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May 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, May 15th at the Historical Society Office, Crossway Tower, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.



FROM THE EDITORS

As we now move forward into the final full month of spring, we have so much to look forward to in our lovely old mill town. Mind you, does it really feel like it's still spring with our temps frequently breaking into the 70's?! Fear not, folks, because it won't be long before our very own beach reopens down at Laurel Lake and we can all head for the water, or laze around on those so brilliantly painted Adirondack chairs, sipping a cold lemonade while our hot dogs heat up on the barbie. For those of us with gardens and the necessary green fingers, May is a great time to pick up the hoe, fork, spade and wheel barrow and get those pansies and other assorted floral beauties into the borders. We're told to wait until Memorial Day to avoid a late frost, but the way things are going, that's probably a low possibility. However you spend the month, do take some YOU time to enjoy the beautiful Berkshires!

REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN

JOHN E. BLACHE (1919 – 1986)



John Blache was born just after Christmas and just before the New Year on December 31st, 1919, and went on to become a decorated WWII Marine. He was the son of Alexander L. and Exilia Trudell Blache of Lee, and graduated from Lee High School, where he was a half-back on the varsity team, in 1938. His brother Richard served with the military police in Italy.

John enlisted at Albany in January 1942 and got his basic training at Parris Island, North Carolina. From there he was sent to Quantico, Virginia for advanced training, and then on to New River, North Carolina before being shipped to the South Pacific. It was here that he saw action as he and his unit participated in the battle at Guadalcanal.

As reported in the May 24th, 1944 edition of the Berkshire County Eagle, his unit, the First Marine Division, received a citation signed by then Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox. It's worth repeating it here as it gives a breakdown of exactly what the unit was involved in.

“Cited in the name of the President of the United States, the First Marine division under the command of Maj. Gen. Alexander A. Vandergrift, USMC: The officers and enlisted men of the First Marine division on Aug. 7-9, 1942, demonstrated outstanding gallantry and determination in successfully executing forced landing assaults against a number of strongly defended Japanese positions on Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo, Florida and Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands, completely routing all the enemy forces and seizing a most valuable base and airfield within the enemy zone of operations in the South Pacific Ocean.

For the above period until Dec. 9, 1942, this division not only held their important strategic positions despite determined and repeated Japanese naval air and land attacks, but by a series of offensive operations against strong enemy resistance drove the Japanese from the proximity of the airfield and inflicted great losses on them by land and air attacks. The courage and determination displayed in these operations were of an inspiring order.”

After Guadalcanal, the unit was sent to Australia for some R&R before re-entering combat on New Britain Island, which is located in the Bismarck Archipelago, within the Islands Region of Papua New Guinea.

Before joining up and going off to war, John worked for the former Smith Paper Company and he returned there after being discharged. He eventually retired from the then Peter J. Schweitzer Division of Kimberly-Clark in 1982 after forty-two years of service as a lab technician at Columbia Mill.

He was very involved with the VFW, and the March 24th, 1948 edition of the Berkshire County Eagle tells us that he was elected as their new commander.

Sadly, John passed away from a heart attack at the age of sixty-six in May 1986 and was laid to rest in St. Mary's Cemetery in Lee.



AN ARTICLE FROM BETTY DENNIS

It's been a while since we repeated an article in the Gateway Gazette by Lee's favorite librarian and historian, but having described the bravery of John Blache in our "Remembering a Lee Veteran" this month, we discovered this story of another Lee veteran, one Charlie Gates, who seems to have been quite a character. Read on and see if you agree...

June 6, 1973

When the "Fighting 10th" Massachusetts infantry, called "The Pride of Springfield" came home in 1864, the Republican published about Charles Gates of Lee.

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 3 cows to pasture. After putting the bars of the pasture up, he put axe and basket in a stone wall and headed for Becket, 9 miles away. He enlisted in the 10th Mass,

A member of the company once said there were two men who never fell out on a long march ... one was from Dalton and the other, Charlie Gates.

In 1864 when the boys came home, Charlie got off in Becket, traveled back over the mountain, "with a musket slung over his shoulder, carrying the ax and basket, hidden in the wall those three years, and driving the same old red cows that he had pastured those years before.

Charlie's story is related in a sentimental ballad written by Kate Putnam Osgood, entitled "Driving Home the Cows".

AN ADDENDUM TO A PREVIOUS ARTICLE



If you remember, the February 2025 edition of the Gateway Gazette featured an article on Bill Ingegni's house on the corner of West Park and Spring Streets. It was entitled "The House That Became Two", and was just so interesting as it and its neighbor had, indeed, once been just one two-story house.

As promised, Bill has found a photo of what the original house looked like and we thought you would all be as interested as were we in what it had looked like. So, here's the photo!

