

# SHADOWS OF LIBERTY: THE LEGACY OF THE MASSOCK MAUSOLEUM





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The Legacy of the Massock Mausoleum

Written by: Pam Broviak  
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Photos on the front and back by Pam Broviak, 2023.

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On a mild winter day in February 1946 Joseph Miknis stood facing a stone mausoleum nestled in a corner of the Lithuanian Liberty Cemetery in Spring Valley, Illinois. With a heavy heart and silent farewell, he turned knowing he had fulfilled his solemn duty to his father's family. His last cousin from his Aunt Annie's line, who like himself had made their way years ago from Lithuania to America, was now laid to rest. Joseph found it fitting that Anton Massock would now spend eternity in the mausoleum with his brothers Jacob and Peter Massock who had been interred years before.

Joseph returned to Detroit and his family taking solace in the thought the Massock brothers would finally find peace. But what Joseph could not know at the time was that Anton's death was not the end of the story and peace would remain elusive.





Two decades later an unsettling incident shook the grounds of the mausoleum. In January 1966, a group of 15 daring youths from the Spring Valley vicinity orchestrated an audacious escapade, surreptitiously breaching the mausoleum's sanctity. With impudence matched only by their audacity, they absconded with Anton's skull, leaving his casket careening to the floor of the crypt. Venturing through the darkened roads, the macabre trophy in hand, they made an impromptu decision to lay it to rest in the nearby town of Mark. However, their desecration of the tomb was discovered, and the stolen relic recovered, restoring a semblance of order to the disrupted sanctity of the mausoleum.

However, two and a half years later in September 1968, another attempt was made to desecrate Anton's body. A fire was started in the mausoleum charring his casket. Then, five months later vandals again broke into the mausoleum and pulled down either Peter or Jacob's casket on top of what remained of Anton's burned casket. It was reported that two skulls were missing due to the latest attacks. After this, State's Attorney Rudolph Comba petitioned to seal the mausoleum with concrete. In response, Judge William Wimbiscus Sr. of the Bureau County Circuit Court granted the order.

Soon after, the Massock mausoleum became the focus of local legend. People began to share stories of strange occurrences there. They talked of a "hatchet man" who prowled the area. Were these stories spread to discourage more vandalism of the cemetery and mausoleum, or was there more to this lone stone structure tucked away in an overgrown corner of a mysterious cemetery? Who really were the men interred in the Massock mausoleum?

The following story is only a brief glance at their lives. It is not meant to be a comprehensive or exhaustive telling of their tale. Yet perhaps a short remembrance of the lives of the men whose bones now lie sealed in the isolated stone tomb will help provide understanding of the mystery of the Massock mausoleum.







# Arriving in America

On 14 April 1893, the SS Lahn docked in New York City releasing a wave of anticipation and determination onto American shores. Among her passengers were Alexander Massock and Andreas Massikelis who eagerly stepped onto American soil for the first time. Both in their mid-twenties, they had made the journey along with many of their countrymen from Lithuania seeking relief from increasing repression by the Czar of Russia.

Three years later in May 1896, Alexander's younger, half-brother Jacob followed him from Lithuania to Illinois.

No.	NAME IN FULL	AGE		SEX	CALLING OR OCCUPATION	MARRIAGE		THE COUNTRY OF WHICH THEY ARE CITIZENS	NATIVE COUNTRY	LAST RESIDENCE	STATE, CITIES OF THE U. S. A.	INTENDED DESTINATION, STATE OR TERRITORY	TRANSPORT, IN TRANSIT OR INTERVING PROTRACTED VOYAGES	LOCATION OF COMPARTMENT OR SPACE OCCUPIED FORWARD, AMIDSHIP, OR AFT	NO. OF PIECES OF BAGGAGE	PORT OF EMBARKATION
		Yr.	Mos.			Real	Wife									
620	Alexander Massock	25		m	farmer	1	1		Russia	Polono.		Waukegan Ill. U. S.		Steerage Comp. III		Polono
621	Andreas Massikelis	27		m	"	1	1		"	"		"		"		"
622	Fisi Gova	22		m	laborer	1	1		"	"		"		"		"

