

Lee Ford Swanson

Sudbury Historian

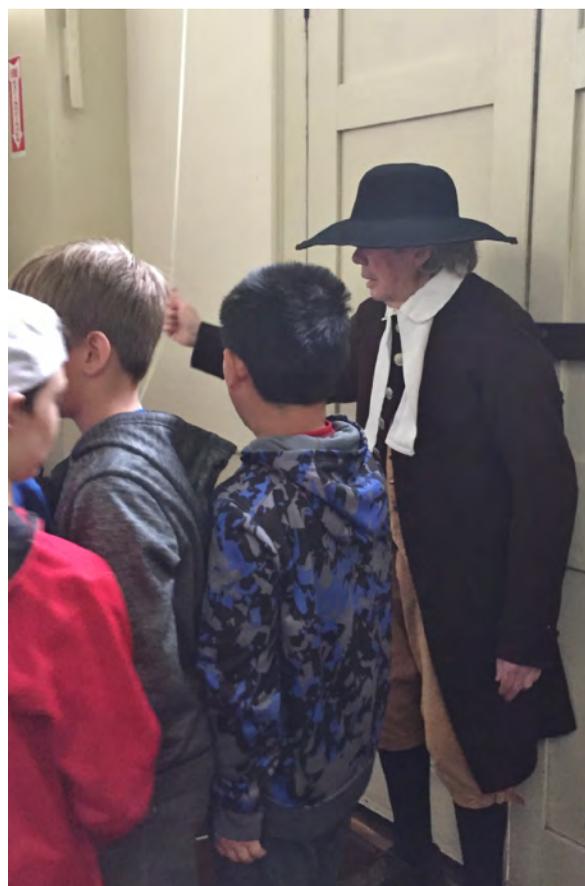


Born May 26, 1938 Died January 22, 2022

(medium-res PDF version for web)



Lee Swanson upstairs in Town Hall, home of the Sudbury Historical Society until the Sudbury History Center opened in the Loring Parsonage in 2021.



Lee Ford Swanson, Sudbury Historian - Printed 2022-03-16. V1.0 This booklet was edited by Jan Hardenbergh with other contributions from Mo-ching Yip, Debbie Keeney, Ursula Lyons, Tony Howes, Gail Hardenbergh, Chuck Zimmer and Beth Gary-Nix from the Sudbury Historical Society Archives. Most pictures are by Debbie Keeney. The Society has Lee's papers for a more thorough examination of Lee's life. This is a very short bio with pictures of Lee. For more information and a PDF of this booklet see jch.com/people/lfs

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Obituary ran in the Sudbury Town Crier on February 17, 2022

Lee Ford Swanson, age 83, passed away on January 22, 2022 in Emerson Hospital, Concord, Mass.

Lee was born in Malden on May 26, 1938 to Milton and Olive Edna Swanson. He is survived by his two adopted sisters: Mo Ching Yip and Jean Soda, her husband Greg, his nephew Eric Swanson and many descendants of his late brother Ray.

Lee was active in all things related to history, including the Sudbury Historical Society, the Wayside Inn, the Historic Districts Commission. He served as Town Historian from 2012 to 2019.

A memorial service will be held at First Parish of Sudbury, Unitarian Universalist on April 2nd.

Donations in his name may be made to First Parish of Sudbury, 327 Concord Rd, or the Sudbury Historical Society, 288 Old Sudbury Rd, both in Sudbury, MA 01776.



To the right is a picture of Lee tolling for the 9/11 memorial in 2015. He never missed ringing the bell on at 8:46.

Below is the front page article in the Sudbury Town Crier that ran with his obituary.

Earlier Lee was featured in the Crier in a Meet your Neighbor interview. In 2008 when the Town purchased a conservation restriction, Lee spoke about the historical landmarks in Nobscot to support the purchase.

His mother Edna was featured in the Town Crier on July 12, 2001, in a front page remembrance piece.



road wins during senior week
SPORTS, 1B

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Remembering Lee Ford Swanson, town historian

Special to Wicked Local
USA TODAY NETWORK

Lee Ford Swanson, well-known Sudbury historian, died Jan. 22 from complications of leukemia.

Lee spent his younger years in the Wayside Country Store in Marlboro after moving from Malden, where he was born in 1938. The store was run by his parents Milton and Edna Swanson, who had purchased it from the widow of Henry Ford in 1947. The structure was moved from the Sudbury Town center to Hager Pond on Route 20 near the Wayside Inn. While working side by side with his father in the Wayside Country

store business, he amassed a deep knowledge and history of antiques and novelty items, especially of all things related to the colonial era. Indeed, he learned to appraise antiques and esoteric items that only a mind like his could appreciate.

