



Vol. 21, No. 12

December 2024

# 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, December 12<sup>th</sup> at the Historical Society Office, Crossway Tower, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.*



## **FROM THE EDITORS**

And so another year has rolled around and here's the final edition of the Gateway Gazette for 2024. It has been a successful year for the Society with much activity – the introduction of the rejuvenation of Fairmount Cemetery, thanks to the Christopher Long Memorial Fund donation and the activity of a team of volunteers – cemetery tours – Historical Main Street Walks – Founders Day activities, including introducing the Adamsville Ancients Fife & Drum Band to the parade – a fantastic series of talks on diverse topics – the expansion of our historical collection, thanks to many generous donations – and so much behind-the-scenes activity! As we look to 2025, we thank our members and sponsors for their continued support, and wish all of you a very Healthy and Happy New Year!

## **IN MEMORIAM**



It is with great sadness that we relay the passing of Barbara “Barb” Allen, wife of Society President, Gary Allen. It was in our November issue that we featured Gary in our “Meet the Board” segment, this article proving to also now be a tribute to Barb as their lives were inseparably intertwined, as was Barb’s involvement to local history. All at the Society extend their condolences to Gary and their family and friends and thank Barb for her decades of invaluable research and contributions to the preservation of Berkshires’ great history. Rest in peace, Friend.

## **REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN** **RAYMOND EARL ALLEN (1899 – 1965)**

Raymond Allen was a Navy man, enlisting on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1917 at the age of eighteen and was discharged on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1921. His rank was C.M. 3<sup>rd</sup> Class, an enlisted rating that stands for Construction Mechanic. This is a specialized role with the Navy Seabees, the Navy’s construction battalions. The role carries a lot of responsibility in that CM’s are in charge of the maintenance and repair of heavy equipment and vehicles that are used in construction projects. There isn’t much to be found on Raymond’s career, but we do know he was assigned to the USS Alameda. Apparently, this name has been given to more than one US Navy ship. With Raymond’s service dates, it’s most likely that the USS Alameda he was assigned to was originally designated Fuel Ship No. 10, a tanker that was in commission from 1919 to 1922, but we cannot confirm that.

On September 26<sup>th</sup>, 1930. Raymond wed Emily Elizabeth Schwab. At that time, they both lived on Summer Street and were married at the home of Emily’s mother, who also lived on Summer Street, by the Rev. Alfred Taylor. It seems neither Raymond nor Emily still had fathers around as there is no mention of them, just the mothers – Mrs. Matilda Schwab and Mrs. M.L. Allen, who lived Out West at Dos Palos in California. Mrs. Schwab was obviously quite the musician as she played the Wedding March at the marriage ceremony. The reception was held at the East Lee Inn and then off went the newlyweds to Canada for “an extended motor trip”. A great start for the happy couple!

After his naval career was over, Raymond became a local business owner. R.E. Allen Co. was an electrical appliance dealership and commercial refrigeration firm, having secured a Frigidaire dealership, which he ran out of 19 Franklin Street from 1930 until his death in 1965. The Lee location was located behind Lee Library and included a warehouse, stock room, a showroom, and a garage. He also had a branch at 64 West Street in Pittsfield, so he did well.

Eventually, the two businesses were sold to two long-time employees, Larry Cernik of Tyringham, and George L. Bernard of Pittsfield. They had both worked for Raymond for seventeen years so must have known the business inside out, the perfect situation!

Raymond was sixty-six years old when he passed away at Pittsfield General Hospital from a lengthy illness. His obituary states that he was a native of Vermont, having been born in Hortenville, a tiny community of about 784 residents, 29 to a square mile, at the time of writing this article. Raymond came to Lee after leaving the Navy and must have noticed a huge difference between where he grew up and where he now lived. He had obviously been impressed by his time in the Navy as he was a former Commander of Lee Post 137, American Legion, as well as of the county Legion. He was a member of the Evening Star Lodge AF & AM, Berkshire Royal Arch chapter of Pittsfield, Berkshire Commandery 22, Knights Templar

of Pittsfield, Melha Temple, AAONMS of Springfield. We wonder how he found the time to run his businesses as well! He was laid to rest in Fairmount Cemetery after a life well-lived.

## **MEET THE BOARD**

### **PEG BIRON**



Many of you will be familiar with Peg Biron from her years on the Lee Planning Board, but she has also been involved in many other organizations in the Town including, of course, the Lee Historical Society. She became a member back in 2006 and now has emeritus status on the Board.

