2.pdf>

[A Letter of Commitment between National Park Service and Arlington House descendant families](#)

<https://www.nps.gov/arho/learn/management/descendants-letter-of-commitment.htm>

[David Rubenstein calls for Arlington House Name Change](#)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/06/08/i-funded-rehabilitation-this-robert-e-lee-memorial-congress-please-rename-it/>

[Arlington House Descendants call for Arlington House Name Change](#)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/09/06/arlington-house-robert-e-lee-name-change/>

[Descendants of enslaved, enslavers gather for reconciliation talks in VA](#)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2023/04/22/arlington-lee-enslaved-enslavers-reconciliation/>

[They're strangers with a painful shared bond: Robert E. Lee enslaved their ancestors](#)

<https://www.wypr.org/2023-04-24/theyre-strangers-with-a-painful-shared-bond-robert-e-lee-enslaved-their-ancestors>

[Redesignate Arlington House as a National Historic Site](#)

<https://www.change.org/RedesignateARHO>

[Arlington House redesignation legislation interactive mapper](#)

<https://tinyurl.com/ARHOredes>