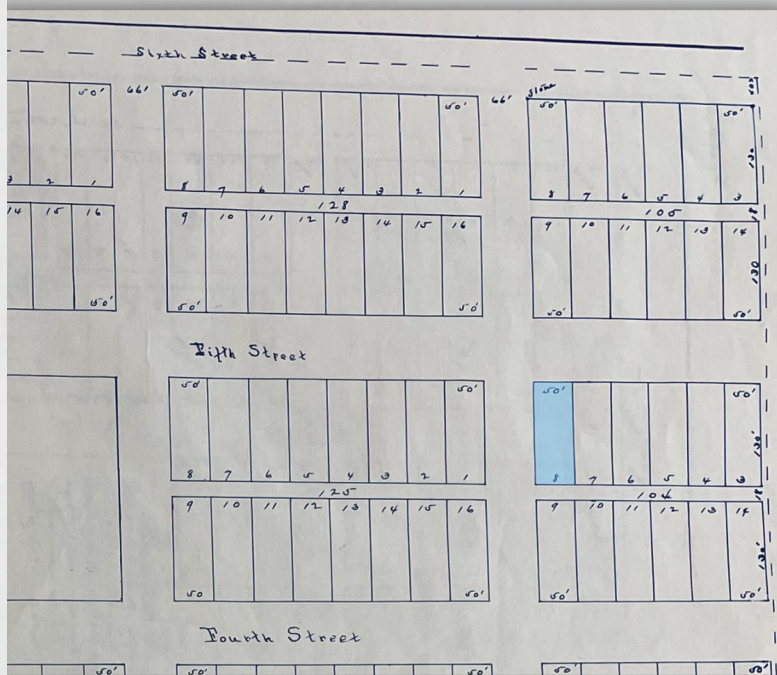
This is a clip of the ship manifest for the SS Lahn which arrived in the port of New York City on 14 April 1893. Alexander Massock is listed on the first line on this page of the manifest.





# Settling in Spring Valley

In 1898 Alexander married 19-year-old Agatha “Aggie” Dochkus. The couple settled in Spring Valley, Illinois, on a lot Alex purchased at the southeast corner of Fifth and Spalding streets. Their home was just north of St. Anne’s—a Lithuanian Catholic church constructed in 1897.



*Plat of O'Biern's Third Addition to the city of Spring Valley, Ill. The lot highlighted in light blue shows the property purchased by Alexander Massock in 1898.*

The arrival of their first child Helen, nicknamed Ella, in 1899 marked a new chapter in their American journey. Shortly after, Alexander proudly secured his U.S. citizenship, cementing his commitment to his newfound homeland.

Their family blossomed over the following years, with the addition of daughters Annie and later a son, Frank, in 1904. Amidst these joys, they also faced the heartbreak of losing a young son at the tender age of 18 months.



*A current photo of St. Anne's Church which is now Templo Cristiano—a Protestant church. Photo by Pam Broviak, 2023.*



S. S. **Phoenicia** vessel having sailed from **Hamburg**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No. on List	NAME IN FULL	Age	Married or Single	Calling or Occupation.	Able to Read. Write.	Nationality.	Last Residence.	
No. auf der Liste	Vollständige Namens-Aufgabe	Alter	Ver-heirathet oder ledig	Stand oder Beruf.	Ob fähig zu Lesen Schreiben	Nationalität.	Letzter Wohnort.	
		Jahr & Mo. & Jahr & Mo.	Ge-schlecht					
1	Peter Bogdan	25	m	laborer	yes		Suwalk	
2	Elisabeth Jansaway	18	f	nurse	yes			
3	Jan Grgalunas	18	m	laborer	yes	Russian		
4	Anton Bobin	21	m			Russian		
5	Anton Massock	21	m					
6	Johann Stein	25	m	Saddler	yes		Storomo	
7	Elisabeth Mehta	20	f	nurse	yes		Waldyema	
8	Anna	19	f					

This is the ship manifest for the SS Phoenicia showing Anton's name on line 5. To the left of his name, there is an indication that he was detained and sent to the infirmary. Below is a photo of the building on Ellis Island Anton would have entered upon his arrival in the U.S.