After his father's retirement and sale of the Wayside Country Store in 1971, Lee was instrumental in gathering and curating the collections and sharing his deep knowledge and expertise with the Sudbury Historical Society, where he took on the role of curator and archivist. The Society honored him with an honorary lifetime membership for his contributions.

At the same time, he was employed as the archivist at Longfellow's Wayside Inn, where he emphasized the value of the inn's colonial identity, including donning traditional colonial garb at various local events and festivals, some featured in local news.

Lee served the town of Sudbury as town historian from 2012 to 2019, as well as many years on the Historical Districts Commission, many years on the Committee for the Preservation and Management of Town Documents, and on the Sudbury 375 Planning committee in 2014.



Sudbury historian Lee Ford Swanson dressed in colonial garb for the holidays. He died Jan. 22.

SUDBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES

See SWANSON, Page 2A

Early Years and Wayside Country Store

Lee spent his younger years in the Wayside Country Store in Marlboro after moving from Malden, where he was born in 1938. The store was run by his parents Milton and Edna Swanson, pictured on right. They had purchased it from the widow of Henry Ford in 1947. The structure was moved from the Sudbury Town center to Hager Pond on Route 20 near the Wayside Inn.

While working side by side with his father in the Wayside Country store business, he amassed a deep knowledge and history of antiques and novelty items, especially of all things related to the Colonial era. Indeed, he learned to appraise antiques and esoteric items that only a mind like his could appreciate.



Wayside Country Store interior.

Below: Milt and Edna Swanson



WBZ-TV and Rex Trailer

Lee worked with WBZ-TV for some years and was involved with the production of Sudbury native Rex Trailer's TV shows. In 1962 he was assisting in the production a Saturday morning children's show and he had scripts for live TV commercials. He was still there in 1964. Lee gathered and kept all sorts of documents about his own life. He had a knack for creating narratives for all manner of history; however he left no narratives of his own life.



Lee and Mo-ching

1962 Assistant Director, Boston International Film Festival

Lee is listed on the 1962 program as an assistant director.

Together, Inc.

In 1971, Lee was a principle in Together, Inc in Hudson, serving on the Board and as Treasurer. The non-profit organization helped young people with drug or any other problems with a hot-line, group sessions and activities.

Wayside Industries

After his father's retirement and sale of the Wayside Country Store in 1971, Lee took some part of the business on as Wayside Industries until about 1976. This was a wholesale operation and included canned food with one order sheet featuring Yankee Clam Chowder, Yankee Injun Pudding and Yankee Saturday night dinner for Four.



Lee, Milt and Edna Swanson hand over the Marlboro Flintlock to Innkeeper Frank Koppeis, 1973

Williams Stove Polish

Lee Owned a company named Right Stove Polish, which was the “home of Williams Stove Polish”. A letter describes the rediscovery of the polish formula and revival of the business. Letters and bills suggest how it was manufactured. It was sold to H.F, Staples & Co, Inc in New Hampshire in 1985. Williams Stove Polish is still being sold today.

1985 SHS Program: Memories of a Country Store

from *Sudbury Town Crier and
Fence Viewer*, October 3rd, 1985

The Sudbury Historical Society opens its 30th Anniversary Program on Monday, Oct. 7 at 8 p.m. at a meeting in the Ford Room at the Wayside Inn. The speaker will be Lee Swanson a Sudbury resident whose father bought the Wayside Country Store from Henry Ford and operated it from 1947 through 1971.



Lee goofing around with Beth Gray-Nix

Swanson is a film editor by trade and a personal property appraiser. He is a former trustee of the Marlboro Historical Society, WBZ children's program producer, director of Boston's International Film Festival, a partner in the firm of Warehouse Antiques of Marlboro for nine years, as well as past vice-president and president of Suburban Antiques Dealers Association. This is the first of a series of historical events during a year which will be devoted to authoritative lectures on Sudbury people and topics, and on Colonial life in New England.

Lee played the part of Arnold Windbag in the 1989 play *Town Meeting Tonight* as part of the Sudbury

Longfellow Poetry Society

Lee organized poetry readings at the Inn and private tours of the Longfellow House in Cambridge.





