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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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FROM THE EDITORS

Ah! April in the Berkshires and spring has sprung, so we're told. April does, of course, get off to a great start on the day that you receive your monthly newsletter with April Fools' Day. Of course, being a very serious publication, we would not attempt to play any jokes on our readers. Would we ...

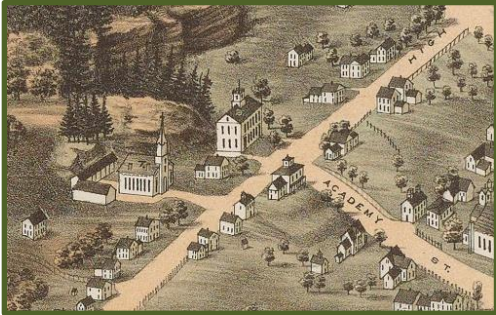
As the – we hope – warmer temperatures start to push out the colder ones, the Society is looking ahead to our 2025 events. We will be gathering our team for the Fairmount Cemetery gravestone cleaning, sponsored by the Christopher Long Memorial Fund. Once we have provisional dates set up, we'll be contacting our ever-expanding list of volunteers. We do, of course, always have room for more – it's a big cemetery with a lot of areas that need help.

Phil Smith and his team have already been hard at work on this year's exhibit that will be held at the Scolforo Gallery at Lee Library. We always plan ahead for Founders Day and will no doubt be marching along with our banner in the parade and, again, volunteers are never turned away! And we'll be hosting more of our Speaker Series programs to keep you all entertained. Take a look at the Membership Form on Page 7 to see what you might be interested in getting involved in!

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO REV. JETER?

We left you hanging last month by not telling the full story of the Rev. Robert Jeter being accused of “Unlawful Marrying”. We just felt it was too riveting a tale to be lost within the lengthy history of Lee’s African Methodist Episcopal Church. Rather than try to retell this in our own words, we have decided to repeat the article here as it was so well-written by the original Berkshire Gleaner journalist back on September 11th, 1907.

MINISTER AND GROOM IN COURT “Rev” Robert Jeter Charged With Unlawful Marrying and Brother Dolphin with Abduction



The African Methodist Episcopal Church is depicted here across the street from the steepled church in the center of the image.

The colored population had a matrimonial difficulty to untangle at the courtroom Monday morning. “Rev.” Robert Jeter was accused of “performing a marriage ceremony knowing the female to be a minor,” and Frederick S. Dolphin was accused of abduction, the act being the marrying of Miss Carrie A. Jackson, 15, without consent of parents or guardian.

The unhappy couple appeared before Town Clerk Pease Saturday night and secured a marriage license. They had eloped Friday night, and the girl’s guardian, Luke Jaynes, went to Great Barrington Saturday to look them up. Getting a tip that he was on the trail the young people came to Lee and after securing a license arranged with

Merton Messick to have the wedding at his house on Prospect Street. No time was to be lost, so Parson Jeter was summoned and the knot tied forthwith. The reception was cut a trifle short that the couple might enjoy a trolley bridal trip to Sheffield, but they were back at Mr. Messick’s residence Sunday in time for the reception. In the midst of the congratulations and feasting the stern guardian appeared with an officer and Mr. Dolphin torn from the arms of the blushing bride and consigned to the lockup.

Well “the blow almost killed father,” but Mr. Dolphin bore the terrible separation with dark-browed fortitude, and the bride very heroically refused a chance at hysterics. It might be added that the bride is a prepossessing colored woman and the young colored sports have been very envious of Dolphin’s good fortune in winning her hand.

There has been a question raised whether Robert Jeter has the legal right to perform a legal ceremony. He has married several couples and it might be interesting to know whether they were married before the census enumerator makes many more rounds, hence he was placed under arrest and brought into court.

The bridegroom showed the terrible mental strain by a night of separation from his bride, but was manly in his plea and said the charge was true and he was guilty. He was bound over to a higher court in \$300 bonds. Mr. Jeter, however, could not see how he had infringed on the law. He had never questioned the age of the bride, taking it for granted that she was of proper age because of her personal appearance. He produced his diploma issued in 1900 by Bishop Derlok of the American African Methodist Episcopal denomination, giving to him all the rights of a “deacon” to officiate at “births, marriages and deaths”, which he has recently framed and hung in his parlor to secure any future prospective matrimonial contractors. The bride, however, is under age, according to the testimony of Mr. Jaynes, who darkened the honeymoon and the court thought it well to hold the defendant for trial until tomorrow, and placed him under \$200 bonds.