## Anton joins his brothers

In Spring of 1901, Anton Massock, also a half-brother of Alex and full brother to Jacob, boarded the SS Phoenicia in Hamburg. Anton had not seen his two brothers since they left their small town of Janionys in Kaunas, Lithuania for America.

When they left, Anton had been a young teen; now he was 21 years old and intent on joining his family in the Illinois Valley.



This map from Google shows the location in Lithuania of the Massock hometown of Janionys. The family also mentioned Ramygola in documents which is a larger town to the south of Janionys.







# Massock Meat Market

Like many other enterprising immigrants, the Massock family established a store in Spring Valley. Starting as a grocery, it was later known as a meat market. The store sat along Spalding street on the southern portion of the lot where Alex and Aggie lived on Fifth street.

In the 1910 census, both Jacob and Alexander were listed working at the family business. While Alex and his family resided in Spring Valley, Jacob's exact residence posed some ambiguity. Some records suggest his presence in Ladd, while others hint at a potential residence in Cherry, supported by his lot purchase at the southeast corner of Park Ave. and Railroad Street (now N. 1st street) in 1907.

After 1911, Jacob may have lived in Spring Valley as that year he sold this lot in Cherry to his brother Alex. And by 1916 Jacob listed his address as 106 West Dakota street in Spring Valley where he worked as an undertaker.



The Sanborn map above from 1906 shows the location of the Massock home and store at the southeast corner of Fifth and Spalding.

This photo of a butcher shop taken in Amarillo, Potter County, Texas, circa 1915 helps to imagine how the Massock store may have looked during the same time period in Spring Valley.





# More family arrives

As Alex and Jacob were building up their business on Spalding street, Alex's other half siblings—Peter and Caroline Massock—back in Lithuania decided to join their family in America.

John and Walter Massock also arrived and may have been cousins or close relatives of Peter, Caroline, Anton, Jacob, and Alex. Some of the new arrivals also may have spent a short time in Spring Valley, but eventually they chose to settle in the city of Rockford.

Peter and John Massock lived for some time with Caroline and her husband William Domasky at their home in Rockford at 316 Wall street (now Salter street). Map: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Rockford, Winnebago County, Illinois. Vol. 1, p. 54, 1913. Library of Congress



This is a photo of Walter James Massock which he used for his naturalization documentation. Records do not indicate he was a brother to the Massock brothers living in Spring Valley. However, his association with the family indicates he may have been a cousin or other close relative.





# WORLD WAR I



**ARCHDUKE AND  
WIFE VICTIMS  
OF ASSASSIN**

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Heir to Throne of Austria and His  
Consort Are Murdered in  
Bosnia.

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**BOMB AND PISTOL ARE USED**

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Anarchists Make Death Sure In Two  
Attacks In Capital of Bosnia—  
Duke Slain While on Way to  
Visit Aid Injured in Earli-  
er Attempt.

In June of 1914 papers throughout the world reported the news of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne. The residents of Spring Valley, including the Massock family, most likely learned of this news from their daily paper as radios were not yet found in homes.

As world changing as this event would become, at the time this news was relegated to the second page in the Bureau county newspaper. But based on their own experiences in Lithuania, perhaps the Massock brothers understood what this could eventually lead to as over the next few years Jacob, Anton, Peter, and John tried to finalize their petitions to become U.S. citizens.

