



Vol. 21, No. 11

November 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
Mail: PO Box 170, Lee, MA 01238

The Monthly Meeting of the Society will be Thursday, November 14th at the Historical Society Office, Crossway Tower, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.



FROM THE EDITORS

Only two months left of 2024. How will you remember the year? If you're like most people, life will have been a mixture of ups, downs, and everything in between. Will you be starting a new year as a repeat performance of the last or vowing to make it better than or just as good? History is a funny thing. As we often repeat, it is as recent as yesterday, as distant as when time began. That is what makes it so fascinating, so personal. We are all making history in our own ways, whether in our everyday lives or in the world beyond our homes. In the two years that Tracie and I have been on this journey of producing the monthly newsletter for the Society, we have both learned so much. We always encourage our readers to participate by contacting us with their own historical stories of their or their family's lives in the Berkshires, their experiences. Our emails are lindabreader@icloud.com and ethere@gmail.com. We would be delighted to hear from you.

THE BUILDING AT 57 PARK



Source: The Lee Library Association

It's an attractive building, especially now that its new residents have added their own touches of elegance to it, inside and out. But who would imagine that once upon a time, here stood a massive Berkshire cottage, sitting on two acres of gardens and greenhouses, attended by no less than four gardeners, and housing a fabulous collection of orchids that, in the late 1800's, had an estimated value of \$30,000? It was the home of DeWitt Sheldon Smith (1840 – 1908), nephew of Elizur Smith, cousin of Wellington Smith, and president of the massive Smith Paper Company that owned and operated five mills in Lee. It was in this

mansion that DeWitt passed away on June 25th, 1908, one of the wealthiest men in Lee. His cousin, Wellington, was his neighbor, living in the mansion on the corner of Park and Main Streets, now the Kelly Funeral Home.

DeWitt's beautiful home was sadly demolished in the late 1920's and in February of 1931, the idea of building a new school on the site was promptly shot down. It was in 1935 that the building we now see was constructed and with great anticipation, in December 1940, it became the home of Lee's first supermarket, operated by the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, otherwise known as A & P. As reported in the Berkshire Gleaner of December 27th, 1940, the extremely enthusiastic (and anonymous) superintendent of the A & P spoke of how the supermarket would be "*five complete food departments in one.*" And, obviously not considering that the male of the species may cross the threshold, he went on to say, "*This arrangement makes it possible for the housewife to do all her shopping in one place, with a minimum of effort and time.*" Excellent!



Eventually, the housewives gave over their supermarket to the purchasers of non-food items, and the A & P closed its doors and in moved Tru-Value Hardware to the 4,500 square feet of prime retail space. Tru-Valu then relocated to Main Street and in came Carr Hardware in 1984, bringing the number of that chain's stores to five in Berkshire County. As most of us will remember, Carr Hardware closed that location in 2023 and relocated to the once-home of Lee Hardware (Tru-Valu) store on Main Street.



Source: The Berkshire Eagle

It was in July 2024 that Knollwood Antiques opened after the hardware store being reinvented as an elegant gallery housing an extensive variety of antiques ranging from fine art, exquisite decorative items, and many varied pieces geared toward interior design. How perfect for a town with such a history as Lee!

Over thirty years ago, a clock adorned the façade of 57 Park, but had not actually functioned as a clock, merely as a decorative object, for some time. Thanks to the expertise of Peter Lilienthal of Old Antiques Repair & Art Gallery in Sheffield, and to Knollwood Antiques owner Richard LaVigne for contacting him, the clock is now working again and back in pride of place.

And so another chapter in the history of 57 Park Street opens in the book of Lee history.

MEET THE BOARD

GARY ALLEN



Born in the Naval Hospital in Portsmouth, Virginia, Gary was the son of a US Navy 1st Class Petty Officer who spent thirty years after his discharge working for IBM while Gary's mother raised him and his four siblings. Gary's Dad has now passed on, but Mom and all the siblings are still alive and kicking and scattered throughout the US.

Gary has definitely led a full life, and here is a piece taken verbatim from Gary as to a small part of it with wife, Barb, that illustrates how this adventurous couple have spent their lives together over the last fifty-four years or so.

