

Concord in the Great War:

The Correspondence of Michael J. Dee and Edward D. Dee

Michael Dee's life was defined by devotion to duty: to his hometown, his church, his work, his family and his country. In his role as Superintendent of the Concord Reformatory, he once walked alone into the midst of three hundred rioting prisoners and talked them into returning to their cells. Employed at the Reformatory beginning in 1907, as superintendent he fought vigorously to maintain the institution as a reformatory, rather than a penitentiary for those who had committed more serious crimes.

In 1909 he enlisted in Company I of the Sixth Massachusetts Infantry and rose through the ranks, achieving that of Captain in 1914. When the U.S. entered the war in 1917, Captain Dee reported for duty with his company at Camp Devens and was appointed Commanding Officer of the Military Police of the 26th Division in France, where he served for the duration of the war. He received a commendation for his efficiency, bravery and humanitarian interest in the men under his command. He returned to Concord a war hero.

In addition to his career at the Reformatory and his war service, he was a civic-minded Concordian who rose to the top of many of the organizations he was associated with, including the American Legion and the Knights of Columbus.

Michael Dee and Margaret McManus (also of Concord) were married in 1906 and together had nine children, six daughters and three sons. They made their home on Elm Street.

Major Dee's funeral, held at Our lady Help of Christians Church, was a solemn remembrance, but also an event. Hundreds attended, spilling out the church doors, including many area clergy, state, police, military, and prison officials. With his wide circle of family, friends, townsmen, acquaintances and co-workers, Michael Dee had touched many lives in his sixty-nine well-spent years.

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The letters in this small collection were written by Michael Dee to his brother, Ed, between December 1917 and December 1918 while he was serving with the 26th Company Military Police in France. They were donated to William Munroe Special Collections at the Concord Free Public Library by Michael Dee and Lucy Dee Kinsey in September 2013.

Over There:

Concord in the Great War

In Concord as elsewhere, the war was a unifying event. People supported the war effort through the purchase of liberty Bonds and by growing "liberty gardens," so the food normally destined for market could go toward feeding the soldiers. They conserved on kerosene, sugar, and tires. Every week the *Enterprise*, the town's paper of record, published "Concord's Roll of Honor," a list of those who were serving. Several Concord women were on the list- Olga Olsen and Mary Dumaine among

them-contributing their nursing skills to the American wounded in France. The list numbered approximately two hundred Concordians, enough so that in a town of a little over six thousand people, their absence must have been palpable.

Many of the soldiers trained at Camp Devens in Ayer, others at Plattsburgh, New York, before sailing a world away. Most went out with the American Expeditionary Force, while some were stationed on battleships and others contributed stateside. Some had names well known in Concord: Damon, Hosmer, Keyes, Pierce, Pratt, Prescott, Richardson, Walcott. Raymond Emerson served as a 2nd lieutenant; Leslie O. Anderson as a member of the U.S. Army Medical Corps. The town's American Legion post is named after 1st lieutenant James J. Mansfield, killed in the battle of Chateau Thierry, while Rideout Playground in West Concord commemorates the memory of Lt. Percy A. Rideout, killed in action near Verdun and cited for bravery by General Pershing. But the name that stands out among the Concordians who served in World War I is Captain Michael Dee. His story is told in the exhibit cases on the lower level of the library, outside of Special Collections.

After the war, in addition to a roll of honor, a boulder was trucked in from Lincoln to serve as a permanent memorial. Fitted with a brass plate listing the names of those who had died serving in the war and located in Monument Square, it was dedicated on Memorial Day in 1924.

Letters, Photographs & Ephemera

Top shelf, left to right:

Concord Soldiers Aid members sewing for the war effort. Among those pictured are Mrs. Prescott Keyes, Miss Marion Keyes, Mrs. Henry F. Smith, Mrs. George Viale, Mrs. Russell Robb.

Townpeople seeing Concord troops off at the depot, August 1917.

letter: Michael J. Dee to Edward D. Dee, 16 December 1918.

Second shelf, left to right:

letter: Two pages of a letter from Michael J. Dee to Edward D. Dee, 12 November 1918.

(The day following Armistice Day).

Townpeople seeing Concord troops off at the depot, August 1917.

Photograph of Michael J. Dee, undated.

Third shelf, left to right:

Townpeople seeing Concord soldiers off at the depot, August 1917.

letter: Two pages of a letter from Michael J. Dee to Edward D. Dee, 23 December 1917.

Townpeople seeing Concord soldiers off at the depot, August 1917.

Fourth shelf, left to right:

letters: Selection of pages and the envelope from a letter from Michael J. Dee to Edward D. Dee, 11 March 1918.

Sarah E. Wheeler. Concord Company off to War. 24 August 1917.

Bottom shelf, left to right:

Scrapbook, ca. 1917-1918. Newspaper clippings from various Boston papers and the *Concord Enterprise*.

Broadside: *Concord Welcomes Home Her Soldiers and Sailors*. April 19, 1919.