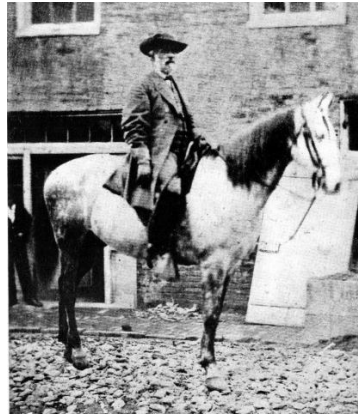




Before General Lee's famous horse was called Traveller, he was named "Jeff Davis" (at birth). He wasn't an easy horse to manage, although he and Lee got along splendidly.

From the first moment Lee saw the four-year-old, he called him "my colt." When his owner (Joseph Broun) offered the steed to Lee, the General refused to accept such a gift. Broun's brother (Thomas L. Broun) tells us how ownership finally changed hands:

He was raised by Mr. Johnston, near the Blue Sulphur Springs, in Greenbrier County, Virginia (now West Virginia); was of the 'Gray Eagle' stock, and, as a colt, took the first premium under the name of 'Jeff Davis' at the Lewisburg fairs for each of the years 1859 and 1860.

He was four years old in the spring of 1861 ... [I]n the fall of 1861, I was major to the Third regiment of infantry in that legion, and my brother, Captain Joseph M. Broun, was quartermaster to the same regiment.

I authorized my brother to purchase a good serviceable horse of the best Greenbrier stock for our use during the war.

After much inquiry and search he came across the horse above mentioned, and I purchased him for \$175 (gold value), in the fall of 1861, from Captain James W. Johnston, son of the Mr. Johnston first above mentioned ... I rode this horse, which was then greatly admired in camp for his rapid, springy walk, his high spirit, bold carriage, and muscular strength.

When General Lee took command of the Wise legion and Floyd brigade that were encamped at and near Big Sewell mountains, in the fall of 1861, he first saw this horse, and took a great fancy to it. He called it his colt, and said that he would use it before the war was over.

Whenever the General saw my brother on this horse he had something pleasant to say to him about 'my colt,' as he designated this horse ... Upon seeing my brother on this horse near Pocotalipo, in South Carolina, General Lee at once recognized the horse, and again inquired of him pleasantly about 'his colt.'

My brother then offered him the horse as a gift, which the General promptly declined, and at the same time remarked: "If you will willingly sell me the horse, I will gladly use it for a week or so to learn its qualities." Thereupon my brother had the horse sent to General Lee's stable.

In about a week the horse was returned to my brother, with a note from General Lee stating that the animal suited him, but that he could not longer use so valuable a horse in such times, unless it was his own; that if he (my brother) would not sell, please to keep the horse, with many thanks. This was in February, 1862.

At that time I was in Virginia, on the sick list from a long and severe attack of camp fever, contracted in the campaign on Big Sewell mountains. My brother wrote me of General Lee's desire to have the horse, and asked me what he should do.

I replied at once: "If he will not accept it, then sell it to him at what it cost me." He then sold the horse to General Lee for \$200 in currency, the sum of \$25 having been added by General Lee to the price I paid for the horse in September, 1861, to make up the depreciation in our currency from September, 1861, to February, 1862.

Once Lee let his son Robert, Jr. ("Rob") ride Traveller. The younger Lee tells an interesting story about his encounter with his father's horse:

The general [that is, Robert's father] had the strongest affection for Traveller, which he showed on all occasions, and his allowing me to ride him on this long march was a great compliment. Possibly he wanted to give me a good hammering before he turned me over to the cavalry.

During my soldier life, so far, I had been on foot, having backed nothing more lively than a tired artillery horse; so I mounted with some misgivings, though I was very proud of my steed.

My misgivings were fully realized, for Traveller would not walk a step. He took a short, high trot — a buck-trot, as compared with a buck-jump — and kept it up to Fredericksburg, some thirty miles. Though young, strong, and tough, I was glad when the journey ended. This was my first introduction to the cavalry service.

