



Vol. 21, No. 6

June 2024

# The Gateway Gazette

*The Newsletter of the Lee Historical Society*

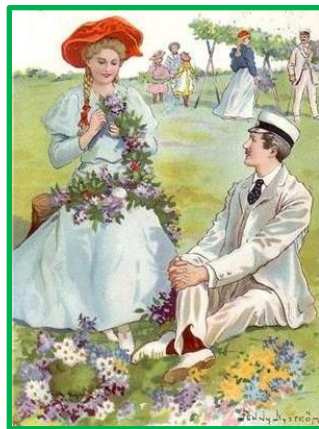
***Our unique history and blend of people defines the foundation of our Town.***

Email: [Lee.Historical@hotmail.com](mailto:Lee.Historical@hotmail.com)

Website: [leehistoricsociety.homestead.com](http://leehistoricsociety.homestead.com)

Facebook: Lee Historical Society Lee MA

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



## **FROM THE EDITORS**

You will notice a new series starting this month in the Gateway Gazette – “Meet the Board”. This happy host of history lovers, and specifically of Lee history, is a very eclectic group of folks, from many diverse backgrounds. Rather than be perceived as an anonymous team, beavering away and hidden from sight in a board room, we thought it might be good to introduce ourselves. We would really love more people to join us as there is so much to be done to continue preserving the history of our little town and we considered it might be less intimidating if you know who you’re joining. Truth is, a lot of you already know us, but may not know being on the LHS Board is one of our passions.

This month, we introduce you to Caroline Meyer Young, our Treasurer, and a real whiz with Quick Books, which makes her invaluable! We hope you enjoy this new series and will maybe consider joining us as a member, even if not on the Board. As you’ll discover, we’re a great group! And very modest...

## **REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN**

### **CORPORAL DONALD I. FILLIO (1919 - 2004)**

Corporal Donald Fillio, a veteran of World War Two, had an exemplary career, as illustrated by the long list of medals and achievements awarded to him during his four years in the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 1st Marine Division. These included the Asiatic-Pacific ribbon with five battle stars, the Presidential Unit Citation with two stars, the Navy Unit Citation ribbon with one star, and the American Theatre and Victory ribbons. At the beginning of his career, while stationed at the Marine Barracks in New York, he achieved a number of records: sharpshooter with the .30 caliber rifle; sharpshooter with the .45 caliber pistol; marksman with the .22 caliber rifle; expert with the bayonet. He must have been a formidable foe in battle!

But what was his connection with Lee pre-war and becoming a Marine? Donald was born in Lee on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1919, the son of Louis and Ella Mead Fillio. He was one of four brothers, all of whom were in the service; James was also a Marine, while Thomas and Francis were in the Army. He graduated from Lee High School in 1939 and went on to employment at the Smith Paper Company. It was in January 1942 that he enlisted and headed off to Parris Island in South Carolina for boot camp. From there, he went to New River, North Carolina and it was here that he was assigned to the First Marine Division for a further three months of training.



*Donald (left) and his brother James at their homecoming, 1945.*

After that, his foray into unknown territory and true adventure, if we can call wartime experience that, began. His unit went to New Zealand, just briefly, before sailing for Guadalcanal, an island that is part of the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific.

The Guadalcanal campaign, aka the Battle of Guadalcanal and codenamed Operation Watchtower, was fought between August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1942 and February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1943. It particularly stands out as it was the first major land offensive against the Empire of Japan by the Allied Forces. Corporal Fillio's unit was one that participated in the August 7<sup>th</sup> invasion and it was there that he and his comrades remained until December 1<sup>st</sup> when they were sent to Australia to recuperate. That must have been the most dramatic four months so far of his life, a young man who had grown up in Lee and knew nothing of warfare. One can only imagine!

After nine months in Australia (and we have no record of where on that continent they were or what his unit did whilst there), in September 1943, the division set off again, this time to New Guinea, and on New Year's Day of 1944 they landed at Cape Gloucester on New Britain Island. From there, Donald was sent to the Russell Islands, the staging area for the invasion of Peleliu, a battle codenamed Operation Stalemate and fought between the United States and Japan, specifically Donald's 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division and soldiers of the US Army's 81<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. The Japanese were heavily out-numbered, but put up a fierce defense, even to the death, fighting in the Emperor's name.

