



Vol. 22, No. 12

December 2025

The Gateway Gazette

The Newsletter of the Lee Historical Society

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

Email: Lee.Historical@hotmail.com

Website: leehistoricsociety.homestead.com

Facebook: Lee Historical Society Lee MA

Mail: PO Box 170, Lee, MA 01238

The Monthly Meeting of the Society will be Thursday, December 11th at the Historical Society Office, Crossway Tower, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.

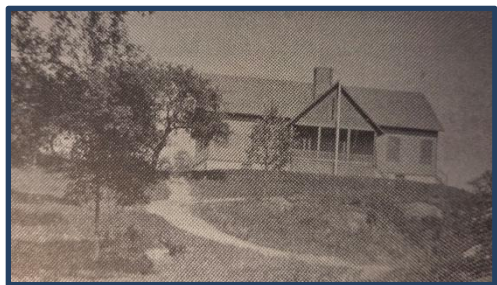


FROM THE EDITOR

In this festive yet busy season please remember to take time for yourself. Have a cup of tea or a cup of cocoa, read a book, take a nap and relax in the midst of the rushing around trying to do everything for everyone. Hopefully, this newsletter will be a diversion from the stresses of today by bringing back stories of yore. Although studying the past can bring up negative and stressful memories this month's newsletter doesn't address anything that should keep you from using it as a distraction from today's stresses, enjoy!

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

THE NEW OLD SCHOOLHOUSE



South Lee Schoolhouse c.1893.

The historic South Lee School House on Route 102 (the official address is 1440 Pleasant Street) is in fact the “New” South Lee School, being the third, and last, that was built and used as a school in South Lee.

The first two schools in South Lee were built as part of the “Hoplands” School District before the town of Lee controlled all the schools in town. In Lee’s early days the schools were funded and controlled by the neighborhoods where they were located. Hoplands, which was one of the original land grant areas of the town, was

one of the earliest school districts in town, established before the town of Lee was founded. Even after the establishment of the town, the Hoplands School District remained independent, raising their own taxes from residents in the area to support the school. The original South Lee School, known as the Center (or Red) School, was built in 1791 and was located near the current Pine and Meadow Streets in South Lee. It is unclear when this school stopped being used.

A second South Lee school house was built around 1833 and was located on Pleasant/Main Street across from the Hurlbut Paper Mill. It was an active school when, in 1889, the Hoplands School District came under the control of the Lee School Committee. A year later, the school was determined to be too small and was soon demolished. It was replaced by the “new” South Lee School House which was located about 300 yards east of the older building on land purchased from Ellen Venables for \$500.

This three room/two classroom school building was built around 1891. The two-story wooden structure with a Lee Marble foundation was built and furnished by the town for \$3,870.63. At its establishment, this school operated in the same style as the older ones, with all the school grades meeting under a single roof and were taught by two teachers. By the 1920s, only elementary grades were taught in the South Lee School. Grades one through four were held in one room and five through seven in the other, each with their own instructor.

The old building was showing its age in 1974, when the School Structure Report gave it a negative assessment. “The side hill cannot be considered an adequate playground. There are drainage problems to the west and south of the school building. Water runs through the basement wall and is diverted by a curb to cross the cellar floor. The present floor sags very badly and all of the windows are so loose that the building is difficult to heat when the wind blows. Lighting levels are low and general condition of the building is poor. It would take about \$40,000 to bring it up to any kind of standard.” At that time, only grades one through three were taught in South Lee and there was consistent discussion about whether or not to continue to maintain and use the building.

In 1977, with the construction of a new wing on the Central Lee School and declining enrollments in the earlier grades it was determined the little schoolhouse was no longer needed. The final classes in the building were held in June 1977.

The School Committee gave approval to renting the building to the Southern Berkshire Educational Collaborative to hold its graphic arts and building maintenance programs there.



The Schoolhouse during the 1987 fire.