Peg grew up in Pittsfield and attended the Pomeroy Elementary School from where she walked to school and home twice a day, leaving to go home for the one hour lunch break. All this going back and forth gave her a love for not only walking, but for observing the world around her. After 5<sup>th</sup> Grade, she moved on to St. Joseph's from where she graduated. During that time from elementary through high school, she developed a passion for volunteerism, particularly influenced by the teachings of Mother Theresa, and which has remained with her all her life.

Her resume as a volunteer is long and includes the Lee Visiting Nurse Association and the Lee Youth Association of which she was a founding member. She also served on the local School Committee, which encompassed Otis and Tyringham as well as Lee. She notes that serving in all these diverse areas has given her a deeper understanding of the different circumstances that people can find themselves in and, therefore, more empathy and compassion toward others.

After graduating high school, further education called and an academic Peg McGowan, as she was then, moved on to Westfield State for four years to study for a degree in English and Social Studies. It was here that she met Gilbert "Gil" Biron who was to become her husband. She continued on to North Adams to the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, graduating from there with a Master's degree in English and Social Studies. She went on to teach these subjects at the Middle and High Schools of both Lee and Lenox, and also for five years in Great Barrington, finally retiring in 2006.

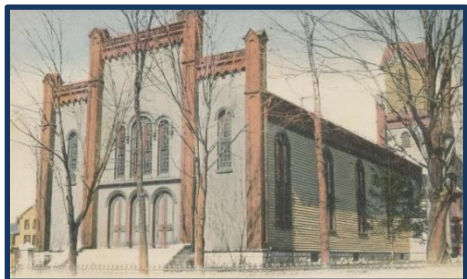
Peg and Gil married in 1970, the ceremony taking place at Peg's parents' home in Pittsfield. They set up home in Becket, eventually moving to Lee. They welcomed two sets of twins; sadly their first son passed away after one hour, his sister surviving, and they also lost one of their later twin sons just a few years ago. Gil has now passed on and Peg continues to live in their lovely old house on Park Street.

A passion nurtured and shared by Gil, Peg has a great love for old buildings so how wonderful that she should have shared with Gil one of the oldest in Lee, the Abner Taylor House, built in 1815. This is where Peg enjoys her love of reading, history, and just listening to people's stories when they visit. Come the Founders Day Parade, if she isn't marching in it, you will see her sitting on her front porch at what was once Number One Foote Square with friends and family, enjoying the festivities.

With Peg's love for her old house and its significance in the history of Lee, it would be remiss not to touch upon its history here. In May of 1882, it was deeded to none other than Elizur Smith, he of Smith Paper Company fame, by John E. Bosworth. The history of its ownership after that becomes a bit foggy after a while and we don't wish to report anything that may be erroneous. However, one interesting thing to note is that from the City Directory of 1919-1920, Mrs. Henry C. Savage operated the Park Inn there for a short time. Then from 1920 until 1934 Florence C. Benjamin operated the Park Place Inn there until it was foreclosed by Lee Savings Bank. It was on November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1975 that it was deeded to Gil.

Finally, an aspiration Peg has for the Society is for it to have its own building, or at least one that could be shared with another organization. This would be a great asset for holding meetings and programs, and keeping our archives. She also wishes to see younger people joining the Society, a wish Peg isn't alone in!

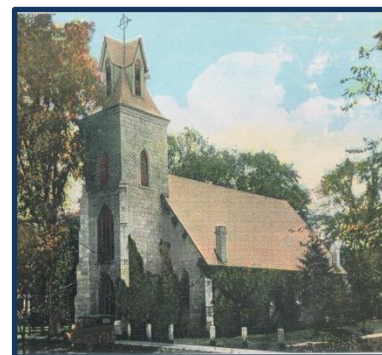
### **CHRISTMAS IN LEE'S CHURCHES IN DAYS GONE BY**



Back in 1927, Christmas was celebrated in four different churches in Lee, two of which remain, two of which are now only memories in the annals of Lee's history. The Methodist-Episcopal Church on High Street has been converted to residences. St. George's is still with us in building only, now being the home of the Spectrum Playhouse. We do, of course, still have the First Congregational Church and St. Mary's, both of which were very active in their Christmas celebrations nearly one

hundred years ago, as they are to this day.

