Fitzhugh Lee

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"FITZHUGH LEE"

History 318
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"FITZHUGH LEE"

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Books


Newspaper

The Richmond Dispatch (Virginia) "Of Distinguished Family" p. 2 April 29, 1905.

Speech

The serious study of any member of the Lee family from the time of its founder, Richard Lee's emigration from Shropshire, England to the north side of the York River in 1640, until the twentieth century brings to mind the immortal words of the immortal bard, "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them". For in this noble family can be found numerous examples of men, each of who possessed the rare combination of those high characteristics of leadership, courage, and honesty, and who thus were able to measure up to all three kinds of greatness.

In my inquest into the life of Fitzhugh Lee I have found that he too, like so many of his forebears, could measure up to this high standard. It might be well to note that Fitzhugh seems to be the last of his clan to demonstrate those qualities of leadership, which raise one above the common herd, for in a changing and growing America the family has today become obscure and from it has arisen no recent leader.

In presenting my study of Fitzhugh Lee, I shall follow the pattern suggested by Shakespeare's words; for born a Virginia Lee, he was born great; in the Civil War, he achieved greatness in his own name; and later as Governor of Virginia and Consul-General to Cuba, greatness was thrust upon him.

Fitzhugh, the eldest of six sons born to Captain Sydney Smith Lee and Anna Maria Mason Lee, was born at "Clermont", Fairfax

(1) Hendrick, Burton J., The Lees of Virginia, p. 1
(2) Shakespeare, Wm., Twelfth Night, Act II, Scene 5, line 159
(3) Hendrick, Burton J., op. cit., p. 458
(4) Freeman, Douglas S., "Fitzhugh Lee" in Dictionary of American Biography, p. 103
County, Virginia, the home of his maternal grandfather, General John
Mason, on Thursday November 15, 1835. His father, Sydney, was an
officer in the United States Navy (however he resigned from the U.S. Navy
and joined the Confederate Navy when the Civil War broke out) and was
a elder brother of Robert Edward Lee. Sydney thus was the second son of
Henry (better known as Light Horse Harry) of Revolutionary War fame, by
his second marriage to Anne Hill Carter of "Shirley" Thus we can see
that Fitzhugh was a nephew of General Robert E. Lee and a grandson of
Light Horse Harry. Fitzhugh's mother, Anna Maria Mason Lee, was the
daughter of General John Mason and the granddaughter of the illustrious
George Mason, author of the Virginia Bill of Rights and builder of
"Gunston Hall" She was a sister of James M. Mason, who was for many
years the United States Senator from Virginia and who with John Slidell,
was a special commissioner of the Confederate Government to England,
their removal from the steamer "Trent" giving rise to this serious
international incident (The Trent Affair). Through his mother Fitzhugh
thus could claim kin to another line, the Masons, who were almost as
famous as the Lees. (For a more detailed treatment of Fitzhugh Lee's
family tree, see the digram at the end of the paper.) "Some are born
Great"; through the veins of young Fitz flowed the blood of the aristocracy
of Virginia; the Lees, the Masons, the Carters, Grimes, Hills, and other
members of Virginia's first families. This was his heritage, but it was
also a torch he must carry. Could he carry the torch? That is our story.

(5) Richmond Dispatch (Virginia), "Of Distinguished Family", April 29, 1905, p. 2
(6) Ibid.
(7) Anonymous, Virginia's Next Governor, General Fitzhugh Lee, p. 6
(8) Hendrick, Burton J., op. cit., p. 439
(9) Richmond Dispatch op.cit. p. 2
(10) Ibid
Little is known of Fitzhugh's boyhood, except that he was educated in private schools of the neighborhood. His local reputation was that he was a bright boy, full of fun and fonder of play than of his books. It is fair to suppose that his boyhood was spent as were the boyhoods of most sons of his station in life at that time in riding, hunting, camping and helping with the chores of farm life. Certainly he learned to work as a boy, because the Lees, although a wealthy family did not believe in pampering their children.