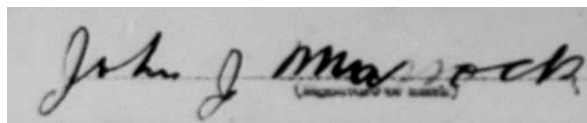
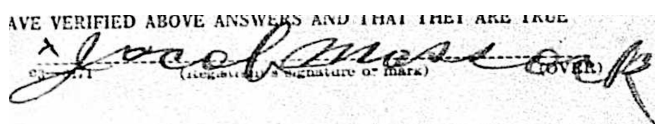
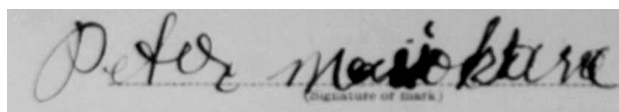


By the time they registered for the draft in 1917/1918, Anton and Jacob were doing so as naturalized citizens; John and Peter listed themselves as a “declarant” as their petitions had been denied.

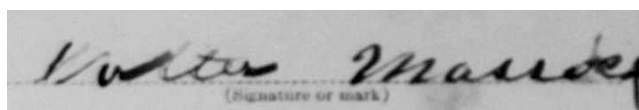
This snapshot in time conveys the following information about the male members of the Massock family who filled out World War I registration cards:

Name	Age	Address	Occupation	Physical Description
<b>Jacob Massock</b>	45	1301 First st. LaSalle, Ill.	Saloon Keeper Self-employed	No description given
<b>Anton Massock</b>	36	125 E. First st. Spring Valley, Ill.	Teamster Self-employed	Medium height Slender build Blue eyes, dark brown hair
<b>Peter Masiokas</b>	30	1510 S. Main st. Rockford, Ill.	Machinist B Z B Knitting Co.	Medium height Medium build Blue eyes, brown hair
<b>John Massock</b>	27	1510 S. Main st. Rockford, Ill.	Clerk Standard Meat Market	Medium height Stout build Blue eyes, brown hair
<b>Walter Massock</b>	21	315 Wall st. Rockford, Ill.	Machinist Cotta Gear Co.	Medium height Medium build Blue eyes, light brown hair

*Note: while no description of Jacob was entered onto his WWI registration card, his naturalization papers describe him at age 37 as a man standing 5 feet 10 inches tall weighing 210 pounds with black hair and blue eyes and a light complexion.*



Men who filled out their WWI registration cards also signed them. These signatures are from the cards noted in the table above.





# WORKING MEN

The occupations shared by the Massocks on their WWI registration cards offer insight into how they supported themselves. Among those living in the Illinois Valley, Anton worked as a teamster. His brother Jacob appeared to run a saloon in LaSalle at the northeast corner of First and Sterling streets. And Alex, who may not have been required to register due to his age, continued to run his store on Spalding street. Alex was doing well enough to eventually purchase an automobile which may have been used to enhance his grocery store business with a delivery service. By 1918, his success had allowed him to also purchase \$800 of Liberty Bonds, invest in \$1,000 of Corporation Stock in the Pioneer Fire Insurance company, and save \$6,000 in cash.

In Rockford, Walter and Peter Massock worked as machinists. And John worked as a clerk in a meat market when he registered. But within the year John quit his job and enlisted in the U.S. Army. He eventually joined Company G in the 27th Infantry and served for a time in Siberia.

*The photos below show the building at the northeast corner of First and Sterling streets in LaSalle where it seems the Massock brothers ran a saloon in the early 1900s for a short time. Photos by Pam Broviak, 2023.*





# Unexpected Loss



As peace seemed imminent in Europe, the Massock family experienced the first of many tragedies with the death on 13 October 1918, of 43-year-old Caroline Massock Domaski. She died in Rockford from dropsy—a disease associated with swelling often leading to heart failure.

Five days later her brother, 48-year-old Alex Massock, died, according to his death certificate, from the “Spanish Flu.” He was 1 of 13 in Spring Valley who succumbed within a five-day period to the pandemic raging across the nation.



*Notice to the public published in the Spring Valley Gazette on 24 October 1918, 6 days after Alex Massock died of the flu.*

## To the Public

Under the supervision of the American Red Cross and the Illinois State Board of Health, AN EMERGENCY HOSPITAL is being opened at the Township High School in Spring Valley, for the care of influenza and pneumonia patients. You may have the care and attention of your own family physician if you desire it. No charge will be made for hospital service. There is a separate ward for men and women, and trained nurses will be in charge of the work

To the women of Spring Valley:

Will you help to stamp out and control the present epidemic of influenza and pneumonia in Spring Valley and vicinity?