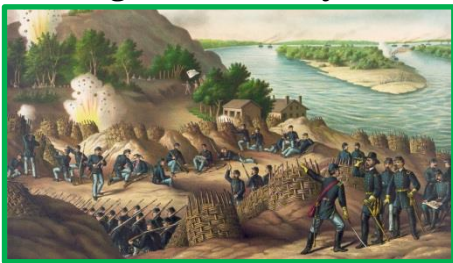
The word “deacon” in the “diploma” looks as though Mr. Jeter’s right or power to perform a legal marriage would be again questioned tomorrow. In the meantime there are fears in several quarters that the parties whom he has joined in bliss have another wedding coming, just to be in fashion and prevent any legal complication in settling the estates on Prospect Street, but the law makes proper provision in such cases.

Town Clerk Pease states that on application for the license the parties claimed that Miss Jackson was 20 years old.”

So now we know the story up to the arraignment of Mr. Dolphin, but not what happened at his subsequent trial. Nor do we know what happened to his bride, Miss (or Mrs.?) Jackson (Dolphin?). Did the couple end up back together and live their lives happily married or were they to remain separated and leading different lives? What about Rev. Jeter? Was it confirmed that he was the victim of a duplicitous attempt for a marriage to an underage child to take place? Did the other couples he had married need to hurry back to church or be considered living in sin? It would be great to find out and, should we discover more, we’ll be sure to let you all know!

REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN **CHARLES O. BROWN (1847 – 1932)**

Lee’s last Civil War veteran, Charles was born out-of-state in Manchester, CT, the son of Mr. & Mrs. Charles A. Brown, and came to live in Lee in 1879 to learn the trade of paper-making. While still in Connecticut, Charles enlisted in the United States Army in Hartford when he was only sixteen years old. He enlisted for three years, but was honorably discharged after twenty-two months as the war ended.



The Siege of Vicksburg by Kurz & Allison

His unit was the 3rd US Artillery, Battery L, and he saw plenty of action while with them, managing to stay unharmed as far as we know, as there is no mention of him being wounded. His unit was engaged at several different historical military encounters, including the Siege of Vicksburg (May 18 – July 4, 1863), which was the final major military action in the Vicksburg Campaign of the Civil War. Union Major General Ulysses S. Grant with his Army of the Tennessee crossed the Mississippi River and drove the

Confederate Army of Mississippi into defensive lines surrounding Vicksburg, leading to the surrender of the Confederates there.

In East Tennessee they were at the Siege of Knoxville in 1863, and also involved in the Rapidan Campaign in 1864, involving the capture of the Confederate capital of Richmond, starting with the Union Army crossing the Rapidan River. In May of 1864, Charles and his comrades fought in the Battle of the Wilderness. This was the opening engagement of Grant’s Overland Campaign and, although probably quite exciting, ended in an inconclusive battle. There were heavy casualties on both sides, so good for Charles for coming from it unscathed. After all this action, back home in Lee, Charles took up employment as a mechanic at Hurlbut Paper Company, moving onto the Hurlbut Manufacturing Company, and then the American Writing Paper Company. During this time, he also managed to find two wives, not at the same time, of course. He and his first wife, Clementine Dudley of Manchester, CT had five children, three daughters and two sons. After he lost Clementine, he married an Elizabeth Mercier of South Lee, and here’s a fact that gets the brain twitching – Elizabeth had a daughter Olive who married Charles’ son George. That meant Charles became the father-in-law of his step-daughter.

This same son came to the rescue of his Dad and step-mother when the house they all lived in on lower Main Street caught fire. This was the evening of Saturday, January 17th, 1931. The cause of the fire was not determined, but its resultant smoke overcame Mrs. Brown, caused Charles to inhale a lot of smoke (and cough a lot, we assume), and a Mrs. Lay, who lived somewhere in the same house, made her own way out, but then suffered from exposure as it was January in the Berkshires.

