

In Search of Jacob J. Lee by Ruth Tweeten Holtan

Jacob J. Lee was the only brother and sibling of my great grandmother Ellen Kjistine Lee Kittleson, mother of my maternal grandmother Elsie Dahlby. In my correspondence with Tom Dahle (from Little Norway, Mt. Horeb, WI), also a great-grandson of Ellen Kjistine of Dane County, Wisconsin, Perry Church settlement, I learned that our great aunt Elise had written in a document of history that Jacob J. Lee had gone to Fertile, Iowa. He challenged me to locate this lost branch and I never forgot that challenge.

There are presently Lees in the Fertile area but they had no knowledge of this Jacob who was an early settler. Then I remembered the Fertile Centennial book of 1956 and the wonderful foldout map of residents on each farm since early days. There was Jacob J. Lee on a farm southwest of Fertile in Grant Twp., Cerro Gordo County. The next owner was my uncle Peter A. Dahlby, who would be J. J. Lee's grand-nephew. Very interesting! When I inquired of Peter's children, they said they called it the Lee farm but never knew why. Peter purchased land of 120 acres for \$6,240 and the Lees had considerable mortgages to settle in 1905.

In the Fertile book with the veteran's listing, I found Jacob J. Lee listed as a Confederate soldier, "who served in the Civil War and was taken prisoner by the Union Army. No food or water was available during imprisonment. The prisoners prayed for water and rain came. He later escaped and injured himself doing so, which caused the sickness which eventually caused his death. He came North in 1879, and settled southwest of Fertile, where he died in 1898 and is buried in Grant Center Cemetery." No one is living who prepared this book so their error lives on. To apply for information for a Confederate soldier, I needed the state where he enlisted so the door was closed on that pursuit.

I cannot say what time elapsed, but sometime later I found Jacob J. Lee on a Dane County Volunteer Infantry list on Colonel Hegg's distinguished 15th Regiment, Company E. He was a Union soldier, not Confederate. Now I could apply for his military records and later I applied for his pension records. He served from October 1861 – October 1864 and was treated for chronic diarrhea for one year after the Battle of Stone's River, Tennessee, where he had been taken prisoner and later escaped. According to his pension records, he was never a well-person after this. The records state he was 5'5" tall, blonde and blue-eyed.

In the 1895 census, Cerro Gordo County I found this family unit:

Jacob J. Lee 67	Mary Lee 24
Margret E. Lee 58	Chris 20
Jacob E. Lee 27	Lisa and Anna 18 twins.

This raised a lot of questions because in going through the land deeds I found that the legal work was always done in Winnebago County. Also, a neighbor John Anderson who recommended his pension said he knew him in Wisconsin when he was well and strong and also knew of his poor health as his neighbor near his home in Winnebago County. This was my county and the main Norwegian settlement was around Winnebago Church, my family church. Luckily, I had an ally in Marilyn Tweeten, my sister-in-law, who had transcribed the baptism records and as I searched, I was overwhelmed. Finally, I found Jacob Elias b. 30 Jan 1867, Aase Mari, b. 26 Dec 1868, Lisa Turine b. 15 Sept 1871, Christian Olaus, b. 25 Nov 1873, Lisa Jensine and Andrea Thurine, twins, born 6 March 1877. Also in the death records, I find an Elen Marie who died Feb. 6, 1867, and was baptized elsewhere but the birth on 23 Sept 1866 (or perhaps 1865), also the death of Lisa Turine on July 8, 1875. I have photographed the two-story log home on the farm 2 miles north of the church which Jacob J. Lee took on a Homestead pre-emption and received a patent signed by Ulysses Grant. He was first (? PEH) in 1866 and why he moved in 1879 to Cerro Gordo County may have been a lump-sum pension payment that enabled him to purchase a bigger, better farm.

