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May 2023

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 next meeting of the Society will be Thursday, May 13 at the Meeting Room at the Crossway Tower on High Street, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.



As full of spirit as the month of May, And gorgeous as the sun at midsummer.
– William Shakespeare –

FROM THE EDITORS

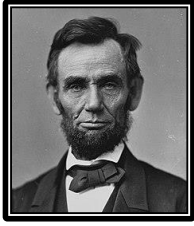
It being Spring, the Society has sprung into action and formed several new committees to keep the history of our Town current, interesting, and informative. We start to whet your appetites by alluding to the coming “Lee Comes of Age” exhibit to be held in July at the library. If you keep on reading, you’ll learn about our Program Committee’s plans for what sound like some pretty fascinating events.

There is so much of historical interest in our town and we’re spoiled for choice as what to pursue next. Tracie and I are already planning the next Cemetery Tour in the Fall at the same time as Lee gears up for our fabulous Founders’ Weekend. So much to look forward to.

Don’t forget, we love to hear from you – Tracie at ethere@gmail.com and Linda at lindabreader@icloud.com. Happy Spring!

1846 – WHAT HADN'T HAPPENED AND WHAT HAD

In the year 1846, a lot of interesting things hadn't happened:



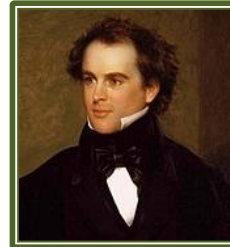
➤ Congressman Abraham Lincoln wasn't President of the United States,



➤ Mary Todd Lincoln wasn't the First Lady, but her nephew, Levi Todd, had designed the California Bear Republic flag and was involved in the Bear Flag Revolt.

- Yerba Buena wasn't San Francisco. The Donner-Reed party hadn't arrived – and mostly wouldn't (at least, not intact) – in California.
- California was not part of the United States, but the US was trying to wrestle it away from the Mexicans who had wrestled it away from the Spanish in 1821.
- There weren't 50 US states – only 30. Most of the other areas west of the Mississippi were considered Indian Territory by the US (as they were by the Indians).

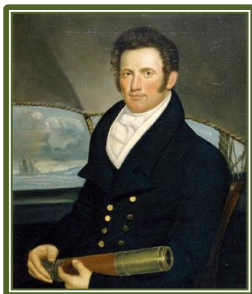
➤ Herman Melville was not living at Arrowhead in Pittsfield and hadn't been inspired by the view of Mount Greylock from his study window to write "Moby Dick".



➤ Nathaniel Hawthorne had not moved to Lenox and the little red house.

So what DID happen?

In 1846, young Crocker T. Howland built (or had built for him) a beautiful house on Laurel Street in which to live with his future bride.



A bit of background – Crocker was an ancestor of John Howland, a Pilgrim who came over from England on the Mayflower way back when.

John rose to prominence (or sank, shall we say) among the Pilgrims when he fell overboard during a gale. He was rescued, thankfully, by grabbing a trailing rope and being hauled back aboard to safety by sailors using boat hooks.

He married Elizabeth Tilley and together they had ten children who decided to single-handedly populate their new country, it seemed, by giving John and Elizabeth eighty grandchildren. Those grandchildren continued the trend and there are

estimated to be two million descendants of John and Elizabeth in the United States, including not only Crocker, but also the two Bush presidents, Ralph Waldo Emerson, FDR, Longfellow, and the acting Baldwin brothers.

Crocker was born in Lee at the Thatcher House on the Tyringham Road in 1820. In 1848, he wed Lucy Barlow of the Lee Barlows and they went on to have four children. Sadly, Crocker had much sorrow in his life. He and Lucy lost their little Esther, aged 11, in 1865. Lucy passed away at the age of 50 in 1870, and Clara, 16, and Charlie, 28, both passed in 1873. Of the four children, William C. Howland managed to survive long enough to marry Minnie Wilkinson and have a child of his own. W.C. had his own business on Center Street where he was a tin-smithing plumber. He inherited the house and lived there until he joined his parents and siblings in 1919 at 60 years of age. Minnie continued on until 1941 and passed at 81 years.