When young Lee was sixteen in 1852 he was appointed by President Millard Fillmore a cadet at large at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Unlike his distinguished uncle, Robert E. Lee who never received a demerit, Fitz managed to receive the maximum number short of dismissal. He was more noted for his comradship and horsemanship than for his scholarship but was the most popular cadet at the Academy. He graduated forty-fifth in a class of forty-nine in 1856.

Although he had stood low in his class academically, he had taken first honors in horsemanship. This lead upon his graduation to his appointment as an instructor in the Cavalry at the army post at Carlisle Barracks, Penn where he served until 1858. Here he rendered a service that won for him the respect of his superiors, in training the new recruits and it was because of the record that he made here that Lee

(12) Virginia's Next Governor; p. 6
(13) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit., p. 103
(14) Ibid.
(15) Richmond Times Dispatch; op. cit., p. 2
(17) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit., p. 103
(18) Ibid.
(19) Hunter, Major Robert W., op. cit. p. 140
(20) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 103
(21) Virginia's Next Governor; p. 7
was then ordered to Texas to join the famous Second Cavalry of which Albert S. Johnston was the Colonel and his uncle Robert E. Lee was Lt. Col.

Fitz Lee was a Second Lieutenant in Kirby Smith's Company and when that company joined the celebrated and highly successful Wichita expedition under Van Dorn, Lee was chosen by Van Dorn to serve as his adjutant. On May 13, 1859 the largest fight between the Indians and the United States troops began when six companies of Van Dorn's men meet a large force of Comanche Indians. Lee was selected to command a picked body of men on foot into the thicket where the Indians had taken refuge. Toward the end of the fight on May 19th his lungs were pierced by an arrow and he was carried out on the prairie not expected to live, but within a few weeks he had recovered from his wounds and returned to his company, soon to take part in another entanglement.

In May 1860, Lee was ordered to report at West Point to serve as an assistant instructor of tactics. This post was one eagerly sought after by Cavalry officers. At the Academy he was famous for his rigid discipline and for the enthusiastic love of the cadets which he enjoyed; making for himself a splendid reputation as a teacher.

Lee was serving at the Military Academy when the war broke out and strong inducements were made to him not to leave the U.S. Army service.

(22) Hunter, Major Robert W., op. cit. p. 6
(23) Smith, Margaret V., Virginia 1492-1892, p. 400
(24) Virginia's Next Governor; p. 7
(25) Ibid.
(26) Ibid.
(27) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 103
(28) Ibid.
(29) Virginia's Next Governor; p. 8
(30) Ibid.
(31) Ibid.
He was even promised that he would not have to leave the Academy to engage in active war service against the South but would remain stationed there as a instructor. However these promises were to no avail, for he tendered his resignation on May 3, 1861 (accepted May 21, 1861) to the United States Army and offered his services to his native state, Virginia, as had done his uncle and so many more of his Virginia and Southern companions.

When Lee joined the Confederate forces he was made a First Lieutenant and he served for a time as a Staff Officer to Ewell and Joseph Johnston during the Manassas Campaign. In September 1861 upon recommendation of J.E. Johnston and J.E.B. Stuart, Fitz Lee was made a Lieutenant Colonel of the First Virginia Cavalry of which Stuart was the Colonel. A great friendship here began and Fitz Lee and Jeb Stuart soon were great companions, laughing, riding, fighting, and singing together. In fact years later when Stuart went to New Orleans to dedicate a statue to Stonewall Jackson, he referred to Fitzhugh Lee as "the friend and peer of Jeb Stuart. When the First Virginia Cavalry was reorganized in April 1862, Lee was made its Colonel.

Fitz Lee's regiment was with Stuart when the famous raid around McClellan's army was made which paved the way for Jackson's great flank movement. For this and for his valuable service in the peninsular operations he was appointed Brigadier-General on July 25, 1862 of the

(32) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 104
(33) Ibid.
(34) Virginia's Next Governor, p. 9
(35) Ibid. p. 19
(36) Hunter, Major Robert W., op. cit. p. 141
(37) Ibid.
(38) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 104
First, Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Ninth regiments of the Cavalry and of Breathed's Battery of Horse artillery. One of the factors in the delay of the Southern offensive against General Pope at the Rapidan was Lee's failure to reach there at the proper time. For this he was severely criticized by Stuart but he soon redeemed himself by covering the withdrawal from South Mountain Pass, D.W. Hill's division, providing the Confederates a much needed extra day for reconcentration at Sharpsburg.