Of great interest to me and perhaps to you were the sponsors whose names I recognized from the earliest residents and charter members, and also recent immigrants from Norway by way of Wisconsin. Who were these people? Do they have a family connection to Margit or Margaret Thorofsdatter? They are identified with Sunderlund, Klevens, Gundersons, etc. but this is still a mystery. The marriage of the couple at Perry Church 1 June 1865 is not recorded at the church or on the Dane County records. This was apparently not rare but it was performed by pastor Brodahl according to Jacob's pension application. Thorof is a name from the area of Treungen in Telemark in Norway and I have searched diligently for this family so I get a clue why they showed up so quickly so far from Wisconsin in this new settlement. (Check at the end of Ruth's narrative for 2021 answers to these very astute questions.)

So, what happened to their children when they sold the Grant twp. Farm to the Dahlbys? One clue showed Jacob E. Lee signing the deed from Marshall County, Minnesota, and this was way up north where available land was \$1.25 an acre and Mary had married a neighbor Edd Kivle in 1900 after her parents had died in 1898.

At the new historical research center in St. Paul, I finally was able to find Jacob E. Lee listed as 52 years old listed as a servant in the home of his sister Mary and Edd Kivle and Tommy. Also listed was Jimmie Lee, age 12 in the 1920 census of Espelie Township, Marshall County. This raised more questions than it answered. Also of great interest was if Mary had Tommy and Jacob had Jimmie, are there descendants in this generation? This was interesting also because Jimmie was called a companion. Was this a clue to a problem for Tommy? Also, where are the 3 unmarried siblings? The girls would be more difficult to find.

Nothing new seems to be happening and perhaps no one else cares except Tom Dahle and me. Stanford says this affair with Jacob J. Lee has gone on for 25 years and it seems like a trail of tears.

Anyhow, it is finally time to go to search the records in Espelie Twp. in Marshall County. The people in the county seat of Warren, MN, don't even know about cemeteries and rural churches in far east Espelie Twp. 50 miles away. Armed with maps we learned that Grygla was a small town in the north corner and that Chris Lee's name was on land south along the road into Moyland Twp. We have limited time as we were on our way to Minot Hostfest and this is October 1998. Grygla was like Thompson (PEH?) but a land sent us to their Lutheran Cemetery east of town with lots of Norwegian names, but no Lees or Kivles. On the map it showed a townhall site for Espelie, so we headed there on a road, #2. Here was road construction and it had rained so no road rock was yet applied so we turned to travel there and there was no turning back. A pickup passed us and stopped at a new rice pond of great size. Stanford stopped to ask him about the pond and also if there were cemeteries in this area. He informed him of one to the right and one abandoned cemetery if we'd go back to the old red town hall and south going left at the first or second mile. He also said it might not be a very good road. Well, Stanford started going left as we were already muddy and adventurous. I'd say it was a game refuge road, newly graded and built on the spoil-bank of a large drainage ditch. It was especially foolish because there were no signs of civilization nearby to observe those Iowa folks driving by. Once we began, no turning around, mile after mile on this two-track road. Also, no sign of the abandoned cemetery either. Finally, after at least 5 miles, we were back to the blacktop to Grygla and no more desire for adventure to try the next mile, although we circled the site and finished driving on #2 as we had a room reservation in Thief River Fall, vowing to search the courthouse records because the Columbus Holiday was passed by Tuesday.

Everywhere were groves of brilliant yellow aspen, birch and scrub marsh growth. The terrain, like Roseau, was next to Lake Agassiz and the Red Lake reservation areas with too much wetlands and marsh and no elevation for relief. This is where these Norwegians took up homesteading land for \$1.25 an acre for up to 160 acres in the 1900's. Uffda, it was far from markets, towns and churches plus the winters were severely long. My heart is full of the drama of their life but where are they finally? By 8 am, we have high hopes of finding Jacob and Mary. We did find

a land deed giving the 80 acres estate of Chris Lee in 1908 to the 4 siblings, Jacob at Anstad, MN, Mary, residing at Norman P. O Washington and Anna Lee and Lisa Lee of Glenwood, Iowa. More surprises!

Stanford got the picture immediately about Anna Lee because we learned in Iowa Civics classes that Glenwood, IA was the school and hospital for the feeble-minded. Earlier, I had found a guardian deed for Anna Lee, a person of unsound mind. This took place after the parents had died and when the family moved away from Iowa. We supposed that the twin of Anna had been a caregiver through their years so Lisa chose to work and live in Glenwood to be near her twin. We have copies of these documents for those of special concern.

