

BERNARD KEELER LEE, JR.



1827-1865

Born: Jul. 13, 1827 in Canandaigua, Ontario, NY

Died: Jan. 8, 1865 at sea, enroute from NY to Hilton Head, SC

Appointment(s):

U.S. Department of Treasury
Superintendent of Contrabands
Port Royal, Hilton Head Island, SC
Nov. 1861

Hilton Head Island, SC
Established 1st school for freedmen on HHI
Jan. 1862

U.S. War Department
U.S. Postmaster
Port Royal – Hilton Head Island, SC
Mar. 30, 1863

Bernard Jr. was born July 13, 1827 in Canandaigua, Ontario, New York to Bernard K. Lee (1801-1864) and Abigail Holden (1805-1865). Lee married Harriet Kellogg on October 15, 1850 in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. Harriet was born about 1828 and died in March 1859, only 31 years old after having given birth to one son and one daughter. Less than two years after she died, Bernard headed to the Sea Islands to be part of the work with the freedmen.

He was appointed as the Superintendent of Contrabands on Hilton Head Island in November 1861 by Captain Rufus Saxton, Chief Quartermaster of the Expeditionary Force.¹ With approval of Saxton, he opened what was the first known school for former slaves on Hilton Head Island at the end of January 1862.² There is some controversy as to which school came first: Lee's or Peck's. But Solomon Peck's school for blacks was established January 8, 1862 in Beaufort, SC, which would mean that Lee's school was still the first on Hilton Head Island. Bernard Lee was the sole teacher at his school

¹ Webster, Laura Josephine. "The Operation of the Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina". *Smith College Studies in History Quarterly*, Vol 1, Issue 2. Northampton, Mass: Smith College, p 70. <https://books.google.com>.

² Taylor, J.A. "Educational Forces at Work" in *The Journal of Negro History*. Vol 9, No 3 July 1924, p 322. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2713746>.

- Rose, Willie Lee. *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999, c. 1964., p 203.

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at the beginning. Bernard K. Lee Jr. lived in Port Royal, Beaufort Co., South Carolina when he was appointed as Postmaster of Port Royal, SC on March 30, 1863.³

On a return trip back north, Mr. Lee married a young Helen Amelia Dyer on December 6, 1864, shortly before his planned return to Hilton Head. He was 37, seventeen years older than she was. Unfortunately, Bernard and his new wife both drowned January 8, 1865 at sea on the steamship 'Melville' enroute from New York to Hilton Head, SC.⁴ The *New York Times* headline on page 8 of January 13, 1865 declared:

*AWFUL MARINE DISASTER; Foundering of the Port Royal, S.C., Steam Packet Melville. Only Four Survivors Known to be Saved Out of Eighty-one Souls on Board.*⁵

In the 'Report of the Secretary of the Treasury on the State of the Finances for the Year 1865' introduced into the 39th Congress House of Representatives, the following official record of the disaster is given:

On the night of January 8, 1865, the Jno. V. Melville, on her passage from New York to Port Royal, it being her second day out from port, encountered a heavy gale, was struck by a heavy sea, which stove in the starboard bow, flooded the forward cabin and broke away the water-tight bulkhead, forward of the engine, and putting out the fires. The engineer reporting the same, a general rush was made by the passengers for the boats, filling them to such an extent as to break away the davits and light rail on the upper deck, by which a large number of persons were precipitated in the water and drowned. The steamer remained afloat about two hours, and then sunk, going down head-foremost, carrying with her all except the mate, third assistant engineer and two passengers, who were saved. Fifty-three passengers and twenty-three of the crew were lost.⁶

³ U.S. Department of War. Annual Reports of the War Department, Vol 1. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1869, p 505. <https://books.google.com>,

- Ancestry.com *US, Appointments of US Postmasters, 1832-1971*, 2010.

⁴ Duyckinck, Evert A. National History of the War for the Union, Civil, Military and Naval, Vol II. NY: Johnson, Fry and Company, 1861, p 119. <https://books.google.com>.

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⁵ *The New York Times*. "Awful Marine Disaster". January 13, 1865, p 8.

⁶ 39th Congress, 1st Session. House of Representatives. Ex.Doc.No 3.

"Report of the Secretary of the Treasury of the State of Finances for the Year 1865". Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1865. P 212.

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Although Bernard and his second wife were lost at sea, there is a tombstone marker for him next to his first wife, Harriet Kellogg in the West Galway Cemetery in West Galway, Fulton County, New York.⁷

Read more about the 'Melville' disaster at this link:

https://books.google.com/books?g=id=uP1FAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA3138dpg=PA3138&rdq=Barnard+K+Lee+Hilton+Head&source=bl&ots=u_B7JMeIzK&sig=569SvHQNunMSsC-Eukn4ri8x8Y&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjMpv2Yte3ahVMtIMKHcqqBwoQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=Barnard%20K.%20Lee%20Hilton%20Head&f=false

⁷ Findagrave.com Memorial ID: 27832078 created 26 Jun 2008 by Thomas Dunne.