

1530 Twelfth Street North
Fargo, North Dakota

November 24, 1950

I am sending the information which was compiled by a Mr. Otto. O. Uhlhorn, Research Assistant, for a historical data project. I know that you are interested in the pioneers of Griggs County and that you would wish to have this information about Gilbert Lee and his parents who came to Griggs County in April 1881.

To the best of my knowledge the factual information is correct, and has been gathered from such sources as found written in the family Bible.

I should be pleased to have you visit me when you come to Fargo; my home is near the Agriculture College. With every best wish, I am,

Very sincerely yours,

Mrs. Gilbert C. Lee

Mrs. Gilbert C. Lee

GILBERT C. LEE

BORN--October 14, 1871 -- died, February 16, 1945.

Gilbert C. Lee, son of Christian Lia (Lee) and his wife Torina Olsdatter, was born on a farm two miles west of Fountain, Fillmore County, Minnesota, October 14, 1871. He was the oldest of three children. All came to the Dakota territory at the same time. His sisters Lena Lia Soma, second wife of Jorgen Soma, Hanna Lia Berg of Fargo, and Christine Lia preceded Gilbert C. Lee in death. Lena and Christine are buried in Griggs County.

On January 9, 1902, Gilbert C. Lee married Miss Clara Josephine Hemness, in the Courthouse in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Judge Harris performed the ceremony. Their attendants were Lewis Hemness, a brother of the bride, and Miss Adelaide Du Prey.

Six children were born to them. Three sons and three daughters. Sidney J. at the time of this writing, 1950, dean of Bismarek Junior College; Adelaide Gladys, Mrs. F. O. Mitchell, of Lima, Montana; Florence Josephine, deceased; Lillian Alice, Mrs. Donald Herzog, of Dickinson, N. Dak.; Robert G., Fargo; and Douglas H., Fargo, North Dakota.

Christian Lia, father of Gilbert C. Lee, was born in Ringerige, Norway, April 11, 1831, and he and his wife came to the United States 27 of June, 1867, and settled in Fillmore County, Minnesota. On this farm Gilbert C. and his three sisters were born. Christian Lia (the name was so spelled in Norwegian but after coming to the United States Christian changed the spelling of his surname from Lia to Lee), increased

his tillable acres year by year, but during the latter half of the "seventies" his crops were destroyed by rust for a number of years in succession. These losses induced him to seek his fortune in the Dakota Territory.

Toward the middle of April 1881, exact date is not known, Christian Leetook his wife and children in a lumber wagon drawn by a team of horses to Fountain where they boarded a train for Valley City, Dakota Territory, via St. Paul, Minnesota, and Fargo, Dakota Territory. Mrs. Lee and children stayed in St. Paul over night. Here the car wherein there were other emigrants was switched to a freight train of the Northern Pacific Railroad and proceeded to Fargo. Here the train "tied up" for the night. The following morning their train proceeded very slowly to Valley City because of the soft roadbed. The country west of the Northern Pacific depot was flooded and people rowed around in wagon boxes. After several hours they reached Valley City where Mrs. Lee and three other emigrant families rented a house and stayed for three weeks. Christian Lee then left his farm in Minnesota and loaded his personal effects into an emigrant car and followed his family to the Dakota Territory arriving at Valley City three days later.

Soon after his arrival at Valley City Christian Lee began looking for a suitable location. There were no settlers 15 miles beyond Valley City, and on May 3, 1881, he squatted on a claim about $3\frac{1}{2}$ directly south of where Cooperstown is now located.

The day after he arrived at his claim, he broke prairie to get sod for his sod house. The house was 18x18 feet, one room, one story high with a shingle roof. It had one window and one door, hung on hinges and fastened with a lock. The walls¹⁴⁵ were of sod three feet thick at the bottom and tapering to less than half that thickness at the top. The inside of the wall was perpendicular but sloped inward on the outside. The eaves extended beyond the outside of the wall so that water running off the roof would not soak and rot the sod. The sod was laid lengthwise and crosswise in alternate tiers so as to bind the sod. When the building was completed the wall was cut smooth on the inside and white-washed. This coating of lime prevented the wall from crumbling and gave it an appearance of being plastered.