In spite of his losses, Crocker soldiered on at his position as foreman of the rag room at the Eagle Mill until his retirement in 1885. Having a good-sized one acre plot, he decided to take up market gardening, much to the pleasure, one would imagine, of the locals. He was able to supply them with a variety of good quality, probably organic (ahead of his time), veggies. Eventually, at the age of 85, Crocker joined Lucy and his children, having breathed his last in his house in 1905. Since then, a whole host of people have taken up residence in Crocker's house, including ourselves. However, truth be known, it still belongs to Crocker and from time to time he lets us know that.

We love our Howland family, though, and have no problem sharing our home with them. We work hard at keeping it as authentic as possible for them so they won't feel uncomfortable here. In case anyone may not know, we've put a sign out front stating clearly that this is the Crocker Howland House. We've also cleaned the headstones of Crocker and his family at Fairmount Cemetery. We hope he's pleased!

Editor's Note: This story first appeared, less some later amendments, in the newsletter about three years ago. We decided to resurrect it as it brings up an issue pertinent to an important activity the Society wishes to pursue. That is, the renovation of our Town's cemeteries, particularly Fairmount, it being the oldest and having some areas that are not in the best shape. My husband and I have taken to task the cleaning of the headstones for the Howland family, which were illegible and encrusted in algae and moss. They are now gleaming white and easy to read once more.

Cleaning gravestones does require great care, as described in the April edition after the story of Emerson McKegg. Should anyone decide to take on the task, please follow the guidelines carefully. – Linda



THE LHS BULLETIN BOARD

THE LHS ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP

To help offset the rising costs of a college education, we are happy to announce that we will continue to offer two scholarships for \$250 each to two Lee High School seniors. These scholarships are in memory of Stephen Cozzaglio, Dolores Eckert and Marion Leach. Please contact the High School Guidance Office where applications are available. Good luck!

AN EXHIBIT OF THE LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY LEE COMES OF AGE: 1850 – 1900

Please mark your calendars for July 1–31 and visit our latest exhibit in the Scolforo Gallery.

In our April edition, we challenged our readers to figure out what event on January 25, 1850 triggered the modernization of Lee. If you said that the first revenue train of the Stockbridge and Pittsfield Railroad came chugging up the tracks, you were correct. The next fifty years in the upper Housatonic Valley could rightly be called “The Railroad Era”. In that time, just about everything and everybody coming to or leaving Lee was on the Housatonic Railroad. Suddenly, the world was connected to Lee and Lee was connected to the world.

Four more significant developments would occur between 1850 and 1900 that would produce unprecedented growth. All of these will be detailed in our exhibit and along the way we hope to give you some insight into what it was like to live here in that time. Watch this space for additional details in our June issue.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

The Lee Historical Society is pleased to announce the reintroduction of engaging speaker programs during 2023. The first program will take place on Thursday, June 22, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. Guest speaker and Berkshire Historian, retired fine art and antiques specialist Charles Flint will present an illustrated talk about The Dodgetown Mystery. Dodgetown, located in East Lee, was once the site of the earliest settlement in Lee in the mid-1700’s. His interesting review will help us to understand the journey and why that location was chosen and then it disappeared, and what remains of it today.

This event, which is free and open to the public, will be held at the Lee Senior Center, 21 Crossway Street, Lee. For parking, enter the Crossway Village north driveway on High Street where visitor parking is available on the left. Walk across the front of Crossway Village to the Senior Center entrance on Crossway Street. Parking is also available along Academy Street nearby. Refreshments will be served.

Is there a topic of local history that particularly interests you? Would you enjoy hearing more about it, or are you willing to share your knowledge of it at one of our speaker programs? Please email your thoughts to Ellen Whittaker at ellenwhit@aol.com.

ERRATUM

Our deepest apologies are extended to Patricia Tyre and family after erroneously reporting that a contribution to the Society was made in memory of Sandra Waddock instead of Eileen Frances Waddock Peterson. We do regret this error and any concern it may have caused the family.

FROM THE VALLEY GLEANER ...

And so we complete in this installment the story of the Great Fire. We left Part Three with the inventory of businesses that sustained damage and now we continue with that and lastly how the Valley Gleaner fared.

A GREAT FIRE - FEBRUARY 5, 1879 PART FOUR

The south store was occupied by George K. Baird, druggist, the greater part of whose stock was saved, though some of it is in bad shape. He is insured. The second-story was occupied by S.K. Saunders, surgeon dentist, who saved about everything of value

The three burned blocks were all of wood, closely connected, with two stories and flat roof. Between Morey's block and the one north was a brick wall extending to the attic. This wall doubtless had something to do in hindering the spread of the fire. Baird's upper block was built in 1875, we believe, while the others were considerably older.

