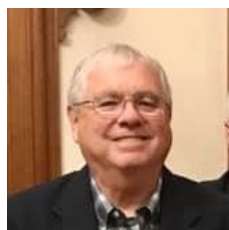


WINTER 2022

**LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT**



The Clara Sexton House was decorated in a Victorian manner for the Christmas Season. Our December Open House was very successful with many commenting on how well the house looked. I want to thank all of those who helped decorate.

In December, Dick Hawes gave a presentation at the Billerica Senior Center on the short-lived Billerica - Bedford Railway. The hour plus talk had a full capacity audience. The audience thoroughly enjoyed the detailed talk.

Rich Kunicki continues to make many necessary repairs and upgrades to house. He has recently installed sensors to detect frozen water pipes, ordered and put up a number of new shades, and will be installing a new rot iron bracket for our outside sign.

Our Collections Committee is now looking at the second floor of the house. We expect to spruce up the bedroom and library. Our plan is that many of our artifacts that are stored on the second floor will be moved to the barn loft, once the barn restoration is complete.

As I mentioned in our last newsletter, we have started working on a Community Preservation proposal for a grant for the restoration and winterization of the barn. If our proposal is approved, we could start this work next summer. In November, we made a Zoom presentation to the Community Preservation Committee. The presentation was well received and they said our project was eligible for a grant at their January meeting. We expect to submit our complete proposal by mid-February.

We have also learned that the Society will be receiving a \$50,000 State grant thanks to Representative Marc Lombardo. Once the barn is restored, we will be using these funds to set-up a first class display area for many of our artifacts that we cannot currently display.

We are tentatively planning a Victorian Tea fundraiser on May 21. We had to cancel the last two due to Covid.

Once again, I want to thank all of you who have made contributions to the Society. Maintaining the Clara Sexton House generally takes all of our funds from membership dues, fundraisers, and more. Your support is essential and we thank you for your generosity.

Regards

John Bartlett

**2022 Membership Drive**

It is time to renew your membership in the historical society:

Senior is \$15  
 Individual is \$20  
 Family is \$30



Membership payment can be sent to:  
 Billerica Historical Society  
 PO Box 381  
 Billerica, MA 01821

**We encourage you to invite a friend to join the society.**

**Donations**

The Billerica Historical Society was present at the farmer's market in September as well as Yankee Doodle. Along with our big open houses in September, we received \$477 in donations. These were great opportunities to let the public know of our presence in the community and our mission to preserve and present Billerica's rich history.

**Victorian Tea Fundraiser**

Grab your gloves and hat and join us for our annual Victorian Tea Fundraiser at the Bennett Library on **Saturday, May 21 at 3:00 PM**. Ladies of all ages are invited. The cost is \$15 per adult and \$10 per child. Meredith Marcinkewicz, from Shirley historical society, will speak about Tea Rooms and their history. There will be a craft for the younger ladies who attend. There will be raffle items as well. To purchase tickets, contact Diane at [secdouglas@aol.com](mailto:secdouglas@aol.com)



**Once Lost, Now Found,  
Never Forgotten**

The morning of Thursday, May 12th, dawned cold and dismal. A curtain of gray mist enshrouded the earth as with a pall. The men shivered as they awoke from unrefreshing sleep,

and the order to advance was promptly responded to. Without food, we moved forward, continuing the line of advance of the previous evening, and after a short march, reached a large opening in the forest, where a portion of the corps was being massed in column by brigades in line of battle.

While forming for the attack, we heard the loud cheers of the troops on our right, who were charging the enemy, followed but the thunder of artillery. This was the signal for our attack, and the division advanced rapidly toward the woods, the brigades deployed to the right and left, and a heavy skirmish line was thrown out. We drew the first fire from the rebel skirmishers at 4:30 AM.

(The above account was written by William H. Hodgkins regarding the 36th Massachusetts regiment in the fighting on May 12, 1864, of which Sergeant Jerome Peirce was a member.)

Jerome Peirce, a cabinetmaker from Gardiner, MA was among the troops. That a man of his refined taste and quiet habits, appreciating so keenly the joys of home, so devoted to his wife, Albinia, and two-year-old daughter, Lucy, should have volunteered for the military service can be accounted for only on the ground that he had come to believe it to be his duty.

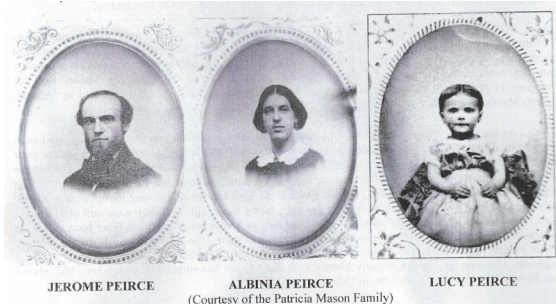
His sole aim in entering the army was to render to his country that service which he felt was due from him in this her hour of trial, and although well qualified to command, he had no aspirations to rise from his humble position in the ranks, contented to render any service that might assisting vindicating his country's honor.

