

# Selina Norris

Selina Norris lived at Arlington House and served as the personal maid and later head housekeeper for Mary Custis Lee. Norris was the second generation of her family to be enslaved by the Lee family, as were her children until their emancipation when the Civil War ended. Although marriages between enslaved people were not recognized legally, Mrs. Lee organized the wedding of Selina Norris to free man Thornton Gray in the same room in Arlington House where Mrs. Lee had married Robert E. Lee. Thornton Gray remained at Arlington House as a slave, possibly to be close to his wife and their eight children.

In May 1861, when Mrs. Lee fled the property, she left behind her household staff, including Gray and her family. Lee entrusted the Arlington House keys to Gray expecting her to protect the Lee-Washington family heirlooms which Lee had inherited as the only surviving child of George Washington Parke Custis. After months of heroic attempts to hide the objects and ward off Union soldiers stealing trophies, Gray requested that General McDowell safeguard the collection. McDowell subsequently secured the remaining Washington artifacts and moved them to the U.S. Patent Office. The continued existence of family heirlooms that had once belonged to Martha Custis Washington and President George Washington can be attributed to Selina Gray's courageous actions. After their emancipation, Thornton and Selina Gray purchased a 10-acre property in present-day Green Valley in 1867 and lived there for the remainder of their lives. The Gray family helped found the Green Valley neighborhood and their descendants continue this legacy of community in Arlington.