The occupants of Oman's block, which until the last seemed ready to go and which did get on fire in several places, moved everything out in as good shape as the general hurry would allow. The basement of this building was occupied by W.J. Hanna, restaurant and billiard room. On the first floor were Albee & Moore, dry goods, groceries, etc., and A.M. Cone, ready-made clothing and custom tailoring. On the second floor was Mrs. Mae Griswold's millinery store and on the floor above C.P. Gutting's photograph gallery. Mr. & Mrs. Griswold and A.M. Cone and family also occupied rooms on the second floor. Everything was moved out of this block in as good shape as could have been expected, and the damage to the building is by water, with which it was flooded.

Notes: That the Gleaner comes out at all this week, even in the shape it does, is due to the distinguished kindness of Messrs. Chickering & Axtell of the Berkshire County Eagle, who, while the fire that destroyed the Gleaner office was still burning, through the foreman of their establishment, Mr. William Mink, put their facilities at our disposal. Their kind offer was gratefully accepted, and as a result we are enabled to give our subscribers what we do. While feeling the deepest gratitude towards the proprietors of the Eagle, we must also acknowledge a like kind offer from Clark W. Bryant of the Berkshire Courier, Great Barrington. Nor can we refrain from pressing our grateful thanks to the numerous friends who have given us that hearty sympathy which after all, is worth a great deal more than in times of prosperity we are apt to think it. We are a little under the weather just now but expect to live through. We have secured new quarters in Phelp's block on Main street, in the store formerly occupied by J.S.E. Barnes, and will open our office there immediately. Old friends

and new are cordially invited to call on us, though we don't expect to do any new business for a week or two. We trust it is unnecessary to do more than suggest that whatever money anybody happens to be owing us would be very acceptable just now.

Editor's Note: So many of Lee's buildings fared badly when it came to fire for several reasons, the most obvious being that they were built of wood. After the Great Fire which consumed so many of Main Street's buildings, most were rebuilt using brick. There was one that was rebuilt using wood, the Oman Block. Subsequently, it burned again in 1911 and then, the light went on, and it, too, was rebuilt using brick!



The remains of the Oman Block after the 1911 fire. Source: Lee Library Association

REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN

We are privileged to be able to record in our newsletter the history of Lee's brave young men and women who served in the forces.

BRIGADIER GENERAL JOHN McEWAN HYDE (1841 – 1916)

John's connection with Lee seems to remain buried along with his remains, but we do know that his impressive forty year military career began in 1861 when he would have been 20 years old.

He joined Company A of the 71st New York Militia as a private. One year later, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant in the 38th New York Voluntary Infantry. The list of his military endeavors is seemingly endless.

He was in the Civil War, the Wars of Western Expansion (also called the Indian Wars), served in China and the Philippines, and was also involved in the 1872 expedition to survey the Northern Pacific Railroad (Minnesota to the Pacific Coast in Washington).

During the Civil War, he was wounded at both the first and second Battles of Bull Run, July 1861 and August 1862 respectively. He managed to remain unscathed while fighting at the Battle of Yorktown in April 1862, the Battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863, and the Battle of the Wilderness in May 1864. It seems by then he may have learned to duck...

At the Battle of Cold Harbor in May 1864 (this man loved a fight!) he was given the brevet rank of Lieutenant Colonel for meritorious service. One month later at the Battle of Petersburg in June 1864, he was given the brevet rank of Full Colonel. Finally, on July 4th, 1863, as the Confederate Army surrendered at Vicksburg, Mississippi, he was given the rank of Brigadier General. And no doubt a pipe, slippers and a comfy chair.

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.



IF YOU LOVE LOCAL HISTORY ...

... how about joining us and becoming a member of the Lee Historical Society? You can also give a Gift Membership to a friend or relative and not only help support our Society, but also join fellow lovers of this wonderful little town in learning about and helping to preserve its history.

MEMBERSHIP FEES:

Individual: \$10.00 Family: \$25.00 *Business: \$35.00

Supporting Membership: \$50.00 or more Sponsor Membership: \$100.00 or more

NAME: _____

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

* Please include your business card if joining as a Business Member. For more information, please contact Kathy Smith at kf23smith@yahoo.com.

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A people without history is like wind on the buffalo grass.
– Traditional Lakota saying –