



Vol. 22, No. 3

March 2025

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
Mail: PO Box 170, Lee, MA 01238

The Monthly Meeting of the Society will be Thursday, March 13th at the Historical Society Office, Crossway Tower, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.



FROM THE EDITORS

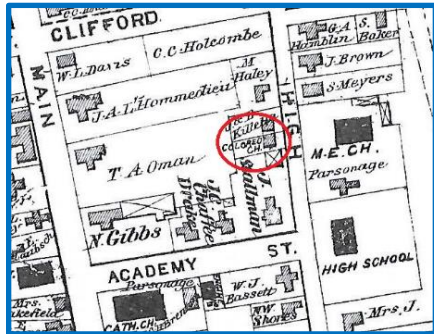
In our March edition, we celebrate Black History Month, which actually ends March 1st, the day you'll be receiving your electronic version of the newsletter. We cover the riveting story of the African American Episcopal Church, full of the intrigue and drama that is not expected amongst Lee's religious leaders! We also talk of two members of the all-Black 54th Massachusetts Voluntary Infantry who lost their lives during the Civil War.

On a more cheerful note, how about the Great Storm of 1888? For those of us not around for that one, but who have survived the Somewhat Mediocre Storm of February 2025, it is hard to imagine what fifteen feet of snow must look like. There still might be time to find out this winter as March is well known for producing some pretty impressive weather, so for those of us who enjoy looking at the snowflakes and how pretty our trees look with a coating of the white stuff, fingers crossed!

LEE'S AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

This church that once echoed to the sounds of joyful gospel music has long been lost to obscurity in Lee's history. It was located on High Street, across the street from what is now Crossway Tower and the Senior Center. As we've said before, much of history is as clear as those who record – or don't record – it. We know there were actually *two* African Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches, but the history and location of the second is unclear to us. However, what we do know is that there were two conferences involved, Zion and Bethel. According to an article in the Berkshire County Eagle dated October 11th, 1866, Bethel won out in a battle as to which conference should reside in the High Street church. The Rev. Cyrus Oliver, he of the unlucky Zion conference, went off in search of funds to build a second church, and this may, or may not, have been on Prospect Street.

According to the Hyde "History of Lee", it was the year 1844 when one Albert Marie arrived in Lee to visit with the "colored people" of which there were less than one hundred. From whence he came we do not know, but upon discovering that the Black citizens of Lee didn't have their own church, he started to preach to them in school houses and private dwellings. Prior to his arrival, they had worshipped in other churches in town. It must have become obvious that, as with other Lee citizens who had their own churches in which to worship, be they of whatever denomination, so did the Black population deserve theirs.



Detail of Lee from the 1876 Atlas of the Berkshires. Note the "Colored Church" in the center of the map.

It was in 1852 that this came to fruition and the African Methodist Episcopal Church on High Street, with the assistance of other congregations, was erected. There must have been much rejoicing amongst the, then, twenty-four communicants. Many local church dignitaries were present

for the ceremony including the Rev. Nahum Gale, the Rev. A. Gale, and the Rev. George A. Rue, who was the pastor of the church, and it was these three gentlemen who performed the laying of the cornerstone. The opening prayer was offered by the Rev. Mr. Harrison of the Second Congregational Church of Pittsfield; the sermon given by the Rev. M.R. Lent of the Lee Methodist Church; the Rev. Armory Gale of the Lee Baptist Church gave the dedicatory prayer; and the Rev. Nahum Gale of the Congregational Church gave the benediction. Forty-five dollars were contributed to help pay off the debt incurred by the building of the church, which does indicate the amount of support the Black people had in the Town.

