

# Captain Andrew Lee, Washington's Spy

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**In 1804, Captain Andrew Lee settled in Hanover (Nanticoke) with his wife Priscilla and raised a family. He built his massive home on the banks of the Susquehanna, in what is now Honey Pot. One can only wonder if he cherished his serene surroundings. After all, the life of Captain Lee, prior to that time, was anything but quiet. According to the Genealogical and Family History of Wyoming by Horace Edwin Hayden, Lee was born in East Hanover, Dauphin County, PA in 1739. In 1754, he served as a volunteer in General Edward Braddock's army during the French and Indian War. After the war, he joined the "famous" Paxtang Boys of 1763, a group of mercenaries who were revered as well as feared for their retaliatory treatment of the Indians. From 1776 to 1779, Lee was commissioned ensign in the Second Canadian regiment (Congress Own) under General Moses Hazen. He served as a captain of dragoons from 1779 to 1783 during the Revolutionary War. During that time, he was a prisoner of the British in 1775 and 1777. His second imprisonment was served aboard a ship in New York harbor. He was part of a daring escape in 1779.**

**However, it's in his first captivity in 1775, Lee's story takes an intriguing turn. According to an account written by John Bakeless, author of Turncoats, Traitors, and Heroes, General George Washington was angered that British prisoners had consistently escaped from Lancaster Prison and vanished even though the nearest British post was miles away and all were wearing bright colored uniforms. Washington charged Lee's commanding officer, General Hazen, with the task of finding their method. Washington suspected an**

**underground railroad, with “royalist sympathizers” and safe houses stretching to the Delaware River. Hazen sent for the one man he knew could complete the task, Captain Andrew Lee. Upon hearing Washington’s order, Lee disguised himself as a British prisoner, and allowed himself taken to Lancaster Prison to live among the very men he fought against, the one objective, to gain the trust of British prisoners and hopefully discover their means and route of escape. His mission was so secretive, fellow soldiers were told Lee was “on command” and “not to ask questions.” Upon arriving at Lancaster, Lee was herded into the prison barracks by an “American intendent” that was an acquaintance. Thankfully he did not recognize Lee under his heavy disguise.**

**As the tortuous days of his imprisonment wore on, Lee took notice of an old woman who regularly visited the prison giving fruit to British prisoners. He noticed covert gestures and exchanges and was told the old woman’s son had been punished and “thrown out” of the American Army. Lee was relatively sure this was the person that was enabling prisoners to escape. He soon discovered his suspicions of the woman held true. A bribed sentry left his post on a rainy night and soon Lee saw a figure moving among the sleeping prisoners waking them saying, “Not the man-but come.” Lee followed as prisoners exited an unbarred section of stockade. The now freed British soldiers were joined by the old woman and a male companion. They were ushered to the woman’s house, fed and were told that as they moved on they must stay in a group. Lee realized the miles-long trek ahead alongside the enemy soldiers would not be easy, but, one made more difficult for the fact that Lee recognized a soldier he’d “punished” at one time and knew the young man would surely be able to recognize him. Lee pulled his coat up to cover his bearded face. A gun fire alarm at a nearby American camp alerted the countryside of the mass escape. The fugitives were told they had to move on. Lee fell in line; surely keeping**

**an eye on the man that could bring about not only the demise of the spy mission, but his own as well.**

**Next Issue: At the Delaware River, Captain Andrew Lee fights for his life.**

**During the first leg of their journey, The British soldier did not exhibit any recognition of Lee, but on the twelfth night the fugitives were given refuge in a stone barn. A Tory guide separated Lee and his adversary from the rest of the soldiers. In a sense they played their card. Across the Delaware lay the British forces, perhaps the Tory guide and soldier were hoping to gain accolades for handing over the American. Lee would undoubtedly have been executed. Armed with all the information Washington needed, Lee knew he'd have to make his escape.**

**In the dark of night, As the British escapees reached the banks of the Delaware; they could not find the boats usually made available by Loyalists. The soldiers scattered along the banks to find a means of crossing the river. Lee saw his opportunity to sneak away, but standing in his way was the British soldier Lee recognized days before, the Tory guide's pistol in hand. The soldier pulled the trigger, but fired-harmlessly, it was discovered later that curiously, the guide's pistol had been loaded only with powder. A knife fight ensued, Lee, small in stature but agile, managed to avoid the assailant's thrusts with the knife until an American patrol alerted by the gunshot arrived.**

**Captain Lee along with the captured British soldiers was taken before a magistrate, who did not believe Lee's claim that he was an American officer. Lee was placed in irons and was taken to Philadelphia. He was released only after he had managed to send a note to General Benjamin Lincoln, who served with Lee prior to his spy mission. Lee retraced the route of the prisoners and exposed the Tory Loyalists who aided in their escape. In essence he was a hero who placed**

**himself in grave danger in order to carry out a mission ordered by General George Washington.**

**According to Nanticoke Historical Society Records:**

**Captain Andrew Lee married Priscilla Espy, widow of James Stewart (brother of Capt. Lazarus Stewart). They had three children, Washington (b. Harrisburg, June 1786), James and Priscilla. In 1795, Captain Andrew Lee acquired the rights to the iron industry in Nanticoke from the Alden's, whose forge lay within the Honey Pot area. He transferred these rights to his son, Washington, in 1815, several years before his death. In 1804, Captain Lee moved his family into the newly constructed Lee house in the Honey Pot section of Nanticoke. He lived there until his death in 1821. Children, Washington, James, and Priscilla survived him. Lee's son, Washington, was named after the man under who he served in the Revolutionary War and would become in 1789, the first president of the United States, George Washington.**

**FACT:**

**According to, Volume 2 of Notes and Queries, Historical Biographical and Genealogical by The Hon. John Blair Linn; "Lee lost rank during his second captivity in 1777. After the Revolutionary War, Lee applied to General George Washington to be reinstated but was told it was not in the power of the General to restore him immediately to his former rank. Lee, in turn, was permitted to join a company of volunteers from the regiment to act as light troops. Linn notes, "The question of his restoration to his former rank was not decided until the close of the war, when his services were no longer needed."**