Lee Swanson, historian of the Wayside Inn in Sudbury, greets patrons at the hotel, which has a long history of catering to film celebrities. GLOBE PHOTO / MICHAEL QUIR

Longfellow's Wayside Inn

Lee first took a job at Longfellow's Wayside Inn on weekend evenings in 1984. His role expanded from there. He was the curator by 1989 and in 1998 he is cited as the historical coordinator of the Wayside Inn in a Baltimore Sun article about the origins of *Mary Had a Little Lamb*. Lee loved the Inn and he emphasized the value of the Inn's colonial identity, including donning traditional colonial garb at various local events and festivals, some featured in local news.

Sudbury Historical Society

Lee was instrumental in gathering and curating the collections and sharing his deep knowledge and expertise with the Sudbury Historical Society, where he took on the role of Curator and Archivist shortly after leaving the Wayside Inn. His imagination led to many tours, programs, and research to celebrate Sudbury's history..

Lee researched far and wide on many, many topics, including Wayside Inn Boys School, Ford's Folly, Grinding Stone, Prohibition, King Philip War battlefields in Sudbury and many others. He was actively researching the Plympton Farm near the Wayside Inn for a book when he passed away.

The Society honored him with an Honorary Lifetime Membership for his contributions.

Lee had a gift for story telling and liked to portray Israel Loring in his Sudbury Through Time program for 3rd graders and for the April 19th muster of the troops at Town Hall, which in 1776, would have been the West Side Meetinghouse.



2005 Colonial Fair
Lee Swanson Elly Berry Bob Purrington Curt Garfield
Silk

First Parish of Sudbury, Unitarian Universalist

He was active in First Parish of Sudbury, Unitarian Universalist where he was a long time and devoted member, contributing ideas and leading fundraising tours. He served as a Trustee from 1994 to 1997 and also served as liaison to the Massachusetts Historical Commission during the 1997 Meetinghouse Preservation Project. Tolling the bell was most important to him every September 11th and for memorial services. On happier occasions, he would peal the bell, especially on the day of April 19th, when the ringing bell would “gather the troops” to march to Concord.



Architect, Bruce Langmuir, Lee and for the Mass Historical Commission.



State grant check for the Loring Parsonage to become the Sudbury History Center Carmine Gentile, Chuck Woodard, Melissa Murphy-Rodrigues, Joe Bausk, Pat Brown, Sally Hild, Stewart Hoover, Lee Swanson, Mike Barrett, Jamie Eldridge, Tom Hollocher, and Ruth Giesel

Sudbury Grange #121

Lee joined the Grange sometime in the 1990s and served as its treasurer for several years. The Grange occupied the building next to Town Hall until the building was sold to the Sudbury Foundation and the Grange disbanded. He arranged for the last possessions of the Grange to be given to the Sudbury Historical Society.



Stewart Hoover, Beth Gray-Nix and Lee



Lee with Ursula Lyons



The old tradition of Caroling on the Steps of Town Hall was brought back to life by Lee.

Lee Ford Swanson, Appraiser

Lee had some things sold through Skinner's Auction House. His background from a bill, dated March 24th, 1982, 55 Howland St. Marlborough,

APPRAISER'S BACKGROUND

12 years of public schooling, graduating in 1956 from Marlborough High School. 2 years of study at Boston University Junior College and the school of Public Relations and Communications. 1 year of study at Harvard University in English, French, and Latin.

Work

1947-1971 (24 years) Wayside Country Store, Marlborough-South Sudbury line. A family business, where I worked with my father, dealing in a general line of antique. However, specializing in early American furniture and accessories; continental furniture and fine art pieces; oriental carved objects d'art; sterling and plated ware; American paintings, books, prints and ephemera, I also performed restoration and conservation process's on a variety of types of objects.

1971-1978 President and owner of Right Stove Polish Company, Inc., producer of the oldest (90 years) black iron stove polish on the market "Williams Stove Polish."

1971-Present, President and owner of Wayside Industries. Packer and distributor of 18th century natural foods and botanicals and reproductions.

1976-Present, Warehouse Antiques, general line of antiques, collectibles, and used furniture.

1977-Present, Appraiser of personal property (antiques, fine arts, residential contents)

1980-present Trustee Marlborough Historical Society.

1982 Vice-President, SUBURBAN ANTIQUE DEALERS ASSOCIATION, serving Eastern Mass.

Left: Lee with a long stick used to wake parishioners during services.



Sudbury Through Time



Sudbury Companies of Militia and Minute

Lee was an important, long-time, active member of the Sudbury Companies of Militia and Minute (SCMM) - a re-enacting group of local people interested in exploring and re-creating the history of colonial Sudbury with particular reference to participation in the American Revolutionary War.

