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January 2024

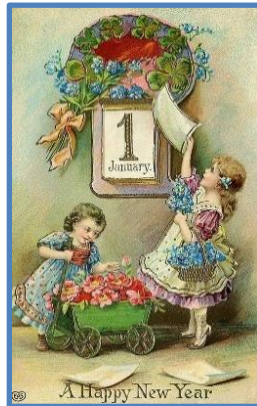
The Gateway Gazette

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
Website: leehistoricsociety.homestead.com
Facebook: Lee Historical Society Lee MA

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



FROM THE EDITORS

January 2024 marks the first full year of The Tracie & Linda Team manning the LHS newsletter! It's been very gratifying seeing it evolve and receiving some very positive feedback. Our New Year's Resolution is to continue to bring articles of interest and intrigue not only to our Members, but also to any others who find the history of our little Town as interesting as we do. We are always available for suggestions as to what topics you might wish us to pursue and elaborate upon. Do contact us – Tracie Etheredge at ethere@gmail.com and Linda Buttery at lindabreader@icloud.com.

We do wish all and every one of you a Healthy and Happy 2024, and may our little Town continue to be the welcoming, friendly, and safe little haven in the Berkshires which we all love. Now sit back and enjoy this latest edition of your Town's history!

MR. PEASE'S MATCHES

Once again, we must thank Charles and Joy Flint for their generosity in adding to the Society's archives of historical items. These donations come with an in-depth background of their history from Charles and a great example is the story of the Lee Match Company and its owner, one Moses Homer Pease. Upon review of what Charles presented to us, we quickly realized we couldn't improve upon what he had already written. Therefore, with his permission, we're going to repeat his article on this subject which first appeared in the October 2019 Society newsletter.

Moses Homer Pease was one of the most interesting people I have ever researched, yet so little was known about him. Somehow, the ambitious Moses Pease was lost in history.

He was born in Simsbury, Connecticut on February 22nd, 1835 and died in Lee, Massachusetts on March 4th, 1901. He was married in 1860 to Adelaide Morgan Griswold, (she was born February 22nd, 1842 and died March 4th, 1923). They had three children: Charles H. Pease, born 1861 (he had a hardware store), Willis Arthur Pease, 1866 – 1944, and Clara Pease (1877 - ?). Moses' father was Abile H. Pease, born 1809 in Tolland, Connecticut and died March 1878 in Lee. His mother, Celestia Moses, was born in 1813 in Hartford, Connecticut and died April 2nd, 1887 in Lee.



Moses was a respected police officer in Lee. He became a detective and worked out of Pittsfield, and later he was a detective for the State of Massachusetts. His reputation was "He always got his man". I found one mention that Moses served as a judge, but where and when I don't know. He served as Treasurer for the Lee Water Works, was a Lee Selectman, a proud member of the Mason's Evening Star, and worked on the Civil War Draft Registration Records from 1863 to 1865.



Moses was an entrepreneur. He owned the Lee Match Block Company, formed in 1882, where he made brimstone wooden sulphur matches that worked with friction. The factory was a small two-room building behind his home and barn. Charlotte Morgan Davis explained that, unlike today's phosphorous matches, they were made of odorous sulphur. "When you struck them, they'd glow bluish for a while, then burst into a flame". She also said, "They smelled terrible." Advantages claimed for the sulphur matches were that they weren't affected by dampness and they leave no marks when struck.

Moses employed about twelve men and made about twenty-five gross boxes a day. These were often stored in a tinderbox, a container made of wood or metal containing brimstone matches, flint, firesteel, and tinder. The match factory building was demolished in 1946.

The Pease house, barn and factory were located at One Park Street in Lee, on the corner of Housatonic Street, and where the Berkshire Bank is now. Abile Pease bought the house from E.D. Field, the brother of Cyrus Field who was the inventor the Trans-Atlantic Cable in 1843. The property was on the site of the first two-story building in Lee. It was called the Red Lion Inn, a tavern and stagecoach stop, which was destroyed by fire in the early 1800's. While living there, Moses constructed a cell room in the basement where he kept prisoners overnight before taking them to the Lenox jail, and then later to the Pittsfield jail. As a young girl, Lorraine Pease remembers seeing the jail with bars in the barn.



