

Sully
Chantilly
Virginia

Fairfax Co.

HABS No. VA-250

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Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District of Washington, D.C.

Historic American Buildings Survey
Delos H. Smith, District Officer
1707 Eye St., N.W., Washington, D.C.

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"Sully"
Chantilly Vicinity
Fairfax County, Virginia

HABS No. VA-250

"Sully"

Address: Adjoining Dulles International Airport, off State Rt. 657

Present Owner: Fairfax County Park Authority

Extraordinary congressional action led by Congressman Joel T. Broyhill saved this historic house for posterity. Restoration of a thirty-six acre setting is planned and "Sully" will take its place among established Virginia Shrines.

Present Occupant: R. E. Wagstaff, Curator,

Present Use: Historic House Museum and Meeting Place for Historical Groups

Brief Statement

of Significance: Aside from pre-eminent historical associations, "Sully" is a notable plantation home possessing two extraordinary dependencies. Extant buildings are in good structural condition and in a relatively unchanged state.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Originally patented by "Captain" Henry Lee of Westmoreland County, possibly in 1712 or at any rate by 1725. The estate was inherited by his son, Henry Lee of "Leesylvania", who may have established quarters on the property. In his will (Prince William Will Book C., page 373), Henry Lee of Leesylvania" left his land (then in Loudoun) to his sons, Richard Bland

and Theoderick. The older, Richard Bland, selected the northern half, which became his "Sully" plantation. On February 1, 1811 Richard Bland Lee sold to his cousin, Francis Lightfoot Lee. (Fairfax Deed Book L-2, page 144). "Sully" passed out of the Lee family in 1839. It was subsequently owned by two families from Dutchess County, New York, a circumstance worth recalling since it may have some bearing in the development of the unusual and engaging piazza. At the time the property was acquired by the Civil Aeronautics Authority, "Sully" was the home of Mr. Frederick Nolting of the State Department.

2. Date of erection: 1794
3. Architect: Attributed to James Wren who is known to have built other homes in the Chantilly area.
4. Original construction: Hewn timber frame with brick nogging; poplar clapboards, beaded.
5. Notes on building and alterations: On June 19, 1794, Richard Bland Lee married Elizabeth Collins of Philadelphia and brought her to "Sully". They spent their honeymoon in a large hewn-log house, dating from his bachelor days, but which disappeared about 1870. While the Lees were residing in the "honeymoon cottage", Liza's father made them a visit and penned a letter home to her mother commenting upon the construction then nearing completion. A fragment which has been preserved merits quoting below:

"..... They are obliged to go more than three miles to get sand to make mortar for the new house, which is nearly all done but the Plastering and Painting and the Piazza across the front. It is a very clever house, has an elegant hall 12 feet wide and a handsome staircase and two very pretty rooms on the first floor. One is 19 by 20 feet and the other 20 by 17 feet. There is two, large and one small chamber in the second story and one handsome and large chamber in the third or garrett story, nearly square with a large window in the gable and another good lodging room besides. Indeed it is and will be a very neate handsome house.

"The Kitchen is about 60 feet from the house and is a finer one than is in a twenty miles square, and it is, in fact, a Kitchen and Laundry with very handsome chimney with cranes in them. Indeed it is, properly speaking, a compleate Double Kitchen or Kitchen and Washhouse and on each end of the ... (end of text)

Further corroboration of the bukliding date occurs in a letter dated October 24, 1797, from Thomas Lee Shippen to his father and written at "Sully" (MS in Library of Congress):

".....This is the seat of Mr. R. B. Lee in Loudoun County, 27 miles from Alexandria, 25 miles from Dumfries and 50 miles from Fredericksburg. We arrived here yesterday from Leesburg before dinner and the great importunity of this delightful family has persuaded us to pass this day with them, when it promised to be like yesterday, a fine one. It has turned out a very bad one and it rained harder than I have seen it rain these many months. Happy travelers to have such a shelter from the storm. I would fain give you some idea of the elegance in which this kinsman has settled himself to make amends for the caprice of his fellow citizens ----. The house is new, built by himself about three years ago, and lately furnished in Philadelphia with every article of silver-plate, mahogany, Wilton carpeting and glassware that can be conceived of that you will find in the very best furnished houses in Philadelphia, parlours and chambers completely equiped with every luxury as well as convenience."

