

June 2023

Congressman Beyer,

I am writing to express my support for the redesignation of the National Park Service site currently known as 'Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial' as the 'Arlington House National Historic Site.'

The memorial to Lee was established in two pieces of legislation 18 years apart. Public Law 84-1071, passed in June 1955, dedicated the memorial and stated that "Lee, whose name will ever be bright in our history as a great military leader, a great educator, and a great American." It went on to say that "he was a truly great man through the simple heritage of his personal traits of high character, his grandeur of soul, and his unflinching strength of heart." The 1972 legislation established public law 92-333 which gave the site its current name, 'Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial'.

I continue believe this redesignation is long overdue. The name Arlington House National Historic Site, is not only inclusive, it is consistent with how the National Park Service manages and interprets this iconic, historic property.

I am a descendant and historian of the **Syphax** family. Syphaxes were enslaved on the Arlington House plantation by both Robert E. Lee and George Washington Parke Custis before him. Although I disagree with how the earlier legislation characterizes Lee, I disparage neither Lee nor the Custises. I do, however, work hard to give agency to the Syphaxes and all of the Arlington House plantation enslaved community. Their lives and stories are equally as important to the history of this site as is those who enslaved them. Their stories are educational, inspiring and uplifting. Their stories are intertwined with the Lees and Custises. The stories and history told completely can help our country better understand slavery at the Arlington House plantation and have the ability to help generate important and necessary conversations that can help repair and heal from a painful, divisive past.

This redesignation is important to the entire country, not just Arlington House descendant families, the state of Virginia and Washington, D.C. It is important to all Americans. During the short time our online petition (RedesignateARHO.org) has been collecting signatures, citizens from every state in the country and 9 other nations have expressed their support for the site redesignation.

I live in Loudoun County, VA. I intend to share this message with my own elected officials. Your colleague, Representative Jennifer Wexton, and Senator Tim Kaine, have both co-sponsored and sponsored legislation in the House and Senate, respectively. In addition, I will attempt to seek the support of Senator Mark Warner as a co-sponsor of the Senate legislation.

Thank you again Congressman Beyer for your leadership on this effort. Please don't hesitate to call on me if you would like to discuss this legislation further or I can help in some way.

Respectfully,
Stephen E. Hammond

To: Representative Don Beyer

I am writing in support of the legislation you plan to introduce to change the name of

'Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial'

to the more neutral

'Arlington House, National Historic Site.'

The name 'Arlington House, National Historic Site' is much more appropriate, accurate, inclusive, and consistent with how the National Park Service manages and interprets historic properties.

As a direct descendant of George Washington Parke Custis and the great-great granddaughter of Robert E. Lee, I own over 100 artifacts currently on display in the mansion and the museum – portraits, furniture, silver, documents, and ephemera. It has always been important to my branch of the Custis/Lee family to maintain close ties to Arlington House, despite our tragic history. Over the last 100 years, we have sought to provide a context for learning about the complicated history of the estate, in the hopes that visitors will be able to experience the house as more than just a mausoleum.

With the generous grant from David Rubenstein, the National Park Service has been able to update their interpretation of the site to include the perspectives of the enslaved who built and worked the plantation. The work that has been done here has been exemplary, and other institutions have taken note.

I have also been a member of the Family Circle of descendants of the enslaved and enslavers for more than a year, and although I was prevented from attending the reunion in April by health issues, I have found the group to be inspiring in these dark days of American politics. We can use as much thoughtful conversation and reconciliation as possible, and the group has proved to be a model for others who are trying to understand why some of our country's oldest wounds have never healed.

As other descendants have pointed out, this redesignation is important to the entire country and all Americans. In my opinion, this property should never have been named a memorial to Robert E. Lee in the first place – the 1972 legislation is directly related to the cult of the Lost Cause and should be seen as political backlash to desegregation. As Ty Seidule has pointed out in his important study, *Robert E Lee and Me*, names matter, and this change is long overdue.