Charles finally passed away on Saturday, April 9, 1932 following a short illness. He was taken from Kelly Funeral Home to Fairmount Cemetery where the Rev. Howard F. Dunn officiated at the funeral, organized by the VFW and the American Legion, with the flag flying at half-mast. A fitting goodbye to a brave old soldier.

MILITARY WOMEN'S MEMORIAL **HONORING HER SERVICE**



More than three million women have served this nation since the American Revolution. Every one of them volunteered to serve.

These women deserve to be honored and remembered, and their stories of service and sacrifice deserve to be preserved and told at the only national memorial to honor their service. For more information about the memorial and their mission: <https://womensmemorial.org/>

For years the Lee Historical Society has been keeping and updating a database of Lee Veterans. We need your help! In conjunction with the Military Women's Memorial we are currently focusing on women veterans. Please let us know if you have information on friends or family members from Lee (recently or historically) who served in the armed services. Email Karen Norton: knorton2@hotmail.com or Tracie Etheredge: ethere@gmail.com

THE MONSTER OF LAUREL LAKE?

It was Thursday, April 1st, 1897 when two Lee brothers, Jonah and Dick Moby, cast their lines into the dusk-darkened waters of Laurel Lake, their hopes being on a succulent fat bass for supper.

"Think they'll be bitin' tonight, Dick?" asked Jonah as he chomped on a piece of dried grass he'd pulled from the water's bank, it still being winter in the Berkshires and no green grass yet.

"Oh, ay!" Dick responded, "Me tummy's fair rumblin' at the thought. I bet we'll get us some big 'uns this night!"

Jonah and Dick had fastened to their hand-made hooks some night crawlers they'd dug up that late afternoon before heading to their favorite spot on the far side of the lake; there was a vast patch of water weed that the fish lurked in as the eagles swooped overhead, hunting them out. This had been their favorite spot since they were little lads, their now-deceased father having taught them the art of making fishing rods from the nearby willow, sharp whittling knives in their child-sized hands moving with expert precision.

The splash of a leaping fish exhibiting its joy at just being in the icy lake broke the surface of the water into ever-expanding ripples.

"Eh! That were a big 'un!" exclaimed Jonah, and he and Dick stared expectantly to the location of the splash, readying their rods for casting in that direction.

“Did ‘e see that, Jonah?” Dick sounded a bit more bemused than usual as he stared intently at the dark water around the now-dissipated splash.

“What you lookin’ at, Dick?” Jonah stared in the same direction as his brother and then both stepped back in unison, dropping their rods and scrambling back into the bushes behind them. Parting the spikey branches, both peered out to the lake with fear-rounded eyes. Neither believed what they were seeing, but neither could they *not* believe their eyes as they watched a huge black shadow, the length and width of a large fishing boat, glide beneath the waters.

“What the ... ! Oh, God ‘elp us!” Dick screeched as he made the sign of the cross on his chest, watching the shadow materialize into a creature the size of a whale, but with the dorsal fins of a Great White shark, its mouth forming a cavernous black hole as it scooped up several large bass in its maw.

All thoughts of further fishing activity gone from their minds, and leaving their rods where they fell, Dick and Jonah ran as fast as they could on shaking legs to alert the constabulary of their sighting, the first and only one ever to be recorded of the Monster of Laurel Lake.

Editors’ Note: Have any of you heard of this legend of Laurel Lake before reading this? If so, we’d love to hear your thoughts.

MEET THE BOARD **TRACIE ETHEREDGE**



From an early age Tracie's curiosity often led her astray.

Tracie is the epitome of a rolling stone, not the now-geriatric rock ‘n rolling type, of course, but the one who’s been there, done that. Our readers will be familiar with the name as she is co-editor of the Gateway Gazette. Regular visitors to Lee Library, especially those wanting to research family history or reveal the stories behind their historic dwellings, will have sought out Tracie’s expertise. But what is the history of *this* free spirit?

It starts at Cocoa Beach, Florida where Tracie first saw the light of day and where, as a two-year old, she and her family watched the launch of Apollo 11 in July 1969 (not that she remembers that particular event...).

