

Custis-Lee Family Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
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Revised and expanded by Harry G. Heiss and Andrea J. Briggs

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Collection Summary

Title: Custis-Lee Family Papers

Span Dates: 1700-circa 1928

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1770-1870)

ID No.: MSS17558

Creator: Custis Family

Creator: Lee Family

Extent: 740 items

Extent: 4 containers plus 1 oversize

Extent: 1.8 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm82017558>

Summary: Correspondence, letterbooks, genealogical papers, notebooks, financial records, indentures, clippings, photographs, and other papers documenting the activities of several generations of the Custis and Lee families of Virginia, who served as diplomats, statesmen, politicians, planters, and military officers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Adams, John, 1735-1826--Correspondence.

Breckinridge, John C. (John Cabell), 1821-1875--Correspondence.

Custis family.

Custis, George Washington Parke, 1781-1857. George Washington Parke Custis papers.

Grayson, William, 1736-1790--Correspondence.

Greene, Nathanael, 1742-1786--Correspondence.

Henry, Patrick, 1736-1799--Correspondence.

Jay, John, 1745-1829--Correspondence.

Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826--Correspondence.

Johnston, Joseph E. (Joseph Eggleston), 1807-1891--Correspondence.

Lafayette, Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, marquis de, 1757-1834--Correspondence.

Law, Elizabeth Parke Custis, 1776-1832. Elizabeth Parke Custis Law papers.

Lea, Albert Miller, 1808-1891--Correspondence.

Lee family.

Lee, Ann Hill Carter, 1773-1829. Ann Hill Carter Lee papers.

Lee, Anne Robinson McCarty, 1798-1840. Anne Robinson McCarty Lee papers.

Lee, Arthur, 1740-1792. Arthur Lee papers.

Lee, Charles, 1758-1815. Charles Lee papers.

Lee, Hannah Philippa Ludwell. Hannah Philippa Ludwell Lee papers.

Lee, Henrietta Bedinger, 1810- Henrietta Bedinger Lee papers.

Lee, Henry, 1691-1747. Henry Lee papers.

Lee, Henry, 1756-1818. Henry Lee papers.

Lee, Ludwell, 1760-1836. Ludwell Lee papers.

Lee, Mary Bland, 1704-1764. Mary Bland Lee papers.

Lee, Mary Custis, 1835-1918. Mary Custis Lee papers.

Lee, Mary Randolph Custis, 1807-1873. Mary Randolph Custis Lee papers.

Lee, Richard Bland, 1761-1827. Richard Bland Lee papers.

Lee, Richard Henry, 1732-1794. Richard Henry Lee papers.

Lee, Robert E. (Robert Edward), 1807-1870--Monuments.

Lee, Robert E. (Robert Edward), 1807-1870. Robert E. Lee papers.
Lee, Thomas, 1690-1750. Thomas Lee papers.
Lee, William Henry Fitzhugh, 1837-1891. William Henry Fitzhugh Lee papers.
Lee, William, 1739-1795. William Lee papers.
Pickering, Timothy, 1745-1829--Correspondence.
Pinckney, Mary Stead, approximately 1751-1812--Correspondence.
Rives, William C. (William Cabell), 1793-1868--Correspondence.
Scott, Winfield, 1786-1866--Correspondence.
Smith, Samuel Harrison, 1772-1845--Correspondence.
Warden, David Bailie, 1772-1845. David Bailie Warden papers.
Wigfall, Louis T. (Louis Trezevant), 1816-1874--Correspondence.

Organizations

Confederate States of America. Army.

Subjects

Agriculture--Virginia.
Diplomatic and consular affairs, American--France--Paris.
Engineers.
Memorials.
Merchants--Virginia.
Mexican War, 1846-1848.
Military engineering.
Slavery--United States.
Women--Education--Virginia--19th century.

Places

France--Commerce--United States.
France--Foreign relations--United States.
Philadelphia (Pa.)--Social life and customs.
Prince William County (Va.)--Social life and customs.
United States--Foreign relations--France.
United States--History--1783-1865.
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
United States--History--Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775.
United States--History--Revolution, 1775-1783.
United States--History--War of 1812.
Virginia--History.
Virginia--Social life and customs.
Washington (D.C.)--Social life and customs.
Westmoreland County (Va.)--Social life and customs.

Titles

Custis family papers
Lee family papers

Provenance

The Custis-Lee Family Papers were assembled from sixteen separate collections that had been acquired by the Library from various sources, circa 1906-1968. Additions were received in 1985, 1990, 1991, and 2015.