Thank you again for your efforts. Please do not hesitate to call on me if you would like to discuss this further.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Susan Vogel

To: Representative Don Beyer,

I am writing in support of the legislation you introduced to change the name of the 'Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial' to the 'Arlington House National Historic Site.'

As a descendant of the Lee family, I was present at the recent Family Reunion, Finding our Voice, at Arlington House, in April of this year. I was very happy to see you there, supporting the redesignation to better reflect all the residents who lived at both Arlington House and at Arlington Plantation. It was a very moving day.

My direct ancestor, Richard Bland Lee, Robert E. Lee's uncle, was a member of the Virginia House of Delegates from Loudoun County from 1796-1797. His enslaved people built and ran Sully Plantation, which is now called Sully Historic Site, in Chantilly, Virginia. I am glad it is no longer called Sully Plantation, and instead called a Historic Site. The same could be true for Arlington House.

Thank you again for your efforts. Please don't hesitate to call on me if you would like to discuss this further.

Sarah Tarr Fleming

Dear Congressman Beyer,

I am writing to express my support for redesignation of the National Park Service site currently known as 'Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial' as the 'Arlington House National Historic Site'.

I am a direct descendant of both George Washington Parke Custis and Robert E. Lee and have been working with the National Park Service, Lee descendants and descendants of the enslaved people at Arlington to review the exhibition planning process. One of our most important goals is to ensure that future exhibits and interpretation honor all of the Arlington Family truths and narratives by including and genuinely presenting ALL descendants' voices.

Through this process, I have become acutely aware of the intrinsic barriers that might deter individuals from having any interest in visiting the site - the most obvious of these being the current name of the plantation house that was established in 1972. By representing itself as a memorial to Robert E. Lee, Arlington House is omitting and dismissing an incredibly significant part of its history. We, as Americans, have an opportunity - and more importantly - a responsibility to change this.

Custis Glover

June 2023

Congressman Beyer,

I write to express my support for your legislation to redesignate the Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial in northern Virginia as the Arlington House National Historic Site. I feel that the current name glorifies a soldier who took up arms to maintain the institution of slavery. This place is so much more than a Lee Museum. Its name should reflect the lives of all who lived, worked, and died there, both enslavers and enslaved.

As a member of the Syphax family, my third great grandmother, Maria Carter Custis, was enslaved at Arlington House. She was the daughter of George Washington Parke Custis, original builder of the plantation. Maria married Charles Syphax in 1821 in the same parlor of the plantation house ten years before her half-sister Mary Custis married Robert E. Lee.

Telling the factual story of Maria, as well as all who labored there, would initiate a conversation about America's past and hopefully be the first step toward healing a badly divided nation.

Arlington House National Historic Site could be an example for other historic sites to present the complete, true stories of eighteenth-century America. The time is right for this legislation, and I heartily support it. I'm pleased that you do too.

I live in Northridge, California. I have also written to my elected officials: Representatives Mike Garcia, (CA-27) and Brad Sherman (CA-32); and Senators Alex Padilla and Diane Feinstein.

Thank you for your leadership Congressman Beyer.

Respectfully,
Donna Kunkel

Dear Senators Kaine and Warner—

As a descendent of the enslaved Caroline Branham (and most likely, George Washington Parke Custis as well,) I have been in the process of turning what was hidden family lore into a complicated and fascinating history; one that encompasses the entire communities of Arlington House and Mount Vernon.

It is crucial to me, as an American, that the name of Arlington House reflect the broad history of one of the most popular destinations in the US, and not focus on the legacy of—or be allowed to glorify—Robert E Lee.

Please support the name change legislation for Arlington House.
My most heartfelt thanks.

—David C Lucas

From Jocelind Julien:

Thank you for this opportunity. Here is my paragraph:

“As a descendent of Caroline Branham, who was enslaved at Arlington and Mount Vernon, I fully support and call for the removal of slave owner and Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s name from Arlington House. To have Lee’s name on this historic property, conjures horrific images of slavery and brutality to those descendants of the enslaved at Arlington House and beyond. To this day, there is a pain of association that must be remedied. It is time to cut the slavery ties.”

