

CRAWFISH SPRING

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Lee and Gordon's Mills is located on the west side of West Chickamauga Creek approximately two miles to the northeast of the town of Chickamauga, Georgia. It is at the end of Red Belt Road off Gordon's Mill Terrace. The area appears on the Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia/Tennessee quadrangle of the U. S. Geological Survey maps.



Wartime view of Lee and Gordon's Mills

James Gordon, one of the largest landowners in the area, developed the site of an earlier mill about two miles to the northeast of Crawfish Springs, on the west bank of West Chickamauga Creek, in 1857. This corn mill was a large two-story white frame structure. He also erected a water-powered saw mill nearby. This was an ideal location, being at the point where the LaFayette Road crossed West Chickamauga Creek. Gordon also established a general store at the mills for the use of farmers in the surrounding area. There was a nearby blacksmith shop, and the stage and mail passed each week. The mills became a gathering place and social center for the community. Gordon entered into a partnership with his son-in-law, James Morgan Lee, who, by 1860, saw to the actual running of the mills. James Lee's house stood on top of a rise of ground to the west of the mill.

When the Confederate Army of Tennessee withdrew from Chattanooga on September 6, 1863, most of the men marched through this area on the LaFayette Road. The division in Polk's Corps that was commanded by General Thomas Hindman camped for some time around the mill. General Braxton Bragg also made his headquarters in the area. Since most of his dispatches are headed "Snow Hill," it can be assumed that he occupied Clarissa Hunt's house. It was here that he formulated his plans for the abortive strike against the Federal advance at Davis' Crossroads in McLemore's Cove on September 9 and 10. Bragg moved his headquarters to LaFayette at dusk on September 10, where he thought he could better direct operations in McLemore's Cove. A cavalry division, commanded by General Frank C. Armstrong, was left there in place at the mill.

On the afternoon of September 10, some of the Federal soldiers in General Thomas J. Wood's command captured a runaway slave. This "contraband," as escaped slaves were called by Federal soldiers at the time, was interrogated by General Wood. The slave gave an accurate account of his observations, stating that a sizable portion of the Confederate Army, along with its commander, Braxton Bragg, were at Lee and Gordon's Mills. Wood was highly skeptical of the slave's story, but mentioned it in a report to General Rosecrans. The Federal commander responded at 1 a.m. on September 11th by

"As soon as the head of his column came within range," Captain George Estep, commanding the 8th Indiana Battery, stated, "I ordered one section to commence firing. I could not, in consequence of the timber in front of the banks of the river and the heavy clouds of dust, discover the effect of the fire ... He was compelled to file his troops to the right and move off the road."

"At about 1 p.m.," General Wood stated "a force, apparently about a brigade of four regiments, emerged from the wood on the southern side of the creek, nearly opposite the center of my position, apparently with the intention of forcing a passage at the ford near the mills. A few well directed shots from Bradley's battery soon forced him to relinquish this design and seek the shelter of the woods. The enemy continued to hover in my front all afternoon."

"September 18, our last day at the mill, was full of excitement," Lieutenant-Colonel Wilbur F. Hindman, in Wood's Division, noted. "In the morning a rebel battery opened viciously upon our pickets but were soon silenced by a few well directed shots ... The brigade formed in line at the breastworks and remained all day, the men being permitted to retire a short distance to the rear, one third at a time, for their meals. Firing at the front was almost without cessation. As darkness came on we were ordered to spend the night in the entrenchments."

"The right wing went into an open field," John J. Hight, 58th Indiana Infantry Regiment, later wrote, "near the bank of the mill pond. The left wing took up a position in the edge of the timber as flankers. The enemy was reported to be approaching in force."

The Confederate force moving on Lee and Gordon Mills was General Thomas Hindman's Division that had reached the John S. Henderson plantation on the LaFayette Road. General Leonidas Polk, the corps commander, was also present, and established his headquarters in the Henderson house. To enable General Polk to communicate with the rest of the army, a courier station was also established.