The group has been critically supported by the Wayside Inn since its inception and Lee's association with the Inn gave him an important role as a facilitator and liaison to the SCMM. Having given the Wayside Store's flintlock musket to the Inn, he would carry a pitchfork at many of the re-enactments and parades - always in 18th century clothing.



He provided accurate information related to the history of the re-enactments and the people involved. He knew historic people's names, occupations and any military activity during the Revolution. He gave slide presentations to the group which were popular for their historic detail and dramatic overtones.

He originated the tradition of ringing the bell of the First Parish Church early in the morning of April 19th. This helps to produce a colonial era atmosphere in the pre-dawn light which accompanies the sound of musket volleys and drums. In later years he would also portray the role of a minister who gives a benediction to the departing troops, to prepare them for their fate at the North Bridge.



Lee with soldiers collecting for Toys for Tots during the Historical Society Holiday party at the Hosmer House.

Service to the Town of Sudbury

Lee served the Town of Sudbury as Town Historian from 2012-2019 and served on the 375th anniversary planning committee in 2013 and 2014.

Lee's first posting to a Town committee was on the Committee for the Preservation and Management of Town Documents starting in 1994. He became the committee chair in 1996 and served until the committee was disbanded in 2007. He then served on the Historic Districts Commission from 2007 until 2019.

Lee worked on the 2006 Sudbury Reconnaissance Report and he appears in Town records as an Emergency Inspector. Lee was well known and well liked in the Town Clerk's office.

Town Historian Annual Report 2012

My name is Lee Swanson, and I was appointed last year by the Selectmen. I have a unique perspective on Sudbury's History, recent and ancient. My parents, Edna and Milton Swanson, purchased the closed empty 'General Store' from the heirs of Henry Ford in 1947. The store was just over the Sudbury line in Marlborough on Route 20, and was closed by Mr. Ford in 1938. My parents reopened it as the Wayside Country Store in September 1947 and stocked it with everything a country store needed as of 1910. It was an almost immediate success, and still survives today, although my parents sold it in 1971.

The reopened Country Store attracted people from all walks of life, and our first customer was Jimmy Cagney! We sold real penny candy, and some items were even 3 for a penny! Vermont cheddar cheese was two years old and only 79 cents a pound. In a couple of years we aged it ourselves, and kept an inventory of two tons of different kinds of cheeses. On most Sundays, the closest a customer could get to the store was parking a quarter mile away.

I was nine years old, and worked on opening day, and every available non-school day. It was a great education as I served the public, and met the people who turned out to be Sudbury residents who were big supporters of the store. I talked with Sudbury people who helped make Sudbury history over the past 100 years; or as we would say, I heard it from the "Horse's Mouth."

Longfellow's Wayside Inn used to send down interesting guests to the store. I met them, and heard their stories. You never knew who you were waiting on. Later I worked at the Wayside Inn, and became Curator, then Archivist, and was the spokesman for the Inn.



Regarding current Sudbury history, this is a reminder that the 375th Anniversary of the founding and incorporation of the Town of Sudbury starts this year in Wayland in June (the original Sudbury). The Sudbury Celebrates 375/Sudbury Day Committee is working with them. However, we're celebrating the anniversary in 2014. Go to <http://sudbury.ma.us/departments/Sudbury375/> to find out more.

The Town Historian can be reached by email at: historian@sudbury.ma.us.



Lee showing off the newly printed map: Sudbury and Maynard, 1875 Beers Atlas of Middlesex County

In 2013 Lee was the Grand Marshall of the Sudbury July 4th parade.

An honor bestowed upon him by the Sudbury Chamber of Commerce.

Meet your neighbor: Lee Swanson

Sudbury Town Crier, Thursday, January 8, 2015

AGE: 76

CAREER: Grew up in the family businesses at the Wayside Country Store in Marlborough, which my parents had purchased as an empty building in 1947 from Henry and Clara Ford. From nothing the main business was built up to become world famous by 1956. We would get mail delivered, addressed just to the “Country Store, Massachusetts” or other similar addresses. Our products were on the Jack Parr Show, the Today Show, etc. We would have six bus loads a day, plus regular customers; you never knew who you were waiting on, Stage & Screen, one moment, the next it was a busload of ranchers, oil men, rodeo stars, circus stars, etc. My father was always creating separate businesses spun off from the basic. Everything from Invisible Fish, to Wholesale-Country Store & Health Food suppliers, and branch Country Stores in Rockport & Hamilton, Ma.