Perhaps the most noted service that Fitzhugh Lee performed during the war was the relieving of the Confederate Pickets after the battle of Sharpsburg. This was done on the night of September 8, 1862. On the morning of the ninth, Lee's Cavalry was the only force confronting McClellan's whole army. Before McClellan had recovered from the surprise Lee had his men in their saddles and had crossed the river. During the winter of 1862-63, after the Dumfries and Occoquan Raids, the shortage of horses and the lack of feed for them were grave problems confronting the Confederates. Fitz Lee and his men retired to the upper Rappahannock where they endured a hard winter with very scant supplies.

The engagement at Kelly's Ford on March 17, 1863 between General Averill's Division and Fitz Lee's Brigade was one of the hardest fought battles in the whole war. Here the Union forces had a division of 3000 men pitted against Lee's 800. Lee's victory here won for him great praise.

(39) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 104
(40) Ibid.
(41) Hunter, Major Robert W., op. cit. p. 142
(42) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 104
(43) Hunter, Major Robert W., op. cit. p. 142
(44) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit., p. 104
During the Chancellorsville campaign Lee gave much assistance by guarding Jackson's March around the right wing of Hooker's army on May 2, 1863 (45) and also by providing Jackson with information gained in his reconnaissancing, which soon led Jackson to begin what turned out to be a decisive attack.

On September 3, 1863 Lee was promoted to Major-General, when Stuart (46) was advanced to Command of the Corps. At this time his uncle, General Robert E. Lee wrote his nephew: "Your admirable conduct, devotion to (47) the cause of your country, and devotion to duty, fill me with pleasure.

At Spottsylvania Courthouse in May of 1864, Lee and his Cavalry again displayed the valor and bravery for which they had become famous. His stand on May 8th enabled the Southern forces to take this important (48) cross road. Later his Cavalry held these positions against the onslaught of General Grant until the Confederate infantry arrived. From May (49) until August, Lee and his men performed combat, reconnaissance, and outpost duty with the Army of Northern Virginia. At Ream's Station Lee put up one of his best fights; here he with Mahone's Brigade struck at Wilson and the Federal forces, stripping them of their wagons, artillery, (51) and other supplies so badly needed by the Rebels.

In August 1864 Lee was dispatched to the Shenandoah Valley to (52) lend support to General Jubal A. Early. During the day of September 19, 1864

(45) Freeman, Douglas S., *op. cit.* p. 104
(46) Hunter, Major Robert W., *op. cit.* p. 143
(48) Freeman, Douglas S., *op. cit.* p. 104
(49) Hunter, Major Robert W., *op. cit.* p. 143
(51) *Virginia's Next Governor*, p. 17
(52) Freeman, Douglas S., *op. cit.* p. 104
while taking part in the desperate fighting at Winchester, Fitz Lee had three horses shot from under him, and was himself so seriously injured by a thigh wound that he was incapacitated for duty for a period of several months.

Early in 1865 he was placed in command of the Cavalry on the north side of the James River. When Wade Hampton was sent to North Carolina, Fitz Lee was made Cavalry Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia. His troops received severe losses at Five Forks during his absence on April 1st, but Lee kept the Commanding Generals advised of the enemy's movements during the retreat to Appomattox.

When Lee realized that the surrender of the Southern Army was inevitable, he with the larger portion of his Cavalry escaped toward Lynchburg. Realizing that the cause was lost, Lee rode to Farmville and reported to General Meade, who instructed him to report at Appomattox, in order that he may be paroled. This Lee did; and while at Appomattox he was the guest of his old West Point friend, General John Gibbon.