Eliot Pease sold the property in 1946 to Margaret and Earle Pero, who owned the Morgan House (built in 1817 as a private home) from 1933 to 1970.



Moses' Civil War Spencer Carbine M1865 with armory cartouche. Moses didn't serve, but worked with the military. He was probably issued this to bring captured prisoners to the jails.

My research: I used Google, Ancestry, and Wiki-Tree. Thanks to notes and an article left by the late Lee historian and Pease family member, Charlotte Morgan Davis (1915 – 2014), and special thanks to Raymond and Diane Kirby of Lenox, and members of the Pease family.

BUCKETS, PEOPLE, WITCHES? **WHAT'S ALL THAT ABOUT?**

For those not in the know, it was the Society's last presentation of 2023 in our Speaker Series, given by our own Jack of All Trades, Gary Allen. We didn't have room in our December issue to do justice to Gary's talk on the history of the Lee Fire Department, so we've saved it for the first edition of our newsletter of 2024. If you missed it, you can still see it at our Community Television for the Southern Berkshires at ctsbtv.org. Click on Public Channel 1301 and search for Lee Historical Society Speaker Series and it's the first video on the left. Well worth watching!

The gathering at the Cafeteria in the Senior Center that Thursday evening of November 14th waited expectantly as to what the Society's next presentation would bring, and were not disappointed. Board Member Ellen Whittaker introduced new Society President Gary and so the evening began.

"Some of you may think, 'I've seen this before,'" was Gary's opening line. "And, in fact, if you were around in 2006, you *have* seen this before." Back then, Lee was celebrating the 250th anniversary of the Lee Fire Department and Gary had put together its history up to

then. Seventeen years on and here he was again giving an updated version. “It’s a fascinating story,” he told his audience, and went on to prove that.

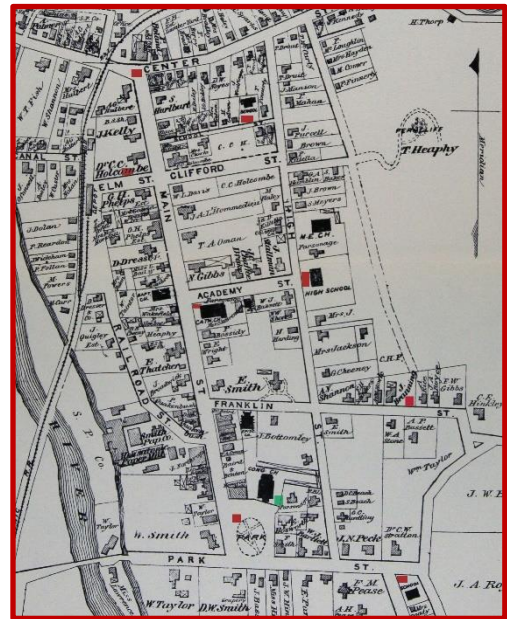
The very earliest equipment for fire-fighting was the humble bucket, made of leather and manufactured by the Reliance Hook & Ladder Company, holding two gallons of water. In fact, every home was required to have one to hand. The system was to form a chain and the furthest the bucket holder could get from the fire would be two to four feet (and one can only assume there were many residents of Lee who were thence without eyebrows and had very red faces...). Once the water was tossed on the inferno, the next person in line would toss their bucket. As so many of Lee’s buildings were destroyed by fire, it seems that didn’t work so well. Many heads must have come together to work out a more efficient system, hence the forming of Lee’s very first Fire Department. They had a huge investment to protect, seeing that Lee’s 25 mills put out a whopping one fifth of all the paper manufactured in the US.



