



# The Gateway Gazette

*The Newsletter of the Lee Historical Society*

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

Email: Lee.Historical@hotmail.com  
Website: leehistoricsociety.homestead.com  
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*The Monthly Meeting of the Society will be Thursday, March 14 at the Historical Society Office, Crossway Tower, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.*



## **FROM THE EDITORS**

March – will it come in like a lion and go out like a lamb? According to the Farmers' Almanac, if the weather comes in roaring like a lion at the beginning of the month, it will leave gently, like a lamb. At the time of writing, we're still in February and too far away from March to predict how things will go. Do we all remember last March, the Biggest Storm in Massachusetts History, according to some? It arrived on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, and dropped around 20.5" in Lenox (sorry, Lee, you don't get a mention). However, the storm of 1960 dumped about the same amount *and* had winds up to 83 mph. We have to assume for last year's storm that March came in like a lamb and left like a lion.

At the time of writing, February is almost spring-like. We shall just have to see if history repeats itself!

Have a Happy March and don't forget, you can reach Linda at [lindabreader@icloud.com](mailto:lindabreader@icloud.com) and Tracie at [ethere@gmail.com](mailto:ethere@gmail.com) with any comments, questions, or suggestions.

## **HENRY BASSETT HOLT**

**1929 - 2024**

It is with great sadness that we report on the passing of Henry Holt, one of the Society's most loyal and active members. Henry was a founding member of the Society and served on the Board for many years. He was born in New York City at the start of the Great Depression, but he was very fortunate in that his grandmother, Carolyn Bassett, a wealthy lady who owned what is now the beautiful Kimball Inn in Lenox, paid for Henry's education at the prestigious Mohunk and Trinity Schools in New York City, and the Forman School in Litchfield, Connecticut. He was given a position teaching English there after his graduation. Henry was such a character, changing careers in mid-life from working as an executive vice-president at a major insurance company to become a fine arts aficionado.

Henry and his beloved wife Mary, who passed in 2022 after 71 years together, had the most amazing art collection, including works by Rockwell, Grandma Moses, James E. Bard, William Harnett, and Archibald Willard. Henry and Mary made many donations to the Society over the years, but the final is that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made in his memory to the Lee Historical Society. Such a gracious bequest and so much in keeping with how Henry lived his life.

There is so much more to tell of Henry, but his biggest accomplishments are the love of his very large family and the respect, admiration, and affection of the communities in which he was involved. We shall miss you, Henry, and may you now rest in peace with your dear Mary.

### **GENERAL CHARLES LEE: SCOUNDREL OR HERO?**

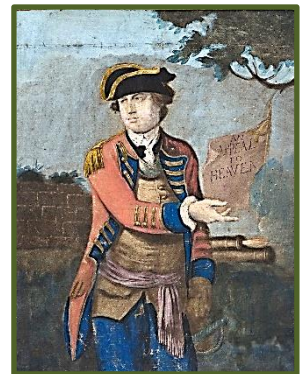
**(and why did we name our Town after him?)**

#### **PART ONE**

*Who of you remembers our leg-pull April Fools article last year where we wrote of the Lee Selectmen meeting in secret to rename Lee? If you need to refresh your memories, or never read it, you can view it on our website, [leehistoricsociety.homestead.com](http://leehistoricsociety.homestead.com). We now think it would be of interest to all to learn more about the man after whom our Town is named. There's much about General Lee which isn't quite as it seems, hence the title of this article. Intrigued? Then read on!*

This hero of the Revolutionary War, fighting against the British, was himself a Brit, and not only that, but part of the aristocracy of England. He was born in 1732 to Major General John Lee and his wife Isabella Bunbury, the daughter of Sir Henry Bunbury, 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet. *(For those of you unfamiliar with how the British aristocracy works, being a baronet is the lowest form of honor that can be awarded. It's below a baron and above a knight and is passed from father to son.)* His grandfather had been a Member of Parliament for the County of Cheshire, and his cousin, Sir Thomas Charles Bunbury, an MP for the County of Suffolk, so he came from a very elite family. As such, he received an excellent education starting with private tutors, then on to a grammar school before going over to a private academy in Switzerland. Upon his return to England, he went to another grammar school, becoming quite the polyglot as he spoke several languages including Latin, Greek, French and, presumably, English.