Hindman's advance brigades, led by Generals Zachariah Deas and Arthur M. Manigault, had been marching much of the previous night down the LaFayette road toward the Federal position. "On the 18th at 8 o'clock A.M.," General Manigault later wrote, "we reached the vicinity of Lee and Gordon's Mills ... It was well known that no great distance separated us from our foes, still we were not a little surprised when three or four rifle shots whizzed over our heads, or struck near the road on which we were marching. Without paying much regard to them, for the stream separated us, we moved on until near the mills ... When about 1 mile from Lee and Gordon's Mills, on Chickamauga Creek, the enemy opening on our column while on the march from a battery on the opposite side, we were ordered to form a line of battle fronting the enemy's position, which threw my command, the right resting on the road, obliquely across an open field, our front being covered by skirmishers deployed from each regiment ... Here the men were ordered to lie down to avoid the fire of the enemy's artillery, which had begun to open our lines, causing a loss of 6 men in the Tenth and Nineteenth South Carolina. This position was afterward changed, in

Throughout the morning and early afternoon of September 20, in spite of the major battle raging a short distance to the north, the area around Lee and Gordon's Mills remained relatively quiet. The calm was broken about 3:00 p.m. when Confederate General Joseph Wheeler's cavalry began advancing toward the mills. Facing the Confederates were two Federal cavalry brigades from the command of General Robert Mitchell. General Mitchell had been ordered to protect "at all hazards" the Federal hospitals and wagon trains at Crawfish Springs, less than two miles west of Lee and Gordon's Mills. Most of Wheeler's cavalymen, dismounted, forded the creek north of the mill. The 4th Alabama Cavalry Regiment, on the extreme left of Wheeler's line, waded the waist-deep stream just below the mill dam.

John A. Wyeth, a member of the 4th Alabama Cavalry Regiment, described the crossing. "We moved along the easterly bank of the Chickamauga, and, although we ran our horses all the way, we lost valuable time before we dismounted to advance on foot at Lee & Gordon's Mill ... As we began the advance our regiment was on the extreme left of our line, and when we struck the Chickamauga we waded the stream just below the Lee and Gordon mill dam. Hoping to get over dry, a number of us started to run across the dam; but an officer shouted: 'Get off! They're going to rake you with grapeshot,' and we leaped into the water like so many bull frogs. Where I waded it was not quite waist-deep. We learned in a few minutes that we could have gone over the dam dry-shod and in perfect safety. Down near the water's edge we reformed our line, and as we climbed the bank to the crest of the ridge in our front every one was alert and at great tension."

The Confederate cavalymen who crossed the creek north of the mill had a more difficult time. "Having dismounted," a member of the 4th Tennessee Cavalry Regiment wrote, "we moved down the road to the Chickamauga in column. Forging the stream near the mill, we formed a line of battle on the opposite bank in the edge of a low, level beech wood, and placing our skirmishers a short distance in front, advanced through the woods. The enemy knew we were coming, and kept up an incessant shelling of the woods, some of the men being injured by limbs of trees torn off by the cannon balls. We had advanced but a short distance before the skirmishers became hotly engaged, which was the signal for a rapid movement, and we swept through the woods driving the enemy before us. They rallied at a fence in the edge of the woods and delivered an effective volley and fell back across a little field to a new line behind a fence and on the edge of another woodland along an eminence where their artillery was planted. As our line emerged from the woods into the open space, this battery, shotted with grape, and the line behind the fence armed with seven-shooting rifles, opened upon us and for a time a perfect hail storm of deadly missiles filled the air. Being commanded to lie down, we did so for a few minutes, and then arose and charged across the field. Just here we sustained our heaviest loss and in a few moments of time. Our recollection is that the Fourth Tennessee had forty men shot down as we arose from the ground. As we rushed across the field, the line at the fence broke, and as they ran off many were killed and wounded. Quite a squad of them surrendered in a body. We were struck here with the gallantry of a Federal

ordering a reconnaissance in force toward the mills. General Charles G. Harker's Brigade was assigned to this mission.

General Harker's men moved out of Rossville, marching south on the LaFayette Road. This movement was noted by scouts from Armstrong's command at Lee and Gordon's Mills. Harker's soldiers had passed about three quarters of a mile south of Rossville Gap when they encountered the Confederate cavalry near Cloud's Store. During the ensuing skirmish the Federals captured a mortally wounded Confederate. The dying cavalryman confirmed the story told by the slave that there was a strong Confederate presence at the Mills. Concerned about avoiding "a sudden encounter with superior force," Harker moved south with caution. When he was within about two and a half miles of the mill, a civilian informed him that the Confederate Infantry occupying the mill area "had left sometime in the night or early in the morning."

