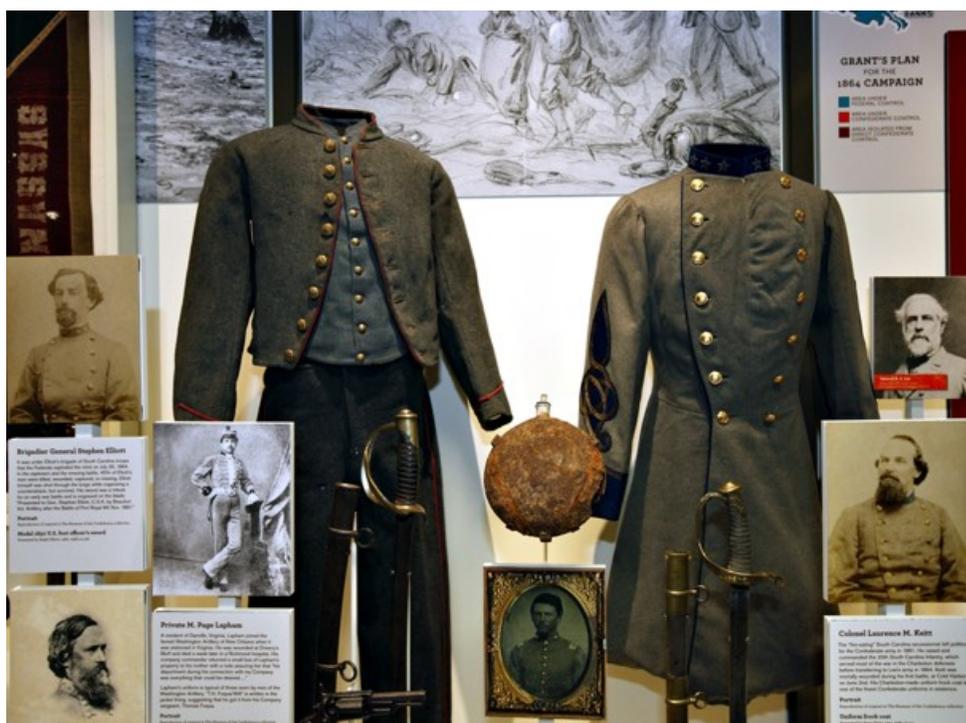


LEE'S SURRENDER SWORD, AND ECHOES OF THE LOST CAUSE, AT NEW APPOMATTOX MUSEUM

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APPOMATTOX, Va. — The sword's hilt was made of ivory and gold, with a pommel shaped like a lion's head, but as the weary, gray-haired general walked up the steps of the simple brick house here, he had never drawn it in battle.

The exquisite weapon had been made in Paris and slipped through the Union blockade. It was presented to Gen. Robert E. Lee in 1863 — a tribute to the virtuous knight of the Confederacy.



But two years later, on April 9, 1865, it seemed like the relic of a misguided dream. And as Lee sat down to await his conqueror, it was perhaps the most elegant thing left in the meager army he was about to surrender.

This weekend, the sword — encased and illuminated as if from an ancient hoard — is the centerpiece of the official opening of the Museum of the Confederacy's new \$7.5 million satellite a mile and a half from the surrender site. It is the first of the Richmond museum's projected three new sites designed to exhibit more of its vast artifact collection and "take the museum to the people," said its president, S. Waite Rawls III. The other sites are near Fredericksburg and Norfolk.

"We did a detailed study of where are people who are interested in Civil War history . . . already going," Rawls said. One answer was that more than 150,000 a year were visiting the Appomattox area. "Appomattox is one of those words that you can say anywhere in the world and people know



what you're talking about," he said. Like "Waterloo, Gettysburg . . . the very name rings.

"It is both an ending and a beginning," he said. "It is certainly the metaphor for the end of the Civil War. . . . It was very much the beginning of the modern United States of America." The opening of the eight-acre site comes as the nation marks the 150th anniversary of the Civil War years 1861-1865.

Lee's sword is inscribed in French on one side of the blade, "Help thyself, and God will help thee," the museum said. The inscription on the other side reads: "Genl. Robert. E. Lee. C.S.A. from a Marylander. 1863." The sword was bequeathed to the museum in 1982. No one seems to know who the Marylander was.