Now his father, a colonel of the 55<sup>th</sup> Foot Regiment, (later renumbered to the 44<sup>th</sup>), introduced his son to the Army at an early age when he purchased a commission as an ensign in the same regiment for him in April 1747 when Lee would have been about 15 years



old. His father died a few years later in 1751 and Lee was either given, or bought, a lieutenant's commission in the same regiment.

Three years later, in 1754, he made his first visit to North America to fight in the French & Indian War under Major General Edward Braddock. Apparently, this war was a front for the Seven Years' War between Britain and France. It seems this part of his career didn't go off too well as he was there with Braddock when he was defeated at the Battle of Monongahela in 1755.



*Surrender of Louisbourg to the British on  
27th July 1758*

Lee purchased a captain's commission in the 44<sup>th</sup> for nine hundred pounds in 1756. He really started to get into things after that, taking part in 1757 in an expedition against the French fortress in Louisbourg, Nova Scotia. His love of a skirmish was put on hold when he received a wound in a failed assault on Fort Ticonderoga, New York and he was dispatched to Long Island, ironically to be treated by a surgeon he had rebuked and thrashed. With Lee in a weakened state, the surgeon attacked him. We have no details on exactly what the doctor did to him, but he obviously

broke his Hippocratic Oath of "First do no harm".

By 1759, Lee was feeling better and was able to get back to his old ways, and took part in the capture of Fort Niagara and then, in 1760, of Montreal. And thus ended the war in the North American theater by the Conquest of Canada.

After this was accomplished, Lee transferred to the 103<sup>rd</sup> Foot Regiment in Europe and served as a lieutenant colonel in the Portuguese Army. The Spanish tried unsuccessfully to invade Portugal and Lee was there to help defeat them, distinguishing himself under John Burgoyne at the Battle of Villa Velha.

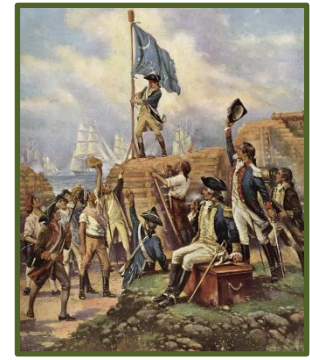
Not one to hang around, Lee went back to England after the Peace of Paris ended the Seven Years' War. After his regiment was disbanded, he retired on half pay as a major, and then, in 1772, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel, even though he wasn't really doing anything of a military fashion at that time.

Next stop for Lee was Poland where he served as an aide-de-camp for Stanislaus II, King of Poland, and he stayed there for some time before returning to England. He wanted to get a promotion in the British Army, but wasn't successful, so he returned to Poland in 1769 and joined in the action of the Russo-Turkish War. At some point, he wandered over into Italy and obviously got into an argument with an Italian officer which ended in a duel where he lost two fingers. However, he later got his own back by getting into another duel with the same man, who he then killed.

Now, here's where his wanderings stopped in Europe and began in North America again. After returning to England, he decided he agreed with the North American colonists in their being upset with Great Britain and so he moved to the colonies in 1773 to be with them. For the, then, huge sum of three thousand pounds, he bought an estate in Berkeley County, which is now part of West Virginia. This was near a friend, Horatio Gates, with whom he had served in the French & Indian War.

Lee spent several months getting to know the patriots in the surrounding colonies and, because of his undoubtedly vast experience in various wars in several different countries, he expected to be put in a position of command, but this went to none other than George Washington himself! He and George did not get along at all well, and the position of second-in-command that Lee expected to be put in was given to one Artemas Ward, much to Lee's disapproval as he considered Artemas didn't have the necessary experience. However, Artemas had to resign in 1776 due to ill health and Lee was then able to step into the coveted position.

While Lee was down in the South, an expedition led by Henry Clinton was sent by the British to take back Charleston, South Carolina. Lee was there to oversee the fortification of the city at Fort Sullivan, later named after its commander, Colonel William Moultrie. It was here that Lee was given the title of “Hero of Charleston”. The fort was built out of palmetto logs, palmettos being a kind of palm tree that grows down South, as any of you who have visited there will be familiar with. Because of this, Lee feared the structure wouldn’t stand up to the barrage from Clinton’s cannonballs and ordered the fort to be evacuated lest the troops be killed. The Governor, John Rutledge, stepped in and forbade this and, to Lee’s surprise, the palmetto logs actually repelled the cannonballs because of their spongy consistency. Clinton gave up, picked up his cannonballs, left with his tail between his legs, and Lee was considered to be the hero of the moment.



