

## **Selected Civil War Attractions in Washington, D.C. compiled by Al Hodge**

For the upcoming Plastics Pioneer Association meeting in Arlington, VA, there are an enormous amount of attractions to visit within the Arlington and Washington D.C. areas. Certainly, far more than ever possible to see and visit within the few days' time allotted for our stay. So choosing where to go and visit within the time constraints of our meeting will be a challenge and will require planning.

As an amateur history buff of the U.S. Civil War, I want to share with you some sites in the DC area related to that time period of US history that may be of interest to you. The Washington D.C. area and the Federal Government grew rapidly in size and importance as the staging area for the Army of the Potomac during the Civil War. The Federal Government has never looked back.

### **Arlington House – Robert E Lee Memorial**

Also known as the Custis–Lee Mansion is located on top of the high point at the Arlington National Cemetery. For thirty years, this was the home of Robert E. Lee and Mary Anna Custis (a direct descendant of George Washington). When the Civil War broke out in 1861, President Lincoln offered Lee the position of overall commander of the Union troops. Citing loyalties to his native state of Virginia, Lee declined. He shortly thereafter resigned his commission in the US Army and joined the Confederate efforts.

When the Lees abandoned their Arlington home estate, the Federal government quickly confiscated it and its 5,100 acres. With the growing savagery of the war and the increasing number of dead Union soldiers from battles in the D.C. vicinity, Army Quarter Master Montgomery Meigs proposed using the Lee grounds for burying dead U.S. soldiers. Meigs' underlying intent at the time was to prevent the Lees from ever again being able to use and live in their home. The first of 2,111 dead U.S. soldiers were buried in the rose garden, located next to the house. These efforts by Meigs became what we now know as the Arlington National Cemetery. The cemetery today has within it the remains of over 400,000 people.

At the Arlington Cemetery Visitor Center, a free shuttle tram will take you to the top of the park to Arlington House. The tram will also stop along the way at the President Kennedy memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Sitting on top of an elevated hill, Arlington House provides a commanding view of the Potomac River and of Washington DC. You won't be disappointed by the view. On the back side of the house sits Arlington Woods. These woods are the oldest and largest track of intact virgin eastern hardwood forest in the Arlington, VA area. These woods are now under the supervision of the National Park Services and protected from development.

Arlington House is open daily with free tours directed by the National Park Service. To reach Arlington Cemetery, take the D.C. Metro subway Blue Line to the Arlington Cemetery stop. It's a short walk then to the park's Visitor Center. Or, take your car as there is ample parking; taxi and or Uber will also suffice.

## **President Lincoln's Cottage**

To escape the heat, pollution and political pressure of living in the White House, President Lincoln and his family escaped to their seasonal residence now known as Lincoln's Cottage. The Cottage is on the northern edge of D.C., about eight miles from the White House. In 1864, on one of his daily horse rides between the White House and the Cottage an unknown assassin made an attempt on President Lincoln's life. A single shot missed the President, but did put a hole through his top hat.

The Cottage was a favorite place for the Lincoln family during his presidency. It was here that Lincoln created his draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. Today the Cottage is part of the grounds of the Armed Forces Retirement Home. There are a number of ancient trees including sugar maples (Lincoln's favorite tree) on the ground surrounding the Cottage. Adjacent to the Cottage is the Soldiers Home Cemetery and the Rock Creek Cemetery, where a number of notable deceased D.C. residents are buried

The National Trust of Historic Preservation oversees the Cottage site. Tours of the Cottage are available between 10am and 3pm. There is a charge of \$15.00 per adult. This also includes a small museum and of course the all-important gift store.

No Metro stops are close – so travel there by car (ample parking), taxi and or Uber will be necessary.

## **Ford Theatre**

Ford Theatre is located about five blocks due east of the White House at 511 10<sup>th</sup> Street NW. It is here on April 14, 1865 that John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Lincoln while he was attending the play Our American Cousin. There is a museum, self-guided and full guided Park Ranger tours of the theatre that provide a complete explanation of the events of April 14, 1865. The theatre has been restored to the original condition as when Lincoln attended.

Across the street from the theatre is the Peterson House. After being shot, it is here that President Lincoln was carried and would die at 7:22AM on April 15. The Peterson House is also open for public touring and contains a number of interesting exhibits.

Before going to the Ford Theatre for a tour, keep in mind that the Ford Theatre is an active theatre and does have both day time and evening performances. It is best to call ahead for public tour hours of the Ford Theatre at 202 347 4833 or go on line [www.fords.org](http://www.fords.org). Or, you may want to see a play as well and for that, it's best to buy these tickets in advance.

There are several Metro stops close by the Ford Theatre – please consult the Metro map they all involve some walking to reach the theatre. Parking is somewhat limited in the area, so best to leave the car at the hotel a take a taxi or Uber.

## **Ulysses S Grant Memorial**

Sometime during your visit I am sure there is the possibility that you may find yourself by the U.S. Capital building. Just to the west of the Capital, or the eastern terminus of the National Mall, is the Grant Memorial. Take the time to visit this monument, you won't be disappointed. It is actually an assimilation of three different monument sections and is one of the most underappreciated, yet stunningly beautiful and emotional moving monuments in Washington D.C. The Grant monument was created by Henry Shrady, an untrained sculpture, dedicated in 1922 and utilizes a combination of granite and bronze.

Depicted as the Commanding General that he was during the war, Grant is mounted on his horse Cincinnati with both placed upon a raised pedestal which is surrounded by four bronze lions. General Grant is positioned in the middle of two other sets of bronze statues. One statue group is of a Union cavalry in a battle charge and the other of a Union artillery unit being made ready for action. This is the largest equestrian monument in the USA. The drama is realistic and has long been recognized for its authenticity to detail and accuracy for its depiction of the soldiers and the horses involved.

You can visit this monument daily and at any time. There is limited car parking in the area so taxi and or Uber is best. The Capital is within a couple blocks of the Metro. It can be reached by the Capital South stop on either the Blue or Orange Line.

## **General William Tecumseh Sherman Monument**

This monument is located in Sherman Plaza, on the SE side of the White House. It is also an equestrian statue and pays tribute to the Union General Sherman. Sherman is depicted as he appeared when leading the Army of the Tennessee during its final review as part of the Army of the Potomac marching up Pennsylvania Avenue after the Civil War had ended.

Each side of the monument pays tribute to an accomplishment by General Sherman during his Civil War efforts. This is an impressive monument and is a great plaza to take a break and sit for a rest.

Parking is not easy to come by around the White House, so forget about driving a car to visit the White House or this monument. As with the other sites to visit, use taxi or Uber. For the Metro, the Farragut West Station on the Orange, Silver and Blue line is just three blocks from the White House.

Have a great time touring the DC area and feel free to contact me for any assistance and for information on several other excellent Civil War monuments and museums.

Al Hodge

alhodge@aol.com