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The Gateway Gazette

The Newsletter of the Lee Historical Society

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

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



FROM THE EDITOR

I hope everyone had a wonderful and minimally stressful holiday season and I wish for everyone the greatest of everything in the new year!

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

THE POISONED CANDY SCANDAL OF 1936

In the spring and summer of 1936, the quiet town of Lee found was rocked by a sensational criminal case. A family drama with accusations of infidelity developed into a dramatic courtroom showdown that ended in a surprising acquittal.

The case began in late April 1936, when Arthur Maceri, a Lee lumber dealer, discovered a small package in the mailbox outside his home. The box contained chocolate-covered candies, but something about the un-postmarked wrapping made him suspicious. When he cracked one of the chocolates open, he noticed a strange white powder inside.

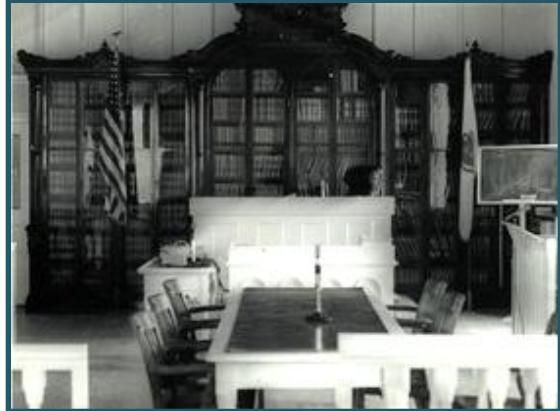
Maceri brought the candy to Lee Police Chief Frank Coughlin, who sent it to the State Division of Food and Drugs for analysis. Chemists Herman C. Lythgoe and Charles W. Schroeder soon confirmed the worst: the chocolates were coated with arsenic trioxide, in quantities large enough to kill multiple people.

Suspicion quickly fell on Amadeo Cadenelli, a 51-year-old Lee farmer, wood dealer, and cider maker. Cadenelli and Maceri had once lived under the same roof, but their relationship had deteriorated sharply when Cadenelli caught Maceri in a compromising position with his wife, Angelina. In September 1935, Cadenelli had filed a \$20,000 alienation-of-affection lawsuit, accusing Maceri of stealing the love of his wife.

Police arrested Cadenelli on May 11, 1936. Evidence presented in the early hearings included: testimony from two pharmacists who said they had sold arsenic to Cadenelli on three occasions, an envelope addressed to Maceri, written by a neighbor at Cadenelli's request, and the fact that the candy had been left in a mailbox belonging to Cadenelli's son-in-law. The prosecution argued that Cadenelli had both motive and means. The defense countered that the evidence was circumstantial and possibly planted.

The July Superior Court trial drew packed crowds. The Commonwealth, led by District Attorney Thomas F. Moriarty, presented a narrative of jealousy, revenge, and premeditated poisoning. The defense was handled by two young local attorneys James E. Hannon of Lee (who would later become famous as the blind judge in Arlo Guthrie's "Alice's Restaurant Massacre") and Paul A. Tamburello of Pittsfield, both recent Boston University Law School graduates.

Cadenelli's testimony was emotional, at times chaotic, and often dramatic. He accused Maceri of carrying on an affair with his wife, having improper relations with his daughter, owing him several thousand dollars and setting fires on his property. The defense also pointed out the police lab had checked the package in question for fingerprints and of those that could be identified, none of them belonged to Cadenelli and employees from the store where the candy had been sold had not seen Cadenelli making the purchase. It was also argued that



Memorial Hall Courtroom, c. 1950.

Cadenelli bought the arsenic to kill rats on his farm, a common practice at the time, and that Maceri or someone else could have planted the poisoned candy to frame him.

When pressed by the District Attorney about whether he wanted Maceri dead, Cadenelli shouted one of the trial's most memorable lines: "If I kill him, how I get my money?"

After three days of testimony and more than three hours of deliberation, the jury returned its verdict on July 24, 1936: not guilty. Cadenelli was acquitted of both attempted murder and the charge of mixing arsenic with candy. Despite the arsenic, the envelope, and the strained relationships, the jury found that the Commonwealth had not proven its case beyond a reasonable doubt. The courtroom erupted in murmurs; the newspapers noted the significance of the victory for the young defense attorneys, who had just won their first Superior Court case.

Cadenelli's alienation of affection case made it to court in October the same year. The jury found in his favor and granted him an award of \$2,000, significantly less than the \$20,000 he was asking. However, his fortunes took a sharp downturn after that. In 1938, his wife filed for divorce, and in 1939, he lost a case he filed against Maceri for malicious persecution and was ordered to pay \$10,000. Despite the hostile feelings between the parties involved in the case both Cadenelli and Maceri remained in Lee until their deaths years later.

REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN

Cpl. William R. Abderhalden (1928-1951)



Born and raised in Lee, William Aberhalder was the youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph U. Abderhalden of East Street. A 1946 graduate of Lee High School, he worked alongside his father in the family trucking, sand and gravel business before answering the call to serve. Drafted into the U.S. Army in November 1949, he trained at Camp Pickett, Virginia, and was later stationed in California before deploying to Japan, and then, in July 1950, to the front lines of Korea. He served with Company A, Ninth Infantry Regiment, Second Infantry Division.

In one of his final letters home, dated August 15, William wrote candidly of the harsh terrain and intense combat. "The Korean terrain is enough to get any man down," he said, but added that his platoon was growing tougher and learning "how to stick together." Just two weeks later, on August 30, he was killed in action, making him the first Lee serviceman to lose his life in the Korean War.

William's death was not just a loss to his family, but to the entire Lee community. His parents received the devastating news via telegram from the War Department. Plans for a military service at St. George's Church were soon underway, as neighbors and friends prepared to honor a young man whose life was cut short in service to his country. Tragically he was also survived by his fiancée, Candace Heath, to whom he was engaged just the prior year.

The Abderhalden family's commitment to military service runs deep. William's three eldest brothers, Joseph Jr., Paul, and Walter, all served in the Marine Corps during World War II and also worked for the family business, Abby & Sons, in town. His brother Edward, also an

Army corporal, was stationed in Nagoya, Japan, at the time of William's death. Their sister, Mrs. Elmer V. Forrest, remained close to home on East Street.

In the wake of tragedy, Mr. Abderhalden reached out to the Red Cross and Congressman James E. Hannon of Lee (*the very same James Hannon mentioned in the article above*), hoping Edward might be granted leave to return home and mourn with his family.

His father Joseph built the 20-house development known as Abbey Court on East Street, and named William Parkway a wide street in the neighborhood, in memory of his late son.



Stone on William Parkway dedicated to William Abderhalden.



MAINTAINING A LEE LANDMARK



View of Lee taken from Ferncliff, with the Congregational Church Steeple peeking out from the trees, c. 1890.

The steeple of the Lee Congregational Church has been a symbol of the town and a beacon to travelers entering the Berkshires since 1857. Considered the tallest all-wooden steeple in New England, its high perch exposes it to extreme conditions. The 195-foot steeple is built of double-planked pine and it has seen damage and undergone repairs repeatedly throughout its long life. The current Lee Congregational Church was built 1857, making both the Romanesque style building and steeple over 160 years old.

In 1918, the spire was struck by lightning, shearing it of its outer covering down to the belfry, exposing the inner framework. The gilt weather vane was untouched and continued to turn in the breeze and the clock continued to operate after the damage. Repairs were conducted by a single steeplejack in just over a month. George Ferguson followed his father into this unusual profession and noted that "the art of the climber is not a question of nerve nor of ability, but a gift." He also explained that the profession of steeplejack combines the skills of several other professions including carpenter, plumber, mason, tinner, painter, gilder, electrician and architect.

In 1980, damage to the steeple was putting the entire church at risk. Along with weather damage there were signs of insect infestation and during high winds pieces of the steeple would blow off. Rainwater also leaked through the structure and dripped onto the organ inside the church. The heavy clock and bell were also at risk because the supporting

structures were damaged, leaving the entire church at risk if the entire structure collapsed on top of it. An entire renovation of the interior of the tower was conducted and the structural beams were strengthened at a cost of over \$10,000.

Seven years later, a survey of the structure determined that repairs were badly needed to the exterior of the steeple due to rainwater working its way under the layers of paint, causing the nails to rust away and parts of the structure to break off. Just one year later, a 12-foot-long wooden rib fell from the steeple, revealing the extent of the damage. Skyline Engineers of Fitchburg was hired to perform a \$54,000 restoration. That year's project involved re-anchoring each of the thousands of pieces of wood in the steeple with brass screws, replacing any rotted or warped exterior pieces, covering the aprons below the belfry and wash tables with lead-coated copper flashing, and a complete scraping and repainting. The restoration to the interior of the church had already been underway when the need for repairs on the steeple was determined.

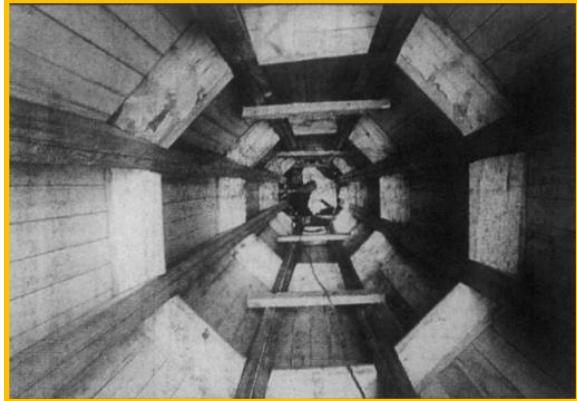
In 2008, Moore's Steeple People of Chicopee was hired to fix the steeple after damage from a thunderstorm the year before, but work was halted when the project was determined to be bigger than first expected. It was decided that the top 35 feet of the spire was beyond repair and needed to be completely removed and rebuilt. The cost of the repairs grew exponentially from its original \$10,000 estimate to over \$150,000.

