Brigadier General Evelyn P. Foote
Commanding General
United States Army Fort Belvoir
requests the pleasure of your company
at a reception to present
Lord Fairfax of Cameron
and
Lady Fairfax
on Friday, the third of March
at half after two o’clock
Fairfax Room
Fort Belvoir Officers’ Club
Fort Belvoir, Virginia

R.S.V.P.
664-1096

Military: Army Green
Civilian: Informal
Lord Fairfax visits site of famed ancestor’s Virginia home

Army boasts plan to refurbish historical location with paths, markers

More than 200 years ago Col. William Fairfax and his family lived on a grassy spot of land overlooking the Potomac River. History and the present seemed to fuse Friday when Lord Nicholas John Albert Fairfax, a direct descendant of the colonel, and Lady Fairfax walked about the foundation of the house where the colonel once lived.

William Fairfax, whom historians credit as being among young George Washington’s earliest mentors, erected the mansion about 1741.

The mansion was inherited in 1757 by his son, Col. George William Fairfax, who returned to England in 1773 upon falling heir to ancestral estates there.

A fire partially destroyed Belvoir Mansion 10 years later. The remaining walls of the structure fell victim to British cannon during the War of 1812.

The U.S. Army recently developed preliminary plans to refurbish the grounds of mansion site with new paths, historic markers and 18th-century style gardens, said Martha Rudd, Ft. Belvoir spokeswoman.

Fairfax praised the restoration efforts by the U.S. Army during a tour of the grounds Friday.

“It is a great sadness to the family that the house was destroyed,” Fairfax said. “It is entirely appropriate that Belvoir is occupied and enjoyed by the U.S. Army in view of the family’s military history.”

The Fairfax family played a major role in shaping Virginia during the 17th and 18th centuries.

William Fairfax became a leading resident of the then British colony, collecting customs levies for England in the south Potomac area. He was a presiding justice of the Fairfax court.

In 1741, as burgess from Prince William County serving on the governor’s council of Virginia, William Fairfax helped craft legislation that carved the new County of Fairfax from the northern section of Prince William County.

The American grandfather of the present Lord Fairfax re-established claim to the Fairfax peerage in England in 1906. He entered the House of Lords in 1908.

Situated on a grassy knoll on the military reservation in southern Fairfax County, all that is left of Belvoir Mansion are rows of stone and brick outlining the building’s foundation.

Brig. Gen. Evelyn P. Foot, commander of Fort Belvoir, invited Lord and Lady Fairfax to the Army installation to inspect plans to restore the grounds where the mansion once stood.

“It is not a matter of just preserving the site, but I want to insure that people who live and work here are educated on the history of the grounds,” Foot said.

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Fort Belvoir museum curator John Dervan, center, describes Belvoir Mansion to Lord and Lady Fairfax, left. Lord Fairfax is a descendant of the house's owner, George Washington's mentor.

VISIT

"Sometimes when I walk on the grounds, I can almost swear that I hear George Washington on horseback," Foot said.

Ft. Belvoir museum curator John Dervan led the Fairfaxes on a walking tour of the site, explaining the mansion's former grandeur to the couple.

During the tour, the Fairfaxes focused interest on the architectural design of the mansion. Dervan said, asking questions about the mansion's rooms.

"It was a flesh and blood connection to figures I've been studying and reading about," Dervan said. "It created a link between the past and the present."
Lord of All He Surveys

Nicholas John Albert Fairfax, the 14th Lord Fairfax of Cameron, last week visited the county that bears the family name. At right, Lord Fairfax and Fort Belvoir commander Brig. Gen. Evelyn P. Foote unveil a sign marking the site of Belvoir Manor, home of Col. William Fairfax (1691-1757). The ruins of the manor, accidentally burned in 1783 and shelled by the British during the War of 1812, are now a national historic site.