General Frank G. Armstrong, commanding the cavalry at Lee and Gordon's Mills, informed Bragg's headquarters in LaFayette of the steady advance of the Federal troops. Noting that his artillery was "too small to be of much service" and that the hills on the east side of the creek commanded the ground on the western side, Armstrong withdrew his forces around 4:30 p.m. across the creek to a stand of timber about a half mile east of the mills. Harker's Federals moved into position near the mill at that time. After placing a "strong cordon of outposts and pickets" along the western side of the creek, Harker allowed his men to rest and make coffee. During this break, some of the soldiers explored the buildings around the mill complex. Colonel Emerson Opdyke, 125th Ohio Infantry Regiment, later mentioned in a letter to his wife that "the mills here are good and there is a large amount of wheat stored but the rebels destroyed the machinery." Around 6 p.m. on the 11th, Harker received a dispatch from General Wood telling him to hold the position.

General Wood arrived with the rest of the division around 8:30 that evening. Just across the creek from the mills, Wood could see large numbers of Confederate campfires. "Their lights," he later stated, "reflected over a wide section of the horizon, [and] told [me] that the foe was present in considerable force. The next morning, on September 11, Wood hoped to push across the creek, but thick fog and smoke made it impossible for him to see further than a hundred yards. In spite of the problem with visibility, Harker led his brigade across the creek, and when he returned to the mills claimed to have driven the Confederate cavalrymen eastward for a mile and a half.

Wood's Division was joined at Lee and Gordon's Mills on September 12th by the other two divisions of General Thomas L. Crittenden's 21st Federal Army Corps. The divisions under General John M. Palmer and Horatio Van Cleve took up positions north of the mills, while Wood's brigades remained directly on the site. The 3rd Wisconsin Artillery Battery also arrived at the mills that afternoon. With orders from General Rosecrans on September 13th directing him "to try stoutly to maintain the position at Gordon's Mills, but if attacked by a superior force, to fall back slowly, resisting stoutly, to Rossville," General Wood "resolved to make a most stubborn resistance." Wood directed his men to build log breastworks along the edge of West Chickamauga Creek and across both flanks of the division. "I took advantage of the creek, a very strong defensible feature ..." he stated, "and barricaded my entire front and flanks strongly."

The Confederate high command was well aware of this Federal build-up. "On the morning of the 13th," General Daniel H. Hill stated, "all the troops except my two divisions were moved up to

order to bring our right nearer to General Deas' left, whose brigade extended beyond me to the right."

"Here line of battle was formed," reported Colonel J. G. Coltart, commander of the 50th Alabama Infantry Regiment, "and the Fiftieth Alabama Regiment ordered to support Dent's battery, which was put in position some distance in front. The battery was placed near a house on the left of the road [probably the Clarissa Hunt house], the regiment in rear slightly protected by the brow of the hill. After exchanging a few rounds with our battery the enemy retired. I had 1 man slightly wounded in the hand by a fragment of a shell from the enemy's guns. The brigade was now advanced to the hill immediately upon the Chickamauga Creek, where I rejoined it with my regiment."

"We formed our line of battle, facing the creek, a few hundred yards from the right bank," Colonel John C. Reid, commanding the 18th Alabama Infantry Regiment in Manigault's Brigade, reported, "the enemy occupying the right bank and playing on us heavily with his batteries; but, owing to the configuration of the ground, did us little damage, wounding only 1 man."

"I formed the regiment in line of battle south of Chickamauga Creek," Major John N. Slaughter, 34th Alabama Infantry Regiment, wrote, "half a mile northwest of Mrs. Hunt's residence in a field. By orders from the brigadier-general commanding, I threw out as skirmishers Companies E and H ... I was ordered to conform to the movements of the Twenty-eighth Alabama Regiment on my right. My command remained in this position two or three hours, when it marched by the right flank and formed line of battle; [and] retired 150 yards from the Twenty-eighth Alabama Regiment to avoid the fire of the enemy's artillery which swept the field in our front. In this position it rested upon arms for the night."