"Sully" has been enlarged but never basically altered. The east wing is roughly contemporaneous with the main block and was probably added before 1800. The west wing or attached kitchen was developed about

1850 with a shed roof which subsequently was altered to a gable. The accompanying old photograph of the home shows a covered walk connecting the porch with this original outside kitchen. A remnant still in place forms a hood over the steps at the west end.

B. Historical Events or Personages Connected with the Structure:

Richard Bland Lee served in the Virginia Assembly as early as 1784 and five years later was elected first Congressman from Northern Virginia, serving until 1785. Lee is credited with playing a key role in the negotiations which fixed the site of the Federal City on the banks of the Potomac. Richard Bland Lee was appointed one of three commissioners to superintend re-erection of public buildings in Washington after their destruction by the British in 1814. He moved to Washington in 1815 when he was appointed Commissioner to Adjudicate Claims resulting from the War of 1812. In 1819 President Monroe appointed him Judge of the Orphans' Court of the District, which office he held until his death.

General and Mrs. Washington stood as godparents at the christening of Lee's son, who was born at "Sully". On that occasion the Washingtons presented the parents with a set of fine crystal glasses to drink to the infant's health. Owned by Lee descendants is a lock of the General's hair, reported also to be a souvenir of the event. General Washington's nephew and chief heir, Bushrod Washington, was a friend of Richard Bland Lee and serves as his principal attorney.

The Lee's most intimate friends were James and Dolley Madison. Elizabeth Lee had been a bridesmaid of Dolley upon her marriage to John Todd, a Philadelphia lawyer. They continued lifelong friends and confidantes. Mrs. Madison frequently sought the "seclusion of "Sully" as their correspondence reveals.

PART II. FURTHER ARCHITECTURAL COMMENTS

- A. Mansion Exterior: Two outstanding details invite full investigation as to whether they are original, that is, the remarkably wide eaves and the porch across the south front. Mention was made above to a Dutchess County, New York, influence where similar scroll work is characteristic. Evidence exists however, of this type of treatment having been employed by James Wren, Fairfax County architect and builder.
- B. Mansion Interior: An awkwardness of the first floor newell is in vivid contrast to the simplicity and delicacy, of trim elsewhere, especially the elegance of the large mantel on the second floor. Worthy of special notice are the plaster cornices which favorably compare with contemporary "fashionable" examples in Philadelphia, Alexandria and Washington. The large-scale of the hospitable entrance doors are notable features of "Sully". A large percentage of original hardware is still in place.
- C. Outbuildings: The small two story house built of redstone southeast of the mansion is believed to have been the "patent house" dating from the issuance of the land grant to Henry Lee of Westmoreland. This would place its building in 1712

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or certainly by 1735. In all probability it was "quarters" for the plantation until Richard Bland Lee moved to Sully as a young bachelor. This building provides an excellent example of "garnetting, or the use of small pieces of stone set into the mortared joints, for decorative effect. The technique follows ancient building tradition.

The hewn log Kitchen now covered with clapboards, is the building described by Eliza Lee's father and quoted above. He identified it as a "Kitchen and Laundry". Upstairs there were quarters for servants. The back to back fireplaces with their swinging cranes are of great interest. In the kitchen end there is indication of a large bake oven, tying-in to the kitchen flue. The original stone sink is still in existence.

In addition to the Patent House and Kitchen, two small square frame buildings still stand. The original Smoke House is located near the stone house. A similar building, probably a Store or Tool House, is located east of the mansion, but does not stand on its original site.

- D. Site: The ancient trees at "Sully" confer a parklike setting, with views of rolling countryside. Old roads have been traced. A field survey conducted under auspices of Fairfax Garden Clubs looks forward to the restoration of original landscape features.

Located at an air crossroads of the world, "Sully" provides such an historical anchor as both to preserve and dramatize a way of life that is past. As "Sully Plantation" faces new airport facilities and thus a new frontier of travel, visitors may

well ponder its deeper meaning as a frontier itself, in the early settlement of our country. In the jet age, we expect Sully to exert a nostalgic impact upon a wide, reflective, and receptive audience.

References: "Sully Memoranda", prepared by R. E. Wagstaff for distribution to visitors, 1960.

Eleanor Lee Templeman, Arlington Heritage, privately printed, 1959, pp. 42-3.

Prepared by: Worth Bailey, Architectural Historian, HABS, March, 1961.

Approved by:


Chief Architect

Date 4-14-61