

LETTER OF GEORGE W. LEE,

1867

Contributed by Lee Ann Shnayer
Chico, California

As successive generations of a family moved westward their contacts with relatives often were limited and knowledge of the family's origins was lost or only dimly remembered. The following letter from George W. Lee to his son Abner Grisham Lee who was then in Montana Territory, transcribed by Nettie Hazel Thunen Brereton from a photocopy of the original (now owned by her daughter Isabelle Cameron of Berry Creek, Calif.), contains the recollections of a California resident concerning a Lee family of Virginia.

October 9th, 1867

Feather River, Sutter County, Cal.

A. G. Lee. I will now write you a few lines to let you know that I am still alive and in tolerable health and do hope this may find you alive and in good health. I have your leter of last March the 7th, 67, before me which is the last leter I have had from you, and the last one that I have seen or heard of from you was the leter you wrote to E. W. after you had heard that Rachal was dead, and as you speak of Scalp takin it may bee that your Scalp has left the head; but I hope not. Well your leter that you wrote to me before the one on the 7th of March got lost so I could not find it and, I waited to see if I would find it but I have not found it-yet. In it you wanted to know something about your mother which I have entirely forgotten but E. W. says that you wanted to know how old she was when she died. Well she was Borne May 12th 1802 and died June 4th, 1852. You wanted to know if your uncle Levi had any son named Alfred. Now I can say to you that he has not. He has a son named Andrew but I have forgot his middle name though it appears to me it was Lawrence or Baley. I had a Cozen in Tennessee named Alfred but whether he had any middle name or not I don't know and he married one of my Cozens daughters on my mother's side by the name of Gailbreath and there was one of his brothers by the name of Abraham Lee and I think his wife was a Piron. Alfred and Abraham was sons of uncle Jehew Lee by Richard Henry Lee's second wife whose maiden name was Miller. Alfred and Abram are onley 1/2 cozens to me. They were Brothers to Isaac Lee of Mud Pararie, Ill. and uncles to Peter T. Lee also of Mud Pararie, Ill. Now if aney one of them had a son cauled Alfred I don't know it. Well

there must bee maney thousands of us as my grate grandfather was certainley the first Lee that ever was in North America with his family. He was one of the settlers of Jamestown, Va. I have forgotten great-grandmother's maiden name. She was Welch and born and raised in the City of Wales. The[y] had 4 sons and how maney daughters I do not now remember but I remember seeing of two. Old Aunt Rhodey Watkins and Aunt Judey. The 4 sons was named John, Peter, Evens and Richard Henrey who is my Grandfather. Well Richard Henry Lee married Mary Grisham who was the sister of the two John Grishams Brothers, full Welch also, and he had by her 7 sons and 3 daughters (to wit) Grisham, William, Jessee, Archer, Young, George and Abner. These was the sons. The daughters was named Dorothy, commonaly cauled Dolley, Mary & Elizabeth. Well I never saw uncle Grisham nor none of his family. He married Priciley Staples and staid in Virginia and was gunsmith to the U. S. in time of the Revolution. Was then quite an old man and had children as old as my father so his family must have spred to maney hundreds by this time. Uncle William also married a Staples and mooved to Kentucky in an early day. Him and his family I have saw excep one son and 2 daughters. He had 5 sons and 4 or 5 daughters. Uncle Jessee married but I have forgotten his wife's name. he went to Georgia, Oglethorp County, had a large family but I never saw him or aney of his children. Uncle Archer died in the Arme of the Revolution. Uncle Young married a Mathewes and had children how maney I do not know. I never saw him. he staid in Virginia. I saw one of his sons, Guy Lee. Uncle George married and moved to Kentucky. Who he married I do not know. I never saw him nor any of his children. They lived on the National Road between Vandalia and the Urebar River in Ill. Your grandfather you know all about. Now Aunt Dolley married a Thornton. The[y] lived in Tennessee though I never saw aney of them. Aunt Mary married her cousin Thomas Lee son of G. uncle Peter Lee and had maney children. I never saw aney but her grandson William Lee, Willis Reeves brother-in-law which you have saw. Aunt Elizabeth married her cousin, also son of G. U. Peter, Richard Henrey Lee. the[y] both moved to Kentucky in an earley day and then to Mo. She was Elizabeth Holley's grandmother & Dr. Wright's Grand mother. She was the youngest; and grandmother died and Grandfather married a Mary Miller and had by her 5 sons and 1 daughter (to wit) Richard, Barnet, Miller, Gehew & Stepen. Uncle Richard married a Mary Devenport, had 5 or 6 boys and as maney girls. I have saw them amaney a time. Uncle Barnet married Mary Dewroset & had one son and 5 or 6 daughters. I have saw them all often. Uncle Miller I have saw but it was when I was little. Who he married I do not know. It is likely that Stephen D. Lee of the confederate army was one of his sons as he move to Alabama in an earley day.

