

**The original documents are located in Box 13, “8/5/75 - Signing of S.J. Res. 23 Rights of Citizenship to General Robert E. Lee” of the President’s Speeches and Statements: Reading Copies at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

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THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN....

SIGNING OF S. J. RES. 23

RIGHTS OF CITIZENSHIP TO GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE

TUESDAY, AUGUST 5, 1975

- 1 - THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN....

I AM PLEASED TO SIGN S. J. RES. 23, RESTORING  
POSTHUMOUSLY THE LONG OVERDUE FULL RIGHTS OF CITIZENSHIP TO  
GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE.

THIS LEGISLATION CORRECTS A 110 YEAR-OLD OVERSIGHT  
OF HISTORY. IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT IT BE SIGNED AT THIS PLACE.

LEE'S DEDICATION TO HIS NATIVE STATE OF VIRGINIA  
CHARTED HIS COURSE FOR THE BITTER CIVIL WAR YEARS, CAUSING HIM  
TO RELUCTANTLY RESIGN FROM A DISTINGUISHED CAREER IN THE  
UNITED STATES ARMY AND TO SERVE AS GENERAL OF THE ARMY OF  
NORTHERN VIRGINIA. HE THUS FORFEITED HIS RIGHTS TO  
U.S. CITIZENSHIP.

ONCE THE WAR WAS OVER, HOWEVER, HE FIRMLY FELT THE WOUNDS  
OF NORTH AND SOUTH MUST BE BOUND UP. HE SOUGHT TO SHOW  
BY EXAMPLE THAT THE CITIZENS OF THE SOUTH MUST DEDICATE THEIR  
EFFORTS TO REBUILDING THAT REGION OF THE COUNTRY AS A STRONG  
AND VITAL PART OF THE AMERICAN UNION.

3A

LETTER WRITTEN BY LEE <sup>IN</sup> [REDACTED], 1865, TO A FORMER

LEE'S  
CONFEDERATE SOLDIER CONCERNING HIS SIGNING THE OATH OF  
ALLEGIANCE:

"THE WAR BEING AT AN END, THE SOUTHERN STATES HAVING  
LAID DOWN THEIR ARMS, AND THE QUESTIONS AT ISSUE BETWEEN  
THEM AND THE NORTHERN STATES HAVING BEEN DECIDED,

3b

I BELIEVE IT TO BE THE DUTY OF EVERYONE TO UNITE IN THE  
RESTORATION OF THE COUNTRY AND THE REESTABLISHMENT OF PEACE  
AND HARMONY . . ."

- 4 -

THIS RESOLUTION RESPONDS TO THE FORMAL APPLICATION OF  
GENERAL LEE TO PRESIDENT ANDREW JOHNSON ON JUNE 13, 1865,  
FOR THE RESTORATION OF FULL RIGHTS OF CITIZENSHIP.

- 5 -

ALTHOUGH HIS PETITION WAS ENDORSED BY GENERAL GRANT AND  
FORWARDED TO THE PRESIDENT THROUGH THE SECRETARY OF WAR, AN  
OATH OF ALLEGIANCE WAS NOT ATTACHED BECAUSE NOTICE OF THIS  
ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENT HAD NOT REACHED LEE IN TIME.

LATER, AFTER HIS INAUGURATION AS PRESIDENT OF WASHINGTON COLLEGE ON OCTOBER 2, 1865, LEE EXECUTED A NOTARIZED OATH OF ALLEGIANCE. AGAIN, HIS APPLICATION WAS NOT ACTED UPON BECAUSE THE OATH OF ALLEGIANCE WAS APPARENTLY LOST. IT WAS FINALLY DISCOVERED IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES IN 1970.

AS A SOLDIER, GENERAL LEE LEFT HIS MARK ON MILITARY STRATEGY. AS A MAN, HE STOOD AS A SYMBOL OF VALOR AND DUTY. AS AN EDUCATOR, HE APPEALED TO REASON AND LEARNING TO ACHIEVE UNDERSTANDING AND TO BUILD A STRONGER NATION. THE COURSE HE CHOSE AFTER THE WAR BECAME A SYMBOL TO ALL THOSE WHO HAD MARCHED WITH HIM IN THE BITTER YEARS TOWARD APPOMATTOX.

GENERAL LEE'S CHARACTER HAS BEEN AN EXAMPLE TO  
SUCCEEDING GENERATIONS, MAKING THE RESTORATION OF HIS  
CITIZENSHIP AN EVENT IN WHICH EVERY AMERICAN CAN TAKE PRIDE.

IN APPROVING THIS JOINT RESOLUTION, THE CONGRESS  
REMOVED THE LEGAL OBSTACLES TO CITIZENSHIP WHICH RESULTED  
FROM GENERAL LEE'S CIVIL WAR SERVICE.      ALTHOUGH MORE THAN  
A CENTURY LATE, I AM DELIGHTED TO SIGN THIS RESOLUTION AND  
COMPLETE THE FULL RESTORATION OF GENERAL LEE'S CITIZENSHIP.

END OF TEXT

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN....

LETTER FROM LEE TO GOVERNOR LETCHER - - AUGUST 28, 1865:

"THE INTERESTS OF THE STATE ARE THEREFORE THE SAME AS THOSE  
OF THE UNITED STATES. ITS PROSPERITY WILL RISE OR FALL WITH THE  
WELFARE OF THE COUNTRY. THE DUTY OF ITS CITIZENS, THEN, APPEARS  
TO ME TOO PLAIN TO ADMIT OF DOUBT.

ALL SHOULD UNITE IN HONEST EFFORTS TO OBLITERATE THE EFFECTS OF  
WAR, AND TO RESTORE THE BLESSINGS OF PEACE."