After five years, they vacated the building, and in 1982, its administration was turned over to the town Selectmen removing the responsibility for the building from the School Committee.

In the early 1980s the building was put up for auction by the town. The only bidder was Willis Fennelley of Otis, who purchased it for \$10,000. He had



The Schoolhouse today

plans to convert the building to a private home, but plans fell through and it was used as storage for many years. In August 1987, it sustained heavy damage in a fire, which gutted much of the interior.

In 1999, David Lanoue, a Stockbridge builder and designer, purchased the former South Lee School for \$70,000. He had plans to renovate and restore the historic building for use as office space, but eventually restored it to become residential.

The building lives on as a condominium building, last sold in 2020. The bright colors and well maintained property bely the early history of the building, but many locals have fond memories of the quaint little school that stands on the hill overlooking South Lee.

REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN **Angelo Sorrentino (1918-2011)**



Sal and his mother during his 1944 holiday furlough.

Angelo “Sal” Sorrentino’s story begins in Lee, Massachusetts, on August 2, 1918. Born to Cosimo and Ignatia “Nancy” Navarro Sorrentino, he grew up in the embrace of a large Italian family whose warmth and hard work left a lasting imprint on the town.

Sal’s journey carried him from the classrooms of Lee High School, where he graduated in 1937, to the battlefields of Europe. In August 1943, he answered the call of duty, training at Fort McClellan, Alabama, before moving on to Fort Meade, Maryland. By January 1944, he was overseas—first a private, then a sergeant—serving in the infantry with courage and resolve.

He fought in Italy with the Seventh Army, braving the chaos of the Anzio beachhead. His unit was the first to march into Rome, where, for three days, he directed traffic in the newly freed city. Later, with his unit he stormed the beaches of Southern France at the Riviera, and by sheer coincidence, reunited with George Castronova, his boyhood neighbor from Lee (revealing the reach of a tiny town like Lee and the number of residents who have served).

War left its mark. Near the Swiss border, a sniper’s bullet struck him, earning Sal the Purple Heart. He recovered first in Italy, then in Atlantic City, New Jersey, where he was able to spend the holidays of 1944 at home. When peace finally came, he returned with both the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star—symbols of sacrifice and valor.

Life after war brought love. Sal married Georgette Mermet of Housatonic at Corpus Christi Church, celebrating with family and friends at Belden’s Tavern in East Lee. Together they raised two daughters, weaving joy into the fabric of everyday life.

For decades, Sal worked at Marland Mold in Pittsfield, retiring in 1973 after 32 years of service, and later lending his skills part-time at Richwell Mold & Tool Co. His devotion extended beyond work—he was a pillar of community life. A communicant of St. Mary’s Church, a commander of the Bossidy-Crerar Post 893 Veterans of Foreign Wars, and a

guiding hand in organizing Lee's Memorial Day parades and building the VFW hall on Route 102.

He wore many hats: member of the Sons of Italy Itam Lodge 564, Little League coach, golfer at Greenock Country Club, bowler at Cove Lanes and Lee Lanes. In retirement, he and Georgette cheered on Massachusetts sports teams and found delight in the bright lights of casinos.

On July 5, 2011, Sal's remarkable journey came to a close at home after a long battle with cancer. Georgette followed in 2014. Together, their lives told a story of devotion—to family, to community, and to country—that continues to echo in Lee.



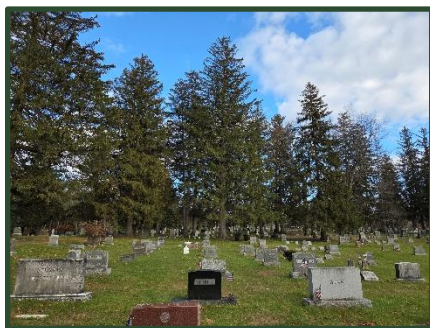
FROM THE GLEANER

Reading the “news” in the old papers is always entertaining, here’s an interesting article about Christmas trees.

