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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, July 10th at the Historical Society Office, Crossway Tower, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.



FROM THE EDITOR

I would like to take this space to highlight the debt we at the Lee Historical Society owe to Phil Smith. For more than a decade he has gone above and beyond to get things done for the Society. First and foremost, he has almost single handedly created, designed, written and mounted the exhibits the Society has displayed in the Lee Library during the summer. He's had to step back from his duties just as we are mounting the current exhibit and we are all quickly learning how much work he has quietly accomplished over the years. I personally hope that we as a group can step up and honor the example he has set by continuing the annual historical exhibits without his extensive labor.

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

A LANDMARK THAT ISN'T THERE: THE GOLDEN HILL (TUTTLE) BRIDGE

There are six locations in Lee that come up on a search of the digitized records of the National Register of Historic Places. Two are neighborhoods, Lower Main Street Historic District and the South Lee Historic District; three are prominent buildings, the Fire Station, the Hyde House, and the Hyde School, the last structure is unique in several ways. It is no longer in Lee, but lingers in the memories of long-term Lee residents.

If you have ever traveled down Golden Hill Road to Greylock Street and into Lenox Dale you have crossed the Housatonic on a fairly non-descript low slung bridge. This “new” bridge is in the state Highway Department files as the “Tuttle Bridge,” borrowing the name from the structure that had been there earlier, itself named for a family farm located nearby. Today, the old bridge is just a memory, but the memory endures because of the bridge’s unique history and design.

When the Lee Historical Commission dug into the bridge’s past in the early 1990s as part of the Historical Structures Survey, they discovered something remarkable: the Tuttle Bridge was the oldest surviving lenticular truss bridge in Massachusetts. Out of roughly 600 lenticular bridges built across the state, only about 50 remained and Lee’s was the senior citizen of the bunch. This lead members of the Commission to pursue its inclusion into to the National Register of Historic Places. Not bad for a one-lane span tucked into a marshy and often flooded bend in the river.

A wooden bridge likely stood at the site as early as the 1790s, but the first solid mention of the Tuttle Bridge appears in 1863, when town selectmen noted that “the abutment needed repairing.” By 1885, the old wooden span had worn out and as the *Valley Gleaner* put it, “The Tuttle bridge is not a very stable affair...” At that point Lee voters decided it was time for something sturdier.



Flood damage, 1984. Source: Berkshire Eagle



Tuttle Bridge, 1992. Photographer: Dan Soules.

Lee opened the contract up for bids, posting a notice to bridge builders to submit proposals for the construction of a bridge “of about 87 feet span and 14 feet width across the Housatonic River”. On May 1, 1885, a number of bridge builders gathered in the town offices to pitch their proposals to the town selectmen. The Berlin Iron Bridge Company of East Berlin, Connecticut submitted the winning bid of \$943.

The success of the Berlin Iron Bridge Company was unusual and relied upon a combination of marketing savvy, engineering skill, and luck. The firm specialized in highway bridges that used a patented design for a distinctive “pumpkinseed-shaped

lenticular truss”. A lenticular truss bridge includes pumpkinseed (or almond) shaped spans, where the arches extend above and below the roadbed of the bridge. The company’s salesmen aggressively pursued contracts with New England towns that were just beginning to replace older wooden bridges with iron spans. With lower transportation and erection costs, the company could underbid many of its competitors from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia thereby convincing selectmen and bridge committees to use their bridge designs.

By July 7, 1885, barely two months after construction had started the new iron bridge was open for travel. The *Gleaner* praised it as “a very handsome and substantial structure and will prove a good investment for the town.” The Tuttle Bridge wasn’t just pretty; it was unusual. Along with its lenticular shape, it included a patented “tension floor-line chord,” a slender iron rod meant to stabilize the bridge against wind and lateral forces. Only a handful of lenticular bridges ever used this feature, and by the 1990s the Tuttle Bridge was the only surviving example in Massachusetts.

After decades of abuse from automobile traffic that it wasn’t designed to withstand, and suffering through several floods, the bridge needed some help. By 1970 the state had to replace the original stringers with steel I-beams and install an open steel grid deck. Still, the old truss remained largely intact, a rare survivor of 19th-century engineering.

By February 1996, further deterioration forced the town to close the bridge to vehicles and then later to even pedestrians. In 1997, the Department of Public Works laid out three options: replace it with steel, replace it with timber, or attempt repairs. Golden Hill residents hoped for restoration, or at least a wooden replacement that fit the neighborhood’s character.