Our search took us to the courthouse for the adjoining county because we now have a homestead deed for Mary and Edd Kivle across the road and township line from Chris's land. We were lucky the new plat book for Marshall County had included the 1909 plat book for reference purposes and so we can locate Mary and Chris on this plat. We see they are at the edge of the next county so we have to try and find Jacob, south into old Red Lake County. That county had been renamed Pennington County and its county seat is Thief River Falls. The local records officials are kind and helpful so we get to study birth records, death and marriages plus the land records.

Finally, we find a marriage for Jacob E. Lee and Suzanne V. M. Speers in 1907. This will be Jimmie's mother but where is she now? Lucky for us we found S. V. M. Speers' name on the land across the schoolhouse road from Mary Kivle, so now we know he married the neighbor girl, who was 15 years younger, on October 15, 1907. We may not know for some time when Jimmie Lee was born but perhaps he is the James Lee from Freeland, Washington, born on May 31, 1908, but we do know now that his mother, Susanne Lee, died on September 19, 1908.

We have the copies of both homestead deeds and also mortgage records that show Jacob E. Lee's brother, Chris, died in 1908. His heirs couldn't finish homestead payments and land taxes due in 1926 so they lost that 80 acres. Also, Kivle's lost their land for nonpayment of taxes in 1926. So many people lost their land for nonpayment of taxes in 1926 because of the big drainage ditching project assessment, foreclosure didn't happen until 1940. We thought the marshy land was no big loss, but where did they go when they didn't die in Marshall County. So, finally we know that the three Kivle and Lee farm units were adjacent in three townships in 2 counties with the school on the township line. It's urgent now that we locate this cemetery that appears to be 3 miles or so from their homes, and on this old map there is Anstad, right where the cemetery seemed to be. So, we went back the 20 miles to see the actual farms and search again. This time we used a better road and these farms seemed on better land. At Jacob and Susanne's place, the house was a shamble but there was a TV dish in the front yard. The school house road was there and went no further but we found the schoolhouse was in the museum at Goodrich. At Mary and Edd Kivle's farm, the old house is a shop and LeRoy Johnson has built a new house. We drove to the cemetery road and crossed the big ditch on an open bridge with no railing and followed another game refuge road, but at least we had a better chance to turn around. A station wagon appeared ahead of us so we kept going.

Just by chance, off on the left, we saw a white gate and a few white posts. What if this was the place? Here was a high rock foundation but the plot was low below the road bed. Aspen trees were growing tall in this crumbling rock structure. 10 or 12 grave stones were visible but no signs of maintenance except the fence. It was a solemn experience to approach these old stone markers. The biggest, whitest granite stone was in wonderful shape, facing east- it was hard to look- but there she was, Susanne Lee!!! Died and buried September 19, 1908. She was 27, Jacob was 41, and Jimmie was a baby. How can we ever know the pain and grief? We have a document of Jacob E Lee being the administrator of the estate of Annie Speers, probably Susanne's mother.

Next, we have a twin marker of marble like two hearts, and we see Mabel Kivle, b. May 1, 1901, d. June 15, 1907. "Asleep in Jesus." And Edna Kivle, b. Sept 9, 1902, d. June 15, 1907. "En Sovn i Jesus." Who can tell this story of

more pain? Perhaps whooping cough or diphtheria? Also, a smaller gray stone nearby for Tom J. Kivle, b. Nov. 18, 1904 and d. March 20, 1929. "He is at Rest in Heaven." Was Tommy really handicapped in some way, so that he needed a companion? One more surprise stone was that for Lisa Lee, b. March 6, 1880, d. Feb 13, 1917, who apparently came back from Glenwood, IA, to be buried. A nice gray stone read "I have found the shore of Everlasting Rest." Other names were Ingeborg Hendrickson, Thina and Johann Nelson, Rebecca and Peder Sund and a flat fieldstone scratched "AK."

And so, my story ends where it began with 5 people in the 1920 census of Espelie twp., Marshall County, MN and I have only found Tom. But now I will begin a new chapter. I spent the 7 hours' drive to Minot that same day writing the whole story as we reviewed the 2 days of discovery. I found peace and empathy plus a kinship with them beyond my early experience.