From the Berkshire Gleaner Dec 10, 1920:

Stealing Christmas Trees

Authorities After Autoists Who Are Using Cars for That Purpose – Have Been Taken from Cemeteries and Lawns – A Million Christmas Trees on Whitney Place



The “too large to steal” trees in Fairmount Cemetery.

Some people become so imbued with the spirit of Christmas that they cut down their neighbor's evergreen trees or help themselves to a shapely tree in a cemetery, cut fine trees along the highway, and sometimes take them from people's lawns. Every Christmas time for a series of years one or two fine young trees were taken from the Lee cemetery, and all efforts to capture the parties failed, as the theft was usually very late at night or in the morning. Finally, the trees became too large for use as Christmas trees and the practice stopped.

It is hard to conceive of any man's idea of the Christmas spirit when he is guilty of such theft. Some years ago a High Street man was very much surprised to find that during the night someone had sawed off three young balsams which he had in his yard, and it was finally concluded that they had been taken away in an automobile.

The new conservation commissioner is after this class of thieves and has applied to the registrar of automobiles for assistance, with the result that an edict has been issued that any person who knowingly permits his car to be used for the taking of such trees of evergreens unlawfully shall lose his license.

If a man is too poor to pay for a Christmas tree, or too stingy, or would rather waste a dollar's worth of gas and half a day's time than pay 75 cents for a tree, he should go to some man who owns mountain land and get permission to go into the hills and get a tree. Very few land owners will object if a fellow is on the level. If there is no pleasure in a tree unless it is stolen, then go far back into the hills, walk into the swamp or forest, back from the road, and cut your tree.

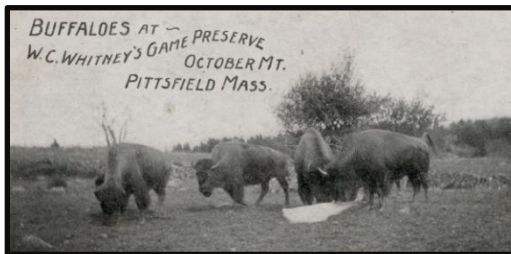
It has always seemed stretching the law badly to insist on prosecuting a man for taking princess pine, that pretty running, ground production, which is so plentiful the hills. Almost any country road has plenty of it growing by the roadside, and it makes splendid decoration, while to take and automobile load of young people and gather it, does not seem to be a serious offence against the public and is a pleasure to those who gather. On the other hand, people come into Berkshire from New York and pack great boxes of it and send it to the city.



Dendrolycopodium obscurum, also known as rare clubmoss, ground pine, or princess pine.

LHS BULLETIN BOARD

LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY SPEAKER SERIES: **WHITNEY'S OCTOBER MOUNTAIN**



Last month's Speaker Series featured October Mountain Man Tom Hoffman with an illustrated talk about William Whitney's October Mountain estate. His talk lasted over an hour and included 105 slides.

Part of the blame for the long running time goes to the full-house audience and their questions at the end of the presentation. Not only was everyone entranced by stories of October Mountain's early days, but they also wanted hear the exploits of a local who has discovered many remnants of the past in the wilderness of today.

William Whitney was born in 1841 in Conway, Massachusetts to William and Linda Collins Whitney. Both parents were from well-to-do families, but William Collins Whitney would go on to become a self-made man, and at his death, he was ranked as the 20th most wealthy man in the United States. In 1885, Whitney was appointed by newly elected President Grover Cleveland to be the Secretary of the Navy. During his four years in this post, he promoted modernizing the United States Navy.



The Antlers.

In 1894, after a few weeks on vacation relaxing at Ventford Hall Whitney discovered October Mountain. It was here that he envisioned an Adirondack style reserve with the added luxury of easy rail service to New York City.

