

Vol. 23, No. 8



August 2026

The Gateway Gazette

The Newsletter of the Lee Historical Society

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

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The Monthly Meeting of the Society will be Thursday, August 13th at the Historical Society Office, Crossway Tower, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.



FROM THE EDITOR

It's hard to believe the summer is on its way out already. I have noticed a huge influx of out-of-staters in our area this summer, for whatever reason people from all over the country have been venturing into the Berkshires to experience our uniqueness. That leads me to believe, weather permitting, Founders Weekend will be bigger than ever this year. Founders is the Historical Society's best opportunity to get the word out about our mission, and frankly, to let people know that we exist.

In that vein, we have announcements and two calls for help relating to Founders. Please see our Bulletin Board at the end of the newsletter for details.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me, Tracie at ethere@gmail.com.

THE DEAN OF BERKSHIRE TAILORS

In the Berkshire Gleaner, November 28, 1941, an article profiling one of Lee's longtime business men begins:

"Charles G. Miller, dean of active Berkshire tailors, was surprised Wednesday when Edward S. Rogers and Carl Wurtzbach walked into his place of business on the corners of Main and Franklin streets, and presented him \$85 in bills, a dollar for each of his 85 birthdays. On the outside of a folder, containing the money, was written the following: 'Your longtime business friends and associates feel that on your 85th birthday is an opportunity to express the high respect which they feel for you. Please use this little remembrance in any way you wish to commemorate your birthday. We wish you many happy returns of the day.'"

The article goes on to detail Miller's life, noting that he was born in Texas, November 24, 1856, but taken to Germany by his parents when he was still a small child. His parents, sadly, died shortly after and he was taken in and raised by a family in Miningen, a town in the state of Thuringia, then part of the Duchy of Saxe-Meiningen, part of the North Germany Confederation (Germany has a very long and convoluted history).

Lee's "Little Tailor" learned his trade at thirteen and travelled around Germany, Russia, Austria and other countries in Europe before being compelled into national service for Germany even though he was an American citizen. While in the army he saw the German Kaiser, Wilhelm I, many times and describes the six black stallions which drew his carriage. "These stallions," Mr. Miller says, "were so well trained they never flinched at the noise of cannons nor became unmanageable at the blare of trumpets."

Following his discharge in 1885, he came to New York, and then to Lee in 1886, where he went to work for Abe Cohen, who ran a clothing store on Main Street. When Cohen's business failed, Miller went into business for himself and for a number of years was the only tailor in Lee.

On October 16, 1888, he married Mary Thomas of Lebanon Springs, NY. The couple owned a small farm on Pleasant Street (near the current location of Big Y), from which Miller walked to his store on the corner of Main and Franklin every day. The couple were the parents of four children. Mrs. Tracy W. Griffin of East Lee, Mrs. Lester P. Jones of Housatonic Street, Carl Miller of Springfield and Arthur Miller, who remained at home.

Or perhaps, as the Berkshire Eagle reported that same year in honor of Miller's 85th birthday, he was born November 24 1856 in Texas and returned to Germany with his mother after the death of his father. He served with the German army three years and came back to this country when he was 25 years old.



Charles G. Miller in his tailor shop, c.1938.
Source: Berkshire Eagle

GENTLEMEN
Desirous of improving their personal
appearance will do well to call on
Chas. Miller,
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Tailor!
And select one of those \$25 business
suits.
Fine dress suits to order, Satin Lined \$15
Also an elegant line of Overcoatings,
Sutings, Pants patterns at very
Low Prices.
CHAS. MILLER,
No. 5 Franklin St., Lee, Mass.

Ad, August 29, 1888, the
Valley Gleaner.

Or perhaps, he was born in Texas and taken back to Germany after both of his parents died, to live with a family in Frankfurt. And this time he returned to the United States when he was nineteen (never having served in the German army) and learned the tailoring trade in New York, this story being reported in the Eagle February 25, 1948, at the time of his death.

And here we have a great example of the problems encountered with the study of history and specifically when trying to trace your family' roots. You have to deal with family lore, second hand stories, rumors and exaggerations to try to come to the truth.

We know that Charles Miller was, in fact, a tailor in Lee for many years, we know who his children and grandchildren are (I'm Mrs. Lester P. Jones's [Alma], granddaughter), but we have very little idea the truth of Charles Miller's background or family before he came to Lee.

We are fairly certain he was not born in Texas. It's a personal hunch that he added that detail when he spoke to the newspapers about his story because they were profiling him in the 1940's when being of German descent would have been considered suspicious. We don't

know why he chose Texas as his supposed birth place, but our guess is that he must have known someone of German descent from Texas, there is a large German enclave around Fredericksburg, Texas, and borrowed their background because of its plausibility.