I think I am safe in saying that I could have walked the distance with much less discomfort and fatigue. My father having thus given me a horse and presented me with one of his swords, also supplied my purse so that I could get myself an outfit suitable to my new position, and he sent me on to join my command, stationed not far away on the Rappahannock [a river in Virginia], southward from Fredericksburg.

Even the General occasionally had issues with Traveller. Once, when the horse was frightened by an unexpected commotion, Lee injured both of his hands. (See *R. E. Lee: A Biography*, by Douglas Southall Freeman, published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York and London, 1934, [at page 340](#).)

With a mind of his own, Traveller sometimes got himself into trouble. When he did, Lee was able to [whistle him back](#):

One afternoon ... the General rode down to the canal-boat landing to put on board a young lady who had been visiting his daughters and was returning home. He dismounted, tied Traveller to a post, and was standing on the boat making his adieux, when someone called out that Traveller was loose.

Sure enough, the gallant grey was making his way up the road, increasing his speed as a number of boys and men tried to stop him. General Lee immediately stepped ashore, called to the crowd to stand still, and advancing a few steps gave a peculiar low whistle.

At the first sound, Traveller stopped and pricked up his ears. The General whistled a second time, and the horse with a glad whinny turned and trotted quietly back to his master, who patted and coaxed him before tying him up again.

To a bystander expressing surprise at the creature's docility the General observed that he did not see how any man could ride a horse for any length of time without a perfect understanding being established between them.

Traveller survived the war, having carried Lee on his back for many long and difficult years. In a letter to his daughter Agnes, who wanted a painting of her father riding his beloved horse, [Lee writes about his traveling companion](#):

I purchased him in the mountains of Virginia in the autumn of 1861, and he has been my patient follower ever since — to Georgia, the Carolinas, and back to Virginia.

He carried me through the Seven Days battle around Richmond, the Second Manassas, at Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, the last day at Chancellorsville, to Pennsylvania, at Gettysburg, and back to the Rappahannock.

From the commencement of the campaign in 1864 at Orange, till its close around Petersburg, the saddle was scarcely off his back, as he passed through the fire of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, and across the James River.

He was almost in daily requisition in the winter of 1864-65 on the long line of defenses from Chickahominy, north of Richmond, to Hatcher's Run, south of the Appomattox.

In the campaign of 1865, he bore me from Petersburg to the final days at Appomattox Court House [where Lee surrendered]. You must know the comfort he is to me in my present retirement...

Of all his companions in toil, 'Richmond,' 'Brown Roan,' 'Ajax,' and quiet 'Lucy Long,' he is the only one that retained his vigor. The first two expired under their onerous burden, the last two failed.

You can, I am sure, from what I have said, paint his portrait. R.E. Lee

During the last years of his life, General Lee served as president of [Washington \(now Washington and Lee\) College](#) in Lexington, Virginia. Traveller lived there too, grazing on the campus grass and spending time in a stable which was connected to [Lee's campus home](#).

Traveller outlived Lee, walking behind the hearse as the General was laid to rest in October of 1870. About eight months later, Traveller contracted tetanus after stepping on a nail. He was put down in June of 1871.

One hundred years after his death, Traveller's bones were placed inside a burial box which was then encased in concrete. His [final resting place](#), next to the Lee Chapel (at the College campus) is only a few feet from the [Lee family crypt](#) (inside the Lee Chapel).

There's one final thing to know about Traveller. After his death, the doors of his [college-campus stable](#) are supposed to remain open. That's to allow the *spirit* of the great horse to wander as freely as the horse himself did while he was alive.

Click on the rare image, of Lee with Traveller, for a much-better view.

ISSUES AND QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

In your own words, describe the special relationship Robert E. Lee had with his horse, Traveler. Have you ever had a special relationship with an animal? How does that relationship compare to Lee's bond with Traveler?

Why must the doors of Traveller's stable always remain open, even today? Do you think the reason for keeping them open makes sense? Why (or, why not)?

Credits:

Image of General Robert E. Lee with Traveller, online courtesy Horse & Man.

PD

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Robert E. Lee and Traveller - Their Special Bond

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