

In 1757, Lee was appointed justice of the peace in Westmoreland County. In 1758 he was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses, where he met Patrick Henry. An early advocate of independence, Lee became one of the first to create Committees of Correspondence among the many independence-minded Americans in the various colonies. In 1766, almost ten years before the American Revolutionary War, Lee is credited with having authored the Westmoreland Resolution^[2] which was publicly signed by prominent landowners who met at Leedstown, Westmoreland County, Virginia on February 27, 1766. This resolution was signed by four brothers of George Washington as well as Gilbert Campbell.

American Revolution

In August 1774, Lee was chosen as a delegate to the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia. In Lee's Resolution on June 7, 1776 during the Second Continental Congress, Lee put forth the motion to the Continental Congress to declare Independence from Great Britain, which read (in part):

Resolved: That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.

Lee had returned to Virginia by the time Congress voted on and adopted the Declaration of Independence, but he signed the document when he returned to Congress.

President of Congress

Lee was elected the sixth President of Congress under the Articles of Confederation on November 30, 1784, in the French Arms Tavern, Trenton, New Jersey. On January 11, 1785, Congress convened in the old New York City Hall and Lee presided over that Congress until November 23, 1785. Although, he was not paid a salary for his office as president, his household expenses were paid by Congress in the amount of \$12,203.13.^[3]

Lee's Congress was most active in 1785, passing numerous legislation, including establishing a United States dollar tied to the Spanish dollar as the national currency. His most pressing issue, however, was to settle the states' territorial disputes over the Northwest Territory. Throughout his term, Lee remained steadfast that the release of states' territorial claims on the Northwest Territory would enable the federal government to fund itself with land sales. He believed that the urgency of this measure was paramount because borrowing more foreign money was no longer prudent, and he abhorred the movement to establish federal taxes. The sale of these vast federal lands, he concluded, was the nation's only hope to pay off the war debt and adequately fund federal government. Debate began on the expansion of the Ordinance of 1784 and Thomas Jefferson's survey method "hundreds of ten geographical miles square, each mile containing 6086 and 4-10ths of a foot" and "subdivided into lots of one mile square each, or 850 and 4-10ths of an acre" on April 14.^[4] On May 3, 1785, William Grayson of Virginia made a motion seconded by James Monroe to change "seven miles square" to "six miles square", and the current US Survey system was born. Lee wrote to his friend and colleague Samuel Adams

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| | Virginia, British America |
| Died | June 19, 1794 (aged 62) Westmoreland County, Virginia, U.S. |
| Resting place | Burnt House Fields, Lee Family Estate, Coles Point, Westmoreland County, Virginia |
| Political party | Anti-Administration |
| Spouse(s) | Anne Aylett (died 1768) Anne (Gaskins) Pinckard |
| Children | 13 |
| Parents | Thomas Lee Hannah Harrison Ludwell |
| Profession | Law |
| Signature | <i>Richard Henry Lee</i> |



Lee Family Coat of Arms

I hope we shall shortly finish our plan for disposing of the western Lands to discharge the oppressive public debt created by the war & I think that if this source of revenue be rightly managed, that these republics may soon be discharged from that state of oppression and distress that an indebted people must invariably feel.^[5]

The states relinquished their right to this "test tract" of land, and the Land Ordinance of 1785 was passed on May 20, 1785.

The federal government, however, lacked the resources to manage the newly surveyed lands because Native Americans refused to relinquish a large percentage of the platted land, and most of the territory remained too dangerous for settlement. This either required troops to eject the Native Americans or capital to purchase their land "fairly", insuring the peaceful sale and settlement. Additionally the small amount of federal land that was not in dispute by the Native Americans was enthusiastically being occupied by western settlers that had no faith in or respect for the Congress as a federal authority. The settlers claimed the land as squatters, and the Congress was unable to muster the capital to send magistrates let alone troops to enforce the \$1.00 per acre fee required for a clear federal land title. With the states no longer in control of the lands and no federal magistrates or troops to enforce the laws, a tide of western squatters flowed into the Northwest Territory. Lee's plan to fill the federal treasury with the proceeds of land sales failed, but the survey system developed under the Land Ordinance of 1785 is still used today

Political offices

- Justice of the Peace for Westmoreland County Virginia (1757)
- Virginia House of Burgesses (1758–1775)
- Member of the Continental Congress (1774–1779, 1784–1785, 1787)
- A Signer of the Declaration of Independence (1776)
- Virginia House of Delegates (1777, 1780, 1785)
- President of the Confederation Congress (November 30, 1784 – November 4, 1785)
- United States Senator from Virginia (March 4, 1789 – October 8, 1792)
- President pro tempore during the Second Congress (April 18 – October 8, 1792)

Personal life and family

Lee was the son of Col. Thomas Lee, Hon. (1690–1750) of "Stratford Hall", Westmoreland Co., Virginia. Thomas married Hannah Harrison Ludwell (1701–1750).

