



Vol. 22, No. 6

June 2025

# The Gateway Gazette

*The Newsletter of the Lee Historical Society*

***Our unique history and blend of people defines the foundation of our Town.***

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*The Monthly Meeting of the Society will be Thursday, June 12<sup>th</sup> at the Historical Society Office, Crossway Tower, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.*



## **FROM THE EDITORS**

The change in the weather has brought us birds, blooms, the Memorial Day Parade, and the snow birds are returning to the Berkshires so the summer season has officially started. With the warmer weather the calendar is filling up with more and more activities, some of them even happening outdoors! Make sure to enjoy the weather (even if it seems to be raining every other day), and everything the summer brings. Farmers Markets have started up, golfers are back on the courses, campers are camping and hikers are hiking. Remember, our summers are short and winter will be with us before very long. 'Tis the season to be as active as possible before Jack Frost comes back this way!

## **A MYSTERIOUS PACKAGE**

If you are at all a follower of true crime stories you've undoubtedly heard gruesome tales of abandoned suitcases that after some time (and often after a dubious odor starts emitting from them) become the first clue in a horrible crime. Well, Lee had its own "mysterious suitcase" event in 1902, with, happily, a much less gruesome outcome.

The events start when some strangers are seen walking through South Lee and "acting strangely." Each man was carrying a heavily laden suitcase. They were seen hailing a passing wagon and having a whispered conversation with the driver, who was also never identified. The interaction resulted in one of the heavy suitcases being carried off in the wagon, and the other one being left at Hayes' livery stable to be picked up later.



The Gleaner continues the story:

"Nothing more was heard from any of the men for several days and as the suitcase stood in Hayes' livery stable it was not noticed until Mr. Hayes observed that there was a strange odor about the place. People who came in also noticed it and asked if there was anything dead in the establishment. Mr. Hayes made a thorough search but could discover nothing for some time. Meanwhile, the weather grew warmer and the effluvia stronger, and finally it could no longer be hidden but was evident that it was in the suitcase.

Mr. Hayes suspected that all was not right and called Officer Perry. The latter was all excitement the moment he got a sniff of the bag and heard the strange story connected with it. It was necessary to have witnesses and Officers Waddock and Cutting were called and also Clerk of Court, Wilson.

The officers gathered and held a council of war and it was decided to open the case, Officer Perry unfastened the straps and then paused and asked if it would be a good thing to summon Judge Casey.

The case was locked and it was finally decided to take further legal advice before breaking into it, which was accordingly done. Officer Perry was the first to put into words the horrible belief which was in the minds of the gentlemen present; he said the case evidently contained the body of a child, or possible a portion of the remains of an adult. The odor was unmistakable to the experienced officer, and in the excitement his trembling fingers could not force the lock. He ceased the effort and went about the stable trying to find something to pry it open with, and the white faced audience went to the door to take a breath of fresh air, when, one of them affirms, he noticed a freight train stop opposite the stable, and the odor was bad enough to stop several trains. Then with stout hearts they gathered and the brave constable cut into the case with his knife.

The unusual sight which met the eyes of the onlookers held them spellbound, for there, fully exposed to view, was six or seven pounds of limburger cheese."

The Gleaner does not clarify if the cheese was later claimed by its rightful owners or if the bounty was shared among the luminaries who witnessed its unveiling. Since the strangers were never identified, it can be assumed they never recovered their lost cheese.

Not only was this event notable enough to warrant a full article in the paper, it was mentioned again the following January in an article outlining the newsworthy events of the previous year.

## **REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN**

### **Charles A. Gates**



This month's Lee Veteran is thanks to Historical Society Member Ed Stanard. He shared images of both sides of an original lithograph he owns, titled "The Berkshire Boy's Return" which was published by Milton Bradley in 1865. The following information is written on the back of the image:

"The story which is so beautifully and touchingly illustrated in this picture is plainly and truthfully told in the following extract from the Springfield (Mass)

Republican, published soon after the return of the gallant Mass. 10<sup>th</sup>: -

Charles Gates, a minor son of William K. Gates, of Lee, wished to enlist, three years ago, but his aged parents objected to it. One morning he was sent to drive the cows to pasture, on his way to his work. But at night he did not come back, because he had run away and enlisted in the 10<sup>th</sup> Regiment. He remained through the three years without a furlough, and returned with the regiment, unharmed by rebel bullets. He arrived in the old pasture at home, one night last week, just at 'cow-time,' and liesurely [sic] drove up the same old cows, as if he hadn't been away for three years. His reception was a joyful one – none the less so because his coming home was a complete surprise.

This picture needs no further description to commend it to the heart of every father, mother, brother or sister in this blood-stained land – and the joy of the young man himself, as his home comes into view, is plainly depicted on his half concealed face."

