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February 2025

# 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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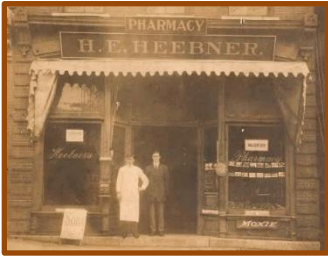
*The Monthly Meeting of the Society will be Thursday, February 13<sup>th</sup> at the Historical Society Office, Crossway Tower, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.*



## **FROM THE EDITORS**

As we write our greeting to you all, our wonderful readers, the snow is thick on the ground outside and the temperatures are so cold that we wouldn't be surprised to see polar bears wandering down Main Street! Perhaps this is more like it used to be in winter in the Good Old Days. The general opinion seems to be that most folk are looking forward to the summer. As for us at the Society, we're looking forward to the start of our Speaker Series for 2025 and, in keeping with talking about snow and cold, the topic of our first presentation in March is on the lost ski resorts of the Berkshires! How appropriate. Of course, that's not in February, but we're giving you all a heads-up. We have Valentine's Day to look forward to in February, as all the stores that sell heart-shaped chocolate boxes and greeting cards have been reminding us. What was Valentine's Day like in Lee a hundred years ago? Anyone remember? Of course not, but have any of you been regaled by parents or grandparents as to how it was celebrated back then? We bet the cards were beautiful!

## A TALE OF TWO HEEBNEERS



H.E. Heeber Pharmacy, c. 1890.  
Source: Lee Library Assoc.

Herman E. Heebner and Miller B. Heebner were father and son, both of whom led lives interesting enough to be mentioned quite frequently in the local newspapers, specifically the Berkshire County Eagle, the Berkshire Gleaner and, a little more distant, the Springfield Daily Republican.

Herman made the news under less than happy circumstances, so let us tell his story first. Born and educated in Lee, he was an upstanding member of his community, a successful businessman and one involved in many different organizations. After graduation from high school in 1881, he studied chemistry in New York City with Lazelle, Marsh & Gardner, known as Lazell of New York City when established by Lewis Lazell in 1880 to manufacture perfumes, later being bought by Max Factor. Upon his return to Lee, a now well-qualified chemist, Herman bought the G.K. Baird drug store on Main Street in Lee in 1889 and was a popular and successful local merchant until his passing in 1911.

So, why sad? What happened to Herman? He was an avid hunter and on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1911, he and two friends and fellow hunters, Raymond Fillmore and Homer Wentworth, harnessed up the horse to a wagon and set off with their guns to hunt deer near the Watson place on Tyringham Mountain, above Goose Pond. After hunting all day, they decided to head home and had just got onto the wagon when three deer ran across the road directly in front of their horse. Herman was the first to jump from the wagon to retrieve his gun, but as he drew it from the wagon, tragedy struck. The gun discharged, striking him on his right side, directly under his arm, a fatal shot.

Horrorified, Raymond and Homer loaded their unconscious friend onto the wagon and drove to the Watson place where they left him and went on to the Mountain Mill to telephone for a physician. All to no avail, as Herman passed away within minutes of his arrival at the Watson place at the age of forty-eight.

He left behind a shocked and grieving community in Lee, his wife Louise, daughter Ethel of Lee, son Miller, who worked as a government surveyor up in Canada at that time, his brother Charles, who was Dean of the Toronto College of Pharmacy, brother William of Millinocket, Maine, and Louis and Edward, two more brothers of Manchester, Connecticut. He also had many friends and acquaintances from his involvement with the Elks, Foresters, the Grange, Lee Club, Shaw Pond Club, the Merchants Association, and the Board of Trade.

His early demise must have had a big impact on his son, Miller, but the young man obviously shared the strong character of his father as he led an exemplary life. Some of the basic facts, such as date of birth and so on, are not known to us, but it would seem from a very brief article in the Berkshire County Eagle of February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1915 that he may have inherited his father's love of the great outdoors. He was reported to be fishing with a party of friends at Judge Bossidy's camp on the shores of Shaw Pond. He managed to catch a twenty-seven inch pickerel that weighed in at 5 lbs 2 oz, obviously a rare enough event to be mentioned in the newspaper!

The same newspaper continued their fascination with Miller's life as, on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1917, they considered a letter he had sent to his mother to be interesting enough to warrant another mention. He was now in Washington, D.C. working for the N.Y. Foundation Company where a large gun factory was under construction for the U.S. Navy Yard. Miller's task was to ascertain how far below a sixty foot pit that had been excavated was bedrock. Four holes and one hundred and thirty feet down and still no result. Apparently, Miller anticipated being on the main part of this endeavor for several more months. We have found no mention of the outcome of his endeavors.