To jog your memories, it was originally built in 1899 by brothers Marshall and Alden Wild whose father had owned the marble quarry on Fairview Street. The stone quarried there was

a rare blue marble and this is what the house was built from. It was in 1916 that the top story was removed and placed on the lot next door.

If you no longer have access to the February article, or never actually read it, and would like to read it, you can go to our website at leehistoricsociety.homestead.com. Our newsletters are all saved there.

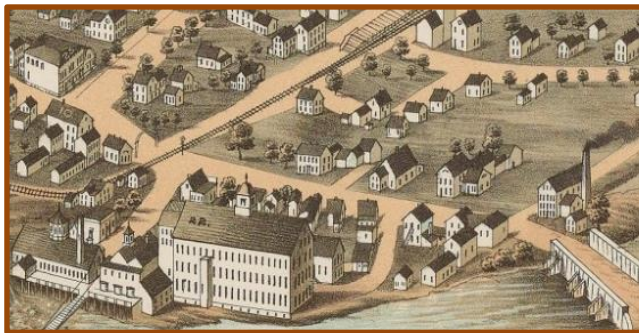
LEE: THEN AND NOW



Center Street looking west, from "Views of Lee," 1895.



The same view, today.



Detail from 1878 print showing the paper mills of Lee by H.H. Rowley & Co., Hartford, CT. Note the arch marking the railroad crossing on Center Street.

How things have changed! Sometimes old photographs of Lee look like entirely different towns and can be hard to place in comparison to the same location today. As History Detectives we have to use multiple methods to figure out what we're looking at, especially with limited information labeling the older views. This pair of photos is a great example of this.

The older image is labeled simply "Center Street" so a general location is known, but because this area of town has changed so drastically there is difficulty determining whether or not the older image is looking west or east. The print detail (left) shows the area

and helped to place it. The railroad tracks and the arch marking them are the key indicators.

Notice the road just past the railroad tracks (center right in the older photograph) leading north into the Smith Paper Company's Eagle Mill (not visible). Keep in mind that the hand-drawn map is not to scale, so some details are slightly off.

The house just behind this road is James W. Ferry's home and mercantile store (his store later moved to Main Street) and across the street (behind the trees) is the home of Samuel and Mary Hulbert. To identify both of these, older town directories were used.

The source of the older photo is "Views of Lee" a book of over fifty early photographs and sketches of the town. It is a priceless resource showing what Lee looked like before the turn of the century, published by the J.B. Goussett Company of Lee in 1895. The Historical Society has a few copies in various conditions (one seems to have survived a fire).

LHS BULLETIN BOARD

PRESENTATION REVIEW **LOST SKI AREAS OF THE BERKSHIRES**



The latest in the Society's Speaker Series held on the Thursday, March 27th was an outstanding success. The Senior Center was packed with an audience of over seventy who came to learn more about the areas skiing history and they weren't disappointed. Author Jeremy Davis' presentation was fascinating for those of us who may have many happy memories of skiing the Berkshire Hills or who, alternatively, may never have strapped on skis and experienced the exhilaration - or terror - of shooting downhill at a vast rate of knots!

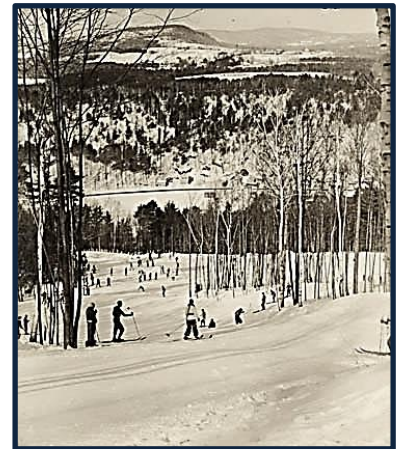
We can give a brief overview of what Jeremy shared with us, but please go to CTSB's screening of the event, which can be found on their website at ctsbvtv.org or by searching Lost Ski Areas of the Berkshires on YouTube. It's well worth watching!

Although there were plenty of areas with slopes steep enough to ski down, the definition of a lost ski area in this respect is where there were once operating lifts or tows. In Lee, there were several - Oak & Spruce operated from 1947 to 1982; Leisure Lee was in business from 1968 to 1976; Beartown didn't close until 1964; Jacob's Ladder had the Here-U-R Inn, which is now the Beaver Storage Company.

Jeremy showed multiple black and white slides of all these much-visited, much-enjoyed areas, with happy skiers dressed in what appeared to be normal clothing, no helmets, no goggles, no gloves, and on wooden skis! People were pretty adventurous back then and didn't seem to be too bothered by either comfort or personal safety! One story was a man who collided with a tree and returned home with "a face that looked like raw beef steak and eyes swollen shut".