N.B. I hope the President will have enough in Congress to sustain his vetos this winter.

Well you will get a letter that I wrote to Robert Cheshire. I had no envelop and sent it to town by George & Cam. George knew who it was to, put it in envelop, gave to Cam to Direct and he Directed it to you instead of to R.C.

A family Bible lists the eleven children of George W. and Mahala Elvira (Griffith) Lee as: James Tilford Lee, born 5 March 1821; Abner Grisham Lee, born 23 Feb. 1823; Ephraim Wilson Lee, born 24 July 1826; Polly Catherine Lee, born 25 March 1829; Milroy Griffith Lee, born 23 Aug. 1831; Walter Campbell Lee, born 8 March 1834; Mahala Elvira Ann Lee, born 11 Nov. 1836; Isabella Berilla Lee, born 22 Jan. 1839; Levi Woodbury Lee, born 3 Jan. 1841; Isyphena Amensia Lee, born 21 April 1843; and George Chisholm Lee, born 21 April 1843.

A letter written by A. G. Lee to his thirteen year old nephew, George Fredrick Lee, on 10 March 1895 lists the births of these same children and adds that George W. Lee was born 15 Feb. 1797 and died 27 Dec. 1870 and that Polly Catherine "Died in 31."

A biography of Levi W. Lee in Joseph F. McGie and George C. Mansfield, *A History of Butte County, California* (Los Angeles, 1918), p. 1138, states in part: "His father, G. W. Lee, was born in Washington County, Va. He removed to Tennessee, and there married Mahala Griffin, a native of that state. Removing to Washington County, Ill., they resided there till 1852, when the family joined the mass of emigrants to the new El Dorado on the Pacific Coast, crossing the plains with ox and horse teams and wagons. On the Big Bend of the Humboldt River the Indians stole their horses, and they completed the journal with oxen. The wife and mother died of cholera west of Ash Hollow, on the plains. They located on a farm three miles south of Nicolaus, Sutter County. In 1854 G. W. Lee was elected county recorder of Sutter County, in which office he served four years. He continued on his farm until his death in 1871. Of the ten children that grew up in the family, three--James T., A. G., and M. G.--crossed the plains to California in 1849, and were mining men in Nevada County. A. G. Lee returned to Illinois in 1851, and in 1852 he piloted the rest of the family across the plains."

The contributor, Lee Ann Shnayer, 483 E. Sacramento Ave., Chico, Calif. 95926, and ~~B. H. Schulte, P.O. Box 4043, Carmel, Calif. 93921~~, will welcome correspondence about this family.

[Although the counties in Virginia where this family lived prior to their western migration are not stated in the letter, it appears likely that they were in

Buckingham County where Arthur, Gresham, John, Richard and Young Lee appear on the tithable list of 1773 and Richard and Evan Eee were tithables in 1774 (Edythe Rucker Whitley, *Genealogical Records of Buckingham County, Virginia* [Baltimore, 1984], p. 20) and Young Lee married Jemima Mathews (*ibid.*, p. 131). Later in Washington County Richard Lee married Mary Davenport (as mentioned in the letter) on 30 Sept. 1795 and an Even, a Stephen and an Archer Lee were also married in the 1790s (Beverley Fleet, *Washington County Marriage Register, 1782-1820* [Virginia Colonial Abstracts, v. 34; Richmond, 1949, reprint Baltimore, 1961], pp. 48-49)--Editor.]

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