



# ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

## News Release

September 1, 2011

### Natural treasure lost at Arlington National Cemetery in Hurricane Irene

Arlington National Cemetery lost its “Arlington Oak,” a 220-year-old post oak tree near the John F. Kennedy gravesite when Hurricane Irene hit the east coast on Aug. 27.

This ancient oak tree ushered in the entire history of Arlington National Cemetery, including the construction of the Arlington House, the pre-Civil War home of General Robert E. Lee, and the creation of the cemetery in 1864.

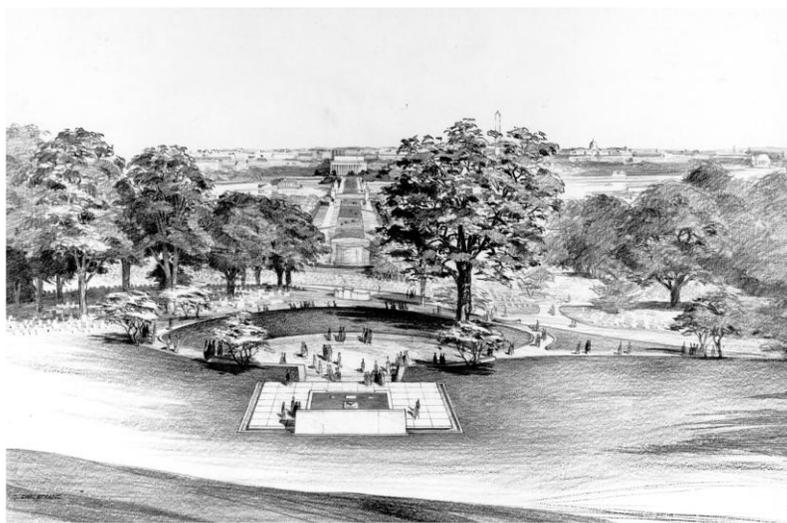
Perhaps the Arlington Oak is most known for its role in the selection and design of the John F. Kennedy gravesite.

In the spring of 1963, President Kennedy visited the Arlington House and said the view was so magnificent that he could stay there forever.

Standing prominent in the vista was the Arlington Oak.



*Tree crews clean up the post oak near the John F. Kennedy gravesite which was uprooted Aug. 27 during Hurricane Irene. The Arlington Oak tree was more than 220 years old and a factor in deciding the gravesite location.*



*The architect of the Kennedy gravesite incorporated the tree, known as the “Arlington Oak” into the design. An elaborate aeration, drainage, and soil improvement plan was developed and constructed to protect the Arlington Oak from the shock of construction.*

After the assassination of President Kennedy, his family began to search for a suitable burial location. Jacqueline Kennedy felt that her husband should be buried in a place that was accessible to the American people. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara felt that President Kennedy should be interred on federal property and contacted the superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery for potential burial plots. Mrs. Kennedy chose the sloping hillside in front of Arlington House.

The architect of the Kennedy gravesite, John Warnecke, incorporated the Arlington Oak into the design. An elaborate aeration, drainage, and soil improvement plan was developed and constructed to protect the Arlington Oak from the shock of construction.

The Arlington Oak enjoyed another 48 years of not only being an integral feature of the gravesite of the fallen president, but also shaded more than 100 million visitors who came to pay their respects to President Kennedy and his family.

“It is truly unfortunate to see it’s now gone – that tree had a significant legacy here at Arlington,” said Steve Van Hoven, the cemetery’s urban forester.

The JFK gravesite was closed to the public on Aug. 28-29 to clean up the damage. The gravesite reopened on Aug. 30.

In addition to the Arlington Oak, five large trees in the cemetery have fallen because of the more than four inches of rain that officials estimate fell in the area over the weekend.

The white oak tree near the Pan Am Flight 103 memorial was also uprooted, but it does not appear to have caused damage to the memorial. A structural engineer will assess the memorial to ensure its integrity.

The four other trees -- a red oak in section nine, a white oak and red oak in section four and a tupelo in section 34 were either uprooted or fell, causing damage to a few nearby headstones. The white oak was estimated to be about 240 years old.

Cemetery clean-up crews have been working since Sunday to cut and remove the large and small fallen trees, to clean up debris from tree limbs, and to remove small uprooted saplings.

Other damage included some gravestones that have sunken due to excessive rain. This is a natural occurrence when the cemetery receives large amounts of rain, and the gravestones will be reset to Arlington National Cemetery’s exacting standards.

While visiting Arlington National Cemetery, please contact the cemetery’s customer call center for assistance at 1-877-907-8585 should you see damage to your loved one’s headstone or gravesite.



*The white oak in section four fell Aug. 27 during the hurricane. The tree was estimated to be about 240 years old.*