Donald was involved in this fierce battle and after three months finally returned to the United States, thankfully still in one piece. Before leaving the South-West Pacific theatre, he was promoted to the rank of Corporal. Once back on home soil, he stayed in the Marines for one more year, serving on bases at Newport, RI, Camp Lejune, NC, and Portsmouth, VA.

His life back in his hometown of Lee resumed a much quieter existence. On June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1945, he married his sweetheart, Marjorie M. Griffin. They had a son, another Donald, but with the middle initial C, and two grandchildren, Matthew and Amanda. He took employment after discharge as a purchasing agent for the Clark Aiken Company, and worked for ten years until his retirement in 1990 for the Westfield River Paper Company, formerly known as the Mountain Mill, in East Lee.



Labor Day, 1986

Socially, he remained active as a member of the First Congregational Church, the Bossidy Crerar Post VFW, and was past Master of the Evening Star Lodge AF & AM. He also served on the Town's Board of Registrars and was Grand Marshall of the Memorial Day Parade in May 2003.

Donald finally hung up his boots on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2004 after suffering a heart attack. On October 1<sup>st</sup>, he was laid to rest at Fairmount Cemetery after a life well-lived.



## **THE LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN BOARD**

### **WHERE WERE YOU IN '52?**

The Society's next annual exhibit will be featuring life in the 1950's. Only one in twenty-five Americans today was born early enough to remember the 1950's, a controversial decade in which President Dwight D. Eisenhower symbolized stability and trust in war and peace before a gyrating baritone named Elvis Presley came along and got us "all shook up".

The 2024 annual exhibit of the Lee Historical Society, entitled "Happy Days: Lee in the 1950's", will recall this fascinating decade of contrasts. For the few who can remember the decade, the exhibit will be a walk down Memory Lane. For those too young to recall, it will be a time to learn about the era that shaped their parents and grandparents.

Our exhibit will look at a decade of peace and prosperity, but one that also produced the frivolous "hula hoop" and the deadly serious threat of nuclear war. Davy Crockett coonskin hats became a fad while Sputnik rocketed us into the space age. And poodle skirts covered up the earth-shaking Brown decision by the Supreme Court.

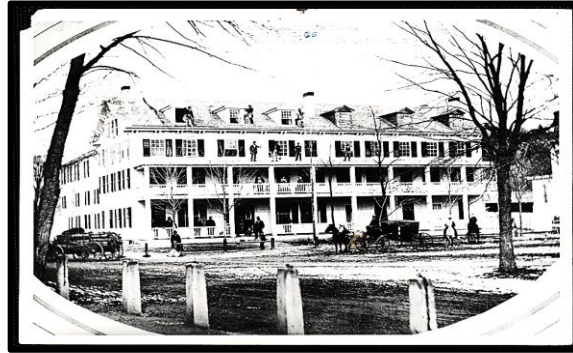
Closer to home, we will learn about life in Lee during the '50's; cleaning up the river, repressive attitudes toward girls, losing part of our heritage, the coming of the Mass Pike, slow response to trendy music, edgy nightlife, bowling together, law and order's response to rebellious youth and much more.

The big, all-new exhibit will be installed at the J. Peter Scolforo Gallery at Lee Library on August 1<sup>st</sup> and will remain on display throughout the month. It is free and open to the public. The exhibit can be viewed during most regular library hours by inquiring at the desk. Please come and enjoy "Happy Days".

For more information, contact Phil Smith, Curator, 413-243-1060.

## THEN AND NOW

### THE HOUSATONIC HOTEL



Take a good look at this photo and ask yourself a couple of questions about it. First of all, where on earth in Lee was this impressive edifice? Secondly, why are those men standing, quite precariously, outside the windows on the third and fourth stories? We can answer the first question and have no idea about the second.

According to the Rev. Hyde, there was only one hotel in the village until 1834. That was the Red Lion, built in 1778 by Nathan Dillingham. It was situated where the Berkshire Bank now sits on the corner of Park and Housatonic Streets. Then along came one William Cole who, after listening to the citizens of Lee complaining that Lee was in need of a first-class hotel, built what you see above, the Housatonic Hotel.