Thanks to the digitization of many genealogy related documents, we've found Charles Miller's naturalization form from 1893. There it states he was born in Miningen, Germany in 1859 (which would have made him 82 when he was gifted the 85 dollars for his birthday). The document also states he arrived in New York July 4, 1884 (a date so patriotic it also raises suspicions about its veracity), and verifies he was at the time of his naturalization working as a tailor in Lee.

From there we know nothing of his parents, their names, when or where they died, and whether or not Charles had any siblings or where they might have lived. We don't even know what his middle initial "G," as reported in the papers, stands for.

Linda Buttery, former co-editor of this newsletter, more than once expressed frustration to me about how little what we think we know about the past can actually be verified as the truth. My only answer to that is we try our best, find trusted sources and verify as much as possible and from there we have to realize what we think know of the past can only be part of the story. If only we had a way to speak to those who have passed, to learn the truth about their lives, and to find out what they were actually thinking at the time. This lack makes the study of history much more of an art than a science.

In this age a well dressed man denotes prosperity. A prosperous man means a successful one. Let us dress you up so you'll look prosperous.
CHARLES MILLER.

Ad, Valley Gleaner, Aug 6, 1902.

Smart Dressers

Will find our Spring Suits and Overcoatings Absolutely Correct in Style and Quality. Our Prices are low as is consistent with good workmanship.

Charles Miller,
Custom Tailor, Lee.

Ad, Berkshire Gleaner April 1, 1903.

REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN
Colonel Helm George Wilde (1907-1998)



Lt. Helm George Hyde at West Point, 1929.

Helm George Wilde was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on October 8, 1907, the son of George William and Agnes Killeen Wilde. He graduated from Winona High School in Minnesota and after starting a pre-med program at St. Mary's College in Winona he was appointed to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point. He graduated the academy with the rank of Lieutenant in 1929, and took a vacation tour of Europe during his furlough.

Three years after graduating from the military academy, Wilde qualified as an alternate for the US Olympic team for the pentathlon in the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles. The events for the pentathlon included fencing, steeple chase on horseback, pistol shooting, swimming and the 4,000-meter run. The entire team that year was made up of graduates of West Point. Although he traveled to Los Angeles for the games, because none of his fellow teammates dropped out, Wilde did not compete.

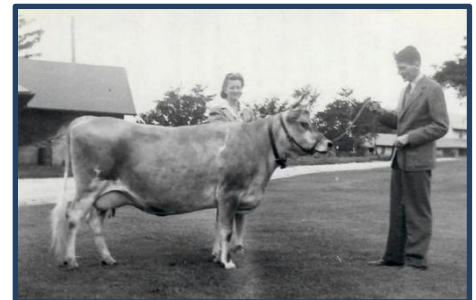
Later that same year, he married the former Marjorie Lila Field of New York City. Before her marriage, Mrs. Wilde lived half the year in New York City, where she was born, and the other half at High Lawn Farm in Lee, which was owned by her parents, William Osgood and Lila Vanderbilt Sloane Field.

The Wildes purchased Highlawn Farm Mrs. Field's estate after her death in 1934. George managed the business side of the farm and Marjorie was the facility's herd manager, overseeing most of the day-to-day work at the farm. Wilde resigned from the army that same year with the rank of lieutenant, and enrolled at Harvard Business School. The Wildes lived in Cambridge until 1934, when he graduated from Harvard with a master of science degree.

In 1940, he joined the War Production Board in Washington as an administrative assistant. During World War II, Wilde re-entered the Army and earned the rank of colonel after serving in the Signal Corps. He served as executive officer for the Procurement and Distribution Service of the signal corps, a position which took him to Africa, Italy, England and France. He received the Legion of Merit medal for his "significant contribution to the successful prosecution of the war."

Wilde left active-duty October 31, 1945. During the Korean War, Wilde served in the Defense Department in Washington DC. Marjorie split her time between Washington and High Lawn Farm during that time.

Wilde was active in Republican politics being elected to the party's state committee in 1968, and to be a delegate at the National Convention in 1970. Locally, Wilde served three years as chairman of the Berkshire County chapter of the American Red Cross, was both president and director of the Lee National Bank, served on the town of Lee's Finance Committee, and was a member of



Marjorie and George Hyde at Highlawn, c.1940. Source: Highlawn Farm

the Lee Beach Committee for many years. Wilde served many terms as the president of the board of trustees of the former Lenox School, and the Wildes were founders of Berkshire Country Day School in Stockbridge.