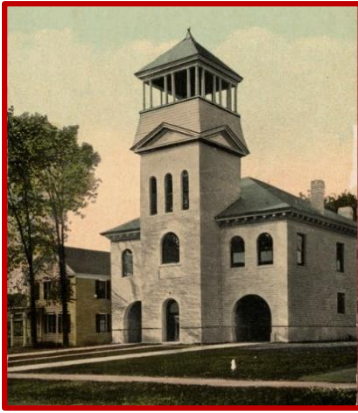
The very first fire company, the Forest, was actually in East Lee and was formed in 1855 when that part of Lee was somewhat separate. Sixty six contributors, mainly paper mill owners who had so much to lose from a fire, donated enough for the company to purchase a hand-pumped engine made by the Button Company (obviously a misleading name), later put out to pasture at the arrival of the steam engine. It was back in 1856 when forty nine of Lee’s residents, probably also predominantly mill owners, pooled their resources to purchase the first engine, the Water Witch, at a cost of \$1,421.00 for the newly-formed Lee Fire Company. (As an aside, it was a lady by the name of Agnes Brown who named the engine. Not sure what Agnes’ involvement was with the Fire Department, or why the engine reminded her of a witch. Maybe one of our readers might be able to elaborate on that.) To quote from Gary’s presentation, “With 50 men manning the bars and pumping, the Witch could put water on the fire from as much as 200 feet away. It was housed in a building on Academy Street.”

Ninety-nine volunteers made up the company and not only paid for the equipment, but also maintained it. The incentive for doing this was due to the expense of fire insurance. One example, taken from the Valley Gleaner of January 19, 1857 was an \$8,000 loss to a company called Smith & Weber who had only \$3,000 in insurance. The \$5,000 shortfall was a massive amount of money back then and the equivalent of close to \$180,000 today.

In 1859, eight huge water cisterns that held about 400 to 500 gallons were inserted around town to relieve the necessity of fetching water from the Housatonic. This helped enormously to aid the bucket gangs, of course. One was quite recently discovered under the road by the side of St. Mary’s Church on Main Street and you can see its location by the big patch of asphalt now covering it. The fire engines also used these cisterns.



Map of the approximate locations of the water cisterns, using an 1867 map of Lee. The ninth cistern (marked in green) was not paid for by the town, but by the Congregational Church.



As most of us know, one of Lee's major industries was in marble. Therefore, how appropriate that Lee's first fire station should be built of Lee marble. Built in 1912 and designed by celebrated architect Henry Moul (who also designed Lee Library), its doors were once rounded, but are now straight across. This modification was made in order to allow access to the evolution of larger engines. Nowadays, of course, modern engines are even larger and, unfortunately, don't fit into our fire station, so we have modified, but still very effective, engines. There is a buzz around Town that we are to be blessed with a new, totally modern, up-to-date fire station which will accommodate the latest engines.

There is so much more to the history of Lee's Fire Department than cannot be addressed in one article, but do watch Gary's presentation on CTSB to hear more. One last piece of information of current history is that last year the Department responded to about 1400 calls, only 230 of which were fire related. Many of the calls are for medical issues, lock-outs, car accidents, cellar floods, but – surprisingly – never to rescue cats from trees!

Editor's Note: Linda Buttery here. I can't resist but to offer my own experience with the brave members of our Fire Department. In our wisdom, my husband and I decided we should dispose of our large accumulation of yard waste by incinerating it in our yard. We applied for and received the appropriate permit, dug a pit, surrounded it by brick, cleared any dried grass from its perimeter and then proceeded to set fire to not only our own property, including our post and rail fence, but also some of our neighbors'.

This was not our intention, you understand; we thought we had taken every precaution. But fire has a mind of its own. As a neighboring tree started to emit smoke and the grass around rapidly disappearing under orange licking flames, I called for help and soon heard the sound of the siren. Within a very short time, four – yes, FOUR! – fire trucks arrived; one parked in our neighbor's driveway, much to her surprise, one at the top of Circular Ave, which allowed access more easily to our property, two others further down. Also, two pick-up trucks off-loaded several volunteers.

Before we knew it, our yard was awash with firefighters who with considerable ease eradicated the fire. Realizing I now could not locate my cell phone and in a bit of a panic, I asked some of the men if anyone had noticed it lying around. After inquiring as to its number, half a dozen delightful chaps now dialed my phone to see if anyone could hear it ringing. It actually turned up in my back porch, but I did appreciate their help. So, I for one can definitely vouch for the wonderful team that make up the Lee Fire Department!

REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN

CAPTAIN (OR MAJOR) DOROTHY LARRISON VOHR (1906 – 1955)

Dr. Dorothy R. (Larrison) Vohr was yet another Lee physician, and she shared the practice, started in 1932, with her husband, Dr. Fred H. Vohr. Their offices were located in their home, the former Gale house on Park Street.