Processing History

The papers of the Custis-Lee Family were arranged and described into a single collection in 1984. The collection was assembled from sixteen separate collections that had been acquired by the Library through more than eighty separate purchases and gifts. The material that now comprises the Custis-Lee Family Papers originally included two collections of papers of Charles Lee and separately titled collections of papers of Anne R. McCarty Lee, Arthur Lee, Mrs. H. I. Lee, Henry Lee, Ludwell Lee, Mary Custis Lee, Mary Anne Randolph Custis Lee, Richard Bland Lee, Richard Henry Lee, Robert E. Lee, Thomas Lee, William Henry Fitzhugh Lee, William and Hanna Philippa Ludwell Lee, and the Custis family. The collection was expanded and revised in 2000. The finding aid was revised in 2007. Additional material was processed by Andrea J. Briggs in 2019, and the finding aid was updated to reflect the addition.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of the Custis-Lee Family Papers is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Custis-Lee Family are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Custis-Lee Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

George Washington Parke Custis

Date	Event
1781, Apr. 30	Born, Mount Airy, Md.
1799	Aide-de-camp to General Charles C. Pinckney, U.S. Army
1804	Married Mary Lee Fitzhugh
1812	Volunteer in defense of Washington, D.C., during the War of 1812
1824	Began publishing "Conversations with Lafayette" in the <i>Alexandria Gazette</i> during the Marquis de Lafayette's visit to the United States
1826	Began publishing "Recollections of Washington" in the <i>United States Gazette</i>
1827	Produced first play, <i>The Indian Prophecy</i> , performed at the Chestnut Street Theater, Philadelphia, Pa.
1830	Produced <i>Pocahontas, or the Settlers of Virginia</i> , performed at the Walnut Street Theater, Philadelphia, Pa.
1833	Produced <i>North Point, or Baltimore Defended</i> , performed in Baltimore, Md.
1834	Produced <i>The Eighth of January</i> , performed at the Park Theater in New York, N.Y.
1857, Oct. 10	Died, Arlington House, Fairfax County, Va.

Arthur Lee

Date	Event
1740, Dec. 20	Born, Stratford Hall, Westmoreland County, Va.
1764	M.D., University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland

1766	Elected fellow, Royal Society Returned to America Practiced medicine, Williamsburg, Va.
1768	Settled in London, England Published "Monitor" letters. <i>Virginia Gazette</i> , William Rind, ed., 25 Feb.-28 Apr.
1769-1774	Published "Junius Americanus" letters. London <i>Evening Post</i> , R. Nutt, ed., and London <i>Gazetteer</i> , Charles Say, ed., 17 July 1769-6 Jan. 1772, and London <i>Public Advertiser</i> , H. S. Woodfall, ed., June 1772-Mar. 1774
1770	Assistant to Benjamin Franklin, agent for Massachusetts in England and France
1770-1774	Studied law, Lincoln's Inn and Middle Temple, London, England
1774	Published <i>An Appeal to the Justice and Interests of the People of Great Britain in the Present Dispute with America</i> . London, England: John Almon
1775	Admitted to bar, London, England Agent for Massachusetts in England and France Confidential correspondent, Continental Congress Committee of Secret Correspondence, London, England Published <i>A Second Appeal to the Justice and Interests of the People on the Measures Respecting America by the Author of the First</i> . London, England: n.p.
1776	Appointed, with Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, to negotiate a treaty with France
1777	Appointed commissioner to Spain, succeeding Benjamin Franklin
1780	Returned to America
1781-1782	Member, Virginia House of Delegates
1782-1785	Member, Continental Congress
1784-1789	Commissioner, U.S. Treasury
1785-1786	Member, Virginia House of Delegates
1792, Dec. 12	Died, Lansdowne, Middlesex County, Va.

Charles Lee

Date	Event
1758, July	Born, Fauquier County, Va.
1775	A.B., College of New Jersey, Princeton, N.J.
1777-1789	Naval officer of South Potomac
1789	Married Anne Lee
1789-1793	Collector, Port of Alexandria, Va.
1793-1795	Member, Virginia General Assembly
1794	Admitted to Pennsylvania bar
1795-1801	U.S. attorney general
1801	Judge, circuit court
1802	Returned to private law practice
1815, June 24	Died, Fauquier County, Va.

Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee

Date	Event
1756, Jan. 29	Born, Leesylvania, Prince William County, Va.
1773	Graduated, College of New Jersey, Princeton, N.J.
1776	Captain, Theodorick Bland's regiment, Virginia Cavalry
1778	Major, Continental Army
1779	Captured 160 British soldiers, Paulus Hook, N.Y.
1780	Promoted to lieutenant colonel
1781	Present at Siege of Yorktown and surrender of General Charles Cornwallis
1782	Married Matilda Lee

1785	Member, Virginia House of Delegates
1785-1788	Member, Continental Congress
1789-1791	Member, Virginia House of Delegates
1792-1795	Governor of Virginia
1793	Married Anne Hill Carter
1794	Commanded troops that put down the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania
1798	Commissioned major general
1799-1801	Member, U.S. House of Representatives
1800	Discharged, U.S. Army
1808	Imprisoned for debt
1812	Published <i>Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States</i> . Philadelphia, Pa.: Bradford & Inskip
1814	Went to the West Indies
1818, Mar. 25	Died, Cumberland Island, Ga.

Richard Bland Lee

Date	Event
1761, Jan. 20	Born, Leesylvania, Prince William County, Va.
1784-1788	Member, Virginia House of Delegates
1789-1795	Member, U.S. House of Representatives
1794	Married Elizabeth Collins
1796, 1799-1806	Member, Virginia House of Delegates
1815	Moved to Washington, D.C.
1816	Appointed commissioner of claims for property destroyed during War of 1812
1819-1827	Judge, Orphans' Court, Washington, D.C.
1827, Mar. 12	Died, Washington, D.C.

Richard Henry Lee

Date	Event
1732, Jan. 20	Born, Stratford Hall, Westmoreland County, Va.
1743-1752	Attended Wakefield Academy, Yorkshire, England
1752	Returned to Virginia
1757	Married Anne Aylett (died 1768)
1758-1776	Member, Virginia House of Burgesses
1763	Instrumental in founding the Mississippi Company
1766	Signed Westmoreland Resolutions against the Stamp Act
1769	Married Anne Gaskins Pinckard
1774-1779	Member, Continental Congress Served on Secret Committee of Commerce
1776	Introduced resolution in Continental Congress for American independence from Great Britain
1780-1784	Member, Virginia House of Delegates
1784-1787	Member and president, Continental Congress
1789-1792	Member, U.S. Senate
1794, June 19	Died, Chantilly, Westmoreland County, Va.

Robert Edward Lee

Date	Event
1807, Jan. 19	Born, Stratford Hall, Westmoreland County, Va.
1829	Graduated, United States Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.
1831	Married Mary Randolph Custis

1837-1841	Superintending engineer, St. Louis, Mo.
1846-1848	Served in Mexican War under General Winfield Scott
1852-1855	Superintendent, United States Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.
1859	Commanded forces that put down John Brown's raid, Harpers Ferry, Va.
1861	Resigned from the U.S. Army
1862	Appointed commander, Army of Northern Virginia
1865	General-in-chief, Confederate armies Surrendered, Appomattox Court House, Va.
1866-1870	President, Washington College (now Washington and Lee University), Lexington, Va.
1870, Oct. 12	Died, Lexington, Va.

William Lee

Date	Event
1739, Aug. 31	Born, Stratford Hall, Westmoreland County, Va.
1761-1763	Studied in England
1763	Secretary, Mississippi Company
1763-1766	Resided in Barbados, West Indies
1766	Signed Westmoreland Resolutions against the Stamp Act
1768	Merchant and financier, London, England
1769	Married Hannah Philippa Ludwell (died 1784)
1769-1770	With firm of DeBerdt & Sayre, then self-employed
1773	Elected sheriff, London, England
1775	Elected alderman, Aldgate ward, London, England
1777	Appointed American commercial agent, France
1778	U.S. commissioner to Berlin, Germany, and Vienna, Austria Negotiated an unauthorized treaty with Holland
1779	Recalled by Congress Settled in Brussels, Belgium
1780	Resigned as alderman, London, England
1783	Returned to Virginia
1795, June 27	Died, Greenspring, James City County, Va.