But time ran out, after over a decade with the neighborhood “split in two”, in August 2004, the state Highway Department announced that the bridge would be replaced. The old bridge would be dismantled and sent to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst as part of its Adaptive Use Bridge Project. There, engineering students would study, restore, and eventually rebuild historic bridges for pedestrian use, the Tuttle Bridge is one of four in the state to be given a second life as teaching tools. At this point in 2026 the bridge is still listed as being in storage at the University.



The current Golden Hill Bridge, 2026.

The new bridge was prefabricated and installed by the J.H. Maxymillian Co. of Pittsfield. By 2005, crossing the Housatonic from Golden Hill was again possible, this time at a cost of over one million dollars. This bridge was 4 feet wider than the old one and slightly longer than the earlier version.

Today, the original Golden Hill (Tuttle) Bridge no longer spans the Housatonic, but its story continues. It remains one of the best-documented lenticular trusses in the country, a testament to the Berlin Iron Bridge Company’s craftsmanship and to Lee’s long memory.

REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN

Julius H Reed (1842-1938)



*Julius H Reed at the
Constitution Day program in
Chicago, 11 September
1936. Source: Library of
Congress*

Julius H. Reed was born in Lee on June 17, 1842 to Theron Reed, a carriagemaker originally from Salisbury, CT and Electa Lander Reed of Lenox.

Young Julius answered President Lincoln's July 1862 call for 300,000 volunteers to help defend the Union following the second battle of Bull Run. He joined Company B of the 37th Massachusetts Infantry, a unit that was filled primarily with Lee men, who mustered in Pittsfield under the command of Captain Franklin W. Pease of Lee. Julius entered the army as a Sergeant.

From December 11, 1862 to April 6, 1865, he fought in 21 major engagements, plus numerous skirmishes. "And a skirmish," he was quoted as saying after the war, "can be as bad as a battle." It seems he survived every major battle of the war including Gettysburg, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania and Petersburg. His unit fought under the command of great Union Army generals including Grant, Sheridan, Burnside, Hooker and Meade.

In September of 1864, after the Battle of Winchester, he was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant and just before the end of the war when he mustered out, he was promoted to 1st Lieutenant. Company B suffered more losses during the war than any other unit in the regiment, including losing Captain Pease who was killed at Spotsylvania. Julius, however, was lucky enough to make it through the war "never wounded, never fell out on march, and never reported on sick call," he recalled. He experienced the true horror of war however, recalling in his later years that after the Battle of Gettysburg, on July 4, "the day after the three days of fighting, we could have marched from Cemetery Ridge to Seminary Ridge – that's three-quarters of a mile – and stepped from dead man to dead man. Awful losses during those three days! – our side more than 23,000 in killed, wounded, and missing and the Confederates nearly 32,000. Curious, for it was roughly the same as Waterloo, where the allies lost 22,000 and the French 35,000."

Shortly after the war, perhaps because he found New England too tame after the excitement of the war, Julius moved West, first to Cedar Rapids, Iowa where he worked on the railroad with the Union Pacific system. It was there, in 1868, Julius married Harriet Jane Carpenter. Following their marriage, the Reeds moved to Boone, Iowa, where Julius entered the milling business. The couple had two sons Theron (named after Julius's father) and William.

In 1882, after the mill he was working at was destroyed in an explosion, Julius moved his family to Chicago, where, because of his career working with milling machinery, he found a position with B.F. Gump and Company, a milling machinery manufacturer. He continued working with the company for over 50 years, still working into his 90s.

Julius was active with the Grand Army of the Republic (the Civil War veterans' organization), serving as commander of the George H. Thomas Post in Chicago. He also helped to establish and served as custodian of the GAR museum of Civil War artifacts located in the top floor of the Main Branch of the Chicago Public Library (in a room specially designed for that purpose). He was also a founding member of the Loyal Legion, a veterans' group of former Union military officers. He was the last surviving member of the 37th Massachusetts Infantry and returned to Lee in 1931 to attend a GAR reunion with fellow Massachusetts veterans. The City of Chicago honored Julius twice by making him Grand Marshall of the city's annual Memorial Day parade in both 1936 and 1937.



The Grand Army of the Republic Hall, Chicago Public Library, 1897. Source: Chicago Public Library.

When he died in 1938 at age 96, Julius left behind not only a record of remarkable military service but nearly a century devoted to remembrance, civic duty, and to honoring his fellow veterans. His story stands as one of Lee's enduring connections to the Civil War generation. He is buried in Grand Rapids, Iowa.