(Taken from letter received from Charles F. Smith.)

Company H had no other such a – purely patriotic – philanthropic, ever lending a helping hand in sickness and working for his comrades as well as for himself. His morals, to the Lord, as you must know were strictly pure. No profanity or obscenities crossed his lips.

(Taken from letter from First Lt. Philip G. Woodward)

Jerome was a man who deeply loved his wife, Albinia, and young daughter, Lucy.



The following is a poem Jerome wrote to Albinia. April 1856 “Written by my father when engaged to Mother.”

Lucy S. Peirce

To “Allie”

Dearest of all my earthly friends  
Again, I fly to thee,  
Whose blessed image ever blends  
In all that's dear to me.

The toils of day and eve's repose  
Alike thy presence brings,  
When sleep serene, my eyelids close  
To thee my spirit wings.

How deeply thus doth love enshrine  
Its object in the soul!  
And guides the heart to things divine  
And Heaven – its final goal.

Oh blessed thought! For those who love  
An immortality remains.  
And in a brighter world above  
A balm for all our pains.

The marriage of Jerome Peirce of Charlestown, aged 26 years, and Albinia Jaquith of Billerica, aged 28, was solemnized at Billerica, on September 10, 1857 by Rev. J. G. D. Stearns.

Letters from Jerome show more of his character, faith, and love for his family.



For a short time in the fall of 1863, Peirce was assigned to a special detail to return to Massachusetts for recruiting duty. In one of his letters home he excitedly describes that he had been selected for this assignment as a reward for his faithful service and that he hoped to see his family and friends. Whether he was able to see them cannot be determined from the available records, but it is highly likely that he did. If so, it would have been the last time he saw his wife and young daughter.

On April 23, 1864, the regiment left Annapolis and marched to Washington, D.C., reaching the capital two days later. There, President Lincoln and General Burnside reviewed the Ninth Corps to the cheers and well wishes of a large crowd. Naturally, this was an exciting one for Peirce and his comrades. The following day, in a letter to Albinia, he wrote, “A great day yesterday. We were received very enthusiastically by General Burnside and President Lincoln on the balcony of the Willard Hotel to salute as we passed. The boys got a “pass: and remained in Washington City. The president looked pale and careworn – very.”

A few weeks before his death, in writing to his wife, then in Billerica, just before the army advanced, he says, “But you will think of the future, as we are now approaching the enemy, it is natural, but we can only rely on the same Power who has thus far led me on. I feel no sad Presentiments, but, on the contrary, am hopeful,” As we look over the letters, we see them pervaded by the spirit of an elevated religious faith and trust.

Again, he writes to his wife, only 12 days before he fell, and after describing the place where he then was, as reminding him much of the certain localities where they had in former days conversed and strolled together. He adds that by the

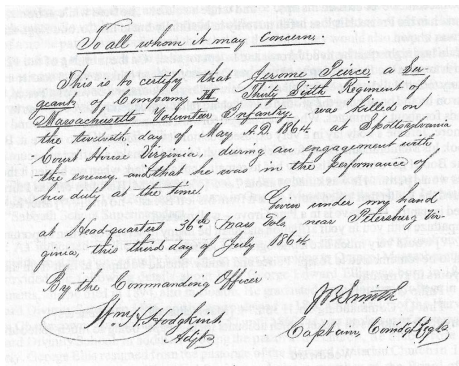
movements of the army, "It looks like a fearful future for some." He asks, "Shall we be spared the last fearful conflict?" "We hope all will be for the best." He then speaks of his darling child to whom he sends some flowers which he has culled for her to keep, to remember Papa and in closing says, "I hope to see you again soon." In his last letter home, he sent a tiny bouquet of spring flowers tied with a thread.

"How much Papa wants to lead you by the hand in some of your pretty summer walks, but he cannot yet. But there is a Good Being who takes care of Papa, Mama and little Lulu and all good people alike."

Returning to May 12, 1864 ...

The last two nights that he lived Jerome and I slept together. On the morning of the 12th of May I went forth to meet the Enemy. Jerome knew our Danger yet faced it like a brave soldier and was first of our company to fall. I did not see him fall as we were falling back under a cover of a fence, the enemy bearing down on us and occupying the ground on which he fell. Consequently his body was in the enemy's hands for about 15 minutes. When he charged forward and not only took the ground we lost but a great deal more. Jerome's body lay in a very exposed position it was impossible to move it. But I went to him and took his memorandum book for I felt as though I ought to make an effort to secure some memento. The book I gave to J. H. His body had to remain until after dark when we buried it the best that circumstances would permit. He was killed at 7 o'clock AM. His other effects I turned over to J. H. I also found the bullet that killed him. I took it from his left breast. He died instantly.