That year, on Christmas Eve, the Methodist-Episcopal Church was the first to open its doors for Christmas service. The same day, St. George's held its annual midnight Eucharist starting at 11:45 p.m. St. Mary's also held a midnight service, its first in twenty-five years. On Christmas Day, which fell that year on a Sunday, the children's choir sang for the congregation at the 8:30 mass while, down the road, the Congregational Church had a Christmas musical program at their 10:45 service, as did the Methodist-Episcopal Church.

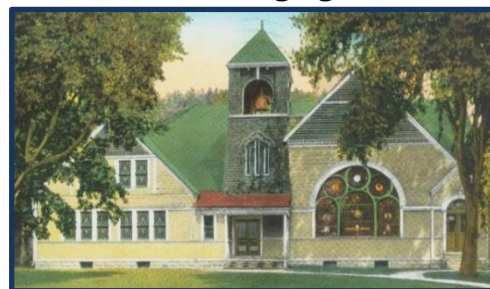
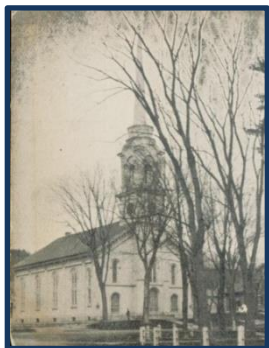


Many of us will be familiar with the Christmas carols sung back then, such as: "Oh, Come All Ye Faithful", "Silent Night", "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear". The Congregational Church included Handel's "Hallelujah", would have been very rousing! It's good to know that, in our times of great change that seems to happen on a regular basis, some things remain the same.

Things were very busy at the Congregational Church and the children were all in for a treat. The 6 p.m. service included not only Christmas carols and recitations by the children, but the distribution of gifts by none other than Santa!

There was just as much merry-making at St. George's children's service as the children not only sang carols and gave recitations, but there was also candy and a gift distributed for every child in the parish by the ever-present Santa. St. George's went above and beyond that year, holding the program in the parish house and arranging for Santa

to actually, really, come down the chimney! Can you imagine the looks on the faces of the children when that happened! One wonders what kind of candy was eaten then and what were the gifts? Did the children find themselves munching on Charleston Chews, Chuckles, or maybe the deliciously chocolatey Bit-O-Honey, their little fingers all sticky and their eyes shining with excitement and too much sugar?



## 'TIS THE SEASON!

And we're all racking our brains – "What can we give to Aunt Matilda this year? She didn't seem to care much for the talking fish ornament we gave her last year..." and what about that one family member or friend who seems to have everything they could possibly want? We can bet even they don't have everything that's in our merch store, just waiting for the jingle of bells and the rustle of gift wrap. If you need inspiration, peruse what we have on offer. Not only will Aunt Matilda be thrilled, but so will your Society when you make that well-thought out purchase!

To purchase any of these items contact Linda at [lindabreader@icloud.com](mailto:lindabreader@icloud.com) or Tracie at [ethere@gmail.com](mailto:ethere@gmail.com)



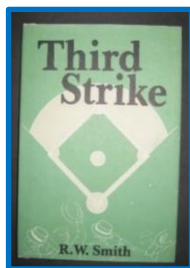
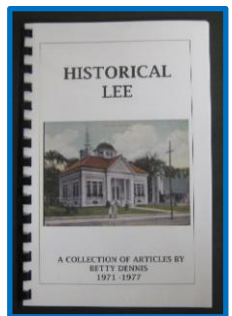
**MUGS** depicting various places of historical interest in Lee. At just **\$5** each, this would normally be a steal, but on offer at BOGO, how can you not take advantage? Rumor has it that the morning coffee tastes extra delicious in one of these exquisite beverage containers!

**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!

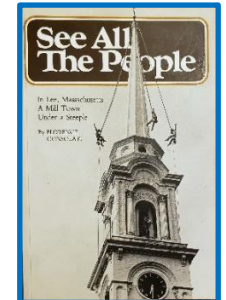


**T-SHIRTS** We can just picture Aunt Matilda in one of our Lee T-shirts. Sizes Small, Medium, Large, XLarge, and 2X Large **\$15**

**"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!



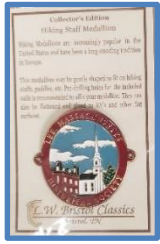
**"THIRD STRIKE"** by R.W. Smith. This is a wonderful book chock full of stories of the everyday people of Lee. An incredible bargain for only **\$5!**



**"SEE ALL THE PEOPLE"** by Florence Consolati. For any who are intrigued by what happened way back when in our Town, this is a tell-all that really will tell all about it! **\$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 **\$15**, with all proceeds going to the Society.