On the afternoon of September 18, General James A. Garfield, Rosecrans' Chief of Staff, visited the mill. A member of his cavalry escort, Charles H. Kirk, of the 15th Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment, later wrote: "In the afternoon I went with General Garfield, Chief of Staff, to Lee & Gordon's Mills on the Chickamauga River. While we were dismounted and the General was talking to General Sheridan [this may have actually been General Wood] I was looking around to see what the place was like. The rebel sharpshooters were annoying a battery that was posted above the mill. Opposite there was a field about 500 yards long and 300 yards wide. On the farther end and two sides were thick woods, the ground being covered with underbrush so dense that you could not see men in it. There was a pile of rails about 100 yards from the end of the field next to the woods and about centrally located from the sides. While standing there I noticed a man run out of the woods to the rail pile, then another, and another, until six or seven of them reached it, and then opened up pretty lively on the battery. The captain trained a gun on the rails. The first shot went over; the next struck the pile fairly in the center, the end being next to us. It threw the rails in every direction and our boys cheered lustily. Out of the six or seven men, I only saw two run away."

Throughout the afternoon artillery duel, Manigault had his men lying on the ground; Deas undoubtedly took the same precaution. Because of the undulating nature of the terrain on the eastern side of West Chickamauga Creek, the Federal artillery shells did little damage to the Confederates. Many of the Federal shells, one Confederate officer, observed, passed over the heads of the prone infantrymen and burst in the rear.

By dawn on September 19, Confederate

officer. He was on horseback, and, with drawn saber, was attempting to hold his men to their position. He was killed and his body fell into our hands. Papers upon his person indicated that he was a colonel of a Pennsylvania regiment. We pursued a half mile further, and ... drove them beyond Crawfish Spring ... We have learned since that we were fighting the division of General George Crook. Both sides lost quite a number in killed and wounded. Where a stand was made, they lay thick upon the ground. The line of attack for a mile was well defined [by bodies]. But, really, though we gained the fight, our loss probably was as great as theirs."

After several hours of sustained skirmishing, Wheelers men pushed on the edge of Crawfish Springs. There they captured the Federal hospitals, a large number of wounded Federal prisoners and a number of ordnance wagons. "After detailing a guard to look after the captured," the 4th Tennessee Cavalryman continued, "the balance of the command formed a line and were marched back to our horses. As we passed back to re-cross the Chickamauga the road was full of ambulances and litters bearing off the killed and wounded. Here was presented that other phase of the grim-visaged war, sickening to think about; friends and comrades dead and dying who a few hours before were full of life and soldierly enthusiasm; men, with their pale, ashy countenances turned toward the skies. Such scenes dissipate the excitement the advance creates. A friend who was mortally wounded recognized us as we passed, and seeming to want to say something, we stopped and took his hand. Pressing it warmly and fixing his glassy eyes upon us he said: 'Let my people at home know that I died like a true soldier.' He died that night, and his body still rests somewhere on the field his valor helped to win ... We have seen paintings depicting the horrors of the battlefield, and which we supposed were overdrawn; but this idea was dispelled at Chickamauga, and we appreciate the fact now that the imagination cannot always do it justice."

Although the fighting around Lee and Gordon's Mills was over, soldiers continued to occupy the area for some time. Following the Confederate defeat on Missionary Ridge, the area around the mills became the winter quarters camp for the Federal troops under Colonel Daniel McCook. Members of the 86th Illinois Regiment in McCook's command who were Masons used the second floor of the mill as a Masonic Lodge at this time. On April 23, 1864, Colonel McCook was advanced to the third degree of the Order in a Masonic ceremony at the mill. McCook's men left their camps around the mill on May 3, 1864, going to join Sherman for the Georgia campaign. Over the next several days numerous Federal commands passed near the mill on their way to join Sherman. The 58th Indiana Infantry Regiment passed on May 12. John J. High, the regimental chaplain, later wrote: "We bivouacked just before reaching the mill. The is resumed [after two hours rest] and the Chickamauga is crossed, just below the mill dam. The mill is running for the citizens, but they have little to be ground."