Although any records that may have been kept at the church have sadly been lost, there are some rather interesting stories that have been uncovered from the local newspapers. This article from the Valley Gleaner of February 3rd, 1870, shows an increase in the number of worshippers, stating that there were now forty-five members and thirty-nine scholars attending the Sunday school. This is what was written:

"Rev. J. Dorsey, the present pastor, is quite an efficient pastor and deserves encouragement. He would like the assistance of well-disposed whites in the Sabbath School, but he has great occasion to reprove the 'enlightened heathen' who cause disturbance on Sunday evenings. We are sorry to learn that this has long been the custom of several rude boys and girls, but it is improving in this respect, and Mr. Dorsey is determined to stop this disturbance entirely. Even if he has to resort to law to do so."

It seems from this that the antics of certain young people at a loose end with not much to occupy them could be just as disruptive back then as they can be now. We have no indication as to whether the local constabulary had to get involved or as to what exactly the nature of the disturbances were, but enough to aggravate the pastor!

Then we have the most intriguing events that involved two different conferences at odds with each other and some most unseemly behavior on behalf of – well – all of them. (No sides being taken here!) As told in a November 30th, 1882 article in the Berkshire County Eagle, we glean that it was a territorial dispute over possession of the church pulpit, only to

investigate further to find it went much deeper than that, so keep reading! The Rev. Charles Ackworth was appointed in June 1881 by Bishop Brown of the New England African Methodist Conference to be pastor of Lee's AME church. However, the pastor he was taking over from, the Rev. Cloyd, who had the support of the Trustees, Freeman and Lewis, disagreed about Ackworth and refused to receive him.

Then, on October 22nd, Ackworth apparently ignored this and took over the pulpit in what must have been quite a hostile take-over. The Rev. Cloyd ordered him out, but Ackworth returned again for the evening service, only to be escorted out by the above-mentioned Trustees. Consequently, he sued the Rev. Cloyd and Freeman for assault and Lewis for disturbing the meeting. Ackworth was himself arrested on the same charges.

According to a Valley Gleaner article dated December 27th, 1882, that judgment was made in favor of the Rev. Ackworth (or Acworth - we have two spellings). This didn't go down with his opposition and the most unusually un-pastorlike behavior ensued. This is how it was reported:

"The more obstreperous of the brethren, after the manner of a Board of Brooklyn Aldermen, not being 'gentlemen of cultivation and learning', barricaded the church and prepared for battle. The reverend gentlemen, it seems, having none of the fiery zeal which characterized him (Ac(k)worth) while stationed here, and when, on Sunday last, he found his way blockaded, he went for the Massachusetts heathens just as if they were only common Long Island folks. After forcing a window, a charge of shot persuaded him that a window is not the proper entrance to a church. With some difficulty he effected an entrance through the door, and from the account that reaches us, never was a pastor given a warmer greeting. The congregation was in full war paint, and at one pistols, shot guns and other implements not normally kept in a first class meeting house were produced, and the dusky limbs informed their darkened shepherd that he might seek another flock. Undaunted by the warlike actions, Ac(k)worth started for the pulpit and it is safe to say that when he reached it, his parishioners had a greater regard for his muscle, if not for his theology."

They certainly knew how to make a church service exciting back then, didn't they! It seems apparent that, after reading the writer's references to Brooklyn and Long Island folk, comments he wouldn't get away with these days, that this journalist was not a fan of New York people.

In August, 1883, it was reported in the Valley Gleaner that the two warring factions had signed an agreement, permitting each to use the church on alternate Sundays. We haven't been able to unearth as yet the outcome of a court case to decide on who had title to the property, that being the church.

In 1885, Robert Jeter, who had been born a slave in 1847 on the plantation of David Allen from Berkeville, Nottway County, Virginia took over as pastor. He was freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, at which time he was owned by David Allen's son, Patrick. He left Virginia in 1871 to be employed by a Dr. Holcomb, and he remained with him for four years. From there he worked for several others before returning to Dr. Holcomb in 1882. By then he had learned to read and write, proved himself to be of good character and eligible to join the ministry as a pastor.

