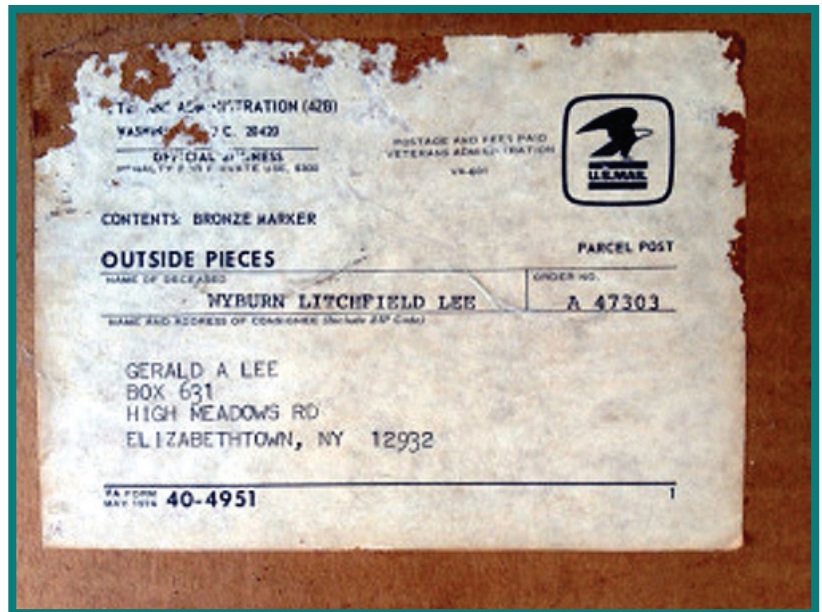


“There’s a grave marker in my closet!” Not too many people have the opportunity to say that phrase but, in the case of James Starbuck, it was true. James had purchased a house in Westport, New York, in 2007. While renovating his new home, James located a flat, military plaque bearing the inscription, “Wyburn Litchfield Lee, QM 3 US Navy, World War I, 1893 – 1977”. Who was Wyburn Litchfield Lee, and why was his grave marker at a house in Westport, New York? The search for answers was on!

The package containing the grave marker was addressed to Wyburn’s brother, Gerald A. Lee, of Elizabethtown, New York. James Starbuck hypothesizes that the grave marker was unable to be delivered to Gerald Lee and somehow made its way to Carlin Walker. Carlin was a Westport postman and local historian. James believes that the Elizabethtown post-



master gave the package containing the marker to Carlin Walker to track down the owner. When Carlin was unsuccessful in that endeavor, he left it in his house, which now belonged to James Starbuck. In an interesting twist of fate, Gerald Lee used to play bridge with James Starbuck’s mother!

James spent several years pondering the mystery of the grave marker. Occasionally, he would search online for answers. On May 31, 2013, I received an email from James, who had located the Find A Grave memorial I had created for Wyburn Litchfield Lee. Wyburn’s parents, George Albert Lee and Gertrude E. Ketcham Lee, are buried at Pittsford Cemetery in Pittsford, New York. They have a nice headstone with their names and dates. Underneath Gertrude’s name it says, “Son, Wyburn L. N. Lee, 1893-19__”. No death date is listed for Wyburn.

The information about Wyburn’s grave marker was intriguing. Who was Wyburn, and why wasn’t his marker on his grave? This promised to be an interesting story. I was already familiar with Gertrude Ketcham Lee.

The Ketcham family was a big name in Pittsford. They even had a road named after them! Surely we could learn something more about Wyburn.

Wyburn has proven to be as much a mystery as his errant grave marker. He was the third of George and Gertrude Ketcham Lee's four sons, and was born April 22, 1893 in Buffalo, New York. Wyburn's father, George Lee, had risen to prominence in the 1890s as a shrewd and calculating financier. The family lived in luxury as George, known as the "Sodus Boy Financier", spent money lavishly. The Monroe County Mail in 1899 noted that George had purchased "the table on which the Declaration of Independence was written". By 1900, Wyburn and his family were living in Sodus with his paternal grandparents, William and Lucy Clark Lee, quite probably to escape the notoriety of George's alleged underhanded dealings on Wall Street.

When the Great War arrived, all four Lee brothers – Merwyn, Gerald, Wyburn and Lowell – served in the military. Wyburn's abstract of service shows that he enrolled at the recruiting station in Newport, Rhode Island, on May 11, 1917 as Quartermaster 3rd Class. He served at the Newport Naval District until June 4, 1918, when he became a member of the Naval Auxiliary Reserve before officially transferring to inactive service on February 9, 1919. The July, 1918 issue of The Rural New Yorker magazine features a photo of the service flag hanging in the window of George and Gertrude Lee's home bearing four stars, one for each son serving the war effort. All four Lee brothers survived the war.

Following his military service, Wyburn lived in the New York City area, and was employed in several different occupations through the years. The 1930 census record shows Wyburn married to a woman named Phyllis, but by 1940 they were divorced. It is unknown whether Wyburn and Phyllis had any children together. Little other information about Wyburn's life was found. Wyburn Litchfield Lee died August 26, 1977 in Palm Beach, Florida. That brings us back to Wyburn's grave marker.

Someone ordered the marker from the U.S. government, who shipped it to Gerald Lee in Elizabethtown. Carlin Walker became the unofficial keeper of the grave marker shortly thereafter. In 2007, the torch was then passed to James Starbuck.



In spring 2016, James sent the marker to Beth Knickerbocker, secretary of the Pittsford Cemetery Association. Beth coordinated the effort to install Wyburn Litchfield Lee's military grave marker in the family plot at Pittsford Cemetery in August.

The mystery of Wyburn Lee isn't completely solved, though. Burial records show that Wyburn had permission from the plot owner to be buried at Pittsford Cemetery, but the records don't definitively show that he is, indeed, interred there.

Perhaps in a few years I'll receive an email from someone that begins,

"While cleaning my house, I found an urn containing the remains of Wyburn Lee." If that is the case, we'll have the spot all ready for him.

The Pittsford Cemetery Association (PCA) took on the initial financial responsibility of paying for the marker installation for this World War I soldier. If you are so inclined to honor Wyburn's memory, please send a check payable to "Friends of Pittsford Cemetery Association" to 155 South Main Street, Pittsford, New York 14534 and note "Wyburn Lee" on the check. The PCA will utilize the funds to pay for the marker installation. Any additional monies received will allow the PCA to continue their fine upkeep of the cemetery and the graves of its eternal residents. For additional information about the Pittsford Cemetery Association, please visit <http://www.pittsfordcemetery.org>.

Thank you to CAPT Steven F. Momano, USN (Ret.) for his assistance deciphering Wyburn's military abstract of service and a special thanks to James Starbuck, who worked tirelessly to ensure that Wyburn Litchfield Lee's grave marker found its rightful home.