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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, March 12th at the Historical Society Office, Crossway Tower, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.

FROM THE EDITOR

"In like a lion, out like a lamb." Let's hope this ancient adage holds true this year as we find ourselves constantly digging out after seemingly constant February storms. We've already seen one of the worst winters in recent memory but the typically volatile weather of March most likely will ensure that we're not done with it yet! Think spring-like thoughts and start planning your garden with the understanding that the snow has not left our lives yet. Winter is the price we pay for living in the Berkshires, but it does make the coming of spring that much sweeter.

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

TED SHAWN BUYS JACOB'S PILLOW

The following article is a submission of Joshua Bloom who has been researching Jacobs Pillow and its connection to Lee for his forthcoming exhibit, "Jacob's Pillow in Lee, Mass.," that will be on display at the Lee Library for the month of June 2026.

When Ted Shawn bought the Carter family farm in Becket in 1930 to use as an artistic retreat, he was already a well known dancer and cultural figure, so there was much intrigue about his intentions.

The Berkshire County Eagle reported on September 17, 1930: "Not only will Mr. Shawn seek recreation at the country home newly acquired, but it is understood that he will undertake extensive alterations at the property, with the view of conducting summertime school of dancing, commencing next season."

Jacob's Pillow Barns, ca. 1930. Courtesy of Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Archive.

In October 1930, the Lee-based Berkshire Gleaner published a piece by N. Y. Herald-Tribune writer Walter Prichard Eaton where Eaton acutely foreshadowed the relationship that would develop between Jacob's Pillow and its neighbors in Lee over the course of nearly a century.

> *Finally, even as this is being written, comes news that Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis have purchased a farm in the hill hamlet of West Becket, near the famous Jacob's Ladder road, which crosses the Berkshires to Springfield, and will probably establish there a summer colony and school of the dance.*

Postcard: "Big Arch Bridge, Jacob's Ladder Roadway, East Lee, Mass." Undated. The postcard was photographed and uploaded by Keith O'Neil; photo used with his permission.

> *It may be urged that most of these institutions [Jacob's Pillow and other rural cultural centers] have been brought into the hills by outsiders, by "summer people" who wish to escape the city for a few months and seek out a pleasant and convenient spot. That is true. But it is also true that many of the summer people have long standing affiliations with the region, sometimes going back several generations, and nearly all of them, once established in summer residence, feel the spell of the land, know the meaning of "an habitation enforced" and are roused to a community consciousness far more deeply than in such a city as New York.*
>
> *The interrelations between these institutions and the native hill folk will inevitably tend to grow closer, their influence to spread into the community life.... They indicate rather a distinct reaction to the urban drift of the last half century*

and a distinct opposition to the commercial exploitation of all the arts in urban life. They indicate the definite desire of many people to see the arts practiced for their own sake, and still more, perhaps, the definite realization that they can be practiced as well, if not better, in the peaceful seclusion of the country, amid leisure and loveliness.

There are many who predict that America is at the threshold of a creative cultural awakening. Certainly, the growth of such institutions amid our resort hills, the redemption by art of entirely abandoned villages, the new attitude of the summer public toward what constitutes a civilized and desirable community in which to dwell, are hopeful straws in the wind.

Looking back over the near century that has passed since Ted Shawn first came to the Berkshires, Eaton's prediction of a burgeoning creative cultural awakening has certainly came true.

REMEMBERING LEE VETERANS
The Civil War Horror of the Andersonville Prison Camp

Andersonville Prison
Source: The National Archives

Officially named Camp Sumter, the Confederate military prison better known as Andersonville was built in early 1864 after Confederate leaders decided to move Union prisoners away from the increasingly active battlefields around Richmond, Virginia. The relocation was meant both to secure the prisoners and to place them where food supplies might be easier to obtain.

Although Camp Sumter operated for only fourteen months, it confined 45,000 Union soldiers, nearly 13,000 of whom died from disease, malnutrition, exposure, overcrowding, and the camp's notoriously poor sanitation.

The prison originally covered about 16½ acres, enclosed by a 15-foot-high stockade wall. By June 1864, severe overcrowding forced an expansion to 26½ acres. The stockade formed a parallelogram measuring 1,620 feet by 779 feet. Roughly 19 feet inside the wall ran the infamous *"deadline,"* a boundary prisoners were forbidden to cross. Guards stationed in elevated "pigeon roosts," spaced about thirty yards apart, were authorized to shoot anyone who stepped over it.