(First Lieutenant Philip G. Woodward, Commander of the 36th Massachusetts Unit wrote to Jerome Peirce's widow to describe her husband's death.)



The fighting of the Spotsylvania Court House is regarded as one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. In places, the dead piled up in the Confederate trenches five deep.

As the guns fell silent on the Spotsylvania Court House Battlefield and Gen. Ulysses S. Grant maneuvered his army on the night of May 20, 1864, toward Richmond, the horrors of what the days of brutal fighting had brought became more evident. The proximity of the two armies, added to the incessant nature of the fighting, had left soldiers from both sides with little time or energy to inter fallen comrades. Consequently, the ground remained littered with many dead Union and Confederate soldiers who had not been buried. When the Confederates abandoned their positions, Union forces briefly occupied the contested ground, now thickly carpeted with blue and gray corpses. To make the position tolerable, the Union soldiers threw the bodies of the dead into the trenches formerly occupied by their foes and kicked dirt from the adjacent parapet down on them.

If there was any comfort that could be taken by Sgt. Peirce's family, it was that his comrades had taken the time to bury him in a temporary grave close to where he had fallen and they had marked its location sufficiently well that his remains

could still be identified when they were transferred to his final resting place in Grave No. 540 in the Fredericksburg National Cemetery.

Soon enough, in far-off Massachusetts, death's dark sadness reached Allie and little Lucy.

The grieving widow, Albinia made several important decisions after she was notified of Jerome's passing. She took the following steps:

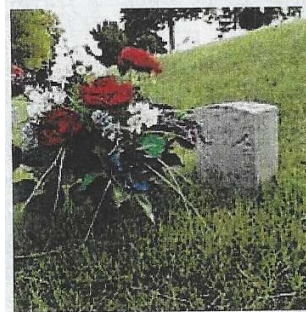
- Albinia applied for widow's pension of \$8 per month and \$2 per month for Lucy.
- She moved her daughter and herself to the home of her parents, Franklin and Lucy Jaquith, on Concord Road in Billerica. (They continued to live with Albinia's parents for many years. Lucy graduated from the Howe School.)
- Finally, Albinia was determined to find where Jerome's body was located.



After trying unsuccessfully for several months, Albinia's brother Franklin heard from Major Andrew J. Birdsall of the Fredericksburg National Cemetery and learned he was buried there. The family sent \$100 to Major Birdsall with the request that Jerome's grave be decorated

Major Birdsall

with flowers every Memorial Day. (Note the value of \$100 in those days as it was almost the equivalent of a year's widow's pension.)



The U.S. National Park Service

Andrew Birdsall recorded his promise to decorate Peirce's grave every Memorial Day in his journal. Through all the years he and his family have decorated the grave of a man they never met. At one point, years later, Albinia and Lucy visited the cemetery and met Major Birdsall and his family.

Birdsall passed the tradition on to his granddaughter, Alice Heflin Abernathy, who put flowers on the grave until she was in her 90's. She died in 1999 at the age of 95, and now her descendants place the flowers.

Lt. Col. Peter Jaquith Casey of Billerica started reading about the solemn tradition in a *Yankee Magazine* article and realized that the story was about his family. Peirce's wife "Allie" was a Jaquith. Casey started poking around in the attic and basement of his Concord Road home and found letters about "Allie" Peirce's life. (Peter lived in the same Jaquith home-stead that Albinia had returned to after Jerome's death.)

Also to be noted: there is Peirce gravestone in the South Cemetery on Concord Road in Billerica where Albinia and Lucy are buried, as is baby Charles Jerome who lived only a day. Jerome's name appears on the stone.



The Billerica Historical Society has an autograph book that had belonged to Lucy Peirce. A number of the entries list Salem. The book could possibly come from the days when Lucy attended Salem Normal School. After graduation, Lucy went on to teach for many years.

(The information in this article was pulled from *Sgt. Jerome Peirce Story* by Josef W. Rokus.)

**Clara E. Sexton Memorial  
House Museum,  
circa 1723  
Headquarters of the  
Billerica Historical Society**

36 Concord Road  
Billerica, MA 01821

(978)667-7020  
Billericahistory.org



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**Ways to Support the BHS**

Due to COVID-19, many of you will be doing your shopping online with Amazon. If you use smile.amazon.com instead, you can designate the Billerica Historical Society as your charity of choice. (Smile.amazon.com IS Amazon.) Place your order as you always would but a portion of your purchase will go to the BHS every time you make a purchase. The BHS has received \$166.19 as of November 2021, from purchases made by folks like you.



**Upcoming Events**

May 21: Victorian Tea Fundraiser, from 3-5 PM  
at the Bennett Library

**Be Watching for:**  
Historical Lectures at COA

**Book & Gifts:**  
Hazen's History of Billerica  
\$55.00  
Sexton House Cookbook  
Commemorative Spode Plate



\$3.00  
**\$10.00**

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