Robert E. Lee Symposium in January Will Feature Audience Discussions and Battlefield Tours

January 22 to 24, 2009, Stratford Hall will be hosting our first symposium dedicated to the continued study of Robert E. Lee and various facets of the American Civil War.

This seminar will be led by faculty director Dr. Peter Carmichael, Eberly Professor of Civil War Studies at West Virginia University and author of The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion. Dr. Aaron Sheehan-Dean, Associate Professor of History at the University of North Florida and author of Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia, and Ms. Elizabeth Brown Pryor, author of Reading the Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee Through His Private Letters, will also join us in leading this conference.

Carmichael, Sheehan-Dean, and Pryor will speak on various Lee-related topics, including Robert E. Lee’s search for the battle of annihilation and Lee’s relationship with his soldiers. Carmichael and Sheehan-Dean will also lead discussions based around primary documents from the Civil War era. These discussions will involve conference participants and give them the opportunity to interact with the conference speakers and interpret these 19th-century documents. Finally, this symposium will include two battlefield tours of the Fredericksburg and Wilderness battlefields.

We invite you to join us in January. More information and details will be forthcoming, so please mark your calendars to attend. If you have any questions about this symposium, please contact Laura Lawfer, Assistant Director of Education, at 804-493-8038 ext. 1920, or at llawfer@stratfordhall.org. We look forward to welcoming you to Stratford Hall for this very intriguing new program!
Celebrating The Lees and Independence

In the United States, July 4 is officially celebrated as Independence Day. But at Stratford Hall, we also celebrate another day—June 7.

On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee presented a resolution for independence in the Continental Congress. It read: “Resolved, That these United Colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.”

He submitted this at the instruction of the Virginia Convention, which included members like his older brother, Thomas Ludwell Lee. Richard Henry Lee's motion was carried on July 2, 1776. Two days later, the Declaration of Independence was officially adopted. Richard Henry Lee presented the idea of freedom from England before Thomas Jefferson ever wrote the Declaration of Independence. While Jefferson often gets most of the credit for the document that declared freedom from the British crown, the Lee family was also deeply involved in this fight for independence.

Because Richard Henry Lee spent most of his life living at Stratford Hall, we celebrated June 7 with a variety of festivities this year. Dick Cheatham, a professional actor, played the part of Richard Henry Lee at Stratford. He gave two talks as Lee throughout the day, and interacted with the Revolutionary War militia, the 1st Virginia and 7th Virginia units. The Revolutionary War militia, encamped at Stratford, participated in several firing demonstrations. Finally, the Rappahannock Colonial Heritage Society, playing the part of 18th century colonial travelers who have stopped to rest for the day, answered visitor questions in character. The festivities ended with a caravan to Richard Henry Lee's grave, where a wreath-laying ceremony took place.

Children were kept busy as they learned to play colonial games, signed their own copy of the Declaration of Independence with a quill pen, and learned about the Lee family's impact on the Revolutionary War through an interactive activity. Children also had the opportunity to dress up in colonial clothing to have their pictures taken.

This annual event will take place next year on Saturday, June 6, 2009. Look for more information about next year's event in the coming months, and plan early to attend!
Virginia was awash in easy and generous credit extended by both English and Scottish merchants eager to get a piece of the lucrative tobacco market. War and independence brought an end to this period of easy credit and left many planters struggling to pay debts owed to their former creditors. To make matters worse a collapse of tobacco prices resulted in a decline in both income and land values. It doesn’t take a lot of imagination to understand the economic consequences for debtors and creditors, facing declining incomes and asset values.

Does all this sound familiar? It should, because it is a story that is repeating itself today. We can draw this contemporary analogy a bit further. It is highly likely that the construction of Stratford Hall, and many other mid-18th-century Virginia houses, was made possible by this easy credit, making it the 18th-century equivalent of our modern suburban housing boom.

The principal message for us today is that history, and the history of the Lees of Stratford Hall in particular, matters, is relevant, and needs to remain one of our top priorities. The history of their accomplishments and especially their struggles, provide reassurance for the future. No matter what fate may befall us, Stratford Hall and its lessons will still be here. Those who sacrificed so generously to support Stratford Hall in the 1930s understood this. Certainly the Lees saw Stratford as an enduring symbol of their social and political legacy.

Thanks for your ongoing support and we hope to see you here.

Sincerely,

Paul C. Reber
Executive Director
This summer Professor Doug Sanford and five students from the University of Mary Washington returned for the 14th field school at Stratford Hall.

Sanford had two field assistants, both veterans of previous field schools, to work with him during the five-week class stage and again during the following one-month crew phase. Sanford also hired two students from this summer's field school and another student from last summer's field school to join the crew.