A native of Belmont, NY, Dr. Vohr graduated from Alfred University, later attended the Women's Medical College at Philadelphia, and graduated from Middlesex Medical College at Boston.

After volunteering for service in World War II, she served for two years in the Army Medical Corps where she diligently cared for the sick and wounded.

A very active member of the local community, Dr. Vohr served on the boards of the United Cerebral Palsy Association of Berkshire County and the Riggs Foundation (now the Austin Riggs Center), in Stockbridge. She was a member of the Ausotunnoog Chapter of the DAR and was a board member in the Lee Visiting Nurses Association.

Dr. Vohr had three children: a daughter, Judith, and two sons, Fred Jr. (Fritz) and Thomas. Following in his parents' footsteps their son, Fred Jr., a doctor, also married a doctor and opened a medical practice in Rhode Island.

It's something of a mystery that her headstone in Fairmount Cemetery states she held the rank of Captain upon her death, but other sources (including her obituary) advise she was promoted to Major before leaving the military.

HONORING ALL LEE VETERANS

The Lee Veterans Wall, recognizing all men and women who have served honorably in the armed services of the United States and its allies, made its debut last July with about 2,500 names found mostly in public sources. The wall is incomplete and there are plans to add missing names on new banners this year. Our goal is to find every qualified veteran and if you know of any veteran who was missed earlier, please let us know.

Any person who served honorably for any period of time in the armed services is qualified to be on our wall if that person ever lived in Lee, is buried in Lee or went to school in Lee. This includes honorable National Guard or Reserves. Any person who ever put on the uniform and swore to defend the nation qualifies.

Partial listings of veterans now on the wall can be found on our website, leemassveterans.homesteadcloud.com. The lists are incomplete, so if you are in doubt please send us information about veterans we may have missed at 2rockpaper9@gmail.com. You can see the kinds of information we are including by looking on our website above. Please don't let the vets in your life go unrecognized.



ARTICLES BY BETTY DENNIS

SEPTEMBER 2, 1971

Just by chance, browsing through "Historical Lee: A Collection of Articles by Betty Dennis 1971 – 1977", we came across this article that also talks about Moses Pease and his Lee Match Factory, a perfect fit along with Charles Flint's article! The two complement each other perfectly!



For those late-comers to Lee, Elizabeth "Betty" Dennis (February 16, 1917 – May 4, 2007) was the much-loved Head Librarian of Lee Library from 1942 until her retirement in 1987. She was a lifelong resident of Lee and had an incredible wealth of knowledge of the Town's history. Every now and again, we reproduce an article from the book that was compiled from the many articles she wrote for the "Penny Saver" from April 1971 until August 1977.

Among the forgotten industries is Lee's Match Factory which was in operation during the middle 1800's. Moses H. Pease, a well-known citizen, widely known as a State Detective, was the match maker. He began his business in a 2-room

building in the rear of his home (now the Pero Apartment House) on Pease's Corner, as it was then called.

Matches were almost a luxury in those days, and the statement printed on the wrappers ... "The Most Economical Match Made" ... served as a promotional ad. These matches were impervious to damp weather and left no mark when struck. Mr. Pease learned the art of matchmaking from an expert in the field, brought machinery from Connecticut, and employed about a dozen people.

In one room of his factory a stone vat was constructed for the dipping. Sulphur was freely used and although slow to light, they were sure to burn.

The "block match" was probably the first, according to a story in a scrap book loaned me by Mrs. Eliot Pease and Miss Lorraine Pease. Next in line came double-headed matches dipped on both ends to be cut later for packing and retailing. Having some of these in our possession we tried and found in 1971 the first striking slowly becomes a busting flame, igniting the wooden stick and emitting a heavy odor of sulphur ... probably as readily as it did a hundred years ago.

Although some of the products are still around, the little factory was torn down 26 years ago, when Moses Pease's grandson, the late Eliot Pease, was remodeling the property.

LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2024 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, 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.

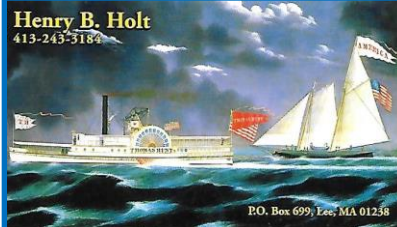
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