Visitors to Lee staying at the Housatonic Hotel and in need of transportation were in luck. In February of 1858, Henry Alexander ran a stage coach business and re-established its route between Lee and Pittsfield. Once a day, his coach would leave the Housatonic Hotel at 7 a.m., returning at 11 a.m. That must have been quite the journey along either dusty, snow-covered, or muddy dirt roads, depending on the weather.

The hotel had changed hands at some time as in 1865 a Mr. Hicks enlarged and improved it at great expense. And then, sadly, in 1867 the Housatonic Hotel met the fate of so many of Lee's original buildings and burnt to the ground, only two years after having been so greatly improved. Fortunately, the First Congregational Church which neighbored it, didn't catch fire on this occasion.

And that answers the first question as to where this hotel was. The photo below gives it away, doesn't it? Memorial Hall, built in 1874 to honor the thirty eight men of Lee who lost their lives in service with the Union Army during the Civil War, now stands in place of that great hotel.



---

We've set the date for cemetery cleaning! We will meet on June 23rd, at 9:00am at the cemetery. All the equipment will be provided, except for rubber gloves and tick spray. Let us know if you can be there, Linda: [lindabreader@icloud.com](mailto:lindabreader@icloud.com) or Tracie: [ethere@gmail.com](mailto:ethere@gmail.com).

---

## THE GREAT EPIDEMIC OF 1928

Inconceivable as it may sound, one cow nearly brought Lee to its knees back in the 1920's. Unbeknownst to a Lee dairy farmer, Pansy, the cow he bought up in Vermont, was sick, her milk infected with the streptococcus bacteria. Symptoms of this infection in humans present as a chronic sore throat that makes swallowing painful, with fever and swollen lymph nodes in the neck. Back then, strep throat could be – and often was – fatal. Pansy's milk, as was not unusual then, was unpasteurized and so the bacteria was not destroyed, thus passing on to unsuspecting consumers. Strep throat is highly contagious, passed through respiratory droplets such as when people talk, cough, or sneeze. And so it began ...

It was Tuesday, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1928 when the people of Lee were saddened to learn of the passing of sixty-four year old Mary Barrett in her home on Summer Street. Mary had been ill with pre-existing conditions, but her death had not been anticipated. As they mourned her loss, little did anyone have an inkling of the catastrophe that lay ahead.

It was just the next day when Edward Childs succumbed, his symptoms the same as had sickened Mary. Two days later on Friday, July 6<sup>th</sup>, Shannon Stephens was the next to pass. By then, in that short space of time, over three hundred residents were reporting strep throat symptoms, though at first it was thought to be influenza. Finding pall bearers for Edward's funeral was proving a major problem as it seemed that any who had been in contact with him were now sick.

On Saturday, July 7<sup>th</sup>, five more deaths were reported and the number of people falling ill was increasing by the hour.

At that time, Lee had three physicians – George Wickham, C.W. Stratton, and A.M. O'Connor. With the situation escalating dramatically, desperately needed assistance arrived in the form of Dr. Leland French, the Pittsfield District Health Officer, and Nancy Ryan, the Town's only Visiting Nurse. They pitched in together and worked tirelessly day and night to minister to the sick until Monday, July 9<sup>th</sup>, when reinforcements started to arrive. By then, twelve people had lost their lives and undertaking services were unavailable as the Town's only undertaker and his wife were also gravely ill.

It was imperative to find out the cause of this fatal sickness. One thing some of those initially infected had in common was milk consumption. Samples from the local dairy farms were tested on the Monday and the streptococcus bacteria was discovered in Pansy's.



*Dairy cows, not the actual Pansy*

Relief efforts, centered around the old Hyde School, were being coordinated with the assistance of Daniel Bigelow, the State Health Commissioner. The school was now an emergency hospital being run by Dr. May Holmes. Originally from Lee, she had been in charge of the Worcester Isolation Hospital since 1896 and was involved in the influenza epidemic of 1918, so bringing a vital wealth of experience with her. She had been about to set off on vacation when news arrived of the dreadful situation in Lee. Setting that plan to one side, she arrived in town on Monday morning, bringing with her not only her equipment but also a team that consisted of her staff, which included Dr. Lillian DeArmit and Dr. Joan Black, two additional highly experienced physicians.