Most of the crew's effort and attention centered on the 20 ft. by 40 ft. earthfast building in the "triangle" area. This area is referred to as the triangle because of its shape, a result of the roads that exist at the edge of the Oval. They had hoped this building would turn out to be a slave quarter, as it has the right dimensions for a duplex arrangement (two rooms). But their excavations didn't support that interpretation. They never found convincing evidence for chimneys or storage pits within the building, both of which are typical features of slave quarters in the mid-18th century. The Oval site in general dates in this period, with its occupation running from about the 1730s to the 1780s. Consequently, they believe the 20 ft. by 40 ft. building is either a tobacco house or a barn. Either building would make sense as part of a farm complex, which is their overall interpretation of the Oval site. The crew also excavated more of the basement that was an addition to the 16 ft. by 20 ft. earthfast building located within the Oval itself (across the road from the triangle). Here they removed more of the rubble fill from the basement, where artifact preservation is much greater. As before, they found lots of animal bone, brass straight pins, a bone-handled knife, the handle of a pewter spoon, and larger fragments of ceramics. There was also further evidence of the bulkhead entrance (a sloping exterior entrance into the basement), wherein the builders had cut into the natural clay to form descending steps. Most likely wood or brick treads would have completed the steps, and the remnants of the bulkhead's sides survive, namely as brick foundations.

The crew also discovered more evidence of brickmaking on the Oval site, an activity that preceded the area's use as a farm quarter/complex. In past seasons they had regularly recovered numerous small fragments of brick without mortar, standard waste products and evidence of brick kilns. This year, there were fire-reddened and heat-affected areas, again evidence of the kilns, where high firing temperatures for brick manufacture would have discolored and hardened the soil beneath. They also may have located the beginning of a "borrow pit," namely a large hole dug in the ground to remove clay for making brick. The crew has seen such features in other locations at Stratford, such as in the West Garden and in the Old Orchard, where they excavated a slave quarter site back between 1998 and 2000.

As always, the usual range of ceramics, window glass, green wine bottle glass, nails, oyster shells, and miscellaneous items were found all across the Oval. Found near the 20 x 40 ft. building is what looks to be the iron rod assembly that connects a wagon's or carriage's body to the tongue and harness assembly. In other words, it connects the body with either a single or double tree—a wooden member with iron fittings that goes behind the horses. This artifact would support the notion that the 20 x 40 ft. building was a barn.

Each year the crew continues to find regular, but light, amounts of prehistoric (Native American) artifacts on the Oval site. Students consistently recover stone fragments ("flakes") from cobbles and stone tool production. Native Americans likely took cobbles from the ravines at Stratford and made tools on-site. The cobbles also were used for hearths. The use of this area was not a large-scale settlement, but rather repeated use on a small-scale basis, likely by small groups that would camp there for a few days at a time. We know the site was used over a considerable timeframe, as we have found projectile points dating about 3,000 (and more) years ago, but also Native American pottery, which is about 1,000 years (or less) old.
Linen Press Helps Illustrate 18th Century Wares Available Locally to The Lees

In May we welcomed a visitor for an extended stay in the Great House. A Lee family descendant generously placed on loan to Stratford a wonderful circa 1770 walnut linen press with yellow pine secondary woods that originally belonged to the Beverley family at Blandfield on the Middle Peninsula of Virginia.

The piece only recently left the family's hands, and we are so fortunate to exhibit such an exceptional piece with an impeccable provenance to a neighboring member of the Virginia gentry.

When you next visit Stratford and see this piece in the Chamber of the Great House, please look closely on the upper panel of the left-hand door, where you will see Robert Beverley's initials carved into the wood. To add to the story, the press has been attributed to Robert Walker, the King George County cabinetmaker who likely crafted an elaborate tea table currently on display in the Parlor of the Great House with a history of Lee family ownership. We are so pleased to have this press on loan; it will help illustrate the type (and quality) of wares available locally in the 18th century to the Lee family and their neighbors.

Clothespresses (or linen presses) were common case pieces in the households of the Virginia gentry. You will notice there are locks on every compartment – the press was utilized for the folded storage of costly imported bed and table linens as well as clothing. The mistress of the household or the housekeeper would be the likely keeper of the keys to prevent theft or misuse of these precious goods. Although the form was never popular in the northern colonies, the Chesapeake gentry adopted the clothespress with great enthusiasm by the 1750s and its popularity continued into the 19th century.1

1See Ronald L. Hurst and Jonathan Prown's Southern Furniture 1680-1830, pp. 386-404 for examples in the Colonial Williamsburg Collection. The book is in the duPont Library collection (call # 749.215 074755).
“I learned more in three days than in three months of school,” one young camper commented. That’s what Stratford’s summer camps are all about, and education is a very important mission of Stratford Hall.