Moving on and no longer in D.C., Miller is now in Dayton, Ohio and busy writing letters to the Sunshine Sisters in his new role in the forces. Written on June 31<sup>st</sup>, 1918, it gives an insight into who the Sunshine Sisters were:

*“How much I appreciate your thoughtfulness and how much I am going to use everything you sent me, for winter in Ohio is certainly no cute plaything, and I believe can run a very close second to Berkshire.*

*All through the excitement of getting the boys off to Ayer and to the many other camps; in fact, ever since Uncle Sam got into this war. I have read in the Gleaner and the Eagle of your achievements in line with making life more ‘liveable (sic), lovable and laughable’ for the boys wherever they are, and I know that to a man they have appreciated all that you have done.*

*I am sure I have no idea when fortune will smile upon me again to the extent of letting me spend a short leave of absence in Lee, but I hope that when it does happen I shall be privileged to thank each one of you personally for what you have done for me.*

*With every good wish that your thoughts and work will help to bring glory and honor to the boys from home when it comes their turn to do their share in putting down the Kaiser and all his family, and once more thanking you, one and all, for your kindness to me, I am, Very Sincerely Yours, Miller B. Heebner”*

Further research reveals that Miller was stationed at the Wilbur Wright Field in Dayton and was then transferred to Langley Field in Hampton Roads, Virginia after being promoted sometime in October 1918 from second lieutenant to first lieutenant. The Berkshire Gleaner of December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1918 reports, somewhat mysteriously, that word had been received that Miller had arrived safely “overseas” and was with the 500<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron (later the 500<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron assigned to the 345<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Wing).

Before heading off “overseas” Miller got married, as reported in the March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1918 edition of the Berkshire Gleaner. His bride was a Miss Gladys Bush and the ceremony took place at the home of her parents Mr. & Mrs. Marshall Bush, in Elmira, New York. After a brief honeymoon, they went to Ohio to live at the base in Dayton. Miller, according to this news article, was stationed at the McCook Aviation Field with the Signal Corps.

From the tone of his letter to the Sunshine Sisters, he sounds like he was a very pleasant character and we hope he and his new wife continued on to live in peace for many happy years and that his final days were much less traumatic than those of his father!



Miller Heebner, c. 1918. Source: Lee Historical Society.

## **THE HOUSE THAT BECAME TWO**



On the corner of West Park and Spring Streets on a manicured acre overlooking Greenock Country Club stands a most impressive structure. As New England houses go, it is quite unique in appearance with its gothic-looking turrets, arched recessed entry and curved bow window. This interesting façade conceals an even more interesting history. Let us delve back to the last days of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, to 1899, when this Queen Anne/Chateausque house was built, only then it was different. Much different.

We shall start with the history of its earliest days. It was built by brothers Marshall and Alden Wild, sons of Warren W. Wild. Now, their father came from Pleasantville, New York in 1871 and bought a half interest in the Ingersoll Quarry on Fairview Street which was on John Merrill’s farmland. Within a short space of time, he bought out John Merrill completely and so now owned the entire quarry.

The stone taken from the quarry, a high quality and rare blue marble, was used to finish the exterior of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City, the Trinity Church in Lenox, some

Pittsfield schools and some of the commercial buildings on North Street. Obviously, Warren made an excellent investment! He died in April of 1884 and his sons took possession of the quarry and operated it into the 1920's.

It was in 1899 that the Wild brothers built their marble house at a cost of about \$10,000 on the site of one destroyed by fire. The construction of the Wild house was under contract to one Fred Martin, who must have been an incredibly accomplished builder. It was 1916 when something quite remarkable happened to it. Somehow, an amazing feat of engineering that must have astonished any onlooking neighbors and passers-by, took place! The house was separated – top from bottom – and the top part of the house became the bottom of the bungalow we now see next door.

Marshall Wild lived in the original house until he departed this world on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1929 at the age of sixty-three after an unspecified illness of several weeks. His wife Kate continued to live there with Henry and Ida Sohl until she joined Marshall in 1945. The Sohls continued to live in the house until the mid-1960's. As of June 1999 the property was owned and occupied by Mary Serra – and more on Mary a little later!

Meanwhile, next door in what had been the top half of the house, but which now was a delightful bungalow, Alex Faxon had moved in as the house's first owner, having been in charge of its construction. Here's what we know about Mr. Faxon. He was originally from Forester, Michigan and came to Lee as a boy where he attended the local schools, ending up working at fourteen as a bookkeeper for the Lee National Bank at what is now considered to be a very young age. His experience in that role proved fortuitous for him as he became Lee's Town Tax Collector, a position he held for fifty-six years until his retirement in 1963. His sister Kate was married to Marshall Wild, hence the Faxons and Wilds were neighbors and family.