Lee cannot be compared to Forrest and Stuart in the art of reconnaissance and as a tactician but he must be included among the first dozen American Cavalry officers. Lee had served well, had won an enviable record, and had proven himself a leader of men.---Fitzhugh Lee had measured up, "some achieve greatness".

(53) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 104
(54) Ibid.
(55) Ibid.
(56) Ibid.
(57) Hunter, Major Robert W., op. cit. p. 144
(58) Ibid.
(59) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 104
The War over, Lee spent a brief period in Richmond as a paroled prisoner. Soon however he returned to his devastated farm in Stafford County to farm. Here he remained for several years and began to rebuild his earthly possessions and investments which had been ruined by the war. Although he made a success of farming, fishing, and dairying, and made a host of friends among the agricultural people of the State, this kind of life was most to quiet for him. He himself said: "I had been accustomed all my life to draw corn from the quartermasters, and found it rather hard to draw it from the ground......but I did it". During this period of his life Lee was married for we read that on April 19, 1871 he took Ellen Bernard Fowle of Alexandria as his bride. She was to bear him five children to bless their home.

In 1874 Lee accompanied the Norfolk Light Infantry Blues to Bunker Hill for the Centennial Celebration, where he made a speech which so eloquent that it attracted the attention of the whole nation for its sincerity and patriotism. During the Winter of 1882 and the Spring of 1883 General Lee made a lecture tour under the sponsorship of the Southern Historical Society. Speaking all over the South he attracted large crowds and was warmly received everywhere. Lee now was becoming a popular idol in the South and respected in the whole nation. Besides being blessed in that he was a nephew of the great General, he had won a excellent war record in his own name.

(60) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 104
(61) Virginia's Next Governor p. 19
(62) Hunter, Major Robert W., op. cit. p. 135-136
(63) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 104
(64) Ibid. p. 105
(65) Virginia's Next Governor p. 20
(66) Ibid.
At the Yorktown Centennial in October 1881, Fitz Lee again commanded the Virginia troops during the celebration. In the Summer of 1884 he was appointed as a member of the Board of Visitors of the United States Military Academy. The South looked upon the election of Grover Cleveland as the end of the reconstruction period as he was the first presidential candidate of the Democratic party to be elected since the Civil War. His inauguration was a big day for the South. Lee headed the Virginia delegation in the parade and according to southern accounts, received an even more enthusiastic ovation than Cleveland himself. When questioned about this he modestly replied: "It was not personal to myself, but merely an expression of the joy of the vast multitude that the South had once more been accorded a place in this gathering of the whole people of our common country". Another and a very significant honor was bestowed upon him when he served as a member of General Hancock's Staff at the funeral of General Grant in July 1885.

Fitzhugh was now to serve his State and his political party in a still more important role, that of Governor of Virginia. But first let us lay the scene that lead up to his election. The Funding Act of 1871 was the real birth of the Readjuster Party in Virginia. It began not as a Party but as a movement by John E. Massey of Albemarle, to establish a debt settlement more liberal in its recognition of the financial conditions of the State. It became, however, a vehicle by which certain politicians with high political aspirations gained control of

(67) Virginia's Next Governor, p. 21
(68) Ibid.
(69) Ibid.
(70) Ibid.
(71) Ibid.
(72) Ibid.
the State Government.

By 1879 the Readjusters had built up a party backed by strong negro and republican vote under the leadership of General William Mahone. (74)

In 1881 the Readjusters nominated Wm. E. Cameron for Governor and he defeated John W. Daniel, the democratic choice. Not only did the Readjusters win the Governorship but also the majority in both houses of the Legislature. In the presidential election of 1884 the Readjusters backed James G. Blaine and soon it was little more than a sub republican party. (75)

The gubernatorial election of 1885 was then one of significance because the Democratic Party was trying to make a comeback in the State. Fitzhugh Lee's famous name, his personality, and skill as a public speaker won for him the candidacy of the Democratic Party. John S. Wise, a Republican, was nominated by the Readjusters. In the election in November 1885 Lee receiving the active support of thousands of Confederate veterans and conducting a active campaign himself brought victory to his party once again by the vote of 152,544 to 133,510. (76)