The Berkshire Eagle of August 5th, 1910 has yet another episode in the dispute and we shall repeat that here verbatim:

"At one time, the opposition to Mr. Jeter went so far as to take off the church doors and carry them to the top of Fern Cliff and there they were hid among the rocks of the mountain. Robert Jeter, hearing that the doors had been removed promptly went in search of them. He hunted one whole day in vain, but during the night, he says that while he was in dreamland, he located the doors and immediately arising from his couch, he went to Fern Cliff and ascended the rocky steep in safety notwithstanding the dark of the night. Keeping his dream in mind he went to the spot indicated and 'behold he found the doors'. Like Sampson of old, 'who carried the gates of the city', Mr. Jeter placed a door on either shoulder and carried them back to the church and placed them in position again." Well! What more can we say about these amazing church dignitaries back then?

Yet another scandal was waiting in the wings, though, again involving Robert Jeter. The headline in the Berkshire Gleaner of September 11th, 1907 reads, “*Minister and Groom in Court*”, and then, “*Rev. Robert Jeter Charged with Unlawful Marrying and Brother Dolphin with Abduction*”. The actual wording of the alleged crime was “*performing a marriage ceremony knowing the female to be a minor.*” The female in question was Miss Carrie A. Jackson, aged fifteen and her suitor a Frederick S. Dolphin. The whole situation was a testimony in confusion, it seems, in that even the validity of Robert Jeter’s status as a pastor eligible to perform the ceremony was in question.

This particular story is one that really deserves its own article and so, as we sometimes do, we will leave you in suspense until the April edition of the Gateway Gazette when we will write up the entire Gleaner article for your perusal!

After a lengthy court case Robert Jeter’s status as a pastor in charge of the AME church was approved. In November 1916 he moved on from Lee to become pastor of the African Methodist church in Pittsfield. This came about due to a large decline in the number of Black people actually living in Lee and the congregation shrinking to the point where there weren’t enough communicants to hold services anymore in the High Street church. Consequently, on May 2nd, 1927, the property was put up for public auction for breach of the conditions of the mortgage deed, funds obviously running dry.

Editors’ Note: If any of our readers know definitively the location of the Prospect Street church or know where we can find images of either church, please let us know!

THE GREAT STORM OF 1888 **AKA THE GREAT WHITE HURRICANE**



Main Street, Lee after the Blizzard of '88. Source: Lee Library Assoc.

When the snow started to fall on March 11th, 1888, the residents of Berkshire County would have had no idea of what was before them. The ability to forecast the weather days ahead and to send out electronic warnings of imminent danger such as we are blessed with now was unimaginable back then. Thus people would have been watching the heavy snow in ignorance of the need to rush out for bread and milk, probably anticipating a future of some sweeping and shoveling and life continuing as usual on a late winter day. Alas, it was not to be.

What lay ahead was what was described in the Berkshire County Eagle of March 15th, 1888 as “one of the most terrific storms that has been known for many years, if ever.” History records it as one of the most severe blizzards in American history. This was a storm that covered not only the Berkshires in unbelievable amounts of snow, but a large portion of the East Coast from Chesapeake Bay up to Maine and the Atlantic Provinces of Canada.

It fell for three days and nights leaving recorded snow totals between ten to fifty-eight inches, the sustained winds of more than forty-five miles per hour producing snowdrifts over fifty feet high. Try to imagine snowdrifts that could cover a three story building and that’s what some areas of New England were facing. As can be expected from such a storm, just about everything ground to a halt – no trains ran for days, ditto all forms



Main Street, Lee after the Blizzard of '88. Source: Lee Library Assoc.

of road transport, fire stations were unable to get to fires, resulting in an estimated \$25 million (\$850 million today) loss of property. One hundred seamen were lost as their vessels were either wrecked or grounded. After the blizzard had abated, then came the flooding from the melting snow, some of which had been pushed into the ocean in an attempt to stem the flow.



Main Street, Lee after the Blizzard of '88.
Source: Lee Library Assoc.