We need a number of women and girl helpers and attendants, to help us care for patients. Will you give up part of your time to this work? Call on Mrs. Geo. Dyer, the nurse in charge.

We need at once bed linen, cots, single beds, towels, blankets, which will be returned to owner later. We can also use any old linen, gauze and clean rags.



# THE REPOSE OF HIS SOUL



Alex Massock was buried in St. Anne's Cemetery just north of Spring Valley on 21 October 1918. His wife Aggie and children Helen, Annie, and Frank were left to mourn his death.

While both of his daughters were adults at the time of his death, his son Frank at age 14 was still a minor. Soon after his father's death, Frank appears to have moved to Rockford to live with Ben Dochkus, possibly his maternal uncle. At some point he began working as a baker.





# JACOB MASSOCK SUCCEUMBS



Around the time of Alex's death, Anton appears to have possibly moved in with his brother Jacob in the building he rented for his saloon on First street in LaSalle. However, the family would soon find themselves again impacted by world events.

At midnight on 17 January 1920, the 18th Amendment which banned alcohol became effective. That night any former alcoholic establishment had to adopt new methods of attracting customers looking for a drink. Some decided to secretly buy alcohol from bootleggers and sell it to customers in back rooms. Others such as Anton and Jacob changed over to soft drinks or were at least better than most at hiding any illegal beverages.

But Anton would not have much time left to enjoy serving patrons in his brother's saloon. Two months after the start of prohibition, Jacob developed a streptococcus infection of his mastoid bone. Whether or not this occurred due to an untreated middle ear infection is unknown but likely. Particularly as penicillin was only discovered that year and would not be available for sale for a couple more decades. So, with no antibiotics, the infection spread and caused a metastatic abscess in his knee and probably liver. On top of all that, tonsillitis flared up.

Jacob sought treatment for his condition over an 11-day time period and ended up in People's Hospital in Peru. But the infection proved too difficult for him to fight on his own. Jacob died on 18 March 1920, at the age of 48.

Jacob Massock's funeral was held in his sister-in-law Aggie Massock's home in Spring Valley and attended by the Sons of Lithuania organization. Jacob was then interred in a mausoleum in the Lithuanian Liberty Cemetery located east of Spring Valley.

## JACOB MASSOCK DIES

Jacob Massock was born in Provincia Kauno, County of Panevezio, City of Janioniu, Lithuania, and died in La Salle at 11:40 P. M., Thursday, March 18, 1920, at the age of 48 years, mastoids being the cause of his death.

Mr. Massock came to this country in 1894, settling in Ladd. Later he came to Spring Valley and was in partnership with his brother, Alex. Massock on Fifth street, in the grocery business for ten years.

Later he entered the saloon business and also conducted an undertaking establishment on Dakota street. A few years ago he moved to La Salle where he died.

The funeral was held from the home of Mrs. Alex. Massock and was attended by the Sons of Lithuania. Burial was made at the Lithuanian Liberty cemetery.

He is survived by two brothers, Anton and Peter of this city.



# ANOTHER BROTHER IS LOST



The next year, Anton purchased 40 acres of property north of Princeton. He and his brother Peter also bought property in Block 118 in LaSalle located along First street east of Joliet street. And apparently at some point, Peter Massock began running a saloon at 1521 Water street.

In the summer of 1923, during a raid, the sheriff found “moonshine” hidden behind the bar in Peter’s establishment. It is unclear if this run-in with the police encouraged him to again change professions as he was later reported working as a “meat cutter” or butcher for Halm & Amsler Brothers.