"Barb and I met in college. Mom and Dad took us on a fishing trip to Canada and Barb caught me – I proposed on the dock of our cottage. After I graduated, I was assigned by the Army to Frankfurt, Germany. Barb was still in school, but she called me one night and said let's get married, so I came back home to Buffalo, NY in February 1970, married her in a snowstorm and took her back to Germany. We spent two and a half years there and traveled much of Europe."

This seems like such a great way to start married life that there were no better words to describe it than Gary's own.

Once back from Germany, the couple still continued to travel, taking a helicopter up to a glacier in Alaska, a paddle boat trip up the Mississippi in New Orleans, traveling to Greece for a boat trip to find the boat had sunk two days before their arrival. Included in their adventures was a car trip to the Grand Canyon and Death Valley and, as Gary said, *"many smaller trips with just as much fun."*

Somewhere along the line, Gary and Barb managed to introduce two daughters into the world, who have since married and, between them, added six grandchildren to the tribe. They, too, are scattered around the States. Gary and Barb bought their home on Summer Street in Lee in 1983 and have now recently downsized to a new home in Pittsfield.

Of course, besides traveling and having children, Gary and Barb did have to find employment to finance their lifestyle. As previously mentioned, Gary was in the US Army where he served as a Captain working in data processing. After discharge, he continued in that field as an internal auditor, also utilizing data processing, for a number of large insurance companies, banks, and also the New York State government, retiring in 2021.

Gary is very insistent that no story of his life would be complete without speaking of his dear wife, Barb, of whom he is so proud. Again, best related in Gary's own words:

"Barb is the real historian of the family. She worked for the Berkshire County Historical Society and built their archives. She worked for twenty-three years in the Stockbridge Library Historical Museum and Archives. She reorganized it and then ran a \$300,000 fund raising effort that allowed it to be modernized. And reorganized it again when there was a \$3,000,000 refurbishing. She also served for over 20 years on the Lee Historical Commission, which is why I became an officer of the Society."

And so, Gary became a founding member of our Society, starting off as the Vice-President in 2003, then on to become President. Once again, Gary is now the serving President.

Gary isn't one to sit still, it seems, and was also the Treasurer for the Community Television of Southern Berkshire and President of the Berkshire Concert Choir from 2010 to 2020 where he got to sing with them in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. His singing preference (not solo, he insists) is baritone and sometimes tenor.

A final quote from Gary on his aspirations for the Society: *"I would love the Society to have a presence on Main Street in Lee. It would house display cases for our collections, be home to our programs, and welcome visitors and residents to learn more about our town and its history. It would attract more and younger members."*

In conclusion, we, the Society members, are very fortunate to have Gary at our helm and long may he reign!

LHS BULLETIN BOARD

ANNUAL MEETING FOR THE SOCIETY

Thursday, October 10th coincided with an important meeting for the Town at the Lee Middle and High School on the Housatonic River / PCB / General Electric situation, which understandably may have explained the low attendance at the Society's Annual Meeting. Only six Board Members were able to attend, but the meeting continued nevertheless and pertinent issues were discussed.

President Gary Allen opened the meeting after the previous year's Annual Meeting minutes had been approved, with a discussion on the achievements made by the Society during the last year. These were many and are articulated here:

- Tours of both St. Mary's and Fairmount Cemeteries – not just something to do, but quietly honoring
- Working with CTSB (Community Television of Southern Berkshire) and Lee Library – not just sharing, but growing
- The Society's Veterans website – not just lists, but recognition
- Adamsville Ancients Fife & Drum Corps in the Founders Day Parade – not just walking, but celebrating
- Phil Smith's "Lee in the 50's" exhibit at Lee Library – not just history, but fun
- Walks of Historical Main Street – not just exercise, but welcoming
- Bill Matthew's advocacy – not just speaking out, but pushing forward
- Calendar Raffle – not just income, but tradition
- Meetings and Programs – not just together, but sharing
- The Gateway Gazette newsletter – not just informative and entertaining, but keeping in touch
- Fairmount Cemetery gravestone cleaning – not just brightening, but remembering and respecting

Several other topics were addressed and will be itemized in the Minutes. Before adjourning to enjoy the delicious home-made treats provided by the ladies, the prestigious Consolati-Davis-Dennis award was made in recognition of the efforts made by Tracie Etheredge and Linda Buttery over the past year, including the cemetery tours and gravestone cleaning, the Historic Main Street walks (all down to Tracie), the monthly production of the Gateway Gazette, and their work in archiving the Society's extensive collection of artifacts.