The first prisoners arrived in late February 1864, and for months afterward roughly 400 new captives entered the camp each day. By June, more than 26,000 men were crammed into a space originally designed for 10,000. The population peaked at 33,000 in August 1864.

The Confederate government simply could not provide adequate shelter, food, clothing, or medical care. Conditions deteriorated rapidly, and the suffering was immense. Sergeant Samuel Corthell of Company C, 4th Massachusetts Cavalry later recalled:

"The camp was covered with vermin all over. You could not sit down anywhere. You might go and pick the lice all off of you, and sit down for a half a moment and get up and you would be covered with them. In between these two hills it was very swampy, all black mud, and where the filth was emptied it was all alive; there was a regular buzz there all the time, and it was covered with large white maggots."

Andersonville Prison by John L. Ransom (a camp survivor). Source: Library of Congress.

After Union forces under General William T. Sherman captured Atlanta on September 2, 1864, bringing Federal cavalry within striking distance of Andersonville, the Confederacy transferred most prisoners to camps in South Carolina and coastal Georgia. From that point until May 1865, Andersonville continued to operate but on a much smaller scale.

The prison finally closed in May 1865. Most survivors returned to their prewar lives, though many carried lifelong physical and emotional scars. That summer, a team of soldiers and laborers, accompanied by former prisoner Dorence Atwater and humanitarian Clara Barton, traveled to Andersonville to identify and mark the graves of the Union dead and establish what became Andersonville National Cemetery. Atwater, who had secretly copied the Confederate death records, helped ensure that only 460 graves had to be marked "Unknown U.S. Soldier."

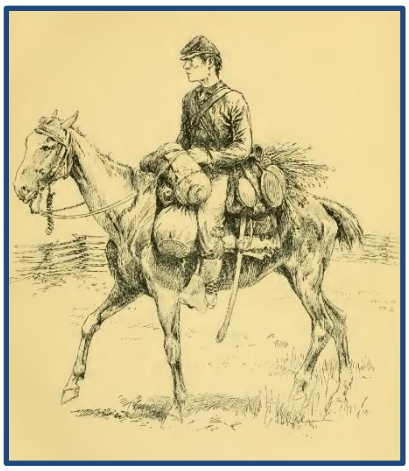
In 1910, the Woman's Relief Corps donated the former prison grounds to the United States. The War Department, and later the Department of the Army, administered the site until Congress designated it a national historic site in October 1970. Since July 1, 1971, Andersonville has been managed by the National Park Service.

Three Lee men were lost to the Andersonville prison camp: Egbert Jaquins, Hugh Dolan and Henry Evans. We don't know a lot about the early lives of these men, but their military records can be used to piece together fragments of their stories.

Egbert Jacquins was 29 when he joined the army and was listed as a laborer before the war. He joined Company D of the 57th Massachusetts Infantry in January 1864. He served under Captain Edson Dresser of Stockbridge. The 57th was recruited by Colonel William Bartlett in the Berkshires and then gathered in Camp Wool, in Worcester for training. The unit left Massachusetts in April 1864 and headed south into the war. They joined Ulysses Grant's "Overland Campaign" in Northern Virginia and Jacquins was captured during the Battle of North Anna on May 24th, 1864. From there we know nothing about what Jacquins experienced other than that he lived for only three more months and died in Andersonville on August 15th, 1864. His cause of death was noted as "diarrhea" which was probably meant, like many others in the unsanitary conditions of the prison camp, he died of dysentery. He was buried at the camp.

Hugh Dolan was born in Ireland and emigrated to the Berkshires in 1853. On September 17, 1861, he joined Company E, known as the "Pittsfield Company", of the Massachusetts 27th Infantry under Captain G.A. Fuller. At 40 years old he was an older recruit, but it is possible that because he was a recent immigrant he joined because of a financial bounty. He may have needed that bounty in anticipation of getting married. During leave from the army,

on October 17, 1862 he married Winifer Carney, also of Lee. He rejoined his unit and for the next two years fought in battles throughout North Carolina. In April 1864 his unit joined the Army of the James and entered Virgina. They participated in the battles of Dunn's farm, Port Walthall Junction, and Arrowfield Church. On May 16, the regiment was engaged at the Battle of Proctor's Creek (alternately Drewry's Bluff or Fort Darling). After a brave defense of their position, much of the regiment was surrounded while fighting in a dense fog, losing in addition to its killed and wounded, 252 men taken prisoners. Among the captured were the colonel, lieutenant colonel, and commanding general, Charles A. Heckman. Dolan had the unusual fortune of being freed from Andersonville in November 1864 as part of a prisoner exchange. Perhaps he was chosen for this exchange because of his poor health because he died just a few days later in Annapolis, Virginia while on his way home. (General Heckman was exchanged at the same time but he survived and returned to duty) Dolan is buried in the Annapolis National Cemetery, but is counted in the Andersonville records as being a casualty of the prison camp, along with 120 other men of his unit who were captured along with him.