The steeple was removed in March 2009, and not replaced until September, leaving a huge hole in the skyline of town for the entire summer. The replica section of the steeple was constructed using mostly modern materials, but was built to be historically accurate and contained some of the original wood. The steeple was made sturdier and more weather-resistant than the original but with the exception to new steel supports it remained completely constructed of wood, allowing it to maintain the "tallest wooden steeple" honor.

A town-wide celebration wrapping up that year's Founders Day weekend greeted the newly repaired steeple even before it was completely painted to match the rest of

the church. The people of Lee were greatly relieved that their town's most recognizable landmark was whole again.

Because of the fame and landmark status of the church and steeple, the people of Lee, not just church members, have come together to protect the church's steeple throughout its life, and will undoubtedly heed the call in the future when the time comes for more care and restoration.



Interior of the steeple after the 2009 repair.



The newly rebuilt section of the steeple being raised into place, September 2009.

ARTICLES BY BETTY DENNIS

We think we know our town well, but it's amazing the number of things that have changed through the years, including the names of familiar places. Here is a Betty Dennis article covering that topic from November 1, 1972.

Many new streets have been added to our town through the years, and some of the old ones have been renamed.



Maple Street was originally called Cemetery Road. It wasn't until 1870 when the family of Lyman Foote was growing up that they wished for some other name for the street on which they lived. Just West of their home was a fine grove of Maple trees, and by 1871 Mr. Foote's son, Theron made a formal offer to the town Fathers of a gift of enough Maple trees to line the street...if the name could be changed to Maple Street. The offer was accepted and maples lined the road all the way from Lee to East Lee.

Laurel Street as we know it was once called "Ball Street". In the early records of Lee several families of the name Ball lived in this area. It was little wonder that the Street was named for them as Joseph, James, Nathan, Isaac, Luther and John all appeared as property owners in the immediate section. In a story of the Berkshire Gleaner of July 29, 1903 there is a feature article about the "Baldwin House", later known as the "White Tip Inn" at 104 Laurel Street. The main structure of the house was sold in 1810 by James Ball to another Ball and so on down the long string of Ball owners. It was not until 1869 that Mr. Baldwin bought the house and within a few years remodeled it almost completely.

According to old City Directories many other changes came in the names of our streets. Among them is Marble Street, which was Quarry, in the old directories. Stockbridge Road as we call it was listed as Stockbridge Street. Yankee Lane was a short street with about two or three houses, running from Chapel Street to the brook, near the home of M. Frank Bastow, this was washed away in the flood of 1868. Housatonic Street was originally called "New Road" and a section of River Street, commonly called "Lawrenceville" where families of Lawrence lived.

WHAT'S FOR SALE

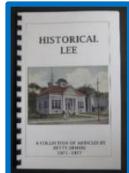
We still have many items on sale! Contact Tracie to purchase: ethere@gmail.com



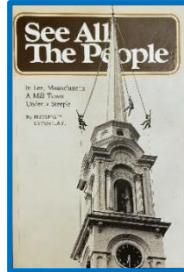
MUGS depicting various places of historical interest in Lee, including the covered bridge, Memorial Hall and the Kilbon Fountain. At just **\$5** each, this would normally be a steal, but on offer at BOGO, how can you not take advantage? Rumor has it that the morning coffee tastes extra delicious in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

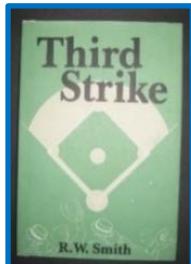




"HISTORICAL LEE" If you've read any of beloved Lee Librarian Betty Dennis' articles reprinted in our newsletter from time to time, you know what a great gift this will be for anyone interested in our Town's diverse and fascinating history, so pick one up for just **\$12** and get it wrapped!



"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: _____

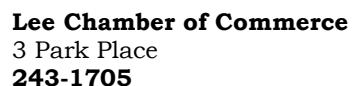
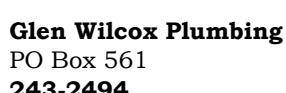
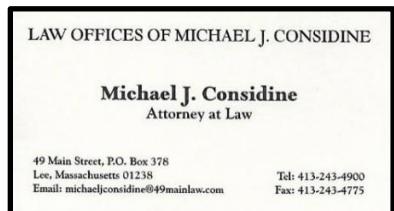
Mail with Membership Fee to: Lee Historical Society, PO Box 170, Lee, MA 01238

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.

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