William Henry Fitzhugh Lee

Date	Event
1837, May 31	Born, Arlington House, Washington, D.C. (now Arlington County, Va.)
1857	Graduated, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. Entered U.S. Army
1859	Married Charlotte Wickham
1861	Appointed major of cavalry, Confederate States Army
1862	Promoted to brigadier general, Confederate States Army Served in Fredericksburg and Gettysburg campaigns
1863	Captured and imprisoned by Union Army
1864	Released from Union prison
1865	Second in command of Confederate cavalry, Appomattox, Va.
1867	Married Mary Tabb Bolling
1875-1879	Member, Virginia state senate
1887-1891	Member, U.S. House of Representatives
1891, Oct. 15	Died, Ravensworth, Alexandria County, Va.

Scope and Content Note

The Custis-Lee Family Papers consist of sixteen previously separate collections formerly in the Manuscript Division's Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection. They span the period 1700-circa 1928, with the bulk of the material produced between 1770 and 1870. The papers include correspondence, transcripts and photocopies of letters in other repositories, facsimiles, financial records, genealogies, indentures, letterbooks, newspaper clippings, notebooks, photographs, poems, and reports. The papers are arranged in the following series: [Letterbooks](#), [Correspondence](#), [Transcripts and Photocopies](#), [Financial Records](#), [Miscellany](#), and [Oversize](#).

The papers document the activities of several generations of the principal members of the Custis and Lee families of Virginia, who as diplomats, statesmen, politicians, planters, and military officers, achieved prominence and power during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The collection contains information on a variety of subjects, including family affairs, military activities during the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, agriculture in Virginia, slavery, mercantile and financial affairs, United States relations with France, and politics during the early republic. Prominent correspondents include John C. Breckinridge, William Grayson, Nathanael Greene, Patrick Henry, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, Joseph E. Johnston, Timothy Pickering, Mary Pinckney, William C. Rives, Winfield Scott, Samuel Harrison Smith, and Louis T. Wigfall.

A [letterbook](#), 1700-1825, of Richard Bland Lee includes correspondence of his grandparents, Henry Lee and Mary Bland Lee. Among the subjects discussed are family finances and business, trade with France, slavery, outfitting of troops during the Revolutionary War, founding of the new government, and the writing of the Constitution.

A group of Custis-Warden [transcripts](#), 1811-1831, consists of copies of letters between David Bailie Warden and Elizabeth Parke Custis Law. The Maryland Historical Society has custody of the originals. Warden was United States consul in Paris from 1811 to 1814, and the correspondence with Custis describes relations with France, naval and military affairs during the War of 1812, and social life in Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia during the early nineteenth century.

Robert E. Lee's [correspondence](#), 1830-1868, relates to his long military career, beginning with his early work as an engineer and continuing with his service in the Mexican War and his role as general-in-chief of the Confederate armies. The Civil War correspondence is especially illuminating because it documents important military battles, the movement of troops, and the devastation and destruction caused by the Union Army.

Family matters are the focus of Mary Randolph Custis Lee's [correspondence](#), 1837-1872. After the death of her husband, Robert E. Lee, she planned to build a memorial church for him, and numerous letters describe that effort. Two [notebooks](#), 1823, contain information on the educational standards for young women in the early nineteenth century. One of the notebooks contains an essay that she wrote, "Some of the Principal Epochs of the Life of Buonaparte and of the French Revolution."

A letter from Arthur Lee to Nathanael Greene, 6 April 1784, received in 1985 has been added to the Arthur Lee [correspondence](#). A letter from Robert E. Lee to Albert Miller Lea, 20 May 1862, received by the Library in 1990 has been added to the Robert E. Lee [correspondence](#). A copy of a letter from Charles Lee to President John Adams, 7 Jan. 1799, was received in 1991 and has been added to the Charles Lee [correspondence](#). Letters written by Mary Custis Lee likely to Elizabeth McCall Symington of St. Louis from 1871-1872 were received in 2015 and have been added to the Mary Custis Lee [correspondence](#). A letter from George Washington Custis Lee to General William R. Boggs, 14 Jan. 1876, was received in 2015 and has been added to the George Washington Custis Lee [correspondence](#).