SECOND MAIN STREET HISTORY WALK



For the second time in September, this time on the 28th, Tracie Etheredge again took an enthusiastic crowd up Railroad Street and down Main Street to share the history of our Town. The enthusiasm that even those who are not from the Berkshires, let alone Lee, have in learning about how the citizens of the Gateway to the Berkshires lived long ago, is so encouraging. As the walk continues, stopping to reveal the past of buildings such as the Chambery Inn and Lee Library, Tracie always finds new facts since lost or forgotten, making these walks events that one can enjoy time after time and still learn something new.

Even when the tour concluded at the Congregational Park and welcome rests were being taken by some on a bench, the participants remained, questions being asked, observations being made, and even some comments and information being provided by Lee residents who had joined the walk. Needless to say, it went over the allotted time by quite a bit, but how rewarding that nobody was in a rush to conclude! Well done, Ms. Etheredge!

**CHRISTOPHER “CHRIS” LONG MEMORIAL FUND
SECOND FAIRMOUNT CEMETERY GRAVESTONE CLEANING**



A chill wind was blowing the fall leaves all around on the morning of Saturday, October 12th, but our faithful team of gravestone cleaners were unperturbed and arrived bright and early to continue where we had left off back in June. Tim Schaeffer returned to demonstrate the safe and very effective way to clean the many years of dirt and grime, lichen and moss, from the gravestones to restore them to almost pristine condition. What a dedicated trooper Tim is, turning up to help us do the best job possible, even though work beckoned.

Sal Angelo and Caroline Young, now considered veterans of our team, returned once more to do battle with the grime concealing the identities of those whose gravestones they cleaned. Caroline teamed up with Linda Horomanski and Ron Robitaille who had both been inspired to help out after attending the Society’s cemetery tours, to clean a large and quite ornate gravestone which Tim had used for his demonstration, it being in particularly bad shape.

Sal’s penchant is for the much shorter stones and, utilizing his much-used kneeling pad, he set to work on three markers next to where Linda, Caroline and Ron were busy spraying and brushing. Linda Buttery, co-organizer along with Tracie Etheredge, was transported to the cemetery, along with the required equipment, by her husband, David. He set off to respray the gravestones of the Howland family, ones he and Linda had previously cleaned. She selected an illegible gravestone which proved to be a challenge, it being crooked on its base and somewhat wobbly. She corrected its crookedness, but had to go carefully with the cleaning. Another example of how many of the gravestones are in need of repair. Meanwhile, Tracie, incapacitated by injury, gave support and guidance from her vehicle, making note of names for research.

The short stones cleaned by Sal were for James A. Cutting (1873 – 1909); Nancy R. Fisher, wife of Chauncey P. Cutting (1833 – 1913); Chauncey Cutting (1823 – 1907).

At 83 when he passed away in his home from pneumonia, Chauncey was one of the oldest Lee residents. He was well known as a stage driver between Lee and Chester at the time the old stage route between Springfield and Albany was conducted. Later, he was a photographer and had a gallery in Lee for many years. He married Nancy and they had two children, Clara and James. Nancy was 75 when she joined Chauncey after a fall at her home on Housatonic Street. She was a true Lee native, having been born in the town to Harvey Fisher and Sarah Cobb. She was a member of the Lee Methodist Church.

The large stone cleaned by Tim, Linda, Caroline and Ron was for Charles G. Lehman who died June 6, 1895 aged 30; Nellie M. Lehman, wife of Alfred Bristol (October 9, 1869 – July 7, 1922); Blanche May, daughter of Charles and Nellie, died February 6, 1895, aged 1 year 3 months. Now, you may be wondering how Charles and Nellie had little Blanche May if Nellie was married to Alfred. Well, she survived Charles and then married Arthur. Before Charles passed, he and Nellie had two sons, Malcolm and Travis. Nellie and Arthur did not have any children together. Charles was a stone cutter which may go some way to explaining the elaborate stone that marks his, Nellie’s, and Blanch May’s grave.

