



ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

HONOR · REMEMBER · EXPLORE

FACT SHEET

Arlington National Cemetery Overview

History

Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) is the final resting place of approximately 400,000 veterans and their dependents. We conduct 27-30 funerals per day and host over 3,000 ceremonies per year, including the National Memorial Day Observance and the National Veterans Day Observance. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, ANC receives more than three million visitors each year. Our visitors come to pay their respects to loved ones, to visit the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and to explore these hallowed grounds. Arlington is a microcosm of the United States' history—a memorial landscape that represents the diversity of the United States. The cemetery includes those who have served our nation, from the Revolutionary War through the present. Every grave marker contains a story. From five-star generals and admirals to enlisted service members and their families—all are honored here.



Arlington officially became a national cemetery on June 15, 1864. The property was originally a plantation owned by George Washington Parke Custis. This land was eventually passed to Custis's daughter, Mary Anna Randolph Lee Custis, the wife of U.S. Army officer Robert E. Lee—who resigned his commission to fight for the Confederacy in the Civil War. (Arlington House is now managed by the National Park Service, which features exhibits on the Custis-Lee family and the enslaved individuals who worked on the property.)

After the Lees abandoned their property at the start of the Civil War, the U.S. Army seized Arlington Estate on May 24, 1861, to defend Washington, D.C. From the property's heights, rifled artillery could range every federal building in the nation's capital. The estate was seized not to punish the Custis-Lee family, but rather for its strategic value.



On May 13, 1864, the first military burial was conducted for Private William Christman. Brig. Gen. Montgomery Meigs, who was responsible for the burial of soldiers, ordered Arlington Estate used for a cemetery. The existing D.C.-area national cemeteries were running out of space, due to the massive casualty rates during the Civil War.

At the time, burial in a national cemetery was not considered an honor. It ensured that service members whose families could not afford to bring them home for a funeral were given a proper burial.

This changed, in large part, due to "Decoration Day" (later renamed Memorial Day). The first official, national Decoration Day was held at Arlington on May 30, 1868. ANC's Memorial Amphitheater was built in 1920, to accommodate the crowds that attended that event. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was dedicated a year later—on November 11, 1921, with the burial of the World War I Unknown.

In 2021, ANC commemorated the centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. With exhibits, a lecture series, and digital media coverage, we reflected upon the meanings of service and sacrifice. The cemetery's history reveals those meanings every day. Visit <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/tomb100> to learn more.



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Memorial Arboretum



Memorial Arboretum, a living tribute to those who have honorably served our nation, encompasses all 639 acres of Arlington National Cemetery. A blend of rolling hills, an extensive and diverse collection of ornamental plants, and over 9,000 native and exotic trees create a rich tapestry on these hallowed grounds. Visitors can stroll through our formal and informal landscapes. Some of our oldest trees, at nearly 250 years old, predate the first burial at ANC. Intimate gardens enhance the cemetery's beauty and sense of peace. ANC features more than 140 memorial trees and five state champion or co-champion trees.

In 2018, ANC was designated as a Level III Arboretum; its Level III designation was renewed in 2023. This requires maintaining over 500 species of woody plants, offering educational programming on our extensive horticulture program and collection, and collaborating with other arboreta to participate in tree science and conservation.

Arlington: Today & the Future

Today, Arlington National Cemetery honors both our past and our future, as we continue to lay United States service members and their families to rest.

As directed by Congress, Arlington National Cemetery has proposed revised eligibility criteria in order to keep ANC an active cemetery for ground burial “well into the future,” defined as the next 150 years. See <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/eligibility>.



One remaining major expansion project will also extend ANC's lifespan as an active cemetery. The Southern Expansion project broke ground in September 2021; construction is expected to last through 2027. The 50-acre site will add over 80,000 burial spaces and integrate the Air Force Memorial into the cemetery.

Education, Interpretation and Outreach

Arlington National Cemetery is committed to interpreting the stories of those buried here—as a lens onto American history as a whole. Our education program enables students (from elementary through high-school, as well as adult lifelong learners) to learn about topics such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, African American History, World War II, Military Technology, and the Environment at ANC. The Education Program can be accessed at <https://education.arlingtoncemetery.mil/>

Arlington National Cemetery's motto is: **HONOR—REMEMBER—EXPLORE**. Our mission is to represent the American people for past, present and future generations. We honor the sacrifices and extraordinary lives of American service members and their families. We remember past and present military conflicts, and the circumstances surrounding them. We invite our guests to explore America's diverse history, as represented by ANC. All visitors to these hallowed grounds are welcome.