I started in the antique business at age 9 at our Country Store, worked for Rex Trailer at WBZ-TV in production. Owned the wholesale Country Store & Health Food business, purchased a stove polish company in 1971 and became the Stove Polish King by 1975. Started at the Wayside Inn in 1984 and became Curator, then created the Wayside Inn Archives. I left the inn in 2000 and have been Curator/Archivist of the Sudbury Historical Society since. I am now the Town Historian.

HOBBIES: Archaeology, reading, dog training, archival work, conservation of art; Native American sites, Sudbury history, and history of the land in this area.

Who do you consider family?

My two sisters (adopted) Jean Swanson Soda and Mo Ching Yip, both are world travelers, and are presently in North Carolina and San Francisco. Plus Sparky my new silky terrier, friends within the Sudbury Historical Society, and the Sudbury Grange (where I am Treasurer), the First Parish of Sudbury, and my Prius!

Where did you grow up and go to school?

In Wakefield and Melrose, Massachusetts. Then Marlborough schools. Our Country Store was actually in Marlborough, but Henry Ford listed it as South Sudbury, as we did too, along with the telephone listing. I could have gone to the Sudbury schools, but it would have cost my father \$150 a year to have the school bus stop for me.





Tell us about an interesting experience you had.

I once sat in (1957) the BUSPRC screening room, when I went to BU, and was waiting alone for a Russian film to be screened - "Battleship Potemkin" by Sergei M. Eisenstein - when about six African American students came and sat down and included me in their conversations about the upcoming film. One said that they were waiting for a friend to come in, who was interested in the famous Odessa Steps scene. A man came in and was introduced as Dr. King and he sat down and the film began. After the Odessa Steps scene, he got up and

reached over and shook everyone's hand and parted with his briefcase. I went home and told my father I wanted to join Dr. King down south in his work. My father said he couldn't stop me, but I couldn't ever come back, and I would probably get killed. I stayed.

What's the most exciting place you've ever traveled to?

To Paris and a great hotel that served fresh baked croissants with homemade strawberry jam and an omelet to die for, along with fresh coffee, in my fourth floor room, while I was madly sketching the scenes from my balcony on postcards that I sent to friends.

How long have you lived in Sudbury?

I feel like I have lived in Sudbury since 1947, as most of our customers at the Wayside Country Store were from Sudbury, and they talked about Sudbury things. We had a real Cracker Barrel gathering around the Pot Belly Stove in the afternoons of locals. I knew more about Sudbury than I did Marlborough. But I didn't get to live in Sudbury until 1986, and then it has been off and on since then.

If you use the senior center, what is your favorite activity or program?

Eating and breaking bread with friends at the various fundraisers.



Lee with Terry Keeney

Anything else you would like to share?

Sudbury has a rich history, and we are learning something new all the time about its history. The Native American part of our history is the least explored but may be even richer than the colonial. It is harder to decipher, but the legacy is written in stone, and may be under our feet, but certainly visible when you are aware.

What advice can you offer our readers?

Stay in Sudbury, support the town, go to Town Meetings, meet your neighbors, and subscribe to the Sudbury Town Crier.

Tour Guide

Lee speaking about the Nobscot Reservation History for the 2008 purchase of the conservation restriction, featuring the grinding stone, smallpox burial ground, Gen. John Nixon's homestead and more.



Nobscot Hill was in a corn-growing area. Native Americans ground their corn at grinding stones like this one which were worn deep and smooth after years of use

Lee loved bringing people to the Native American sites in Sudbury, such as the grinding stones and Tantamous's collapsed cave below the summit of Nobscot Hill. He also would guide some to sacred sites with the promise that they would not publicize the information.

Musketahquid Neighbor

Lee lived at Musketahquid from 2007 until the time of his death. He was a good neighbor and well liked. He served on the Board there and organized activities, for example renting movies and making popcorn for Movie Night. He would bring the movie and the popcorn. He helped many of his neighbors and they certainly helped him in the later years. Thank you!





North Billerica Dam Tour - the dam that causes the flooding of the Great Meadows

Ghost Tour in King Philips Woods, for First Parish
Jan Hardenbergh, Sherri Cline, Lee and Philip Ralli



Ford's Folly with Debbie Keeney



At the Community Grinding Stone on Green Hill



Lee heading to the Native sites - photo Bob Maier





Lee lived and breathed the history of Sudbury and loved to share his knowledge.