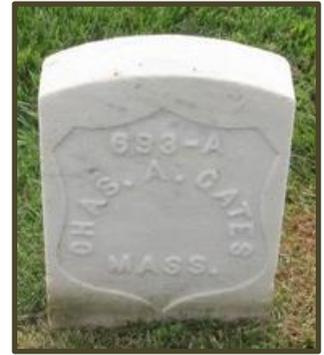
Betty Dennis covered Gates in an article from June 6, 1976. She describes Gates' story this way:

"William Gates lived on Cape Street, East Lee, where the Kenneth Bakers live today. "Bill" Gates is pictured as having been a strict parent, inherited from his Puritan ancestors. Winters – young Charlie, oldest of five children – attended school, while summers he was expected to work on the farm. He was 16 when the Civil War broke out and had taken a great interest in military affairs. He told his father he wanted to go to war, but both parents refused. As the war news gained momentum he again requested permission to enlist, but again was refused.

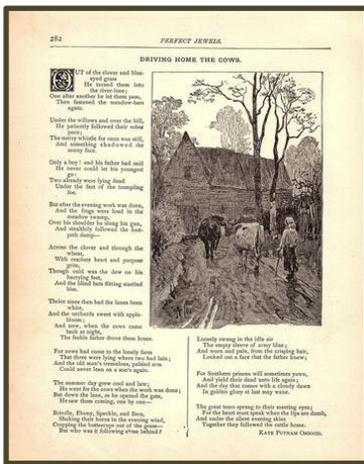
Charlie was not of an adventurous nature, but was truly a true patriot. In June, 1861 he was sent out to peel bark in the southwest corner of the farm, carrying an axe, a dinner bucket and driving their 3 cows to pasture. After putting the bars of the pasture up, he hid the ax and basket in a stone wall and headed for Becket, 9 miles away. He enlisted in the 10th Mass."

Charles A. Gates of Lee did, in fact, join Company A of the 10th Massachusetts Infantry in 1861 and fought for three years in the Civil War. The Massachusetts 10<sup>th</sup> was made up of volunteers from the Connecticut Valley and the western part of the State. Five of these companies were in existence before the Civil War broke out, and five were recruited in May and June, 1861. The regiment rendezvoused at Hampden Park in Springfield, and Henry S. Briggs, a Pittsfield officer with command experience, was made its colonel.

The 10<sup>th</sup> saw action in many of the largest and most famous battles of the Civil War, including: in 1862, the Penninsular Campaign; in 1863, Fredericksburg; in 1863, Gettysburg; in 1864, the Battle of the Wilderness; and in 1864, Spotsylvania. Charles Gates mustered out of the Army with the rest of his unit in July 1864. Gates then reenlisted with the 27<sup>th</sup> Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, another unit raised in the western counties of Massachusetts, this time by Horace C. Lee of Springfield, who became its colonel. The companies reported at Camp Reed Springfield, between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1864. The unit spent the final months of the war in North Carolina as the fighting wound down. He mustered out of the army and returned home in June of 1865.



Little is known about Gates' life after the war. He did come back to Lee from time to time to visit family, but didn't seem to live here long term. His story was well known even during his lifetime and his visits to town were noted in the newspaper. He never married and lived a fairly nomadic life, living in Springfield for a time before traveling to the west and working as a lumberman in Kansas and Washington State (among other places, surely). By 1901, because of chronic ailments acquired during the war he started living in various Veterans Care Homes from California to Virginia. He died in Hampton, Virginia in 1924.



Gate's story is often said to be the inspiration for "Driving Home the Cattle" a sentimental poem by Kate Putnam Osgood which was published in Harper's Weekly in 1884. Betty Dennis herself, at the end of her article, makes this connection. The poem loosely covers the same subject; a father who sees his son returning from the war behind a herd of cows being led home, but some details in the poem don't fit Gates' story. In the poem, the returning soldier had lost an arm during war, had spent some time in a prison camp, and had two other brothers who had also left for the war. Gates' own brother, William, asserted that Charles "passed through the campaign unwounded," and since Charles was the oldest child in the family (according to Betty Dennis), it would have been improbable for his younger brothers to have served in the war (remember, he was only 16

when he enlisted!). So, although the lithograph is based on Charles Gates of Lee we can be certain that the poem is, at best, inspired by his story, but not a true telling of it.



## LHS BULLETIN BOARD

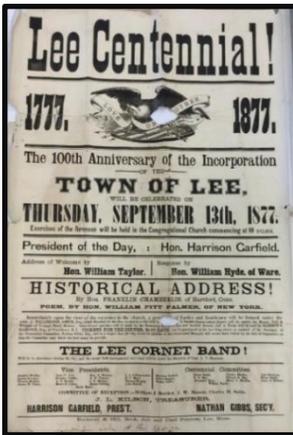
### THE LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S ANNUAL EXHIBIT: THE TURBULENT 1960'S

By popular demand, our major exhibit "Lee in the Tumultuous 1960's" will be featured at Lee Library throughout the month of July. After the sedate 1950's, came the chaotic '60's with the revolution in youth culture, the spread of drug abuse and the turmoil of a controversial war in Vietnam. If you remember that muddled decade come and relive it; if not come and learn about our troubled past. It will be free and open to the public during regular library hours.