"The Real Cavalryman" from A History of the First Regiment of Massachusetts Cavalry Volunteers by Benjamin Crowninshield, 1891.

Henry Evans was only 18 when he joined the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry on December 29, 1863. Unlike the men who joined the infantry divisions as they were being established by enlisting soldiers from the Berkshires, Evans joined a cavalry division that had been in battle from the beginning of the war and was comprised of men from throughout the state. Also, different from the infantry, the cavalry was more selective and only enlisted men with skill on horseback. By the time Evans joined the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry the unit had already seen battle at Fredericksburg, Antietam and Gettysburg. We don't know when and where Evans was captured and transferred to Andersonville, but we do know he died August 10th 1864 from scurvy, a vitamin deficiency that would not be a surprising death from someone in a prison camp. He is buried in Andersonville.

The plaque in Memorial Hall that lists the civil war dead from Lee also lists another soldier who supposedly died in Andersonville, but the information is incorrect. James Richards who, like Egbert Jacquins, served with the 57th Massachusetts Regiment didn't die at Andersonville, but at the Battle of the Wilderness in Virginia on May 6th, 1864. He was initially noted as being "missing" after the battle, and there were several prisoners of war captured at the battle, which perhaps accounts for the confusion. Interestingly Richards is the last name listed on the panels and his entry is short of information.

Third panel of theMemorial Tablets in honor of Lee's Civil War Dead.

Although Lee and the Berkshires were far from the fighting in the Civil War, stories like these remind us how the community was impacted by horrific events occurring several states away. The tablets were installed in Memorial Hall and we continue to gather information on Lee Veterans so that we do not forget the contributions of men like these who did not return home after war.

WHY DO WE CALL IT THAT?

Sometimes we have to wonder "Why do we call it that?" when looking at places around our town. The latest that struck me is Crossway Street. Why is it called that, it seems like an unusual name for a street. Apparently, it was a group decision by the people who lived in the area from around the turn of the century.

From the Gleaner, May 5, 1909:

"The lane running from High Street to Cliffwood Street along the school property has been named by the people living on it "The Crossway."

The name came about as a practical description of a lane running between two more substantial roads, and the name stuck. And there you have it.

LHS BULLETIN BOARD

LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY SPEAKER SERIES: Lee's 1928 Deadly Strep Epidemic

Old Hyde School transformed into Lee Emergency Hospital

Photo courtesy of The Berkshire Eagle

Dr. Bob Wespiser will give an illustrated talk, Lee's 1928 Deadly Strep Epidemic, on Thursday, March 26, 2026 at 6:30pm at the Lee Senior Center, 21 Crossway Street, Lee. A prize cow named Pansy caused a catastrophe in Lee! The tainted, unpasteurized milk from this single cow at Lee's largest milk dealer left at least 48 dead and over 1,000 residents ill. Dr. Wespiser will tell us the story of this event and its influence on many important wide sweeping public health improvements which were made following it. These include regulations for pasteurization, public health emergency management, state and national policies and the science of bacterial illness and prevention of infection.

Dr. Wespiser recently retired after practicing primary care medicine for 37 years in Lee. He is familiar with the families and descendants of many of the people affected by this epidemic. Dr. Wespiser currently serves as chair of the Lee Board of Health and is a member of the Lee Historical Society.

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.

LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2025 MEMBERSHIP FORM (JANUARY – DECEMBER)

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

NAME: _____

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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.

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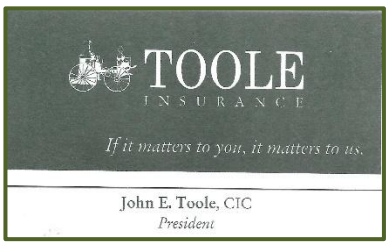

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