Franklin J. Dawley’s stone was cleaned by the other Linda – Linda Buttery. He was a veteran of the Civil War, having been enlisted in Company A, the 10th Massachusetts Infantry and serving for three years. He was born September 14, 1819 and died October 1, 1906 at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Mark Butler on Forest Street. He was eighty-seven and the cause of death was given as old age, which seems as good a cause as any. It was thought he was one of the oldest, if not the oldest, citizen in Berkshire County at the time of his death. Franklin was employed during his working days for 10 years at Lee Marble. He was a

teamster and described as a very powerful man in his younger days who worked on wood and lumber jobs. He and his wife, who is only described as Mrs. Frank Dawley in her obituary, had four children, two boys and two girls. She was seventy-five and passed from dropsy, leaving Franklin a widow.

The Howland family story is given in the May 2023 edition which can be found on our website at leehistoricsociety.homestead.com.

A PROGRAM REMINDER



Please mark your calendars for Tuesday, November 12th as the Society will be hosting Arrowhead volunteer guide, John Dickson, as he recounts the life of Herman Melville – Inspired by the Berkshires. Most of us will have at least heard of our county’s renowned author of “Moby Dick”, the novel that brought him fame, albeit posthumously.

Mr. Dickson will be educating and entertaining us about Mr. Melville and his life writing and living at his lovely old house in Pittsfield with its view of Mt. Greylock that is said to have inspired his story of the Great Whale.

The program will start at 6:30 p.m. and, as with all our programs, refreshments will be supplied afterwards for those who wish to remain and spend some time with old and new friends in the Senior Center Cafeteria. Your vehicles may be safely parked either on the north entrance to Crossway Village or on nearby Academy Street, opposite Crossway. We look forward to seeing you all!

ANNUAL CALENDAR RAFFLE

By the time you read this, sale of the tickets for the above will have concluded, so if you missed the opportunity to be a winner of some really rather amazing prizes, make sure you don’t miss out next year! For those of you who did make your purchases, on the first of November, when the newsletter goes out by email or is made available as a printed version, the first winner will have been announced! And then, every day in November, another winner will be notified. When a name is drawn, the winner’s name is returned to the barrel, so there is the opportunity to win more than one prize! This has actually happened in previous years.

Hopefully, all you raffle ticket holders will have perused the calendar that came with the ticket and will know of the incredible generosity of the local businesses and organizations who have donated their services or products. It would be wrong to single out any one of them, but you can see who they are. Please do show your own support and appreciation by using them when the need arises.

THE PRESERVATION OF OUR LOCAL HISTORY

This is a reprint of an article by Charles Flint from earlier in the year outlining his thoughts and opinions on why historical societies, such as Lee’s, are necessary and important.

Historical Societies: The keepers of local history and objects. They collect, research, preserve, and catalog artifacts, documents, photographs, and other materials related to the history of the town. This helps to ensure that important historical resources are not lost or forgotten over time.

Education and Outreach: Historical societies often organize educational programs, exhibits, lectures, and tours for both residents and visitors. These activities help to raise awareness about local history and its significance, fostering a sense of pride and connection to the community.

Cultural Identity: Understanding and appreciating local history can foster a sense of identity and belonging among community members. Historical societies often play a key role in celebrating local traditions, customs, and landmarks, which can strengthen community cohesion.

Research Opportunities: Historical societies provide researchers, scholars, educators, genealogists, and students with access to valuable primary sources and archival materials.

Historic Preservation and Advocacy: Historical societies advocate for the preservation of historic buildings, sites, and landscapes. By raising awareness about the importance of preserving these resources, they help to preserve the character and integrity of the community.

Tourism and Economic Development: A vibrant local history can attract tourists and visitors interested in the heritage of a region. Historical societies often collaborate with local businesses, governments, and tourism organizations to promote heritage tourism and stimulate economic development.

Community Engagement: Historical societies provide opportunities for community members to get involved in preserving and sharing local history. Volunteers play a crucial role in the operation of historical societies, contributing their time, expertise, and resources to support the organization's mission.

Get involved with your local historical society. Not only do you meet new people, but you also find it an honor to be a part of the exciting organization. You will learn about your town's rich history, its first people, the colonists and why and how they came here. Serve on the Board of Directors.

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: _____

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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 in way, 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.

The Society's annual membership drive has now started and renewal letters have been mailed. Any renewals made before January 2025 will be honored through 2025. Do encourage friends and other family members to join us.

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Michael J. Considine
 Attorney at Law
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