



Mrs. Lee's Rose Garden: The True Story of the Founding of Arlington National Cemetery

Carlo DeVito

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Mrs. Lee's Rose Garden is an intimate retelling of Arlington National Cemetery's tragic beginnings, and sheds new light on this profound chapter in American history.

Mrs. Lee's Rose Garden is the intensely personal story of Arlington National Cemetery's earliest history as seen through the lives of three people during the outbreak of the Civil War: Mary Ann Randolph Custis Lee, Robert E. Lee, and Montgomery C. Meigs. With all the majesty and pathos of a Greek tragedy, this story unfolds as the war's inevitable spiral of betrayal, tragedy, loss, and death begins, ultimately transforming the nation's most famous country estate into its most sacred ground.

In the years before the war, the Arlington estate sat like an American Acropolis towering above Washington. Mary Custis Lee was known as the Rose of Arlington, a brash, young, willful, and charming young woman, indulged by her famous father, George Washington Parke Custis, the grandson of George Washington. Artistic, well read, and highly intelligent, she was an avid gardener who spent as much time as possible tending the numerous flowerbeds of the Arlington Mansion, along with her mother and her three daughters.

Handsome and dashing, Robert E. Lee was easily the most promising soldier of his generation. But long before he was a field commander he was also a great success in the Army Corps of Engineers, having worked on major projects around the U.S. His friend, Montgomery C. Meigs, who had served under Robert, was a scion of Philadelphia society, and rose to become the engineer responsible for helping to complete the capital, and one of the most accomplished builders of his generation.

When the time for war arose, Lee refused the opportunity to head the Union Army. He could not draw his sword against his own state, his own people, and instead accepted a commission in the Confederate Army, pitting himself against many of his old comrades. Thus began a series of events that would ultimately pit these three against each other.

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