Lord Fairfax and Lady Annabel Fairfax examine a riding chair, a type of carriage, once owned by Thomas, the sixth Lord Fairfax (1693-1781), and now on display at Mount Vernon.

Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Audrey Moore and James Scott, president of Fairfax Corporation, present Lord and Lady Fairfax a map of the Fairfax family lands in the 18th century. An earlier Lord Fairfax once owned all of Northern Virginia between the Rappahannock and Potomac rivers.

Lord Fairfax and Lady Annabel Fairfax examine a riding chair, a type of carriage, once owned by Thomas, the sixth Lord Fairfax (1693-1781), and now on display at Mount Vernon.
Lord Fairfax visits ancestral home

BY STEPHEN LANKEHANU

Beyond the severe military structures of the Fort Belvoir Army installation, Nicholas John Albert Fairfax, the 14th Lord Fairfax of Cameron, toured the Belvoir mansion grounds and presented a short speech at a rededication ceremony held March 3 at a wooded site overlooking the Potomac River.

A grand Georgian-style home built by Col. William Fairfax in 1741 once rose above the remaining brick and stone foundation outlines. Col. Fairfax built the estate while serving as land agent for the 6th Lord Fairfax, who inherited 5.3 million acres of Virginia land from his mother, Catherine Culpeper. The Belvoir (meaning “beautiful to see”) mansion was destroyed by an accidental fire in 1763.

The March 3 ceremony marks the beginning of expanded interest in the historic site, according to Martha Rudd, Fort Belvoir’s public information officer. Rudd said plans for the site include professionally surveying the foundations to ensure proper preservation, revamping foot paths surrounding the site, restoring the grounds in 18th-century fashion, and developing interpretive signs and a brochure for the site. A completion date has not yet been set, according to Rudd.

Lord Fairfax, who arrived in Virginia with his wife, Annabel, March 2, has traveled throughout the United States on previous trips, but this was his first visit to Fort Belvoir. The 32-year-old maritime lawyer and House of Commons member cited ties between his family and the Fort Belvoir area in his brief speech.

"It is entirely appropriate, in view of my family’s military history, that the military connection should be maintained here today at Fort Belvoir."

—Lord Fairfax

Lord Fairfax linked his most notable military ancestor, the 3rd Lord Fairfax, to the U.S. Army installation that dwarfs the Belvoir mansion property. The third lord commanded English parliamentary forces during the civil war in England in 1642; Fairfax County, created in 1741, was named for the sixth lord.

Fairfax said he looks forward to revisiting Fort Belvoir to see the completed project firsthand. After the speech, Lord and Lady Fairfax received a walking tour of the grounds, ending at the Fairfax gravesite, where Col. William Fairfax and his wife, Deborah, are buried.

Brig. General Evelyn P. Foot, who also spoke at the ceremony, became interested in the historic site soon after becoming commander of Fort Belvoir in early October 1988, according to Lt. Col. James E. Van Sickle, Fort Belvoir public affairs officer.

"Preserving the historic site is not only a matter of preservation, but also involves educating the people that live here of the site’s tremendous historical wealth," Foot said.

"There are times, I swear, I can almost hear George Washington coming in on horseback," she said.

Washington, whose Mount Vernon estate lies 3 miles to the north, was a frequent visitor at the Belvoir mansion, and was moved by its destruction. "Belvoir is no more... ruins indeed they are... When I viewed them, when I considered that the happiest days of my life had been spent there... I was obliged to fly from there," he wrote.

The Belvoir mansion grounds, now a National Historic Site, once consisted of the main house, a detached office, a kitchen and a smokehouse.

The grounds were excavated twice. In 1931, a group cleared away brush that covered the foundation and took some steps to preserve it, according to Van Sickle. Between 1971 and 1976, Fairfax County students and teachers, under the direction of an archaeologist, made more extensive excavations and unearthed numerous artifacts, according to Rudd.

Wednesday, March 8, 1989
LORD OF ALL
HE SURVEYS

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