Sunday evening, I was able to talk to LeRoy Johnson, who owns the Kivle farm, and ask him some questions. When I asked about the two girls that had died on June 15, 1907, he said it was a fire, something about an Aladdin lamp. "But if you ask Cora Olson who always lived in that township, she would tell you because she is 94 and has a good mind. If you call my Uncle Albert, he will give you the telephone # in Minneapolis where she can be reached."

When I asked to speak with her, the lady said, "I don't think she'll talk to you a stranger." I said that was OK, if she'd ask her about the two Kivle girls who died in a fire. Soon, she was on the phone telling me how sad it was those two little girls crawled under the bed to avoid seeing the fire and smoke. Even when their parents were calling from the window to come, they stayed under the bed and died. They saved Tommy by the window. Stanford and I are guessing someone was perhaps naughty and afraid, only God knows. (Perhaps he is remembering a story about Elmer, Stan's dad, hiding under the bed when he played with matches and started a fire. PEH) She further told me she went to school with both Tommy Kivle and Jimmie Lee. "Was Tommy OK to learn?"

"Yes, he could learn but it was when Stella Olson was his teacher, he had to stay in his seat and be good." She said he couldn't talk good, but plainly she was defending Tommy even now. She said Jimmie was afraid of dogs. When a family dog came to school, he was terrified. Cora said "Come on Jimmie, I'll take care of you. You'll be safe inside the school."

When I asked where they went, she thought it was to Washington. She said the church by the cemetery was only a basement church. Her mother had been confirmed there but the family had joined the church in Moylan township. She said a prairie grass fire had burned the roof off the church. She didn't know why Jacob and Jimmie Lee had always lived with Mary, but she thought I was right that Jimmie's mother had died. She seemed pleased that I wanted to talk to her about Tommy and Jimmie who were her schoolmates.

Another Sunday evening, I spoke with Mrs. Halvorsen who lives near the cemetery. I asked where those records might be kept. She said they were quite certain a lady had them in her boxes but she didn't seem to want to find them. She said they would try to get them so they could help us learn if this was perhaps a Lutheran Free Church or Lutheran Brethren and who else was buried there. It was unusual to see the rock structure as there seemed to be fewer rocks than we see in Iowa but they had hand-cut the stones. Leroy J said he'd heard they heated the stones, then used cold water to split them. It appears to me these 3 Lee families were a major part of that small church community. These people were so genuinely helpful and kind to me. I am thankful for this feeling.

Monday morning, after we were home from ND, I went to the Cerro Gordo County courthouse to follow up on the guardian deed for Anna Lee, dated 1900, a person of unsound mind, filled in that courthouse. I had just learned this summer how to use a guardian docket or packet. The clerk disappeared and returned with my packet which I could

search on her counter. This was 30 or 40 pages of legal documents, mainly yearly reports of her few expenses and her bank accounting by her guardian, George Homme, perhaps the banker at Fertile where the account was. All her years, she had the 1/5 interest in the sale of her parents' farm which drew some interest and paid her bills, while her siblings were having great financial distress. I read every page searching for a medical reason for her being committed to the state hospital. Finally, a letter said, "She was damaged in a fire when she was 6 years old and since had not been able to be responsible for herself or her actions". There is a hand-written bill of Edd Kivle's for hospital costs so at her death in 1934, she had two heirs, Mary Kivle and Jacob E. Lee of Ferndale, Washington. What a find, but will I ever find if Jimmie Lee had any heirs?