Moving forward to this century, the house is now owned by local business owner Bill Ingegna. So many of you will know Bill. He grew up in Lee, owned The Grind, an enormously popular eatery, from 2004 until 2011. He has now, for years, been one of Lee's busiest hairdressers, working tirelessly to keep us all well-coiffed as he works from the same building as The Grill once was (remember Baja Charlie's ...) in his Ingegna Salon.

Bill rented the house in 2011, finally purchasing it three years ago, but he has a long-standing history in it going back to his childhood. You see, Mary Serra, the previous owner, was Bill's aunt. Mary was quite the local character. She ran a Bed & Breakfast out of her house as well as operating the switchboard for the Lee Chamber of Commerce. Her home became known as the Party House, not the kind for wild parties, you understand, but for regular gatherings of friends and family, where nourishment was provided to guests by Auga, the domestic help, who prepared the meals in the basement kitchen so the cooking smells wouldn't invade the upstairs accommodation. Bill would go to Aunt Mary's after church every Sunday and some of his happiest childhood memories were spent in what is now his beloved home.

Next time you drive up West Park and admire the two marble-clad homes on the corner of Spring Street, try to see if you can picture them as one! What a challenge!

### **MEET THE BOARD MARY HAYES MORRISSEY**

*Within minutes of sitting down at Mary's kitchen table, strewn with books, papers, photo albums, newspaper clippings, it became evident that this was a lady who has led quite the life! It also became evident that there was no way that all her adventures, accomplishments, volunteer activities and just general life experiences could be encapsulated in a page or two.*

*It's been quite the task to pull out those that just cannot be excluded, so we hope we do justice in this article to Mary's exemplary life.*

To start right at the very beginning (a very good place to start according to Mary Poppins). Mary was born in Lee to Ned and Marie, and right away there's quite the story. In the June 2024 edition of the Gateway Gazette, we covered the "Great Epidemic of 1928". It was due to this tragic event that Mary's parents met. Dad (Edmund "Ned" Hayes) had a sister Mary (who later joined the convent and became Sister Marie Elizabeth). Mary became infected by the virus and, seriously ill, was taken to St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut where Mom (Marie O'Connell) was one of the nurses taking care of her. Dad would go to the hospital to visit his sister and that is where he became enchanted by Mom. They married at St. Thomas Church in Thomaston, Connecticut, Marie's home town, on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

Mary's education started at St. Mary's School where she was taught by the nuns who had arrived in Lee from Chambery in France. After finishing high school, she went on to Elms College in Chicopee and graduated from there with a Bachelor's degree in History and Education. On to the University of Connecticut at Storrs where she earned a graduate degree in U.S. History.

Armed with her extensive degrees, Central School on High Street in Lee was very fortunate to have her there for thirty-eight years until her retirement in 1998 and where she taught Grades 5, 6, and 8, as well as Kindergarten. While still teaching, Mary chose another occupation as a Children's Activity Coordinator for Sitmar and Princess Cruises where she worked during February and April school vacations and some weekends, and this she did for fourteen years. She also was a Tour Director for Morgan Coach Lines. After retirement from Central, and obviously not one to let the grass grow under her feet, she moved on to the Berkshire Center, also known now as the College Internship Program, or CIP, where she was employed as an Academic Tutor for eight years.

She confesses that she loved to travel, which may have been the impetus for her to join the coach and cruise line companies. Off she went to Tahiti, the Hawaiian Islands, Alaska, many of the Canadian Provinces, many European and Caribbean countries, the Ukraine and Turkey!

During one of her cruises to the Caribbean in 1973, fate smiled upon her when she met William (Bill) Morrissey who was to become her husband. They married in July 1976 and were happily together until August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 when he sadly passed. His career was as interesting as Mary's as he was a Corporate Auditor and spent much of his time travelling abroad for his work, especially to the South American countries.

Mary is a very accomplished lady, but is much more proud of the accomplishments of those she has had an influence on than of her own. Here is an excerpt from some of her writings:

*"In 1993, one of my eighth grade students of history wrote a one thousand word essay titled 'Education in Early America'. Her essay was named a local winner of the Lee Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The Chapter then forwarded it to the State where a panel of judges chose it as the best entry in Massachusetts. The young girl who received the award was the first State winner from Lee in the annual contest."* Mary spoke of this event with much pride.

As a Girl Scout Leader, she tells of the achievement of three of her Senior Cadette Scouts who received the highest award in Girl Scouting at that time, the First Class Award, which is the equivalent of the Eagle Boy Scout Award.