Lee married first on December 5, 1757, Anne Aylett (1738–1768), daughter of William Aylett and Elizabeth Eskridge (1719). Anne died December 12, 1768 at Chantilly, Westmoreland Co., Virginia. The couple had six children, four of whom survived infancy

Lee remarried in June or July 1769 to Anne (Gaskins) Pinckard. The couple had seven children, five of whom survived infancy

Lee honored his brother, Francis Lightfoot Lee (another signer of the Articles of Confederation and the Declaration of Independence), by naming his fourth son after him.

Richard Henry Lee died on June 19, 1794 at the age of 62.

Legacy

Richard Henry Lee Elementary School in Rossmoor, California and Richard Henry Lee School in Chicago, Illinois are named in his honor. Richard Henry Lee Elementary in Glen Burnie, Maryland is also named after him.

Late in 1941, a Liberty Ship was named for him.

The Chantilly Archaeological Site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971.^[6]

In popular culture

Lee is portrayed as a character in the musical *1776*. He was portrayed by Ron Holgate in both the Broadway cast and in the 1972 film. In one scene, Lee performs a song called "The Lees of Old Virginia," in which he explains how he knows he will be able to convince the Virginia House of Burgesses to allow him to propose independence and celebrates his own status as a Lee, one of the First Families of Virginia. The character is presented as vain, but not very bright, serving the play as a comic device rather than a historically based portrayal of Lee.

References

- McGaughy, J. K. Richard Henry Lee (1732–1794). (March 18, 2014). In *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Retrieved from http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Lee_Richard_Henry_1732-1794
- Washington, Lawrence; McKim, Randolph Harrison; Beale, George William (January 1, 1912) "Westmoreland County, Virginia: Parts I and II : a Short Chapter and Bright Day in Its History"(<https://books.google.com/books?id=SCjUGrFx5wMC&pg=PA42&dq=Westmoreland%20Resolution%20Washington%20Campbell#v=twopage&q=Westmoreland%20Resolution&f=false>) Whittet & Shepperson, printers Retrieved September 22, 2016 – via Google Books.
- Estimate of the Annual Expenditure of the Civil Departments of the United States, on the present Establishment(<http://www.fredsonline.com/p://2.bp.blogspot.com/-YhGJOCnB8bE/Uw4lv1Rksdl/AAAAAAAAAJNg/VtgHb6N1bZk/s1600/President's+Expenses.png>) President Richard Henry Lee(<http://www.richardhenrylee.org/>)
- Plat of Township 2, Range 7 in the Ohio Seven Ranges ca. 1786(<http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-HeY1dA9YvQ/Um07Ec68twl/AAAAAAAAAHgY/vVmemvCmfTg/s1600/Ohio+Territory+Section.jpg>) Richard Henry Lee, President of the United States in Congress Assembled(<http://www.richardhenrylee.org/>)
- "President Richard Henry Lee to Samuel Adams, New York May 20. 1785"(<http://leearchive.wlu.edu/papers/letters/transcripts-ballagh/b311.html>) Retrieved 22 September 2016.
- National Park Service(July 9, 2010). "National Register Information System"(http://nrhp.focus.nps.gov/natreg/docs/All_Data.html) *National Register of Historic Places* National Park Service.

External links

- United States Congress."Richard Henry Lee (id: L000201)" *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*
 - President Richard Henry Lee
 - Richard Henry Lee
 - Biography by Rev Charles A. Goodrich, 1856
 - Richard Henry Lee papers in the Manuscripts and Archives Division at The New York Public Library
 - Richard Henry Lee at Find a Grave
 - Richard Henry Lee Bio
 - Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). Lee, Richard Henry. *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

| Political offices | | |
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| <p>Preceded by <u>Thomas Mifflin</u></p> | <p>President of the Confederation Congress November 30, 1784 – November 6, 1785</p> | <p>Succeeded by <u>John Hancock</u></p> |
| <p>Preceded by <u>John Langdon</u></p> | <p>President pro tempore of the United States Senate April 18, 1792 – October 8, 1792</p> | <p>Succeeded by <u>John Langdon</u></p> |
| U.S. Senate | | |
| <p>Preceded by <i>None</i></p> | <p>U.S. Senator (Class 2) from Virginia March 4, 1789 – October 8, 1792 Served alongside: William Grayson, John Walker, James Monroe</p> | <p>Succeeded by <u>John Taylor</u></p> |

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