I wrote my Mandt cousin, Lorna Robertson, Issaquah, Washington, and asked what resource help she could give me, and she soon learned there is difficulty securing information in that state. On Tuesday evening, November 23, 1998, I was reading in my Halling Lag (descendants of persons from Hallingdal, Norway) magazine about a man who left North Dakota during the Depression and went to Ferndale, Washington and was being honored by the Lag. I immediately secured his number. I told him I was also a Halling and had a request of him. Did he know the name Kivle or Jacob Lee? Yes, he knew the Kivle girls, and he gave me the name of Mabel Kivle Werdal from Alberta, plus her telephone number. He commented about their leaving his church community of the Lutheran Free Church and joining the Lutheran Brethren, so I made note to ask if she knew Pastor Jim Nelson. She said, "You mean Jimmie and Helen?" So, this was my cousin Helen and all their friends and acquaintances in the Fergus Falls, MN world of the Lutheran Brethren. In my conversation with Mabel, I learned that she was a niece of Edd Kivle (and was probably named after Mabel, one of Edd's children who died in the fire in 1907) and they were acquainted with Mary, Jacob E. Lee and Jimmie as they always lived with Mary. She knew Tommy Kivle and she was afraid of him because he was retarded and didn't speak, mostly grunted, so they took him back to Minnesota for burial when he died. She could also tell me that Jimmie Lee had married a beautician when he was older and they both became alcoholics. They had no children. This was the disappointing answer to my lost branch search, as his child would have been my third cousin, and there is no one else in that generation.

Mabel wanted me to call her sister Myrtle Kivle Larson and Morris who were career missionaries to Japan, but are now in Arlington, Washington and are very interested in genealogy. In my conversation with her, she too knew the Nelson, Valdars, and Fergus Falls families. She was sorry she didn't know where Mary and Jacob were buried but she had an obituary for Edd and he is buried at the Silvana cemetery. They had lived near Stanwood, Washington, and she thought they had a small farm operation. When she said she would send me a picture she had of the 3 Kivle families and one of the Jakob and Mary Kivle family, I was delighted. It was beyond my dreams that someone could share a look with me. Now that I have them, I feel more kinship with their lives and their trail of tears. I sense their faith in their loving God and in their hope of eternity with Him. Blessed be their memory to each of us.

Chronology of Jacob J. Lee

21 Nov 1827	Born Osebakken, Porsgrunn, Norway
	Enlisted 15 th Volunteer Wisconsin Infantry, Colonel Hegg's, Company E, Civil War
Oct. 26, 1864	Wounded, later discharged
June 1, 1865	Married at Perry Church, Wisconsin to Margaret Thoroffsdatter, moved to Winnebago Cty, IA
Sept. 23, 1866	Elen Mari born, died Feb 6, 1867
Jan 30, 1867	Jacob Elias born
Dec. 26, 1868	Aase Marie born, also called Mary
Nov 25, 1873	Christian Olaus Lee born
Sept 15, 1871	Lisa Turine Lee born, d. July 8, 1875
March 6, 1877	Lisa Jensine Lee born, one of twins

Den 22de Månad June 22-16
 I den första jag trodde
 att det var en godis
 av den skickade
 försändelse at gjäre
 men det var ett brev
 af den första jag trodde
 som alla led ut mig
 om min sista försändelse
 Alla denna sätter
 Mrs E. Kivle

POST CARD.

Mrs E. Kivle
 Fennel
 Wash



ED KIVLE
 Ed Kivle, 80, 1711 Twenty Third Street, died at his home Saturday evening after an extended illness. Mr. Kivle was born in Norway May 13, 1873, and had resided in Everett and vicinity for the past 23 years. He was a member of Calvary Lutheran Church. Surviving are his widow, Mary Kivle; one brother, Svein Kivle of Fennel, and one brother in Norway. Funeral services will be Friday afternoon at 3 o'clock at the chapel of the Solie Funeral Home. The Rev. Arthur J. Reesnes and the Rev. Jens Hafverson will officiate. Burial will be in Silvana Cemetery.

1953

Jacob E Lee
 Ed Kivle
 Grandma Speers
 Emma Lee
 Mary Lee
 Kivle

On the 27th of June 1915
 I received your letter
 and was very glad to
 hear from you and
 to hear that you were
 well and at home
 I hope you are all
 well and happy and
 I hope you will
 write soon and let me
 hear from you
 Love
 Mrs. E. Kivle

POST CARD

Mrs. J. J. Kivle
 Ferndale
 Wash
 JUN 27 1915
 10c



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 Ed Kivle, 80, 1711 Twenty Third Street, died at his home Sunday evening after an extended illness. Mr. Kivle was born in Norway May 13, 1873, and had resided in Everett and vicinity for the past 23 years. He was a member of Calvary Lutheran Church. Surviving are his widow, Mary Kivle; one brother, Svein Kivle of Ferndale, and one brother in Norway. Funeral services will be Friday afternoon at 3 o'clock at the chapel of the Solie Funeral Home. The Rev. Arthur J. Reesnes and the Rev. Jens Halvorsen will officiate. Burial will be in Silvana Cemetery.