*A photo from the 1964 LHS yearbook, recalls controversy about hair where crew cuts were viewed as traditional and long hair was rebellious.*

### LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY SPEAKER SERIES: EVERYTHING HAS A STORY!



In the most recent Lee Historical Society Speaker Series Mary Philpott passed along several stories that are stored away in the Lee Library Archives. Most important of all is the formation and purpose of the archives. The collection was started in the early days of the Lee Library Association to help preserve the history of the town, and it remains as a "living archives" to be used by researchers and others interested in Lee History to tell the story of Lee.

Mary related the story connected to the poster in the image here. The poster is for the Lee Centennial celebrations in 1877. You will notice in the middle of the image listed the "President of the Day" Harrison Garfield, who was the first library board president (and whose portrait can be seen in the reading room, in the southwest corner of the library). Besides being a valuable resource to tell us

about the Centennial Celebrations the poster has a story of its own: it was found about 10 years ago rolled up and stored behind the door in the director's office. Since its discovery it is being cared for in the archives to preserve it for future generations. Mary mentioned several such surprising discoveries of valuable historic treasures, so who knows what may be found next.

Mary outlined the scope of the archives which includes numerous photographs, all of which have been cataloged and scanned; a complete set of the Berkshire Gleaner newspaper, which has also been scanned and is available online; records from the lifetime of the library; records from the town Lee dating back to its founding; records from various organizations

that have existed in town through the years; and thematic scrapbooks covering all of these topics.

The audience was entranced by all the stories Mary related that were found in and which continue to be told by the artifacts and records stored in the archives. As if we didn't know before, Mary's talk confirmed her importance to the existence and organization of the archives, her bottomless knowledge of Lee's history and, as a result, her value as a vital resource for the history of Lee.

If you have any interest in the history of the town stop by the library reading room to access the indexes and copies of the photos in the collection among other resources. Or, from the comfort of your own home, log onto the library website, and, under the "Historical Collection" tab, access the complete collection of the Berkshire Gleaner Newspaper (spanning the years 1857 to 1944), the library's historic photography collection, and the scrapbook collection, all of which are searchable online.

## SPRING CEMETERY CLEANING



Once again a small group of intrepid volunteers risked the iffy weather and helped to clean headstones in Fairmount cemetery. We had hoped to be able to work in Foote Square, the older section of the cemetery, but because of the recent constant rain, the DPW hadn't had the chance to mow that area, making access difficult (perhaps hazardous, due to the abundance of ticks in the high grass). We instead worked in an area near where we worked before and close to a stone that Tim Schaeffer

(our cemetery cleaning guru) had already worked on restoring.



Joan Angelo cleaned the stone for Jennie Gates the daughter of George A. and Julia Gates, (no relation to Charles A. Gates mentioned earlier in this edition). The front of the stone is wonderfully elaborate, but sadly the stone is leaning due to shifting of the soil under it.



Tim Hoffman cleaned the stone for Oscar Sweet. Not only did he clean the stone, which brought out some details that couldn't be seen before, but he also did research on this civil war veteran, who will be profiled in a later newsletter.

Karen Norton and David Walker cleaned the stone for Enoch and Ann Perry. Enoch Perry was apparently a worker at the Valley Paper Mill, whose various injuries, (including to his eye, his shoulder and his knee) incurred while at work, were reported in the newspaper. It's possible he also got in trouble during Prohibition while visiting a bar, but more research is needed to fill out that story.





A few of our party were so inspired by the day's activities they went off on their own to clean stones elsewhere in the cemetery. Tom Barenski knew of a stone for a resident of Dodgetown which is in Foote Square, the older section of the cemetery. He wanted to take his new found skill and see what a difference it would make on Samuel Standly's monument. Not only is it more legible, but the decorative flower design at the top really stands out.



The Historical Society is actively working on identifying the burial locations of the earliest residents of Lee, and this is a great addition to our knowledge.



These pictures show the slow work that the D2 cleaning solution has on the stones we clean. The first image is before cleaning, the second was taken the day of cleaning, and the third was taken a year later. Although the stones look better after an initial scrub, the lichen, moss and stains on the stones continue to fade as time passes making the transformation truly dramatic.

**LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2025 MEMBERSHIP FORM (JANUARY – DECEMBER)**

Individual: \$10.00 Family: \$25.00 Supporting: \$50.00 or more Sponsor: \$100.00 or more

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Mail with Membership Fee to: Lee Historical Society, PO Box 170, Lee, MA 01238

The Society is always in search of volunteers for our various events – the more, the merrier! If you would like to assist, please check any or all of the following:

Program Set-up: \_\_\_ Provide Refreshments at Events: \_\_\_ Address Mailings: \_\_\_  
 Founders Day: March in the parade \_\_\_ Assist at our booth: \_\_\_ Gravestone Cleaning: \_\_\_

We always have room for more volunteers to assist us in so many different ways. Kathy Smith is our Membership Committee Chairperson and knows of all the different areas. If you have any questions, thoughts, suggestions, feel free to email her at [kf23Smith@yahoo.com](mailto:kf23Smith@yahoo.com).

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