This summer Stratford hosted an Adventure Day Camp and two intergenerational camps for grandparents and their grandchildren. The Adventure Day Camp was filled to capacity with local youngsters thriving on experiencing life in the 18th century, from marching with the Militia to finding shark’s teeth fossils on the beach. The grandparent/grandchild camp was likewise overflowing with registrants—probably enough to have filled a second camp session.

A second camp will indeed be offered next year, but early registration is still advised, considering the camps book up by April. Grandparents and children alike loved a twilight ghost hunt in the Great House and were spellbound by interpreter Rita Wagstaff’s stories of slave life around the evening campfire. This summer marked Stratford’s first-time offering of an intergenerational Elderhostel, similar to the grandparent camp, but two days longer. One proud grandmother remarked that the silhouette she made of her grandchild was itself “worth the camp tuition.” Judy Hynson’s presentation of “The Lee Women” and local spinner, Judy Moorers’ program, “Turning fibers into clothing in the Lee’s time” were particularly well received. Many campers vowed that they would re-enroll in a camp next summer.

Those that missed the summer camp this year can rest assured that there will be a 2009 camping season at Stratford. Details of camp dates will be forthcoming soon, but you may call or email to be placed on the camp mailing list, and be among the first to receive camp registration information. Contact Camp Coordinator, Bill Doerken, at 804-493-8038 ext. 1026 or email bdoerken@stratfordhall.org. Stratford intergenerational Elderhostel program information may be obtained directly from www.elderhostel.org (program #16283) or call 877-426-8056.
Order a Gift Basket from the Stratford Hall Gift Shop in time for Christmas 2008

These wonderful gift baskets, filled with Stratford products, are available from the Stratford Hall Gift Shop. Please use the convenient order form provided here, phone your order to 804-493-8038 ext. 9796 or fax to 804-493-0333. Custom gift baskets can also be ordered. Call or visit us on the web at www.StratfordHall.org!

Stratford Dinner Basket .................. $65.00
Includes a 3-pound Virginia Hamlet (fully cooked and boneless), Apple Chutney and Stratford Cocktail Napkins.

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Pride of Stratford ...................... $35.00
Includes Stratford Fruit Cake, Strawberry Preserves and Apple Chutney.

Country Sampler ....................... $30.00
Includes Strawberry Preserves, Vidalia Onion Tomato Salad Dressing and Good and Evil Pickles.

Breakfast Basket ....................... $25.00
Includes Stratford Grits, Pancake Flour and a Stratford Linen Pot Holder.

Just For You ............................. $20.00
Includes Strawberry Preserves and a Stratford Linen Pot Holder.

Also Available from the Gift Shop

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Please make checks payable to: Robert E. Lee Memorial Association, Inc. (RELMA)
December 16 - last date to order for Christmas delivery.
Additional charge for oversized boxes and air service.
Calendar of Events

October 25

Historical Haunts
Thrills and chills for the whole family! Join us for Stratford's annual Halloween Extravaganza to be held from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. that will include eerie ghost walks, pumpkin painting, crafts and games for kids, and refreshments. General admission is $5 for adults, and $3 for children. Children five and under are free. For more information call 804-493-8038 ext. 1920.

November 27

Thanksgiving Dinner
Join us for a traditional southern feast with choice of dinner seating times at either 12 noon or 3 p.m. Walk off dinner with a Great House tour and shop till you drop in the Gift Shop. The menu includes roasted turkey and gravy, savory stuffing, sliced Virginia baked and country ham, silver dollar crab cakes, seasoned green beans, mashed potatoes, and more! For a full menu visit the website at www.StratfordHall.org. Cost is $40 for adults and $18 for children. Children five and under are free. For reservations call the dining room at 804-493-9696.

December 3

Christmas Wreath-Making Workshop
Area native Don Haynie will lead two workshops, one at 10:30 a.m. and another at 1:30 p.m. Mr. Haynie is well known in the region for his skill at floral arranging. Class size is limited to 15, so sign up early! The cost of the workshop ranges from $25 to $45 depending on the package selected. All materials will be provided, but participants should bring their own hand pruners. Reservations are required. Please contact Neva Folk at 804-493-8038 ext. 8504 or e-mail nfolk@stratfordhall.org.

December 12 & 13

Christmas at Stratford Hall
Be transported back to the festive holiday times of the Lees of Stratford Hall. Enjoy a tour of the Great House, including period music and dancing, and shop in the gift store for that special Christmas gift. Dinner seating times on Friday are at 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. On Saturday there are three seating times at 4 p.m., 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. The cost of the tour and dinner is $48 for adults and $24 for children. Lodging is also available on a limited basis at the two guest houses. Dinner and lodging are available by reservation only at 804-493-8038 ext. 8504.