Thus Fitzhugh Lee became the third member of his family to serve Virginia as its Governor. Thomas Lee had been President of the Council in 1749 and Henry was Governor for a short period in 1791. (77)

The election of Lee as Governor brought in a "new era for Richmond

(74) Glass, Robert C. & Carter Jr., Virginia Democracy Vol I p. 229
(75) Ibid. p. 238
(76) Ibid. Passim 240-241
(77) Ibid. p. 474
(78) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 104
(79) Smith, Margret V., loc. cit p. 399
and the State. Reconstruction was over, and with the Democratic party securely in control of the state government, a general feeling of relief and rejoicing seemed to pervade both the political and social atmosphere. Richmond was so anxious to show its affection for the Governor and his wife that plans for an Inaugural Ball were formed way in advance. Mr. Beverley Munford in his most charming book, Richmond Homes and Memories, gives in vivid detail the story of this ball (probably the grandest Ball in Richmond's history) and of the inauguration of the new Democratic Governor. He tells of the social life that Governor and Mrs. Lee reintroduced into Richmond. The Governor's two sons, Fitzhugh Lee, Jr. and George Mason Lee, were with their father during his years as Governor and soon thereafter followed his footsteps by becoming highly successful officers in the U. S. Army.

"Fitzhugh Lee was one of our very best Governors. He proved himself wise in counsel, upright, and tactful in civil admiration, as he had been among the bravest of the brave in those terrible days "when the grapes were of iron and their vintage was of blood". This civic renown supplanted his firmly established military fame." His term of office, however was more marked by the firm encampment of the Democratic Party upon the controls of the State Government than it was by any marked achievement.

In 1890, his four year term of Governor having expired, Lee now

(80) Munford, Robert B., Jr., Richmond Homes and Memories p. 110
(81) Ibid. p. 110
(82) Ibid. p. 113
(83) Hunter, Major Robert W., op. cit. p. 136
(84) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 104.
aspired for a seat in the United States Senate. At that time the United States Senators were appointed by the State Senate rather than being elected by the people. The Virginia State Senate was thought to favor the election of Lee, who had been a saviour to the party and who had been a most popular Governor. However, powerful money and railroad interest and influence was brought to bear and Thomas Martin of Albemarle County was elected by a small margin over Lee. Martin's election was not popular and especially did the Confederate veterans resent it, taking it as a personal insult to themselves and what they had fought together with Lee for. Greater things were in store for our hero though, because in 1896 Cleveland, a democrat, was still President and he had the power to pass out offices.

On April 13, 1896, President Cleveland named him Consul General to Cuba. Yellow fever was prevalent in Cuba at that time and his family and friends tried to dissuade him from accepting the post, but his mind was made up and Lee went to Havana. So well did he serve that President McKinley kept him at his post, when he a republican President, was inaugurated.

At this time the situation in Cuba was most grave and Lee had to display all of his tact and firmness to deal with the events that proceeded the outbreak of war. Soon the point was reached, when tolerance no longer worked as our treaty obligations were violated and Americans insulted. When Lee called on Governor-General Weyler to ask for the

(85) Glass, Robert C. & Carter Jr.; op. cit. p. 259
(86) Ibid. p. 263
(87) Ibid. p. 264
(88) Ibid. p. 265
(89) Freeman, Douglas S.; op. cit. p. 104
(90) Hunter, Major Robert W.; op. cit. p. 137
(91) Ibid.
(92) Freeman, Douglas S.; op. cit. p. 104
(93) Hunter, Major Robert W.; op. cit. p. 137
release of an American citizen, who had been jailed on a minor charge he was told that martial law existed in Cuba, and the prisoner would not be released. Lee again demanded the release of the prisoner and when this was refused he cabled Washington, asking for a war vessel to enforce American rights. The State Department wired a reply asking why he had changed his policy to which Lee replied: "I have made no change in policy, I am simply demanding that the rights of American citizens shall be respected. If you approve of my course send a war vessel. If you do not, accept my resignation, which goes by today's mail." As it turned out the ship was not needed because Weyler released the prisoner when he saw that Lee meant business.