What had once been classrooms in the old school were now wards, the walls lined with cots. Each day saw three or four more deaths.

Drastic measures to curb the spread needed to be taken. Church services and public gatherings were prohibited, restaurants were ordered to close early, mills, banks, and stores had only minimum staff or were shut down completely. Milk sales were banned.



*Dr. May Holmes*

By Tuesday, July 10<sup>th</sup>, the number of reported cases was declining and optimism was being expressed that the worst was over. There had been a few dozen cases reported from nearby towns of people who had visited Lee, but their symptoms were mild. Unfortunately, perhaps due to a slackening of the steps taken to stop the spread, cases started to increase again. By Wednesday, July 11<sup>th</sup>, an army of seventy nurses were in Lee to care for the sick; by Saturday, that number had doubled. Thankfully, the following week saw a decrease in the number of new cases and deaths had reduced to one every couple of days. The school was down to fifty-six patients by July 20<sup>th</sup> and, even though deaths continued through the end of the month, it was deemed that the danger had passed.

Although there was not a cure, Dr. Holmes administered a serum that was used for scarlet fever, which is related to strep, and this was credited with saving at least a hundred or more lives. Despite the large number of nurses who arrived to assist, Visiting Nurse Nancy Ryan had continued to work day and night until the epidemic was finally considered over on July 30<sup>th</sup>. Overall figures are that of the 4,000 residents of Lee, 1,000 became seriously ill, and forty-eight lost their lives.



*Streptococcus pyogenes*

In a fortuitous twist, Lee's epidemic eventually led to major changes in the understanding of how to treat and prevent bacterial infection. A couple of months later, on the other side of the Atlantic, and unrelated to the epidemic in Lee, a London doctor returned from vacation and noticed something interesting in a petri dish. Before leaving, he had placed a mold – penicillium notatum – in the dish and, upon noticing its reaction, he made some random observations.

A decade later, three scientists in Oxford looked into these observations and obviously saw some merit. Their interest turned into the development of antibiotics that changed the course of the treatment of infections.

Back in Lee, the epidemic resulted in massive support for the pasteurization of milk and Lee passed a bylaw which made it a requirement. Commissioner Bigelow got on the case for making pasteurization a legal requirement nationwide by attempting to pass bills through the Legislature, using what happened in Lee to advance his case, citing the loss of life and the estimated cost of a million dollars to tackle it. The discussions and debates on this continue to this day – should the restrictions on raw milk be eased or not? What are your thoughts?

## **MEET THE BOARD**

### **CAROLINE MEYER YOUNG**



Caroline has always been interested in history. As a child, living in what had once been an original Dutch settlement in New Jersey, she went around to neighbors asking to see inside of their 17th century houses. As it was a small community, she was tolerated with surprising good humor. This was accompanied by a real passion for historical novels that prevails today.

Her Fine Arts degree from Ohio University required the intense study of historical costume architecture and interior design. This knowledge is required to get through the testing for membership in any of the theatre designers' unions, and so it was vitally important for a useful degree. Caroline can still date a photograph as long as there is a clothed woman in it!

Caroline continues her interest in costuming and was involved with the now defunct Berkshire Public Theatre and the North Adams Theatre Group at one time, but her interests go even further. Gardening is one of her passions, she is a skilled knitter and crocheter, and

is also a cabaret singer We cannot forget her flock of chickens that she keeps happily pecking away and laying eggs in a coop on her property.

When she's not busy with her hobbies and interests, Caroline is Treasurer for the Lee Historical Society, using the skills she used as a full charge bookkeeper before retiring, and has been on the Board for eight years. She is also a corporator for the Lee Library Association and is Secretary for the Lee Agricultural Commission.

Landing in Massachusetts after college, where her ancestors came from, made for lots of fun reading, visiting, and study. Getting to Lee with all its well-preserved history was the icing on the cake. When friend Carol Marino, who was the Secretary to the Selectmen at the time, wanted to form an Historical Commission, Caroline raised her hand enthusiastically. (Imagine husband rolling eyes, honeymoon was spent at Plimoth Plantation!) Neighbor and friend, Betty Dennis, took her in hand and made sure East Lee history was imparted.