Strangely enough, a few years later Peter appeared to develop an infection similar to that experienced by his brother Jacob. On top of that, he also had interstitial nephritis or swelling around his kidneys. Like his brother he was admitted to a hospital, but perhaps because Peter was living at 342 Dakota street in Spring Valley at the time, he was taken to St. Margaret’s Hospital rather than People’s. He apparently refused to have an operation to address his condition and died on 3 December 1928. On December 6th his remains joined those of his brother Jacob in the crypt in the Lithuanian Liberty Cemetery in Spring Valley.



# TRAGEDY AND LOSS

## CONTINUE

After losing his brothers, Anton remained in Spring Valley. He continued to be involved in several land transactions over the next several years, and it is unclear where exactly he lived during this time.

Aggie Massock, Alex's widow, also remained in Spring Valley. Aggie's children had all moved away from the area and settled in Chicago. Despite the Great Depression impacting the country, the Massock children all seemed to be doing well. Aggie's daughter Helen was married to Paul Piscia, and they had one daughter. Aggie's other daughter Annie had married John Pachankis—they had two daughters. Finally, Aggie's son Frank too had married. His wife's name was Esther, and they had a baby daughter. But while it seemed her children were successfully making their own way in the world, at least for one it was about to take a tragic turn.

Frank Massock, son of Alex and Maggie, at 26 years old seemed to be doing well for himself despite having some challenges with his health. He had a wife and baby and worked in the city of Chicago as a salesman for Omaha Packing.

In November of 1930, the couple traveled back to Spring Valley to visit Frank's mother Aggie. While there, Frank asked his mother to borrow \$20 to pay for a doctor. At some point it seems his mother and wife and daughter left the house. Upon returning they found Frank had taken his own life. It was determined he had become despondent due to his ill health and used the money to buy an automatic pistol to carry out the deed. The family buried Frank three days later on 18 November 1930, in St. Anne's Cemetery near his father's grave.





# THE FINAL FAREWELL

After losing her son, Aggie seemed to spend more time away from Spring Valley often staying with her daughters in Chicago. In 1940 she lived with her daughter Annie, son-in-law John, and her three grandchildren. John was the office manager for the Chicago Park System.

Anton remained in Spring Valley, the last of the Massock brothers in the area. In 1940, he was 63 years old and living as a lodger in a household at 206 Spalding street headed by Ignatz Marena, a butcher with whom he had previously bought and sold land.

As another war engulfed the world, Anton's health began to fade. In 1945 he developed pancreatic cancer and underwent treatment for it from May through February of 1946.

Then on 1 February 1946, Anton passed away. He was in his 60s. The only close relative who stepped up to arrange for his funeral was his maternal cousin Joseph Miknis who lived in Detroit, Michigan. On 5 February 1946, Anton's remains were placed into the Massock mausoleum in the Lithuanian Liberty Cemetery in Spring Valley.





# AFTERWORD

Having grown up in the Illinois Valley, I first heard the story of “hatchet man” and visited the Massock mausoleum when I was a teenager in the 1970s. Some versions of the legend suggest the Massock brothers had a home near the cemetery, and their caretaker who murdered his wife is the hatchet man. Other versions suggest hatchet man is one of the brothers. So is hatchet man one of the brothers or a caretaker? Of course no one really seems to know.

Earlier this year, some people from the area were again talking about it on social media. One person said they would like to know more about the men in the mausoleum. It made me realize I would also like to know about them. Intrigued, I began the research to see what I could find.

As I said at the start, my research and this story is not an exhaustive study of their lives. Instead I just wanted to find out who they were and share the highlights of their lives. And once I discovered so many of them and their colleagues were butchers, it made me wonder if “hatchet man” somehow came about because an old-timer referred to them that way. Then like so many things, it all spiraled into something totally beyond the original meaning. But then again, maybe not.

Some final information I want to share for future researchers is that I could not find any of their birth records in Lithuania. Therefore I relied on more current documents to determine relationships such as siblings and cousins. Also there are alternative spellings of their name such as Masiokas. If more records are found in the future, perhaps the determinations I made will need to be revised.





LITHUANIAN  
LIBERTY CEMETERY  
INCORPORATED  
1914.