It is one of scores of artifacts on display related to the surrender of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, to the months leading up to the capitulation, and to the years after the event, which effectively brought an end to the Civil War. They include two-dozen uniforms — some moth-eaten and tattered, others on special mounts, looking as if their owners might be back in a minute to slip them on again.

"You open those things up and they look like they just came off the rack," said museum spokesman Sam Craghead. The elegant gray uniform coat Lee wore when he surrendered to begrimed, cigar-smoking Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant is there. So is that of Confederate Gen. William N. Pendleton, the Episcopal priest and artillery commander to whom other rebel officers delegated the task of urging Lee to surrender.

The gray-bearded Pendleton, who was often mistaken for Lee, had lost his son, "Sandie," in battle only six months before. Sandie's uniform coat, which was said to be hidden in upholstery to keep it from the Yankees, is there, too. Several garments still bear the bullet holes indicating the death or wounding of the wearer. A child's "sack coat," made from the uniform of the toddler's father, shows how some impoverished Southerners made do after the war, said museum curator Catherine Wright.

Also in the display cases are Confederate flags said to have been surrendered at Appomattox, and their flagstaves — often just long tree branches.

The new museum has an interactive, touch-screen “wall of faces,” featuring people of those times whose backgrounds can be viewed by tapping the screen, as well as a copy of Lee’s death mask.

The surrender came after four years of increasingly savage civil war and an estimated 600,000 deaths from battle and disease. That was 2 percent of the U.S. population, the equivalent of 6 million deaths today, historians have said. In the final campaign, Grant, with about 63,000 men, had driven Lee’s estimated 30,000 men from entrenchments around Petersburg, Va., on April 2, according to the National Park Service. Over the next week, the Union army chased down and, with the help of seven regiments of black troops, trapped the dwindling Confederate force near Appomattox Court House, 90 miles west of Richmond.

After an exchange of notes between Lee and Grant, Lee recognized the hopelessness of his situation and met Grant on Palm Sunday in the home of Wilmer McLean, on the old Richmond-Lynchburg Stage road. McLean, a slave owner and sugar speculator, had recently moved his family from its plantation in Manassas to the former tavern in Appomattox to escape the war and ease his business dealings, said National Park Service historian Patrick A. Schroeder.

A slave cabin sat in McLean’s backyard, clearly visible out the window of the room where Lee sat down to await Grant. Although it’s not known whether any of McLean’s 18 slaves observed the event, Schroeder said, Appomattox County had more slaves than whites, according to the 1860 Census. And the lone civilian killed in the final fighting on April 9 was Hannah Reynolds, a slave.

Lee, whose son, Custis, had been captured three days before, came to the meeting in an immaculate uniform, boots, spurs and buckskin gloves, Horace Porter, an aide to Grant, wrote later. Lee arrived with his aide, Col. Charles Marshall, a bespectacled lawyer and former college mathematics teacher who borrowed a sword, gauntlets and a clean shirt collar to look presentable.

They had to wait half an hour for Grant to show up with a small entourage that included Abraham Lincoln’s son, Robert, who was an officer on Grant’s staff. (Robert later recounted the scene to his father over breakfast on the day of the president’s assassination.) The meeting at the McLean house was amiable, businesslike and one of the most remarkable surrenders in military history. No reparations were demanded. No hostages were taken. No one was imprisoned. Grant agreed to feed Lee’s starving army, and he ordered his men to stop celebratory cannon firing. Lee did not offer, and Grant did not demand, the beautiful sword.

The next day the officers of the two armies mingled at McLean’s house. They “seemed to enjoy the meeting . . . as though they had been friends separated for a long time while fighting battles under the same flag,” Grant wrote in his memoirs. “For the time being it looked . . . as if all thought of the war had escaped their minds.”

It had not, of course, and the name Appomattox would echo, for better and worse, across 15 decades of American history. “It’s one of the great turning points, if not *the* great turning point, in American history,” said Wright, the museum curator. It is “when we kind of decided once and for all exactly what that means when we say, ‘liberty and justice for all.’ ”