James Morgan Lee, Gordon's son-in-law, continued to operate the mill after the war. When it burned in 1867, Lee rebuilt the mill as the structure that currently stands on the site. Many veterans, from both armies, visited the mill in later years. One of these was the cavalryman from the 4th Tennessee Cavalry Regiment who was quoted above, who visited in 1887. "We have had a desire to visit these scenes ever since the war closed," he stated. Soldiers are rushed upon fields of battle, and hurried away without knowing anything about it, always leaving a desire to see it again. Besides, they are not in a state of mind at the time to take in the situation really as it is, and sometimes many exaggerated impressions are left. It was just twenty-four years ago, [and]

Lee and Gordon's Mills to attack Crittenden's corps isolated at this point. The attack, however, was not made." Otho F. Strahl's Brigade was sent forward that morning on the La Fayette Road toward the mill.

"Our army corps was in line of battle at 4 o'clock this a.m.," Lieutenant W. J. Colburn, with the 3rd Wisconsin Artillery, wrote in his diary on the 13th. "There had been some skirmishing this forenoon. This afternoon our Div. was ordered forward. I went with Capt. Drury as Aide de Camp. He sent me back to bring up Swallow's battery which I did & then Capt. Drury who I found in the advance line of skirmishers with our battery, He was about half way up a little hill & eighty rods from a strip of timber. He did not go more than 15 paces before he was shot through the breast. The ball lodging about inch under the skin in the back. I returned with Capt. D & remained with him the rest of the day & until he was placed in the ambulance to go to Chattanooga. The ball passed straight through his body & though he bled but very little his wound is dangerous if not mortal. I tried to find where our battery was encamped but could not."

"On the 13th," John H. Renick, 44th Indiana Infantry Regiment, stated, "Van Cleve's division crossed the Chickamauga at the Mills and advanced on the LaFayette Road to John Henderson's plantation, where a sharp skirmish ensued, the rebels shelling the whole line." Van Cleve's advance brigade passed through the advance Federal pickets and made contact with Strahl's Confederate brigade. The Federal skirmishers, supported by an artillery battery, pushed up to the front line and pushed the Confederates back for a considerable distance, before receiving orders to withdraw. Confederate losses are not known, and the Federals suffered 5 men killed or wounded.

General Horatio P. Van Cleve, commanding the Third Division in the 21st Federal Army Corps, also reported: "On the 13th ... I made a reconnaissance with my division 3 miles toward La Fayette. We met the rebel cavalry immediately after passing our picket line and with sharp skirmishing, drove them back."

Except for a brief reconnaissance conducted by General Harker with two regiments on the 14th, there was no further action of consequence until September 18. General Wood made his headquarters in James Lee's house, west of the mill, and his men remained in their fortified positions on the grounds. Between 11 a.m. and noon on the 18th Wood reported the advance of Confederate skirmishers against his right front. Confederate infantry drove Wood's pickets back to the west side of West Chickamauga Creek, but made no effort at that time to follow the Federals across the stream."

"I perceived a column of dust approaching my front on the main LaFayette Road," General Harker observed. The ground in that direction from Gordon's Mills is comparatively level for a space of a thousand yards square, and free of timber; beyond that space the timber is quite large and dense. As the head of the column debouched from the skirt of timber, I perceived something white, which I mistook for a flag of truce. I therefore sent immediate word to the pickets not to fire. I soon perceived my mistake, and as the column approached it deployed. When in effective range of my artillery, I directed the battery to open upon the enemy, and he at once gave way and sought refuge in the timber."

skirmishers had worked their way almost to the banks of West Chickamauga Creek. "Bivouacking near the road that night," General Manigault reported, "we again occupied a position near the same place, but with the lines advanced and the left thrown forward some 300 or 400 yards on the following morning, the enemy's artillery occasionally throwing a few shot in our neighborhood, but without effect, our skirmishers keeping up a steady fire with those of the enemy opposing them, suffering a small loss on their own part."

"Early on the morning of the 19th," Colonel John C. Reid, 28th Alabama Infantry Regiment, noted, "by orders from the brigadier general commanding, the regiment moved closer in to the enemy, and formed a new line a short distance from the creek and well up to their batteries, which at intervals, kept up a vigorous fire, but with little effect, Companies B and G engaging those of the enemy on the opposite shore."