Later Lee was informed by the War Department that the battleship "Maine" would call at Havana to make a friendly visit. Lee realized that an American battleship in the Cuban Harbor at this time would only cause hard feelings and might result in an outbreak of hostilities. He informed the War Department of this, but it was too late as the "Maine" was at that time entering Cuban waters. As it turned out, Lee was right, as the "Maine" was blown up while on this mission. The war had come.

Lee returned to Washington on April 12, 1898 and his return "took on something of the nature of a triumph". He had become by now not only a Virginia and Southern hero but a national figure. "When Lee donned the uniform of the United States and received a commission

(94) Hunter, Major Robert W., op. cit. p. 137
(95) Ibid. p. 158
(96) Ibid. p. 158
(97) Ibid. p. 158
(98) Ibid.
(99) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 104
(100) Hendrick, Burton T., op. cit. p. 458
as Major General of volunteers, his act was taken both North and South, as a symbol of a united country.

On May 3, 1898, Lee was assigned to the Army Corps, which was intended to be the main fighting force in the occupation of Cuba. When Santiago fell however the war was over and his division saw little fighting. Lee then established Headquarters at Camp Columbia, near Havana and was in charge of reestablishing order. From April 12, 1899 to March 2, 1901 (when he was retired with the rank of Brigadier-General) he served as Brigadier-General of the Volunteers set up by the Congressional Act of March 2, 1899.

In 1899 he published a book, Cuba's Struggle Against Spain. Previously in 1894 he had published a biography, General Lee, of his uncle in the "Great Commanders Series". Both of these volumes are considered standard works although the biography of his uncle contains many inaccuracies.

Upon his retirement from the Army, Lee was made President of the Jamestown Tercentenary Exposition. His leadership and planning laid the foundation for the successful exposition, although Lee never lived to see its opening in 1907.

Returning home from a Boston, Mass. speaking engagement on the 29th of April 1905, Lee was stricken with apoplexy, the entire left side of his body being affected. He tried to endure the pain without stopping the train to be let off as wanted to be in Richmond the next day, however,

(101) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 104
(102) Ibid.
(103) Ibid.
(104) Smith, Margaret V., op. cit. p. 402
(105) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 105
(106) Ibid.
(107) Hunter, Major Robert W., op. cit. p. 134
(108) Richmond Dispatch, April 29, 1905
by the time the train had reached Washington, D.C. his pain was so great that he was removed to the Providence Hospital. Here he died at 11:30 P.M. April 29, 1905. He was buried in Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond, Va.

Thus ended the life of Fitzhugh Lee, who was born great, achieved greatness, and had greatness thrust upon him. Had his great family come to an end with his passing, or is it merely sleeping, some day to rise again and furnish the nation with new leaders? At least that is my hope.

(109) Richmond Dispatch, April 29, 1940
(110) Freeman, Douglas S., op. cit. p. 105
General Henry (1756–1818)
Better known as Light-Horse Harry. Member of Congress; Governor of Virginia. General in the Revolutionary War.

Lucy Grimes

Sydney Smith (1802–1869)
brother of Robert E. Lee. Officer in the U.S. Navy later in the Confederate Navy. Last owner of "Straford".

Charles Carter
Son of John Carter, Secretary of Va. and grandson of Robert "King" Carter of "Carter's Grove".

Anne Hill Carter

George Mason (1725–1792)
Author of the Virginia Bill of Rights. One of the great minds behind the American Revolution.

Anne B. Moore of "Chelsea"

General John Mason
U.S. Army Officer

George Mason
Author of the Virginia Bill of Rights. One of the great minds behind the American Revolution.

Anne Eilbeck

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Author of the Virginia Bill of Rights. One of the great minds behind the American Revolution.

Anne Eilbeck

General Fitzhugh Lee

Anna Maria Mason

General Fitzhugh Lee

Anna Maria Murray