Close to home, the North Adams Transcript of March 5th, 1938, on the fiftieth anniversary of the blizzard, reports on how some townspeople actually dug a tunnel through the snow on Main Street to get from one side of the road to the other. The obviously inventive shop owner of Quinn's on Spring Street in North Adams, discovering a drift that obliterated his business from view, strung Chinese lanterns on poles in the drift so his establishment could be found.

There are enough accounts of deprivation and disaster, heroic acts, amusing anecdotes, to fill a book on this particular storm. However, a certain "Uncle Josh" wrote his own observations and thoughts in an article in the March 29th, 1888 Pittsfield Sun. His take on the cause are especially intriguing, and we shall repeat them here for our readers' amusement.

"Although in one sense it was democratic in its nature, it raised many barriers which separated man from man – and worse than that it seemed to be using its influence chiefly in the interest of restaurants, hotels and cab drivers.

Various views are expressed as to the cause of the great blizzard. Some blame the administration and some lay it to other causes, but I think it was caused by the wrath of the departed spirits of the heroes of the Rebellion, on account of the attack of Senator Ingalls on McClellan and Hancock. If the republican party allows such unscrupulous ranters as Ingalls to run loose it will encounter a blizzard next fall which will snow it under so deep that it can never be dug out."

Well! Such a diatribe sends the obvious message that some things never change!

REMEMBERING TWO LEE VETERANS

The 54th Massachusetts Voluntary Infantry of the Union Army was the second regiment established in the Northern States during the Civil War to be made up entirely of enlisted men of color. In this edition, we honor the memory of two young men who both lost their lives fighting with the Union Army. The brief history of both these young men is one that so illustrates the tragedy of war.

AARON SPENCER (abt. 1843 – 1863)

Corporal Spencer's life was taken from him, not in an heroic act, but by his own comrades. The details of how this happened are not available, but it seems that Aaron was killed by friendly fire on September 6th, 1863 in Morris Island, Charleston, South Carolina. He is buried at Beaufort National Cemetery, South Carolina.

Corporal Spencer came from a large family of six brothers and two sisters: Nilo, Henry W., Samuel, Ann, Louis, Cornelia, William, Theoren, Charles. His parents were Samuel and Louisa. They moved to Lee from Sheffield in 1860 without their father, Samuel, who had passed. At the age of twenty, Aaron was working as a farm laborer when he enlisted with Company A, never to return.



Detail of the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial, Boston Common.

HENRY FRANCIS BURGHARDT AKA BURKHART (abt. 1842 – 1863)

Private Burghardt (Burkhart) was born about 1842 in Lee to Phebe Janette (Treadwell) Freeman and, perhaps, Francis Ira Burghardt. His actual paternity is questionable, but we shall address that further. As did Aaron Spencer, Henry had a long list of siblings, all listed as half-brothers or sisters: Sarah Estelle, Harriet M., Edgar, Sylvina E., Harriet Ann, Mary E., Eudora A., Ida V., Frances, Fred, Elmer.

As regards the question of who Henry's father was, his mother was unmarried when Henry was born. Phebe always asserted that the father was Ira Burghardt, who never acknowledged him as his son. If he was, this would make Henry an illegitimate, but biological cousin, of W.E.B. DuBois. However, at that time there were TWO Ira Burghardts in Berkshire County, who were uncle and nephew, so which Ira was Phebe citing as the father? The older Ira was married with legitimate offspring, while the younger, the Ira who Phebe says was Henry's father and who states he was not, was younger and unmarried. Confused yet?

Back to Henry ...

In 1850, Henry lived in Lee with his mother, who was now married to Frank Freeman, and with his half-sister Harriet. At the time of his enlistment on February 18th, 1863 he worked as a mason. He was killed in action on July 18th, 1863 at the Second Battle of Fort Wagner on Morris Island in South Carolina.