Jeremy is the author of five books on the history of ski areas in New England, his latest being on the Berkshires. These cover in great depth the history of the people who opened up and operated the various ski resorts, descriptions of the slopes, various mishaps and adventures that occurred along the way, and many photographs. Well worth reading, even if you're not a skier.

So, go and click on CTSB or YouTube and see why we are so enthusiastic about our latest presentation!



*Beartown Polar Slope, c.1937.
Source: New England Lost Ski Areas
Project Website, Jeremy Davis.*

HEADSTONE CLEANING



We're again having a springtime headstone cleaning meetup at Fairmount Cemetery as part of our ongoing Chris Long Memorial Grant for that purpose. We'll be starting at 9:00 am on Sunday May 18th. Tim Schaeffer will be again give a tutorial on how to clean headstones, so no experience is necessary. If you've helped us before and seen the presentation, or if you can't make it that early, feel free to join us later. We will be in the cemetery from 9 to 11 working on the stones, so join us when you can!

We will be providing all the supplies needed, but you might want to bring something to kneel on, bug spray, etc. to be comfortable. Dress for the weather and to possibly get wet and/or dirty.

We will meet at the vault (the stone building in the middle of the cemetery) at 9:00; if you come later just look for the group in the older section of the cemetery in the north west corner along Maple Street.

If you have any questions, contact Tracie at ethere@gmail.com



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



The Lee Historical Society will mount its annual major exhibit, “Lee in the Turbulent 1960’s”, throughout the month of July at the J. Peter Scolforo Gallery, Lee Library, 100 Main Street.

On the heels of last year’s popular exhibit on the relatively sedate 1950’s, comes the chaotic ‘60’s with the revolution in youth culture, the spread of drug abuse and the turmoil produced by an highly controversial war in Vietnam. Those who remember that chaotic decade come and relive those moments. Those too young to remember the ‘60’s come and learn about those times. The exhibit is free and open to the public during regular library hours.

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



This is a reminder for you all about the next of our Speaker Series when Mary Philpott, President Emerita of the Lee Library Association Board of Directors, will give an illustrated talk, “Everything Has a Story”. This will be held on Thursday, May 22nd, 2025 at 6:30 pm at the Lee Senior Center, 21 Crossway Street, Lee (look for the lantern near the entrance).

In case you didn’t get to read our April newsletter – or weren’t paying attention - this will undoubtedly be fascinating and engaging as it is a presentation on the Lee Library Historical Collection, which most of us are unaware actually existed! Mary will tell us of the interesting artifacts, rare scrapbooks, and vintage photographs tucked away in the library archives along with a rich collection of town records, textiles, early letters, business ledgers, maps, and even unexpected treasures – each with a story waiting to be told.

This is perfect for history buffs, curious minds, and anyone who loves a good story! Learn how the collection has grown, how the community can access it, and the surprising discoveries made while preserving these priceless pieces of Lee’s history.

This presentation is free and open to 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 do come along and join us for a great evening of entertainment, education, and socializing!

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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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. 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.

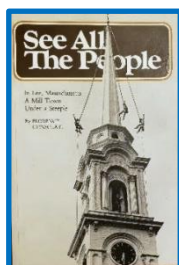
WHAT'S IN OUR STORE

Here's just a sample of things we still have for sale. Remember Mom this month with a Lee themed gift. To buy any of these items (or any of the others we have available) contact Tracie: ethere@gmail.com.



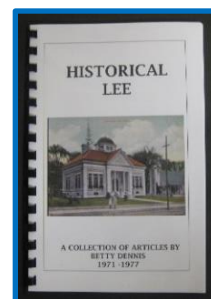
MUGS depicting various places of historical interest in Lee. At just **\$5** each, this would normally be a steal, but on offer at BOGO, how can you not take advantage? Rumor has it that the morning coffee tastes extra delicious in one of these exquisite beverage containers!

PICTURE PACKETS These beautiful prints depict scenes of Lee from yesteryear, including Main Street before the automobile, and the magnificent Congregational Church. Perfect for framing and only **\$6 per packet or 2 for \$10**. The dingiest of walls will look even more Berkshirish once embellished with these!



“HISTORICAL LEE” If you’ve read any of beloved Lee Librarian Betty Dennis’ articles reprinted in our newsletter from time to time, you know what a great gift this will be for anyone interested in our Town’s diverse and fascinating history, so pick one up for just **\$12** and get it wrapped!

“SEE ALL THE PEOPLE” by Florence Consolati. For any who are intrigued by what happened way back when in our Town, this is a tell-all that really will tell all about it! **\$26**



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