Mary was a member of Central/Southern Berkshire Site Board of Massachusetts, which advocated an increase in the number of beds available at the Crisis Stabilization Unit located in Pittsfield and administered by Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services of the Berkshires. The unit opened in 1998. The three-bed CSU was a valuable resource, but more



beds were needed so that the children that needed help could stay in the area for treatment and not have to travel out of the Berkshires to places as far away from home as Holyoke and Providence, Rhode Island.

Mary's love of history has led her to become one of Lee's chief preservers and recorders of our Town's history. She is a Founder Member of the Lee Historical Society and now has Emeritus status. She still continues her efforts on the Board for the preservation of Lee's amazing history.

### **REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN** **LEONARD TOLVO (1917 – 2006)**

*It's always so rewarding to hear from one of our readers, and this contact, in particular, is very timely as it leads on from our January article on Lee Veteran Arlene Dupont to February's hero. Ronald Nickerson shared with us the story of his uncle, Leonard Tolvo, brother of his mother, Margeurite Tolvo. This is how his story unfolds ...*



Leonard and Anita Tolvo,  
1941. Source: Ron  
Nickerson

The Tolvo and Dupont families lived just a few houses away from each other on Summer Street. Leonard was one of eleven children born to Michele and Josephine Tolvo, of Italian descent, with Michele being a founding member of Lee's Sons of Italy.

After graduating from Lee High School, Leonard was drafted into the Army to fight in WWII and left the Berkshires for the conflict in Europe. His regiment was sent to defend the Western Front and became involved in what became known as the Battle of the Bulge or the Ardennes Offensive.

Seriously wounded by German machine gun fire, Leonard was transported to a field hospital, spattered in mud and dirt.

What strange turns life's events can take. Enter Arlene Dupont, on duty that day as Leonard lay on the operating table, steps being taken to save this brave man's life. Recognizing her neighbor from Lee, she helped treat his wounds. Somehow Arlene managed afterwards to contact Leonard's family to let them know of his injuries and that it would be some time before he would be returning home to them.

Thankfully, Leonard recovered and was able to eventually return to the States where he met and married, at Mount Carmel Church in Pittsfield, a young lady named Anita. (*As far as Ronald knows, Anita is still with us at the age of 106!*) Leonard was accepted into the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York State, the oldest technological institute in the Western Hemisphere and English-speaking world. He graduated from there with a degree in engineering. He then accepted a position with the Navy in San Diego. Expanding their family with four children, they remained in San Diego until Leonard's passing in 2006. As an aside, Leonard's sister, Ronald's mother, told him that to that day Leonard would never discuss the Battle of the Bulge.

*Editor's Note: The Battle of the Bulge was fought from December 16, 1944 through January 25<sup>th</sup> 1945, some eighty years ago, so some of our younger readers may not be familiar with what it was about. It was the last major German offensive on the Western Front and happened in the Ardennes region, which is located between Belgium and Luxembourg. The German Forces hoped to keep the Allied Forces from using Antwerp in Belgium where there was a major port.*

*This isn't the space to record the full details of the battle; these can be found extensively online and in history books. What is astonishing is the number of troops engaged in this on*

both sides, one of whom would have been Leonard Tolvo, of course. German troops included 410,000 men, 1,400 tanks, 2,000 pieces of artillery, over 1,000 combat aircraft. Of these men, somewhere between 63,000 and 104,000 were either killed, MIA, wounded, or captured.

The Allied troop numbers were even more impressive – if that’s the right word – with 77,000 or more casualties, of which at least 8,600 lost their lives.

It was recorded as the largest and bloodiest single battle to be fought by the US in WWII and the third in American history. Such a sad part of history, but we must celebrate the fact that at least Leonard made it home alive to find love and build a family in a beautiful part of this country!

**LHS BULLETIN BOARD**  
**LOST SKI AREAS OF THE BERKSHIRES**



Author Jeremy Davis will give an illustrated talk on the lost ski areas of the Berkshires on Thursday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, at 6:30 p.m. at the Lee Senior Center, 21 Crossway Street, Lee.

From the 1930’s to the 1970’s, forty-four ski areas were developed throughout the Berkshires, ranging from community rope tows to all-inclusive resorts; only seven remain today. This presentation, based on Davis’ 2018 award-winning book “Lost Ski Areas of the Berkshires”, explores the histories of these former ski areas and their contributions to the ski industry, including areas near Lee.

Before and after photographs, trail maps, personal stories, and their new roles in the landscape will be shown to bring these mostly forgotten areas back to life. Davis will have copies of his book available at the conclusion of the presentation.

This presentation is free and open to the public and is 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.

**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](mailto:kf23Smith@yahoo.com).

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