My best,
Jocelind

From Tamara Moore:

James Parks was born in 1843 on the Arlington estate. After his freedom at 19 years of age, he continued to live, work and finally transitioned into eternity on August 1929. As a part of the descendants group, we endorse the legislation being sponsored to change the name so that it accurately reflects the numerous families that were essential to the Arlington House community. James Parks was honored for his service by the Assistant Secretary of War in 1928 with approval to be buried with full military honors at Arlington Cemetery. As a part of this group, it is amazing that the descendants are able to connect and share the many family stories that began over 150 years ago.

To Whom It May Concern:

As an Arlington House and Decatur House slave descendant (Syphax family), I've long-since given my complete approval to the effort to change the Arlington House name from its present form to "Arlington House" simply. My approval comes from an appreciation of the idea that doing this would make the name more inclusive. I note that members of the Lee family agree with my fellow slave descendants regarding this. Given the high level of visitorship at Arlington House, the name change will have likely have a broad and thought-provoking effect. The National Park Service has already done a great deal to make inclusiveness at Arlington House real. It's time to do the same with name.

—Kenneth D.M. Jensen, Oakton, Virginia

To: Representative Don Beyer

I am writing in support of the legislation you introduced to change the name of the 'Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial' to the 'Arlington House National Historic Site.'

As a descendant of the Lee family, I was present at the recent Family Reunion, Finding our Voice, at Arlington House, in April of this year. I was very happy to see you there, supporting the redesignation to better reflect all the residents who lived at both Arlington House and at Arlington Plantation. It was a very moving day because of the warm reception of the descendants of those our family enslaved. The hugs and conversations enriched the weekend for my husband and myself, our daughter Sarah and her then 10 year old Margaret. Margaret and Sarah also read aloud the names of the ancestors of the enslaved and then gave a report at school.

My direct ancestor, Richard Bland Lee, Robert E. Lee's uncle, was a member of the Virginia House of Delegates from Loudoun County from 1796-1797. His enslaved people built and ran Sully Plantation, which is now called Sully Historic Site, in Chantilly, Virginia. I am glad it is no longer called Sully Plantation, and instead called a Historic Site. The same could be true for Arlington House.

Thank you again for your efforts. Please don't hesitate to call on me if you would like to discuss this further.

Mary Lee Fleming Kowalski

Quote from [NPR story](#):

"I am Gen. Lee's great-great-grandson, and I am Robert E. Lee the Fifth. I don't feel like we're taking the name away," says Rob Lee. "I think when you call it the Arlington House, you're just opening it up to more of the families who lived there, honestly. And I think it's just more appropriate."

June 20, 2023

To: Representative Don Beyer

Dear Congressman Beyer:

I strongly support legislation to redesignate “Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial” as “the Arlington House National Historic Site.” I am a descendant of the Lee family of Virginia.

Like other Lee/Custis descendants, I view this change not as a repudiation of my ancestors who lived at Arlington House, but as a far more accurate representation of this historic place and its scores of other residents — who literally built the house, cleared the land for agriculture and then maintained it all. They were skilled artisans, farmers, seamstresses, nannies, cooks, and experts at backbreaking labor. The imprint of these enslaved workers is on every inch of the property; without them, it would not exist. Redesignating their home as a National Historic Site will invite and welcome THEIR descendants, who, it must be acknowledged, cannot feel welcome at a place that honors only their great great grandparents’ enslaver. Intaking this action, we are being true to the most basic morals and values of our country.

Congressman Beyer, I am deeply grateful to you for your support, and your commitment to this effort. I am contacting my North Carolina representatives, Senator Thom Tillis, Senator Ted Budd and House Representative David Rouzer, hoping they will join you in supporting this legislation.

With my sincere thanks,
Leni Fleming