"The regiment moved to the front in line of battle," Major John N. Slaughter, 34th Alabama Infantry Regiment, stated, "through [an] open field between one-quarter and a half-mile, then by the left flank into a body of woods, and formed line in support of Captain Garrity's battery, which moved up to our front."

Around 3:00 p.m. on the afternoon of September 19th, General Hindman received orders to break off the engagement at Lee and Gordon's Mills and take his division to the right where a fierce battle had been raging all day. His position was briefly occupied by General Patton Anderson's Division and then by General John C. Breckinridge. This division, including elements of the famed Kentucky "Orphan" Brigade, took up positions along the creek. "Soon after taking up the new position, I was ordered to relieve Brig. Gen. Patton Anderson's division, which was facing the enemy opposite Lee and Gordon's Mills. The troops marched rapidly, yet it was late in the afternoon before this movement was completed. The division was hardly in position, when I received an order from the general commanding the army to move to the right, cross the Chickamauga to a point farther down, and occupy a position indicated."

About the same time as Hindman was ordered to leave the area, 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon, the Federal high command ordered General Wood to vacate the position and march his division north to the main battle area. Concerned that the Confederates would be able to cross the creek after he left, Wood requested that at least a brigade be supplied to guard the crossing. General Alexander McCook, commander of the 20th Federal Army Corps, was given the responsibility for the safety of Lee and Gordon's Mills. General McCook assigned General Sheridan's Division to the site. Sheridan's men briefly skirmished with Breckinridge's Confederates across the creek before also being ordered to the north. Sheridan left General Lytle's Brigade, with a section of artillery, to guard the area.

Lytle placed the artillery at the ford and his men behind the log breastworks that Wood had constructed earlier. Fortunately for Lytle's men, Breckinridge had been withdrawn soon after their arrival. Nevertheless, the Federals had a restless night. "We lay on our arms," a member of one of the Illinois regiments wrote, "expecting to be called in any emergency, for we could plainly hear the enemy busy in preparations." Lytle's Brigade remained in the vicinity of the mill until around 3:30 a.m. on the morning of September 20th, when they moved westward beyond Crawfish Springs.

at the same hour of the day, when we last saw this portion of the field, where Harrison's brigade made their fight, yet many things were true to the impression left, and what a rush of buried memories it resurrected! The old mill, where we crossed the Chickamauga, is still there, though very much dilapidated. The woodman's axe has leveled the dense beech grove on the north side, through which we moved to the attack. A few scattering trees are still standing to indicate the character of the timber that stood upon the ground. Now it is an enclosed field, upon which is growing in a rich luxuriance 'the tall yellow corn.' We tried to follow the line of our advance and suppose we did so, from the fact that the timber cleared away, the high ground beyond; upon which the enemy's battery was located, is plainly to be seen. We imagined that we found the little hillock on the far edge of the wood land where, when we were ordered to lie down, the enemy's shot sprinkled us with gravel. We cut a cornstalk as a memento from the spot where so many of our men were shot down."

James T. Holmes, who had been at the mill as a member of the 44th Ohio Infantry Regiment with Wood's Division in 1863, came back in 1897, after the National Military Park had been established. While visiting the southern end of the battlefield, he noted: "The monuments and tablets continue on up to Lee and Gordon's Mill -- still standing -- still running, for that matter, and still owned by the Lee estate. We passed our [wartime] camp which was across the road, a little to the northwest of the mill and stopped on top of the rise of ground immediately west of the mill where the Lee house stood during the war and still stands. It was General Wood's headquarters on the night of September 18, and the General with his wife and daughter, or the latter, was there quite recently. The road ran around the hill to the left, nearer the mill, in that 'elder day.'"



Lee and Gordon Mill as it appears today.

After the death of James Lee in 1889, the mill became part of the Lee estate. For a time Tom Lee was its general manager, and then it stood idle for several years until it was purchased by the Wallace brothers in 1929. The mill was operated by the Wallace brothers until May, 1968. Once more it stood idle and neglected for several years. It was recently purchased by Frank Pierce, who rebuilt the dam and restored the mill to full operating condition. Until his recent death, Mr. Adair Brotherton, a descendant of one of the families living on the battlefield in 1863, was the general manager. The site is now controlled by the city of Chickamauga and the mill is open to the public.

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