**HIKING STAFF MEDALLION** Another great addition to our selection! For all your hiking people out there who love to pound the beautiful trails with which the Berkshires are blessed, this is something totally unique. (Okay, we do get that this may not be for Aunt Matilda...) Our metal medallions depict two of our landmarks – the Congregational Church and Memorial Hall. Their use is very versatile, initially designed to adorn a favorite hiking pole, they can also be flattened out and attached to, say, the camper, sewn on to a favorite cap or hiking jacket.

### **AN ARTICLE FROM BETTY DENNIS** **CELEBRATING IN THE 1800'S**

*Now and again we feature an article by Lee's much-loved and respected Head Librarian, from 1942 until 1987, and local historian. These are taken from the book "Historical Lee", a collection of articles by Betty Dennis, 1971 – 1977, which was put together as a tribute to her. The Lee Rotary Club requested Betty to write these articles and they appeared every month in the Penny Saver. This article appeared on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1971.*

A Berkshire Gleaner of 1868 tells us that "Christmas was more generally observed throughout the country this year than ever before. It is fast becoming our most popular holiday." July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1859 was ushered in with the ringing of "our eight bells," (church and factory bells), processions of "Horribles" and a parade of silver trumpets marked all special days. A balloon ascension was a "fluke" as it became tangled and could not go up. Our townspeople were thrilled when a successful ascension took place in Pittsfield and their balloon was sent to soar over our town.

Home gatherings were numerous and exciting according to local items, but large and formal parties were almost unknown. Chief means of entertainment were old-fashioned games. Dancing was ruled out by public opinion, as were cards and all games of chance ... these being considered the tools of the Devil. By the mid-1800's though we find Lee's social life enlivened by corn popping parties, butternut cracking and molasses candy pulls, and building up to cider parties and even kitchen dances! Debating societies were formed, and a "Highland Association" for the "promotion of social welfare for the community". The Lee Harmonic Association was one of some few others which helped toward the study and enjoyment of music.

Many home talent shows were presented in Northrup's (now Central Block). Merchants' Carnivals were also big in those days. Each store in town was represented by an act in the show and a prize awarded for the best performance. These carnivals were usually climaxed in a Grand Performance at which all the mills were represented. The paper mills usually dressed their girls in lavish gowns made entirely of paper.



Lee women dressed as various months/holidays at an unknown event, c.1880. Source: Lee Library Assoc.

**LHS BULLETIN BOARD**  
**“INSPIRED BY THE BERKSHIRES”**



This was the latest – and final - presentation in the Society’s 2024 Speaker Series and what a perfect finale to a successful season it was! It was Thursday evening, November 12<sup>th</sup>, when John Dickson shared with us his vast knowledge of the life and loves of Herman Melville, author of “Moby Dick”, “Billy Budd”, and so many others. John is an easygoing, conversational type of presenter and that style made his sharing of the life of Herman Melville so interesting.

He did bring up some aspects of Melville’s life that aren’t so well known, such as how, an educated supposition that John has from studying Melville’s writings, he may have identified himself with Ishmael in “Moby Dick”. Both were wanderers, and Melville was, indeed, very well-traveled for a man of his time, exploring most of the globe. A fascinating hypothesis. John also highlighted how, in more than one instance, Melville brought Berkshire County locations into “Moby Dick”, such as the Stockbridge Ice Glen, referred to as “Icey Glen”.

We were very fortunate to have the Community Television of Southern Berkshires on hand to record John’s presentation, and this can be found at [ctsbvtv.org](http://ctsbvtv.org), Public 1301. Therefore, we won’t expound our thoughts here, but leave our readers to watch at their leisure.

One point is that, after watching John in action on the video, it would be remiss not to mention that he is a volunteer guide at Arrowhead and would be more than happy to answer any lingering questions. Enjoy!

**LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2025 MEMBERSHIP FORM (JANUARY – DECEMBER)**

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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](mailto:kf23Smith@yahoo.com).

The Society’s annual membership drive has now started and renewal letters have been mailed. Any renewals made before January 2025 will be honored through 2025. Do encourage friends and other family members to join us.

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