

Robert E. Lee Timeline

Date	Event
1807	Robert Edward Lee is born on January 19 at Stratford Hall in Westmoreland county, Virginia. He is the fifth child of Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee, a hero of the American Revolution, and his second wife, Anne Carter Lee, the daughter of Robert "King" Carter, the richest man in Virginia.
1810	Mounting debts caused by bad business ventures force Henry Lee to move his family from Stratford Hall to Alexandria, Virginia.
1818	"Light Horse Harry" Lee dies in Savannah, Georgia, while traveling home to Virginia after an extended stay in the West Indies. Eleven year old Robert begins to take on additional family responsibilities.
1829	Robert E. Lee graduates from West Point; he is second in his class, with no demerits. Lee is assigned to the engineer corps, and begins working on fortifications at Cockspur Island in South Carolina.
1831	Lee is transferred to Fort Monroe, Virginia. On June 30 he marries Mary Anna Randolph Custis at Arlington; her father is George Washington Parke Custis, the owner of Arlington, and the great grandson of Martha Washington; her mother is Mary Lee Fitzhugh. The couple takes up residence at his new post.
1834	Lee is assigned to the Chief Engineer's Office in Washington, D. C., allowing the family - which now includes their son, Custis Lee to - return home to Arlington.
1835	Lee resolves a boundary dispute between Michigan and Ohio.
1837	Lee is transferred to St. Louis; his assignment is to stabilize the harbor and straighten out a bottleneck in the Mississippi river. Lee's assistant is Lt. Montgomery C. Meigs.
1838	Lee is promoted to captain.

- 1841** The entire family moves to Brooklyn, New York, where Lee supervises construction and repairs to Fort Hamilton and the New York harbor defenses.
- 1846** The United States declares war on Mexico. Lee serves on the staff of Generals John Wool and Winfield Scott. He receives three brevet (honorary) promotions for bravery; Scott declares him to be "the very best soldier I ever saw in the field."
- 1848** Captain Lee returns to Arlington from Mexico. His next assignment, and the family's next move, is to Baltimore, Maryland, where Lee supervises construction of Fort Carroll.
- 1852** Lee becomes superintendent of the U. S. Military academy at West Point. For the next three years he will strengthen the academic program and improve the facilities.
- 1853** Lee's beloved mother-in-law, Mary Lee Fitzhugh Custis, dies at Arlington.
- 1855** Lee is transferred to Texas to command the Second U. S. Cavalry Regiment. It is the first time he commands troops in the field.
- 1857** Lee's father-in-law, George Washington Parke Custis, dies at Arlington. Lee returns to Arlington as the executor of the Custis will and to manage the plantation. The will is so complicated, and the estate in such poor condition, that Lee is forced to take an extended leave of over two years to straighten out the matters.
- 1859** The abolitionist John Brown and a band of followers capture the federal Arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, taking several hostages. Their intention is to start a slave revolt. Lee, assisted by Lt. Jeb Stuart, takes temporary command of a detachment of U. S. Marines and rushes to the scene. The arsenal is retaken, Brown is captured, and the hostages released unharmed. Lee calls the raid "the attempt of a fanatic or a madman..."
- 1860** Lee returns to the Second Cavalry in Texas. In December of 1860 South Carolina secedes from the United States.

1861

Lt. Col. Lee is recalled to Washington; he leaves Texas just as Texas leaves the Union. He arrives at Arlington on March 1. On April 12 the newly formed Confederate states of America open fire on Fort Sumter, the United States fort in Charleston Harbor. Fort Sumter surrenders, and the new president, Abraham Lincoln, calls for seventy five thousand volunteers to put down the rebellion. Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas, and North Carolina refuse, and secede from the Union. On April 18, Lee meets with Montgomery Blair, an associate of the President, who informs him that he will be offered command of the new army of volunteers. Lee declines the offer, saying later that he could not raise his sword against "my home, my family, and my native state of Virginia."

He meets with General Scott, who advises him to resign from the Army immediately. On Friday, April 19, Lee submits his resignation to the secretary of War. He travels to Richmond, where he is offered and accepts command of the Virginia State forces; within a month he and Virginia will join the Confederacy.

Mrs. Lee and the rest of the family remain at Arlington until the middle of May, when they leave for family property further south. Late in May eight thousand Union troops move onto the property, converting the plantation into an army camp and the house into an army headquarters.

1862

On June 1 Lee is given command of the Army of Northern Virginia, the main Confederate army in the eastern theater of the war. Union troops are poised at the gates of Richmond. Lee commences a series of counterattacks at the Seven Days Battle that drives the enemy away from the Confederate capital. He then turns north, defeating another Union army at the Second Battle of Manassas, and carries the war into Maryland. Lee and his army are attacked at Antietam Creek, and driven back into Virginia. In December Lee smashes another Union attack at Fredericksburg, forcing the enemy to retreat.

1863

In May Lee wins a stunning victory at Chancellorsville, defeating an enemy nearly twice his size. His victory emboldens him to invade the north again. However, at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Lee's attacks against strong Union positions fail, and he retreats back into Virginia.

1864

In the spring of 1864 Ulysses S. Grant, the new commander of all the Union forces, takes the field against Lee. After a bloody campaign that features heavy casualties on both sides Lee's army is

forced into a siege around Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia. Lee fears the siege means "it is only a matter of time."

In June of 1864 General Montgomery Meigs, the Quartermaster of the Union Army, recommends that the grounds around Arlington House be used for cemetery to Union dead. The Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, approves the recommendation.

1865 On January 31 Lee becomes the commander in chief of all Confederate forces. On April 2 he is forced to abandon Richmond and Petersburg in a vain attempt to join up with Confederate forces in North Carolina. Grant pursues and catches up with him at Appomattox Court House on April 9. Lee surrenders the Army of Northern Virginia, and the Civil War begins drawing to an end. Lee returns to Richmond and rejoins his family.

In August Lee is offered the Presidency of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia. He accepts the position, and the family travels to the Shenandoah Valley to their last home.

1870 On October 12 Lee dies at Lexington, and is buried in the college chapel.

1873 Mary Custis Lee visits her beloved Arlington for the last time. She dies on November 5, at Lexington, and is interred next to her husband in the college chapel.