*Raising the flag at Fort Sullivan.*

We know that Lee and Washington had a mutual dislike of each other, and Lee wasted no time criticizing how Washington was directing the war, particularly after the British captured Fort Mifflin with its 3,000 strong garrison in November 1776. Lee believed that Washington should have evacuated the fort, and held him responsible for the loss. He put his feelings on this in a letter to Joseph Reed, who was one of Washington’s aides-de-camp, but which Washington got to read first, opening the letter he thought to be on official business. This would not have improved relationships between the two men.

In 1776, while enjoying a quick brewskie at White’s Tavern in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, he was writing another scathing letter about Washington, this time to his friend, General Horatio Gates, when he was captured by British troops. He was kept imprisoned for sixteen months, finally being released on parole as part of a prisoner exchange in April 1778. He was on his way to York, Pennsylvania when he met up with Washington at Valley Forge. Surprisingly, he was greeted with great enthusiasm by his nemesis.

Since his internment, Lee claimed that the army was in a worse situation than he had expected. He lobbied Congress to be promoted to lieutenant general, going above Washington’s head and submitting a plan for reorganizing the army in a completely different way than Washington had so far done. He then returned as Washington’s second-in-command with the Continental Army.

*The story of General Lee is a long one that takes up more room than we can afford to give him in just one edition. Therefore, we’re dividing it into two parts, and those of you who expected to learn this month everything about who our Town was named after will have to be patient until April’s edition comes out! So, here we leave you in suspense!*

## **REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN**

### **WILLIAM J. DUNN (1917 – 2002)**

William Dunn was born in Fall River, but when he was 18 months old, his father died and he was raised in Lee by his grandparents, Mr. & Mrs. Edward Dunn. He was a graduate of St. Mary’s School and Lee High School.

He served with the 502<sup>nd</sup> Paratrooper Infantry of the 101 Airborne Division during World War II and was captured a few days after the Normandy Landing with a medical unit of his

outfit. He was held by the Germans as a POW for eleven months, finally being freed by the Russians. He was discharged in 1945.

Returning home to Lee, he worked at the Eagle Mill of the Smith Paper Company and continued his employment with them at the Greylock Mill, from where he retired as an electrician in 1980.

Staying with the church of his younger school days, he was a communicant at St. Mary's where he served as a Eucharist minister.

Never forgetting his time in the military, he was a member of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Society as well as a member of the Bossidy-Crerar Post 893 VFW of Lee. He was a member of the Berkshire Hills Council 314 Knights of Columbus of Lee.

We posthumously thank William for his service and are happy that he had a life well lived after surviving his time as a prisoner of war.



### **THE FASCINATING FOOTE FAMILY FALLACY**

*The Foote family is one of Lee's originals, coming to the Berkshires from Connecticut and originally from Colchester, England. According to the Foote Family Association of America, there are estimated to be one million descendants of Nathaniel Foote and his wife Elizabeth, not all in Lee, of course. Perusing the Rev. C.M. Hyde and Alexander Hyde's history of Lee, "Lee, the Centennial Celebration and Centennial History of the Town of Lee, Massachusetts", the following interesting information was found, and we thought you would all enjoy it as much as we did.*



*Charles in the Royal Oak by Isaac Fuller (1606-72), National Portrait Gallery, London*

"In the Foote "Genealogy and in Gale's History of Lee, it is stated that Nathaniel Foote, the grandfather of this Jonathan Foote (of Lee), put Charles the Second, King of England, into an oak to shield him from his pursuers. Afterwards, when the King was in a situation to do so, he remembered his preserver, and granted him a tract of land in Connecticut. The Foote family have for their coat of arms, a design representing an oak [tree] and Charles the Second, and Nathaniel Foote endeavoring to assist Charles into the oak. There is a well-remembered couplet in the old Primer:

"The Royal Oak, it was the tree,  
That saved his Royal Majesty."

The story of the oak is pleasant and plausible, but Mr. H.W. Taft of Pittsfield, himself a descendant of the hero of the story, and an expert antiquarian, desires that we should refute it, and we can do no better than insert his letter:

PITTSFIELD, August 31, 1877

*My Dear Sir:-* Won't you try to put an end to that absurd and impossible story about the Foote emigrant ancestor helping King Charles into the oak, etc. At least see to it that it don't get into the Lee History, and so start out on a new tour. I think it is dead sometimes, and then it starts off as good as new, to my infinite disgust, for he was my ancestor, and I don't

want him made game of, and history turned into fable. Here are two or three reasons why it well can't be true:

1. Nathaniel Foote, the emigrant and ancestor of the Lee Footes, was in Watertown before September, 1634, and never returned to England.
2. Charles I'd, the oak tree man, was born May 29, 1680. Put these two facts together.
3. Nathaniel Foote *died* in Wethersfield in 1614, when Charles was about 14 years old.
4. The Battle of Worcester (*after* which Charles hid in the oak), was fought September 3, 1651, when Nathaniel Foote had been dead seven years.
5. Nathaniel was a Puritan, and if he had been *alive* and in *England*, would have been on Cromwell's side and not with Charles.