In June of 1896, Whitney finalized his grand plan to build his personal hunting preserve and authorized the breaking of ground for the Antlers. He utilized local craftsmen to build the lodge and also employed the famous landscape architect Fred Frederick Law Olmstead to design the landscape and gardens to reflect the native beauty of the land. The building had uninterrupted views over the farms he owned to the south.



The foundation of the Antlers today.

To fulfill his dream of his own private game preserve, Whitney imported exotic game animals from across the country. The exact numbers aren't known for sure, but is estimated that Whitney owned 32 buffalo, over 60 elk, 20 or so moose, and around 200 black tailed deer. He also had pheasants that he raised at one point numbering over 1,500. He had grouse imported, Belgian hairs, sheep, and angora goats. This doesn't include his stable of horses that he brought with him as he came and went from the estate.

After Whitney's death in 1904, no one wanted or could afford to take over the estate. In 1922, October Mountain officially became the largest state park in Massachusetts. The Antlers began falling apart due to neglect and finally after a lightning strike burned down in 1929, but as Tom revealed there are still hints of the elegant estate in hidden out on October Mountain there to be found by those who know what they are looking for.

Please note, if you missed this fascinating presentation, or any of the others we have hosted, videos of all the presentations from our Speaker Series (and more) are available from CTSB on their YouTube site (<https://www.youtube.com/@actsbtv>). Enter "Lee Historical Society" into the search bar to create a watch list.

WHAT'S FOR SALE

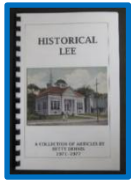
Don't forget! Lee memorabilia make great gifts for the holidays! Contact Tracie to purchase: ethere@gmail.com



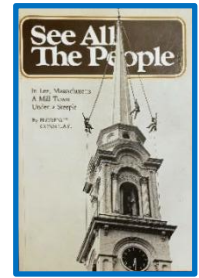
MUGS depicting various places of historical interest in Lee, including the covered bridge, Memorial Hall and the Kilbon Fountain. At just **\$5** each, this would normally be a steal, but on offer at BOGO, how can you not take advantage? Rumor has it that the morning coffee tastes extra delicious in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

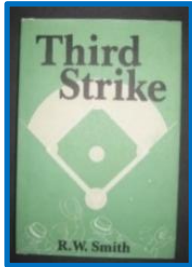




“HISTORICAL LEE” If you’ve read any of beloved Lee Librarian Betty Dennis’ articles reprinted in our newsletter from time to time, you know what a great gift this will be for anyone interested in our Town’s diverse and fascinating history, so pick one up for just **\$12** and get it wrapped!

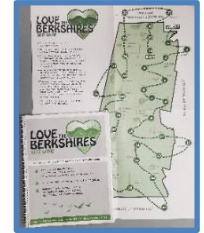


“THIRD STRIKE” by R.W. Smith. This is a wonderful book chock full of stories of the everyday people of Lee. An incredible bargain for only **\$5!**



“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 **\$15**, with all proceeds going to the Society.



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: _____

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. 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.

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

WOOD
SLATE
ASPHALT

TPO
TANK GRAPES
BUILT UP ROOFING
RUBBER
EDPM

BARTINI ROOFING COMPANY
ALL TYPES OF ROOFING
FULLY INSURED - FREE ESTIMATES
ALL WORK GUARANTEED

STEVE BARTINI
TEL (413) 243-0570

ROOFS

Fox Homes
225 Housatonic St.
243-1950

R.W.'s TOWING & REPAIRS
24 Hour Recovery
35 Ron Way • P.O. Box 774 • Lee, MA 01238

Ph: (413) 243-0946
Fax: (413) 243-0948
rwstowing.com
rwstowing@verizon.net

BILL & BECKY BRUNELL

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@henryselectricinc.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**
Graphic Design & Printing Company

Ann M. LaBier
Owner

Full Service Printing
Graphic Design
Laser Engraving

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

TOOLE
INSURANCE

If it matters to you, it matters to us.

John E. Toole, CIC
President