Lee Heritage Interpretive Plan Research Focuses on Chamber and Nursery for 2007

Anticipating the celebration of Robert E. Lee’s birth in January 2007, projects to investigate architectural changes and paint colors in the chamber where Lee was born are already underway. On June 1, Carl Lounsbury, architectural historian from Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, inspected the chamber for evidence of previous carpeting, wall and window treatments, and changes to partitions and doorways. In conjunction with Lounsbury’s research, Susan Buck, paint analyst from Williamsburg, sampled the walls and woodwork of the chamber and adjoining nursery to identify the paint colors used in the rooms.

Carl Lounsbury carefully examined the floorboards and identified holes made by carpet tacks. During the Federal period when “Light Horse Harry” was remodeling his home, carpets were manufactured in fairly narrow strips that were butted and nailed at the edges to the floorboards. Eventually, the room will probably be fully carpeted using one of the patterns popular at the time of Robert E. Lee’s birth.

One of the interesting discoveries made by Carl was a series of apotropaic signs drawn on one of the nursery floorboards. The six-petaled daisy drawings encompassed within a circle may have existed during the time of the Lees and historically were used to ward off evil spirits.

The Lee Heritage Plan calls for the eventual return of the chamber and nursery to their appearance in 1807 when Robert E. Lee was born. A mock-up of possible treatments for the chamber’s walls and floors is planned for 2007.

Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee, father of Robert E. Lee, enlarged the chamber during his tenure at Stratford, updated its woodwork, removed the window seats and reduced the size of the fireplace opening. Harry’s modifications were retained by restoration architect Fiske Kimball in the 1930s and visitors can still see them today. However, over the 200 plus years following Harry’s architectural changes, the room has been redecorated and repainted many times.

New Grounds Pass Added, Lower Fees for Northern Neck Friends Membership

Effective August 1, 2006, Stratford Hall has added a new “Grounds Pass” to its admission policy. Also, a new lower fee schedule has been instituted for Northern Neck Friends of Stratford members. Other components of the current admission fee structure will remain intact and unchanged.

“We believe this new policy highlights the vast resources that Stratford’s 1,800 acres has to offer,” said Paul Reber, Executive Director. “The Grounds Pass entitles the purchaser to access the hiking trails, public beach area, gardens and other public outdoor locations that help make Stratford such a treasure,” Reber added.

The fee for the new Grounds Pass is $5 for adults and $3 for children. Those visitors whose only purpose is to go to the Plantation Dining Room or Store will pay the fee and it will then be applied toward their purchase. The new Grounds Pass is valid for only the day purchased.

The new Northern Neck Friends of Stratford fee structure offers a $20 discount on both the family and joint rate and a $10 discount on the individual rate over regular membership fees. Now, Northern Neck Friends pay $25 for an individual, $50 for joint membership and $55 for a family membership. An annual oyster roast will also be re-instituted as part of their membership benefits.

“We truly appreciate the support of the people who live in the Northern Neck,” said Reber. “We hope this new discounted membership program not only shows that appreciation but also gives an incentive for more people to join Friends of Stratford.”
Field School Unearths New Finds on Oval

Dr. Douglas Sanford, Chair of University of Mary Washington’s Department of Historic Preservation, directed the twelfth residential field school on the Stratford Plantation grounds from May 22 to June 23, 2006. He, crew members Brad Hatch and Andrew Wilkins, and 12 students learning the basics of archaeological excavation conducted excavations on the Oval directly south of the Great House. The site was once occupied by a house in the mid-18th century. The students, who come from Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia, earned four hours of undergraduate or graduate credit in the five-week school co-sponsored by Stratford and the University of Mary Washington.

Previous field schools partly uncovered the brick basement of the frame building aligned with the road to the mill. The students found evidence that the building was deliberately demolished in the late 18th century and that the nine-inch-thick basement walls were robbed down to a level where the basement could be filled in and plowed over. This year’s group further excavated the remains of the basement in hopes of finding a chimney with the basement. It is possible that the 16 by 20-foot structure was possibly a slave quarter—south of the Great House in the mid-18th century.