1953

Jacob E. Lee
 Ed Kivle
 Grandma
 Emma
 Mary Lee
 Kivle

Postscript from Phil Holtan 9-11-2021

I transcribed Ruth Holtan's narrative in September 2021 and then followed up by searching computer databases for more information. I discovered that Jacob E. Lee and his sister Mary Kivle and her husband Ed lived their last years in the Ferndale/ Everett, Washington area and are buried in the

Silvana Cemetery nearby. Their disabled son Tom died earlier and was buried back in the Basement Church Cemetery in MN.

It was more difficult to find Margit Thorofsdatter's origin, which Ruth Holtan rightly suspected was in the Treungen, Norway area, like most of the Winnebago Church charter members. I finally found a Family Search "life sketch" for Jacob J. Lee that I include below:

WI 15th Infantry Co E.... Residence: Perry, Dane County, Wisconsin. Came to America from Porsgrund, Norway. Civil War: Age 35. Unmarried. Enlisted 26 Nov 1861. Mustered 8 Dec 1861 at Madison, Wisconsin. Private. Seriously wounded and taken prisoner at Stone's River near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, on 31 Dec 1862. Paroled in 1863 at Annapolis, Maryland; moved to Benton Barracks, St. Louis, Missouri, as a prisoner on parole. Restored to duty. Left sick at Chattanooga, Tennessee, 28 Nov 1863. Later, sick at Nashville. Transferred to the Invalid Corps on 22 Apr 1864.

Married 1 Jun 1865 at Perry Church to Margit Thorofsdatter, who had been born at Helleslia farm in Treungen, Telemark, in 1836, to Torav Olavsen Arak and Ase Svendsdatter.

They moved to Winnebago County, Iowa, in 1866, where six children were born to them.

In 1886, they were listed as living in Fertile, Iowa. Jacob died in 1898

This is great additional army information and I found that Stanford and Ruth Holtan had followed up on similar information and actually visited the Stone's River battlefield in Tennessee. The men, three of them, I believe, from Lee and Dahlby families were some of the very earliest immigrants in our extended family and therefore are the only ones who fought in the Civil War.

Even more helpful was the information about Treungen. It was still difficult to find more, partly because of the incorrect spelling of "Torav." Finally, I found Margit's parents, Thoruf Olesen Arak and Aase Svendsdatter Helleslien family in the Treungen, Nissedal church books, with their marriage and the baptisms of each of their children and also in various census records. I have added additional ancestors, with Thoruf's clan related to the Arak Nordre farm near where many others of our Holtan relatives have come from, especially Thorvilson (Fjelstad), Onstad (Suby), Tvedts etc. I find it very intriguing that the sponsors for Margit's baptism in Treungen had the same last names as at her children's baptisms at Winnebago Church: Klevens, Sonderland, Arak, Homme. No great surprise. When I visited this Treungen church cemetery with Stan, Ruth and Audrey in about 1990, we all noticed that the names on the gravestones were identical to the ones in the Winnebago cemetery.

I also discovered that Edd Kivle came from Seljord, Telemark, quite near to Treungen. He was born in 1873 as Eivind Taraldsen, son of Thor Taraldsen Kivle, and he took his American name from the Kivle farm, as many new immigrants did.

I finished this project quite amazed at Ruth Holtan's resourcefulness and joy in following these leads on Jacob J. Lee and family. The challenge from Tom Dahle was really a burr under her saddle. She would have been so excited that I cracked the mystery of the ancestors of the Lee family in Gjerpen, Telemark, Norway and that I also filled in the blanks of where Edd, Mary and Jacob E. finally died and that Jacob J.'s wife Margit came from Treungen, ancestral home of many of the Holtans and other Winnebago Church neighbors. The computer resources today make these searches easy by comparison to her 25+ year journey of discovery. Ruth, we salute you.