Even though born in Florida and having lived, basically, all over, Tracie’s roots do descend to Lee via her mother, Jarolyn Jones Etheredge. Jarolyn was born on Park Street in Lee, and her Dad worked at the Lee Lumber Mill. Tracie’s maternal great-granddad, Charles Miller, was a well-known figure in Lee as he operated his tailoring business for fifty-odd years in a space above what is now the Salmon Run Restaurant.

How did Berkshire-born Jarolyn meet West Texan Boyd Etheredge? She was a Flight Nurse with the rank of Lieutenant then and he was a Lieutenant with the Air Force’s Strategic Air Command and later with the Satellite Control Network. Boyd had an exciting career working in the space and satellite programs with high level security clearance. His department monitored the “Wild Weasels”, swift aircraft mounted with radar detecting and jamming equipment that would fly over North Vietnam in search of radar installations. He was eventually promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. Jarolyn had to retire from the Air Force upon becoming pregnant with their first child.

Being an Air Force “brat” meant Tracie’s life started as it continued as the family, Tracie, Mum and Dad, sister Patricia and brother Tim, moved from base to base. This included a

four year stay in Germany, at Bad Aibling, near the Austrian border, and where Tracie learned the language as she went from second through fifth grade at the Air Force base's school.

After graduating from Milford Area Senior High School in Milford, New Hampshire, Tracie went off to Clark University in Worcester where she gained an Undergraduate Degree in History, English, and American Studies. Not too far from Lee, then. But then wanderlust must have struck as her next stop was at Colorado State University in Fort Collins for a Graduate Master's Degree in History with a Public History Specialization.

Tracie makes this interesting observation about her life which has obviously included much academia: *"I love learning and have never had a single-minded drive to rise to the top in any one skill/profession/craft. I have followed all sorts of paths leading me in different directions in different parts of the country as my interests are piqued at different times by different things. If I could have afforded it, I would have been a life-long student."*

Equipped with her multiple degrees, Tracie held many different positions in many locations. She shares just a few, including as an Archive Intern at the Air & Space Museum in Washington, DC, an Archivist in Denver, CO, a Museum Collections Curator for the Lycoming County History Museum in Williamsport, PA, a Business Research Specialist in Chicago, IL Maybe her Texas roots from her Dad's side beckoned as, after gaining work experience in Denver and Williamsport, she went on to further her academic career at the University of Texas in Austin where she gained her Master's Degree in Library & Information Studies. Phew!

Now, returning to her roots in Lee, she is employed as a Library Assistant at Lee Library. In her downtime, she relaxes by crafting and, again, in her own words: *"crocheting, tatting, book binding, book folding, blah, blah, blah – if I hear about it, I'll try it ..."* If you're interested in what the blah, blah, blah involves, have a chat with Tracie at the library!

For five years now, Tracie has been an extremely active member of the Board of Directors for Lee Historical Society. Not only does she do extensive research and layout for the Gateway Gazette, but is also Chair of both the Collections and Cemetery Committees, and is the Society's chief Archivist. She does the research and acts as tour guide for the annual tours of both Fairmount and St. Mary's Cemeteries, as well as being the tour guide for the Walking Tours of Lee, sponsored by the Upper Housatonic Valley Heritage Corridor.

To quote Tracie one more time, after asking of her aspirations for the Historical Society, her response is *"I would love for the LHS to have a permanent home with proper storage space and display space for our collection. We need more people to see our collection so we can demonstrate that Lee has a history to be proud of and talked about."* Hear! Hear! Well said. Let's hope for this aspiration of Tracie's, shared by many, to come to fruition before too long.



LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY SPEAKER SERIES:
EVERYTHING HAS A STORY!



In the next of our Speaker Series, Mary Philpott, President Emerita of the Lee Library Association Board of Directors, will give an illustrated talk, “Everything Has a Story”, 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).

This fascinating and engaging presentation on the Lee Library Historical Collection, featuring interesting artifacts, rare scrapbooks, and vintage photographs, is perfect for history buffs, curious minds, and anyone who loves a good story! What is tucked away in the library archives? A rich collection of town records, textiles, early letters, business ledgers, maps, and even unexpected treasures – each with a story waiting to be told. 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

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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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