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in six series:

- [Letterbooks, 1700-1825](#)
- [Correspondence, 1711-1915](#)
- [Transcripts and Photocopies, 1750-1873](#)
- [Financial Records, 1730-1844](#)
- [Miscellany, 1792-circa 1928](#)
- [Oversize, 1789-1800](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1	<p><u>Letterbooks, 1700-1825</u></p> <p>Letterbooks of John Custis and Richard Bland Lee. Arranged chronologically.</p>
BOX 1-2	<p><u>Correspondence, 1711-1915</u></p> <p>Correspondence of several generations of the Custis and Lee families. Arranged alphabetically by name of family member and chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 2	<p><u>Transcripts and Photocopies, 1750-1873</u></p> <p>Transcripts and photocopies of correspondence of several generations of the Custis and Lee families. Arranged by type of material and chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 2-4	<p><u>Financial Records, 1730-1844</u></p> <p>Account books, bills, invoices, ledgers, and receipts. Arranged alphabetically by name of family member and type of material, and chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 4	<p><u>Miscellany, 1792-circa 1928</u></p> <p>Facsimiles, genealogies, indentures, newspaper clippings, notebooks, photographs, report on Fielding Lewis, photocopy of Robert E. Lee's will, and a tribute to Ann Randolph Meade. Arranged alphabetically by type of material and chronologically therein.</p>
BOX OV 1	<p><u>Oversize, 1789-1800</u></p> <p>Correspondence and an indenture. Arranged according to the series, containers, and folders from which the items were removed.</p>

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BOX 1	Lee, Richard Bland, 1700-1825, undated
BOX 1-2	Correspondence, 1711-1915 Correspondence of several generations of the Custis and Lee families. Arranged alphabetically by name of family member and chronologically therein.
BOX 1	Custis, Daniel Parke, 1749-1756
BOX 1	Custis, George Washington Parke, 1812-1846, undated
BOX 1	Custis, John (1678-1749), 1711, 1745
BOX 1	Law, Elizabeth Parke Custis, undated
BOX 1	Lee, Anne R. McCarty, 1838
BOX 1	Lee, Arthur, 1777-1784
BOX 2	Lee, Charles, 1799-1814, undated
BOX 2	Lee, George Washington Custis, 1876
BOX 2	Lee, Hannah Philippa Ludwell, 1768-1769
BOX 2	Lee, Henry, 1781-1818, undated <i>See also Oversize</i>
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BOX 2	Lee, Mary Custis, 1871-1872, 1915 (2 folders)
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BOX 2	Lee, Thomas, 1750
BOX 2	Lee, William, 1769-1791
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BOX 2	Transcripts and Photocopies, 1750-1873 Transcripts and photocopies of correspondence of several generations of the Custis and Lee families. Arranged by type of material and chronologically therein.
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BOX 2	Miscellany, 1778-1864, undated

Transcripts and Photocopies, 1750-1873

Container	Contents
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BOX 2-4	Financial Records, 1730-1844 Account books, bills, invoices, ledgers, and receipts. Arranged alphabetically by name of family member and type of material, and chronologically therein.
BOX 2	Custis, Daniel Parke, tobacco accounts, 1753-1756
BOX 2	Custis, George Washington Parke, bills and accounts, 1804-1808
BOX 2	Custis, John (1678-1749), invoices, 1730, 1740
BOX 2	Custis, John Parke, estate, 1797
BOX 3	Lee, Charles
BOX 3	Daybook, 1808-1815
BOX 3	Ledger, 1800-1815
BOX 4	Lewis, Lawrence, accounts and receipts, 1810-1844, undated
BOX 4	Miscellany, 1792-circa 1928 Facsimiles, genealogies, indentures, newspaper clippings, notebooks, photographs, report on Fielding Lewis, photocopy of Robert E. Lee's will, and a tribute to Ann Randolph Meade. Arranged alphabetically by type of material and chronologically therein.
BOX 4	Facsimiles
BOX 4	Declaration of Independence, undated
BOX 4	Lee, Robert E.
BOX 4	General Order No. 9, farewell address to Confederate troops, 1865
BOX 4	Surrender terms from Ulysses S. Grant, 1865
BOX 4	Genealogies, Custis family, undated
BOX 4	Indentures, 1792-1796 <i>See also Oversize</i>
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BOX 4	Notebooks, Mary Randolph Custis Lee, 1823
BOX 4	Photocopy, will of Robert E. Lee, circa 1928
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BOX 4	Poems, 1853, 1913
BOX 4	Report, "Colonel Fielding Lewis," by Emeline Lee Stearns, 1924
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BOX OV 1	Oversize, 1789-1800 Correspondence and an indenture. Arranged according to the series, containers, and folders from which the items were removed.
BOX OV 1	Correspondence
BOX OV 1	Lee, Henry, 1800 (Container 2)
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BOX OV 1	Indenture, 1795 (Container 4)