

Vol. 23, No. 10



October 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 Lee Historical Society Annual Meeting will be Thursday, October 8th at the Lee Senior Center, High & Crossway Streets. 5:30 pm – 8:00 pm.



View of Lee from Ferncliff, c. 1900.

FROM THE EDITOR

Founder's Weekend was a huge success for both the town and the Historical Society with a higher turnout than we've had for a while. Now we are moving into the wonderful New England autumn with all its colors. Let's enjoy a little calm before the storm of the coming holidays.

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

HOW LEE RECLAIMED CONTROL THROUGH A WASTEWATER DEBATE



Protest organizers DeeDee Consolati and Paul Monachina leading a protest in front of Lee's Memorial Hall, September 2004. Source: The Berkshire Eagle

In the early 2000s, the town of Lee wrestled with one of the most divisive issues in its recent history: whether or not to privatize its water and sewer systems under a 20-year contract with Veolia Water North America. What began as a technical challenge, expanding a wastewater treatment plant strained during heavy storms, quickly evolved into a community-wide reckoning over public resources, local jobs, and democratic participation.

The town had been under a state consent decree since 2000, requiring upgrades to its aging wastewater plant. As officials explored options,

privatization emerged as a seemingly cost-saving solution. Veolia, the only firm to submit a bid, offered a fixed construction price of about \$13.2 million and promised long-term savings. Supporters argued the proposal would shield the town from cost overruns and modernize infrastructure without burdening taxpayers.

But the plan struck a nerve. Many residents were uneasy about ceding control of a public utility to a multinational corporation. The most emotional flashpoint was the fate of seven town employees who would be transferred to Veolia. Despite assurances of equal or better benefits, the workers remained uncomfortable, and their families and neighbors rallied behind them. As Selectman Frank Consolati told the *Berkshire Eagle*: “In the end, emotion took over.”

Opposition grew into a broad coalition ranging across the entire state: longtime local families, environmental activists, Green Party members, Quaker Friends, and voters who simply felt the process was moving too fast. Public meetings grew tense. At one point, a frustrated attorney sparred with Veolia vice president, former state representative and local resident Christopher Hodgkins, reflecting the rising distrust toward the company’s assurances.

The turning point came in September 2004, when town representatives, after months of hearings, negotiations, and public pressure, voted 41–10 against entering the contract. Opponents celebrated, believing the town had avoided a long-term commitment that could limit flexibility and expose residents to legal risks if disputes arose.

The aftermath reshaped local politics. Grassroots organizer Deidre “DeeDee” Consolati, a leading voice against privatization, later defeated Hodgkins in the Democratic caucus, signaling a shift in public sentiment. Calls emerged to expand the Selectboard and restore one-person, one-vote town meetings. Civic engagement surged; residents who had rarely attended meetings became regular participants.

Meanwhile, the wastewater project moved forward under town control. Costs rose, partly due to soaring prices for steel, energy, and materials, but officials emphasized that the final price would likely fall below the projected \$22 million. The town created an oversight committee to ensure transparency and accountability, a direct response to concerns raised during the privatization debate.

The Veolia chapter was a defining moment for Lee. The town’s choice to retain control of its water and sewer systems reflected not only financial calculations but a deeper belief that

essential public resources should remain in public hands, the desire the people of Lee maintain that they will be the ones who determine the town's future.

REMEMBERING TWO LEE VETERANS

Donald E. Whalen (1924 – 1943)

Michael C. Whalen (1943 - 1969)

The Whalen family story is not just one of loss, it is one of devotion, courage, and a family whose service spans three wars and three generations.

Joseph and Louise Whalen raised eight children. Joseph was a veteran of the U.S. Aviation Corps in World War I and a longtime selectman in Lee, this tradition of service was instilled in the Whalen children.



*Sgt. Donald E.
Whalen*

Donald Whalen, the family's second son, was born and raised in Lee. He and his older brother, Joseph followed in their father's footsteps when they enlisted into the Army Air Corps in December 1942. Joseph went on to be a radio operator while Donald was assigned to the flight crew of a B-25 bomber.

In 1943, Don was assigned to the 334th Bomb Group out of Greenville Army Air Base in South Carolina. By this point, he had already earned three honor badges: one for bombing an enemy submarine, one for overseas service, and one for good conduct and he had been promoted to Sergeant.

In September of that year, the Whalen family in Lee received devastating news: the B-25 in which Sgt. Whalen was acting as a gunner was reported missing. During a routine flight the plane lost contact somewhere over the ocean between South Carolina and the Bahamas. Even after many patrol flights searched the area over several days, the aircraft and crew were never found.

In 1943, three months before Donald was lost, his mother Louise gave birth to twins, Michael and Margaret. Twenty-six years after Donald's plane vanished, the Whalens received another heartbreaking message.