Col. Wilde passed at 90 years old in 1998, a year after his wife Marjorie, leaving six children, twelve grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Wilde lived a world ranging life shaped by service and discipline. He represented his country in the Olympics and served his country in the military and in politics, but his story is also a Berkshires story. Leaving a legacy that impacts Lee even today.



LHS BULLETIN BOARD

LHS SPEAKERS SERIES – JOHN HANSON



Historical archaeologist Bob Drinkwater will give an illustrated talk, Local Gravestone Carvers and Their Work (ca. 1720-1850), on Thursday, September 24, 2026 at 6:30pm at the Lee Senior Center, 21 Crossway Street, Lee. During this presentation he will share his extensive knowledge about these craftsmen who worked in Lee and vicinity and the local marble industry.

Bob Drinkwater is a charter member, former Board member and past President of the Association for Gravestone Studies and currently chairs the Western New England Chapter of AGS. For much of the past 50 years he has been studying and photographing 18th and early 19th century gravestones in western Massachusetts, as well as researching the people who made them. He is the author of *In Memory of Susan Freedom: Searching for Gravestones of African Americans in Western Massachusetts* (2020) as well as a new book to be released later in 2026, *Keeping Memory Alive in Western Massachusetts*, a regional guide to more than 100 of the men who made gravestones in Western Massachusetts ca. 1720 to 1850.

This presentation is free and open to the public and is part of the Lee Historical Society

Speaker Series. Look for the lanterns near the Senior Center entrance. Parking is available along the North entrance to Crossway Village as well as on Academy Street. Refreshments will be served.

FOUNDERS' WEEK EVENTS

EVERYBODY LOVES A PARADE!

Would you like to be in one?



The Historical Society will be in the Founders' Day Parade again this year, and again we'll be accompanied by music. This year the Berkshire Fife and Drum Corps will march with us to motivate us and keep us marching in time.

Have you ever dreamed of marching in a parade in front of a band playing patriotic music? Now's your chance! We're taking any/all volunteers to march (walk) in the Founders Parade on Saturday

September 19th from 9am to about 11am. The walk is about a mile on flat surfaces and doesn't move very swiftly. "Period" costumes are a plus, any period you can muster up will work, but we try to keep with the colonial feel if possible.

Also, if you have a classic or stylish car you'd like to show off in the parade, we have a non-marching contingent who will be traveling by car as well and would love to help you show off your wheels!

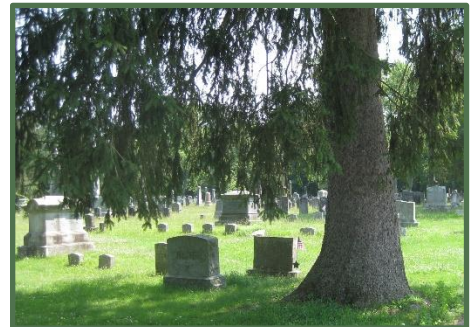
Please contact Karen Norton at knorton2@hotmail.com if you're interested in joining us for the parade.

CEMETERY TOURS

We will be leading two cemetery tours again this year for Founders Week. Both tours are open to everyone, will be held rain or shine, and should last about an hour. Obviously, they will be outside so dress for the weather, and bring bug repellent since we will be walking through grass.

The Saint Mary's tour will be on Thursday September 17th at 10am This tour will be over fairly flat surfaces and should be an easy walk. We will meet on the road at the back of the cemetery where there is parking away from any monuments.

The Fairmount tour will be Friday September 18th at 10am. This tour will be concentrating on the older section of the cemetery and will therefore be over uneven, rough terrain. We will meet at the cemetery vault (the building in the middle of the cemetery), park along any of the pathways around the area.



CALENDAR RAFFLE

Our biggest fund raiser every year has traditionally been our calendar raffle. We have a small team (Mal Eckert and Doreen Bartini) that have worked hard over the past months to bring in donations from local businesses to provide our prizes. Tickets will be sold starting during Founders through the end of September. The winners will be drawn for prizes assigned to every day in October, that means 31 prizes will be available! This year, most of the prizes will be cold hard cash, something everyone can find a use for.



We will have raffle tickets for sale at our booth during Founders' Weekend, and we would love to have volunteers selling packs of tickets before during and after Founders' so we can reach those who may miss us at our booth. Please reach out to Mal Eckert if you can help us sell tickets: maleckert@msn.com.

LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2026 MEMBERSHIP FORM (JANUARY – DECEMBER)

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

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

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NEW: _____ RENEWAL: _____

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.



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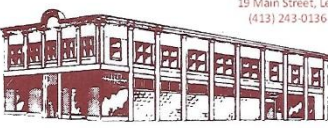
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