

Visit Stratford Hall

By Delegate Albert C. Pollard, Jr.

May 24, 2010

Once, when I as a teenager, my mom was trying to talk my dad into going on a trip. I don't remember exactly where or exactly when, but I clearly remember my dad pushing back.

"People come from all over the world just to visit the Northern Neck," he said. "I don't see why I need to go anywhere else."

This comment struck home as Mariah and I spent this past weekend at Stratford Hall with our kids. Legislators from all over the Commonwealth came to the Northern Neck to visit Stratford Hall which hosted Virginia Horse Council's Annual Legislative Trail Ride.

While I normally do not attend this event, the fact it occurred in my district and that my middle child is an avid rider, we decided it would be a good opportunity for a 'working weekend' mixed with some family time.

We all had a delightful time. "Stratford" (as we call it locally) has done an excellent job of telling the story about the generations of families that lived at Stratford Hall Plantation. The grist mill is fascinating. The pond has decent fishing. And, as always, it is fun to look for sharks teeth down at the beach.

The story of the Lee Family of Stratford Hall is the story of Virginia and our nation. [Thomas Lee](#), who built the house around 1730-38, was a founder of the Ohio Company, a member of the governing Council of the colony, and acting Governor of Virginia. He owned more than 16,000 acres in Virginia and Maryland.

He and his wife, Hannah, raised a remarkable family of six sons and two daughters. Their eldest son, [Philip Ludwell Lee](#) (1727-1775), inherited Stratford. Two other sons, [Richard Henry](#) and [Francis Lightfoot Lee](#) were the only brothers to sign the Declaration of Independence.

Soon after the death of Philip Ludwell Lee, Stratford became the home of his eldest daughter, the "divine Matilda", who married her cousin, Revolutionary War hero, "[Light Horse Harry](#)" Lee. She died in 1790 and left her husband a life interest in the Plantation. He then married Ann Hill Carter of Shirley Plantation. Their son [Robert E. Lee](#) was born at Stratford in 1807.

To their credit, throughout the telling of the story of the Lee family, Stratford grapples with – and addresses head on -- the fact that all this was made possible with labor from slaves and indentured servants. It is accurate in its historical interpretation and does not sugar coat the sometimes ugly truth.

But, as much as the people, the place itself is both grand and quiet at the same time. And it is right here in the Northern Neck.

The lesson learned: take time to visit those things closest to you. Go visit.

The National Park Service is currently conducting a feasibility study of the Northern Neck for National Heritage Area designation. Please visit their website for more information at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>. Select by state, "Virginia", and then "Northern Neck National Heritage Feasibility Study". Delegate Albert Pollard, Jr., represents the 99th District, which consists of the counties of Lancaster, Northumberland, Richmond, Westmoreland, King George and a portion of Caroline, in Virginia's House of Delegates. You may contact his office in Lancaster Courthouse at (804) 462-5940 or visit his website at www.albertpollard.com.