

Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee

(1756-1818) Revolutionary General, Congressman, **Governor of Virginia**

Henry Lee was born at Leesylvania, near Dumfries, Virginia, on January 29, 1756. He graduated from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) in 1773, and returned home just prior to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War.

A skilled horseman, Lee was commissioned as a Captain in the Virginia Light Dragoons (cavalry) in 1776, and the next year his company joined George Washington's army.

Leading his men on lightning raids against enemy supply trains, Lee attracted the attention of General Washington and was rapidly promoted. Those lightning raids, combined with his excellent horse-riding skills, are what earned him the infamous nickname "Light-Horse Harry." In 1778, he became a Major in charge of a cavalry troop called "Lee's Legion," which he led in a daring raid on the British post at Paulus Hook, New York (now Jersey City, New Jersey); the raid resulted in the capture of 400 British soldiers, with the loss of only one American soldier. As a Lieutenant Colonel in 1780, he fought under General Nathanael Greene, and in 1781 he covered Greene's retreat across North Carolina to Virginia. He resigned his commission after the British surrender at Yorktown.

After the war, Lee entered the Virginia House of Delegates. As a member of the Congress of the Confederation from 1785 to 1788, he supported adoption of the Constitution, and was a member of the Virginia convention that ratified the final document. He served in the Virginia General Assembly from 1789 to 1791, and was then **elected Governor of Virginia three times, serving from 1791 to 1794.** In 1794, he commanded the troops that President George Washington sent to end the Whiskey Rebellion. From 1799 to 1801, he was a member of Congress.

Upon the death of George Washington in 1799, Lee was asked to deliver a tribute before both houses of Congress, in which he described Washington as:

First in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen...second to none in the humble and endearing scenes of private life.

Disastrous land speculation, coupled with the financial needs of a large family, led to financial ruin for Lee, and he was imprisoned for debts in 1808 and 1809. During this time, he wrote his *Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States*, the publication of which in 1810 allowed his family to live a modest life. In 1812, he was injured while trying to protect a friend from rioters in Baltimore. He never recovered

from this injury, and died on Cumberland Island, Georgia, in the home of the daughter of Nathanael Greene, on March 25, 1818.

In 1781, Lee married a cousin, Matilda, with whom he had three children; she died in 1790. In 1793, he married Ann Hill Carter, with whom he had five children. [Robert Edward Lee](#), his youngest son by Ann, is best known as leading the Confederate Army during the latter years of the Civil War.