Michael Whalen, the boy born the year his older brother was lost, had grown into a dedicated Army medic. A graduate of St. Mary's School and Lee High School, he entered the army in 1967 and deployed to Vietnam in 1968 with the 11th Infantry.

On February 28, 1969, Michael died of wounds sustained near the Cambodian border. His actions in the field revealed a medic who repeatedly risked his life for others. The U.S. Army posthumously awarded him the Distinguished Service Cross (the nation's second-highest military honor), along with the Bronze Star, a Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster, and the Purple Heart.

The citations tell the story of a man who ran toward danger, not away from it. During a "search-and-clear mission," Michael crossed nearly 200 meters of open terrain under heavy fire to reach wounded soldiers. Even after being shot in the leg, he continued treating casualties until he was fatally wounded.

His heroism wasn't limited to that day. On Christmas 1968, during an ambush on a supply convoy, Michael drove directly into the "killing zone," coordinated reinforcements, and performed lifesaving first aid on a critically wounded soldier. His actions "undoubtedly saved the man's life."

On September 25, 1969, Brig. Gen. John H. Cushman visited the Whalen home to present Michael's medals to his mother. It was a moment of honor layered with grief; one she had lived through once before.

There is no record of Donald's plane or crew ever being recovered. For decades, the Whalen



*Spec. 4 Michael
C. Whalen*

family lived with unanswered questions. In 1974, Donald's mother finally ordered his bronze military monument, more than thirty years after his disappearance, to be installed in the family's plot in St. Mary's Cemetery.

Today, both Donald and Michael's monuments stand together at St. Mary's Cemetery, two brothers separated by a generation but united in sacrifice.



LHS BULLETIN BOARD

CALENDAR RAFFLE

Our biggest fundraiser every year has traditionally been our calendar raffle. The money raised will fund two scholarships the Historical Society awards every year to help Lee students with their further education expenses. We have a small team (led by 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 are still for sale until the end of October. The winners will be drawn for prizes assigned to every day in November, that means 30 prizes will be available! This year, most of the prizes will be cold hard cash, something everyone can find a use for.

Please contact Mal Eckert: maleckert@msn.com or me (Tracie) at: ethere@gmail.com to purchase tickets.

\$10

November Calendar Raffle

2026 Lee Historical Society Fundraiser

\$10

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 \$100 cash donated by Kelly Funeral Home	2 (2) tickets to any BTG produced or presented show (\$160 value) donated by Berkshire Theatre Group	3 • \$100 cash donated by Berkshire Liquors • \$50 gift certificate donated by Finders Keepers	4 \$100 gift certificate donated by Clark's Nursery	5 \$100 cash donated by Zabian's Clothing	6 • (4) Mansion passes (\$88 value) donated by The Mount • \$75 cash donated by Frank Consolati Insurance	7 \$250 cash donated by Eagle Mill Redevelopment LLC
8 • \$100 cash donated by Knollwood Antiques • (2) passes (\$50 value) donated by Norman Rockwell Museum	9 \$100 Visa gift card donated by October Mtn Financial Advisors	10 \$200 cash donated by B-Safe Storage	11 \$50 cash in memory of Barbara Allen and \$100 cash in memory of Doug & Marion Leach donated by Gary Allen	12 3 yds bark mulch (\$225 value) donated by Meadow Farm (will be delivered within Berkshire County)	13 • (2) tickets for the 2026 or 2027 season (\$100 value) donated by Shakespeare & Co • \$50 cash donated by Bob Denley's Foreign Car Repair	14 • \$100 cash donated by Considine Arnold & Schopp LLP • \$25 gift card donated by Locker Room Sports Pub
15 \$100 cash donated by LePrevost Plumbing, Heating & Cooling	16 • \$100 cash donated by Lee Audio 'N Security • Gift basket donated by Greylock Federal Credit Union	17 (2) tickets to any one show of the 10x10 New Play Festival in Feb/Mar 2027 season (\$140 value) donated by Barrington Stage Company	18 • One-year family membership (\$100 value) donated by Hancock Shaker Village • \$75 cash donated by AF Viale Insurance	19 \$100 cash donated by LB Corporation	20 • Gift certificate for oil change service (\$75 value) donated by Fraser Auto Service • \$50 cash donated by Glenn Wilcox	21 \$100 Visa gift card donated by October Mtn Financial Advisors
22 \$125 cash donated by DF Lane Landscaping	23 • \$100 cash donated by Knollwood Antiques • \$50 gift card donated by 51 Park Restaurant & Tavern	24 \$100 cash donated by Gateway Physical Therapy & Wellness	25 One-year family membership (\$115 value) donated by Berkshire Botanical Garden	26  \$250 cash donated by Eagle Mill Redevelopment LLC	27 • \$100 gift card donated by Patriot Car Wash • \$25 gift card donated by Locker Room Sports Pub	28 \$200 cash donated by RW's Inc
29 \$100 cash donated by Lee Bank	30 \$125 gift certificate donated by Henry's Electric	~Winners will be posted on the Lee Historical Society Lee, MA Facebook Group page~ WIN MULTIPLE TIMES! Each daily winner is re-entered for future drawings in the raffle.				