There are a great many more reasons, but perhaps these will do.

Yours Truly,  
Henry W. Taft"

*Now, history being what it is, makes it hard to pin down the facts. There are some odd mathematical and historical discrepancies in Mr. Taft's writings.*

*He states that Nathaniel Foote was in Watertown, CT before 1634, and that he died there in 1614*

*He gets his King Charleses confused as he says that Charles I'd [sic] (presumably meaning Charles I) was born in 1680, but that he was about 14 years old in 1614.*

*And, if he was born in 1680, how did he manage to fight in England's Civil War in 1651?*

*Just to put a few facts straight – hopefully – Nathaniel Foote was born in 1592 and died in 1644. Charles II was born in 1630 and died in 1685. He would have been about 21 when the Civil War between the Cavaliers (for Charles I) and Roundheads (for Oliver Cromwell – he won) ended. During that time from 1649 – 1651, he was Charles II of Scotland, but not England, as his dad, Charles I, was executed in 1649 and the monarchy was put on hold for a while. His coronation to the throne of England was in 1661, so he wasn't actually Charles II of England during the Civil War. Confused yet?*

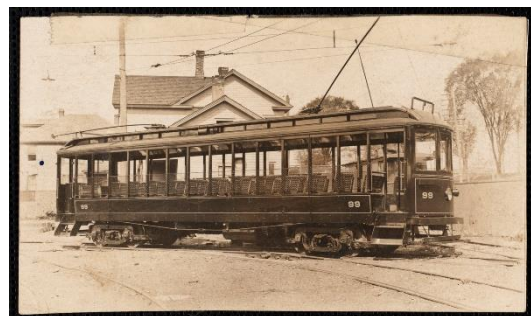
*We hope all of you, confused or otherwise, including our Foote family members, will have enjoyed this rather more lighthearted piece on Lee's – and England's - history.*

## **THE LHS BULLETIN BOARD**

### **“RIDING THE BERKSHIRE TROLLEY”**

This is a reminder that the first of our Speaker Series presentations will be given by local historian Gary Leveille on Thursday, March 28<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm at the Lee Senior Center, 21 Crossway Street, Lee.

Gary will be giving an illustrated talk on the history of the Berkshire Street Railway which was one of the largest trolley systems in the country, transporting riders as they commuted to school and work, shopping, visiting friends and touring.



His engaging and detailed photographic review, focusing on South County and Lee, will help us to understand how important this line was to Berkshire County, what caused its disappearance, and what remains of it today.

As always, this presentation is free and open to members of the public as part of the Lee Historical Society Speaker Series. Parking is available along the North entrance to Crossway Village as well as on Academy Street. Refreshments will be served, so please come on over for an educational, interesting, and sociable evening! Please put this on your calendars so as not to miss it! We look forward to seeing you!

**LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2024 MEMBERSHIP FORM (JANUARY – DECEMBER)**

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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, and thank you for your support:

Program Set-up: \_\_\_\_\_ Provide Refreshments at Events: \_\_\_\_\_ Address Mailings: \_\_\_\_\_  
Founders Day (march in the parade/assist at our booth): \_\_\_\_\_

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).

The Membership Committee extends their thanks to all those who have renewed their membership for 2024. We are grateful for your continued support. For those of you who are yet to rejoin our great Society, please feel free to use this form. Our Business Members will by now have received their renewal notices and we look forward to hearing from them as well. If you are a current Business Member and wish to update the business card which appears on Page 8 of our newsletter, please contact Tracie Etheredge, co-editor.

Thanks to all for supporting the Lee Historical Society!



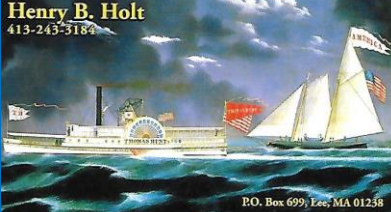
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