The annual field school is Stratford’s most visible research effort to discover the former landscape of the plantation. The landscape of the Lees that is being revealed by archaeology is quite a different setting than the current pristine view of the Oval with its wide expanse of lawn and formal tree plantings. The simply constructed, but bustling, domestic quarter would have been only one of such familiar sights to the Lees. We look forward to finding more about the occupants of the complex in future field school seasons.

Reber Named Executive Director

The Stratford Board of Directors announced the appointment of Paul C. Reber as Executive Director of Stratford. Reber began his duties in mid-April. He succeeds Colonel Thomas C. Taylor, who retired in December.

“Paul has a proven track record in leading organizations such as Stratford and has a vision for the renewed vitality of history museums in the 21st century,” said Courtenay S. Wilson, President, in announcing the appointment. “We look forward to working with him as we plan Stratford’s future.”

Reber most recently served as an adjunct professor of History at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, where he was an instructor in a graduate program focusing on museum management, organization and leadership. Before that he served as President of Old Salem in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, a history museum that includes the south’s largest decorative arts museum, children’s museum, living history museum and extensive restored gardens and landscape. While at Old Salem, he oversaw a 15 million dollar expansion to the museum, including a new 25,000 square foot visitor center; the restoration, reconstruction and opening of the oldest African American church building in North Carolina; the creation of a toy museum; the restoration of America’s oldest surviving gun shop for trade demonstrations; and an extensive landscape and garden restoration project.

In his 19-year museum career, he has also served as Associate Campaign Director for Historic Sites for the National Trust for Historic Preservation; Executive Director of the Decatur House Museum; Director of Development at Historic Mount Vernon; and Director of the White House Endowment Fund. He has a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland; a Master of Arts Degree from George Mason University; and a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

Reber and his wife Shannon are already very familiar with the Northern Neck as they have owned a home on the Yeocomico River in Kinsale for ten years. Their son, Alex, is a seasoned sharks’ tooth hunter.

Lee Circle Continues to Grow

In the spring newsletter, Stratford announced the establishment of The Lee Circle, a donor recognition group created for those individuals, families, foundations or corporations who annually give $5,000 or above to Stratford.

Founding members of The Lee Circle will be honored at Stratford with an elegant dinner on Friday, September 29, 2006, which will be the kick-off event of a year-long celebration of the 200th Anniversary of Robert E. Lee’s birth. Lee Circle members will have the opportunity to spend the night at Stratford and to hear special presentations on Saturday, September 30.

We are pleased to announce that the Lee Circle currently has 80 founding members as of press time. For more information on the Lee Circle event, contact Pat Givens at 804-493-8038 extension 9578.

Stratford News and Notes

Path of Honor Series Brings ’792 Attendees from 15 States

“Path of Honor: From Stratford to Lexington—The Robert E. Lee Educational Series” brought a total of 792 attendees for the five Path of Honor Lecture Series from the following 15 states and the District of Colombia (4): Alabama (1), California (3), Connecticut (1), Delaware (2), Illinois (2), Maryland (80), Massachusetts (1), Michigan (2), New Jersey (7), North Carolina (5), Pennsylvania (2), Tennessee (4), Virginia (674), West Virginia (2), and Wisconsin (4). Funding for the series was provided by a grant from the Lee-Jackson Educational Foundation.

Northern Neck Harvest Fest

Planned for October 28

Save the date! Plans are underway for a Northern Neck Harvest Fest at Stratford on October 28 from 12 noon to 4 p.m. Join us for crafts, tradesmen, games, hayrides, antique cars, great food and fun for the whole family. Visit the website for more information.

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The Robert E. Lee Memorial Association is a national, non-profit organization that has owned and operated Stratford since 1979. It is dedicated to preservation, research and education. The Association interprets to the public Stratford Hall and the plantation life of the Lee family, whose ideals and leadership helped shape democracy in the United States.