LHS SPEAKERS SERIES – Tom Ragusa



Local historian Tom Ragusa will give an illustrated talk, Following Knox's Footsteps: Mapping the Trail Through Otis and Sandisfield, on Tuesday, November 17, 2026 at 6:30pm at the Lee Senior Center, 21 Crossway Street, Lee. General Knox was commissioned by

General Washington in December 1775 to bring captured artillery, including 59 cannons, from Fort Ticonderoga, located on the south end of New York's Lake Champlain, to Boston. Washington desperately needed this artillery to defend Boston against the British. During this presentation he will share his extensive research to rediscover the seven-mile segment of the Knox Trail which runs through the Otis State Forest in Sandisfield and Otis. This section is the longest surviving original stretch of the one-time colonial "military road" that connected Boston and Albany.

Tom Ragusa, a retired DCR parks employee and longtime member of the Otis Historical Commission, started this quest in 2008 and worked part time on the project since then. He is also one of the co-authors of the recently published book, *Ye Trodden Path: A History of the Knox Trail*.

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 2026 ANNUAL MEETING

The Lee Historical Society's Annual meeting will be October 8th at 5:30, at the Senior Center at High and Crossway Streets. All Historical Society members are welcome to attend.

The speaker this year will be Tracie Etheredge, the chair of the Historical Society's Historic Preservation Committee. She will talk about the historic collection and the work that is being done to catalog and preserve the artifacts.

The Consolati-Davis-Dennis award will be presented to an outstanding volunteer who has helped the Society with its ongoing mission and there will be a report on the achievements the Society had achieved throughout the year.

WHAT'S IN OUR STORE

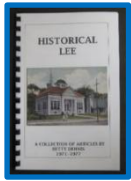
Contact Tracie to purchase any of these items: ethere@gmail.com



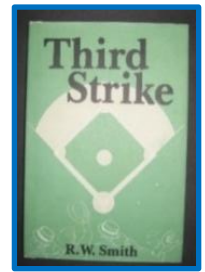
MUGS depicting various places of historical interest in Lee, including the covered bridge, Memorial Hall and the Kilbon Fountain. At just **\$5** each, this would normally be a steal, but on offer at BOGO, how can you not take advantage? Rumor has it that the morning coffee tastes extra delicious in 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!

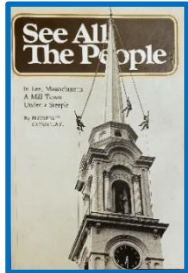




“HISTORICAL LEE” If you’ve read any of beloved Lee Librarian Betty Dennis’ articles reprinted in our newsletter from time to time, you know what a great gift this will be for anyone interested in our Town’s diverse and fascinating history, so pick one up for just **\$12** and get it wrapped!

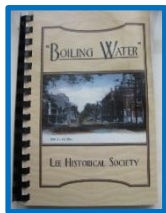
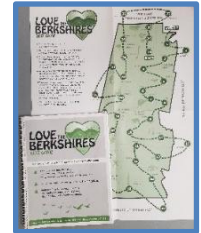


“THIRD STRIKE” by R.W. Smith. This is a wonderful book chock full of stories of the everyday people of Lee. An incredible bargain for only **\$5!**



“SEE ALL THE PEOPLE” by Florence Consolati. For any who are intrigued by what happened way back when in our Town, this is THE social history of Lee, filled with important pictures of the people and places that make Lee what it is. **\$26**

‘LOVE THE BERKSHIRES QUIZ GAME’ A new offering to our selection of merchandise, this is a trivia game designed and produced by our own Phil Smith. First brought to the market in 2010, it sold like hot cakes and of the original one thousand, only a handful are left. A fun and educational game to play after the turkey has been consumed and it’s time to settle down and relax. Originally selling for \$30, we have decided on only **\$20**, with all proceeds going to the Society.



“BOILING WATER” This delightful book was compiled by the Society’s Cookbook Committee back in 2005 and is full of the most mouth-watering recipes, such as Molasses Spice Cookies. It includes some pages by Florence Consolati on various places of historical interest in Lee. **\$8**

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: _____

CITY/TOWN: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

TELEPHONE: _____ EMAIL: _____

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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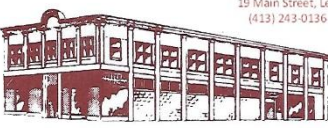
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