The furnishings consisted of a Grandfather's clock, a four-hold iron cookstove with oven, two beds -- one small enough and low enough so that it could be shoved underneath the other bed. A table which was fastened to the wall with hinges and with two legs on the other side was also part of the original furniture. After meals the table was raised up against the wall where it was secured with a button. In this way, and by shoving one bed underneath the other there was more room in the house. Benches served as chairs. All the furniture was home-made of lumber bought in Valley City, where the lumber and shingles for the roof were bought also. Water was secured from a near-by slough which had been filled by melting snows and runoff water from spring rains. However, this water became

stagnant and Mr. Lee dug a well striking a vein at 14 feet below the surface which furnished an ample supply of water for years. Mr. Lee had located the vein with the aid of a willow wand.

Supplies were brought in stores in Valley City, Sandborn, and later in Cooperstown.

Mrs. Lee spun yarn on a spinning wheel brought from Norway, from wool brought from Minnesota. She knitted stockings and mittens for the family as well as making all their clothes at home. Christian A. Lee was one of the promoters for organizing the school in his neighborhood which was held in the homes of the settlers as early as 1882. The first minister was a missionary named Lundby. He was paid by the Conference. At first services were held in the homes of the settlers, later in the schoolhouses, and in 1890 the Union Congregation, which Mr. Lee had helped organize in 1887, built a church on land donated by Alvin Fosberg. In 1903 a basement was added and the building is still used for worship. Mrs. Christian Lee, who died in 14 January, 1903, and Christian A. Lee, who died July 1922, are buried in Union Cemetery.

Mr. Gilbert C. Lee lived with his parents and worked on his father's farm until he was 20 years old. Then he went to Minnesota where he worked two years on a farm east of Moorhead. Then he returned to his father's farm where he worked two years more. He next bought a farm, it being the east $\frac{1}{2}$ of the west $\frac{1}{2}$ section 1, Ball Hill Township, comprising all of that tract or parcel of land of the west $\frac{1}{2}$ of section 1 lying east of the Northern Pacific Railroad company's right of way, being 130 acres. The purchase was on a crop payment contract.

Mr. Lee was to deliver one-half of the crop each year. This was to be applied on the contract after the interest had been paid. The remainder was to be applied on the principal. Purchase price was \$10.00 per acre and interest was 10%. No cash payment. He erected buildings on it and made it his home. It was here that his children were born. He sold the land in 1916. While farming Mr. Lee had a half interest in a threshing rig, the earnings of which augmented the farm income. Upon his marriage he was given the quarter section of land which adjoined the land he had purchased; this land was the homestead of his father's. At intervals he also rented additional land. He sold his holdings in Griggs County in 1916.

Mr. Gilbert C. Lee was active in his township and local school affairs. He was road boss, assessor, and supervisor at various times in Ball Hill Township. He was also a member of the Ball Hill Township school board. The rural teacher often roomed and boarded at the Gilbert Lee farm home. He helped organize the Farmers' Elevator in Shepherd, N. Dak., and the farmers' telephone line, buying shares of stock in both ventures. He and his father were lovers of trees, and they planted large groves of boxelders, ash, cottonwoods, and experimented with cherry, apple, and elm trees. After his marriage, Gilbert C. Lee built a large eight-room house on his farm, and later built a large hip-roofed barn. He took pride in his Belgian horses.

He was appointed Deputy Sheriff of Griggs County by Sheriff Claus Jackson; a job which he held for several years.

As Bailiff his first assignment was to guard prisoners in the County jail. His special assignee was a William Kerber, who was held on a charge of murdering his hired man. Kerber was tried before a jury and acquitted. Another prisoner was Vergo, who was suspected of having murdered his first wife and then ran afoul of the statute governing domestic relations. Vergo was tried and acquitted. In 1910 Mr. Lee was elected Sheriff of Griggs County and re-elected in 1912. Mr. Lee was also a candidate for the legislature from Griggs-Stehe County; a democrat in politics, he was defeated from the legislature by a small margin.

Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Lee took active interest in lodge work, and he was active in the Odd Fellows, Yeoman, and the Sons-of-Norway. They were members of the "Jolly-Twenties" and other social activities, both in the Ball Hill Township and Cooperstown communities. Although Mr. Lee had little formal education, he was self-educated in law and literature, especially in the classical literature of Norway. He was often called upon to give declamations in the Norwegian language, for programs. Mr. Lee was interested in fostering such movements as the Griggs County Old Settlers' yearly picnics and celebration, the Griggs County Fair association. Although he helped organize the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota, and declined an endorsement for the legislature by the League on the Republican ticket, he broke with them over what he thought was their radical policies, and later helped organize the opposition movement, known as the I.V.A. (Independent Voters Association). Mr. Lee always remained a democrat at heart, and was a warm admirer of such democrats as William Jennings Bryan.

The first school Mr. Gilbert C. Lee attended was a two month's term, held in the home of Andrew Benson, Ball Hill Township, in 1883. The teacher was Nat. Siften. His salary was \$60.00 paid from Cooperstown. The pupils were Gilbert, Hannah, and Christine Lee; John, Bertha, and Sophia Benson; Eling Froiland; Dora, and Belle Johnson, and Axel Bull.

The scholars furnished thir books which were the Appleton Series. Gilbert Lee completed the Fourth Reader. He attended school in four different districts, Ball Hill, Greenland (now the Wesley School), Gallatin, and Langford Schools. The first school house built in Ball Hill Township was moved 10 or 15 rods farther north from the original site. It was built in 1883. The lumber for the building was bought in Cooperstown.

Fritjos Greenland, a theological student, taught the children religion in the Norwegian language. School was held in the homes of settlers as early as 1882.

There were three post offices in the vicinity, all extinct now, viz---Clair (Mr. Sinclair, father of the ex-congressman Sinclair, postmaster); Gallatin Post Office (John Atchinson, postmaster); Mardel post office, a little village which had sprung up on the banks of the Sheyenne east of Cooperstown. Mr. Mardel anticipated that the Northern Pacific would build a line close to where the village was located and he wanted to be there on time. There was a hardware store, and a general store in the town of Mardel, Anton Ngen, proprietor. Mr. Frost had the hotel. After about a year, the village was abandoned.

The first birth in Ball Hill Township was Ingvald Greenland, born October or November, 1881. He died in 1935.

Father's name was Fritjof Greenland, and mother's name was Nallid Greenland. The first marriage was in 1886.

Gilbert Johnson, who died of tuberculosis, was the first white person to die in Ball Hill Township. He died in 1883 and was buried on the Iver Hanson farm. Gilbert Lee's father, Christian Lee, and Mathias Fjelstad made the coffin for Gilbert Johnson in Mr. Lee's house. Lumber and paint for the same were bought in Cooperstown. Gilbert remembers that the smell of the paint was very offensive to him and he felt quite sick from its effects.

There was a baseball nine composed of young men from the farms in the vicinity. In this group were Jim, Andrew, Fred, and Bill Sinclair. This team held the State Championship in 1893. Most of the players were from Ball Hill Township.

The first newspaper was the Griggs County Courier, Cooperstown. It was founded in 1883 by a Mr. Adams and sold to Mr. Percy Trubshaw of Valley City after three years (not sure of date). The subscription price was \$1.50 per year. The Griggs County Sentinel was founded as an opposition paper and the subscription price was the same as for the courier.

Gilbert C. Lee and family came to Fargo in the fall of 1938 after selling his farm in Barnes County near the town of Dazey. Their home in Fargo is at 1530 Twelfth Street North. Gilbert Lee died Feb. 16, 1945, and is buried at Riverside Cemetery, Fargo, N. Dak.

Otto O. Uhlhorn
Research Assistant
Historical Data Project

Gilbert C Lee

By O.D.Purinton, Clerk and Historian of Old Settlers Association

Gilbert C. Lee, Son of Christian A. and Thorine Lee , was born Oct 14th 1871
was-born at Filmore Co. Minn. In 1881 he came with his parents to
Griggs County, arriving May 3rd., walking most of the way from Valley City
to where his parents settled in Bald Hill township, fifteen miles from the
nearest neighbor on the south,

In Jan. 9th 1902 he married Miss Clara Hemness

In 1909 he was elected sheriff.