Visitors to Lee who happen to encounter Caroline will get the free historical tour if they show the slightest interest. It should be noted, however, that Caroline does not want to go back and live in the past. She is far too fond of plumbing.

**LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2024 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, 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 at [ethere@gmail.com](mailto:ethere@gmail.com).

Thanks to all for supporting the Lee Historical Society!

**THESE BUSINESSES SUPPORT US.....PLEASE SUPPORT THEM**

**Bartini Roofing Company**  
290 Pleasant Street  
**243-0570**

**Fox Homes**  
225 Housatonic St.  
**243-1950**

**Toole Insurance Co.**  
195 Main Street  
**243-0089**



**Clark's Nursery**  
A family owned business in the Berkshires for over 30 years  
1210 Pleasant St., Lee, MA 01238  
(413) 243-0660  
ClarksNursery@gmail.com  
Annuals, perennials, vegetables, and landscape design services



Pete Sorrentino  
Owner  
P (413) 243-0326  
F (413) 243-8109  
**Fraser Auto Services Inc.**  
139 West Park St.  
P.O. Box 905  
Lee, MA 01238  
E-mail: fraserautoservice@msn.com  
We accept ALL major Credit Cards

vinyl lips - stereos - art - crystals - jewelry  
**UPTOWN**  
antiques - collectibles - and a whole lot more  
266 Main Street, Lee, MA 01238  
**Marc Manoli**  
413-358-0107 Marc@theuptownstore.org  
SHOP OUR EBAY: www.stores.ebay.com/arcnoli

LAW OFFICES OF MICHAEL J. CONSIDINE  
**Michael J. Considine**  
Attorney at Law  
49 Main Street, P.O. Box 378  
Lee, Massachusetts 01238  
Email: michaeljconsidine@49mainlaw.com  
Tel: 413-243-4900  
Fax: 413-243-4775



**MJ KELLY**  
Funeral Home  
Established in 1806 Family owned since 1872  
3 Main Street • Lee, MA 01238  
413-243-0204

**A.F. VIALE INSURANCE AGENCY**  
SINCE 1912  
AUTO • HOME • RENTERS  
BUSINESS AUTO • CONTRACTOR'S LIABILITY  
Paul A. Viale, Owner  
www.vialeinsurance.com  
75 MAIN ST. ~ LEE, MA. 01238  
413-243-0347

71 Main Street, Lee, MA 01238  
consolati@verizon.net 413-243-0109 F 413-243-4622  
**CONSOLATI**  
Insurance Inc.  
Customizing Policies Since 1945  
Home Auto Business Umbrella

**Henry's Electric Inc.**  
EST. 1946  
WE LIGHT THE WAY  
John LePrevost  
Home Appliances - Electrical Contracting  
252 MAIN STREET  
LEE, MA 01238  
TEL. (413) 243-0690  
FAX. (413) 243-4609  
Email: john@henryelectricinc.com

**Glen Wilcox Plumbing**  
PO Box 561  
**243-2494**



**Cottage Care**  
INCORPORATED  
413 243 • 4257  
Fully Insured Free Estimates

**Lee Chamber of Commerce**  
3 Park Place  
**243-1705**

Your **Color Connection**  
Ann M. LaBier  
Owner  
Full Service Printing  
Graphic Design  
Laser Engraving  
Graphic Design & Printing Company  
36 Pittsfield Road, Lenox, MA 01240  
ycc01240@aol.com 413-637-0500  
yourcolorconnection.com

**DRESSER HULL**  
LUMBER & BUILDING SUPPLY COMPANY  
60 RAILROAD STREET  
LEE, MASSACHUSETTS 01238  
(413) 243-1400  
(413) 243-4156 - FAX  
www.dresserhull.com  
Keith Kelly  
Sales  
keith.kelly@dresserhull.com

**Onyx Specialty Papers**  
40 Willow Street, South Lee  
**243-1231**



19 Main Street, Lee  
(413) 243-0136  
**Zabian's Clothing**



**R.W.'s TOWING & REPAIRS**  
24-Hour Recovery  
35 Ron Way • P.O. Box 799 • Lee, MA 01238  
Ph: (413) 243-0946  
Fax: (413) 243-0948  
rwtowing.com  
rwtowing@verizon.net  
BILL & BECKY BRUNELL