"The Storming of Fort Wagner" by Kurz-Allison. Source: Library of Congress.

The battle mentioned above at Morris Island is one that was depicted in the movie "Glory". This unsuccessful assault led by the 54th ended in a victory to the Confederates. Nine other regiments and two brigades were able to invade Fort Wagner, but were driven out after receiving heavy casualties. Deciding that this first plan of attack was unlikely to be successful, the Federals combined a mixture of attacks from land and sea. It took sixty days before the Confederates finally abandoned the fort on September 7th, 1863, two days after Corporal Spencer lost his life.

The figures from this one battle are quite staggering. The Union Army lost two hundred and sixty-four men (one being Aaron, of course), had eight hundred and eighty wounded, and three hundred and eighty nine MIA. The Confederate Army fared much better (if that's the right word) with thirty six killed, one hundred and thirty three wounded, and five MIA.

MEET THE BOARD **LHS BULLETIN BOARD**

LOST SKI AREAS OF THE BERKSHIRES

We first alerted you to our next Speaker Series presentation in February's edition of the Gazette. Now we remind you that author Jeremy Davis will be giving an illustrated talk on the lost ski areas of the Berkshires on Thursday, March 27th, 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 the book available at the conclusion of the presentation.

This presentation is free and open to the public. Parking is available along the north entrance to Crossway Village as well as on Academy Street. Refreshments will be served. An evening of entertainment and socializing at no cost; definitely a not-to-miss event, so see you there!

THE LHS SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Every year, the Lee Historical Society, Inc. offers two scholarships to Lee High School Seniors who have shown interest in the humanities, especially in history, and plan on attending a two or four year college to seek further education in these subjects. These are both in the sum of \$250.00, one in the memory of former LHS President Stephen A. Cozzaglio and the other in memory of Dolores L. Eckert, wife of former President Mal Eckert, and Marion Leach, former LHS board member.

The deadline to submit an application is March 30th and these are available at the Lee Middle and High School Guidance Department.

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
TAR & GRAVEL
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

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

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

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

Cottage Care
INCORPORATED

413 243 • 4257

Fully Insured Free Estimates

DRESSER HULL
LUMBER & BUILDING SUPPLY COMPANY

60 RAILROAD STREET
LEE, MASSACHUSETTS 01238

Keith Kelly
Sales
keith.kelly@dresserhull.com

(413) 243-1400
(413) 243-4156 - FAX
www.dresserhull.com

Fox Homes
225 Housatonic St.
243-1950

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

MJ Kelly
Funeral Home

Established in 1806 Family owned since 1872

3 Main Street • Lee, MA 01238
413-243-0204

Henry's Electric Inc.

EST. 1946
WE LIGHT THE WAY
John LePrevost
Home Appliances - Electrical Contracting

252 MAIN STREET TEL. (413) 243-0690
LEE, MA 01238 FAX. (413) 243-4609

Email: john@henryselectricinc.com

Lee Chamber of Commerce
3 Park Place
243-1705

Onyx Specialty Papers
40 Willow Street, South Lee
243-1231

R.W.'s TOWING & REPAIRS
24-Hour Recovery

35 Run Way • P.O. Box 795 • Lee, MA 01238

Ph: (413) 243-0946
Fax: (413) 243-0948
rws towing.com
rwtowing@verizon.net

BILL & BECKY BRUNELL

TOOLE INSURANCE

If it matters to you, it matters to us.

John E. Toole, CIC
President

vinyl ips - 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

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

Glen Wilcox Plumbing
PO Box 561
243-2494

Your **Color Connection** Ann M. LaBier
Owner

Full Service Printing
Graphic Design
Laser Engraving

Graphic Design & Printing Company

36 Pittsfield Road, Lenox, MA 01240
ycc01240@aol.com 413-637-0500
yourcolorconnection.com

Our printer of choice

19 Main Street, Lee
(413) 243-0136

Zabian's Clothing