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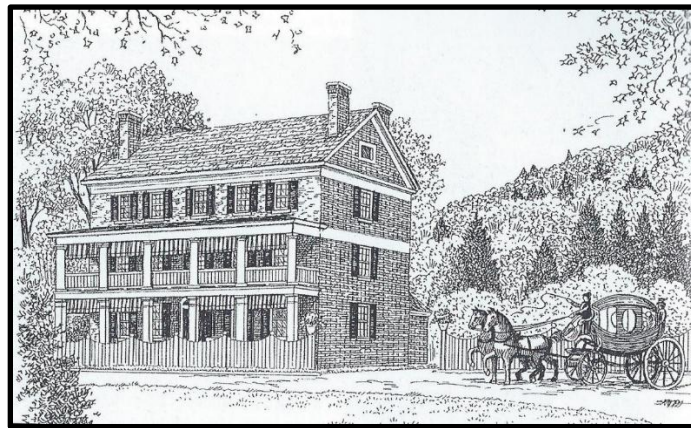


Illustration photo courtesy of The Berkshire Edge

LEE ON LEGS & WHEELS: 250 YEARS OF PERSONAL TRANSPORTATION

Lee Historical Society will mount a major exhibit entitled "Lee on Legs & Wheels: 250 Years of Personal Transportation" at the J. Peter Scolforo Gallery in the Lee Library during the entire month of July. This exhibit traces the history of getting around in and out of Lee,

activities that shaped the town we live in today. Come and ride with us as we traverse the hilly landscape in our fast-moving 2026 exhibit.

Thanks to Phil Smith, curator of the exhibit, for creating this voyage through time around Lee using the engine of transportation! Thanks also to other writers/researchers Bette Flood, Peggy Biron, Linda Buttery, Bill Mathews, Karen Norton, and David Walker.

This exhibit is free and open to the public during regular library hours.



THE SPIRIT OF '76 CELEBRATION

The Town of Lee presents

Saturday July 18, 2026

Beginning at 1 PM

Lee Athletic Field 100 Housatonic Street, Lee, Ma 01238

Free Admission!

Join the Town of Lee for an unforgettable afternoon and evening celebrating America's 250th birthday! The Spirit of '76 Celebration features family-friendly activities, live music, local history, food, and community fun. Highlights include a Revolutionary-themed scavenger hunt, Spirit of '76 art contest and display, a patriotic concert by the Eagles Band, a Red, White and Chowder Cookoff, and a movie night on the field with Hamilton. Celebrate history, creativity, and community-bring a blanket and stay for the whole day!

The Lee Historical Society will have a booth at the Athletic Field from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Stop by and see what we have for sale, become a member, or just have a chat about what the Historical Society is up to!

PROPOSED LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BY-LAWS CHANGE

In accordance to the by-laws of the Lee Historical Society, before the organization's Board can vote to accept any amendments to the by-laws the proposed changes have to be presented to the entire membership, as noted in Article Twelve:

Article Twelve – Amendment – A.) These By-laws may be altered, amended or repealed and new By-laws may be adopted by a majority vote of the directors at any legally constituted meeting with 10 days advance notice to the Board except where such provisions may be required by law. B.) No later than the time of giving notice for the next meeting of members following any amending of the By-laws by the Board, notice thereof stating the substance of such changes shall be given to all members. C.) The members may alter, amend, or repeal any By-laws adopted by the Board by a majority vote at any legally constituted membership meeting except where such provisions may be required by law.

Due to the current difficulty we are experiencing to find a single person willing and able to take over the presidency of the Society, the Board has instituted a co-president position to help with the burden, giving two people joint responsibility for the organization's leadership. Certain verbiage in the by-laws must be changed to accommodate this. Therefore, the Board is proposing a rewriting of Article Seven of the by-laws. The board will vote to change the article to read:

Article Seven – Legal Instruments – A.) The Board may authorize one or more people to act as its agent, entering into contracts or delivering any instrument in the name of the corporation. B.) A legal agent may be granted general powers or may be confined to a specific instance. C.) Authority to sign checks, drafts or orders on behalf of the corporation shall be granted to the Treasurer, the President and each Co-President. One signature is sufficient for amounts of \$1,000 or less. Two signatures are required for amounts greater than \$1,000. D.) The Corporation may maintain a credit card under terms set by the Board.

If any members have questions or concerns about this amendment please contact me, Tracie at ethere@gmail.com or Karen Norton, one of our current co-presidents, at knorton2@hotmail.com.



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