



Vol. 22, No. 9

September 2025

## The Gateway Gazette

*The Newsletter of the Lee Historical Society*

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

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*The Monthly Meeting of the Society will be Thursday, September 11<sup>th</sup> at the Historical Society Office, Crossway Tower, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.*



### **FROM THE EDITOR**

According to one definition, history is “the study of past events, particularly in human affairs.” I like this definition as opposed to those that emphasize academic study or in depth analysis because it centers history around people and indicates that it is something that impacts everyone. The Lee Historical Society was established to keep and share Lee’s history, but we have to remember that means not only saving old treasures from the past, but also recording the present, in order to remind the future what happened during our lives. History does not have to be old and dusty, we make history in our everyday lives because that is what makes up the community in which we live. As the main platform of communication for the Historical Society I hope that this newsletter reflects these ideas. If you have any ideas or topics you’d like to share, or if you want to become more involved in what we do, please contact me, Tracie at [ethere@gmail.com](mailto:ethere@gmail.com).

## **FOUNDING FOUNDERS**



*Members of the 27th Massachusetts volunteer regiment marching in the first Founders Weekend Parade, 1995.*

Early in 1993, business owners in Lee experienced a threat that divided the town and inspired debate about the future and the best way to keep this small Berkshire town vital and growing. The behemoth that is Wal-Mart was putting out feelers in preparation to building a discount store on Route 102 in Lee, and that idea worried locals as to the future of the small stores that operated in town. In a brain storming session hosted by the Chamber of Commerce at the Cork n' Hearth ideas were floated, including bringing back the "Sale-a-bration," an annual sidewalk sale and festival that had fallen by the wayside. Recent Main Street rehabilitation, including a complete revamp of all the sidewalks had interrupted not only retail business, but festivals that had been held in the past.

As a response to these changes, even after the Wal-Mart threat was over, in the summer of 1994 the first iteration of a town-wide fall festival was held including sports tournaments, walking tours, a collectibles auction and a 19th century blacksmithing demonstration. Called a "Homecoming Weekend" it was something, but only a shadow of what it soon would become.

The following year, spearheaded by the Chamber of Commerce and Veterans of Foreign Wars, a much more elaborate event was organized to be held the second week in October. The festival centered around commemorating the history of Lee, especially highlighting the Civil War era. In that vein, a Civil War re-enactment group, the 27th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment, created an encampment on the property of Baird House Bed and Breakfast on High St. The festivities also included square dancing, a photo contest, an antique auction, musical programs and a turn of the century style wooden racquet tennis tournament.

Also, because 1995 was the 50th Anniversary marking the end of World War II, the scheduled parade had a World War II theme along with the Civil War commemoration. The Grand Marshall was James Burt, the area's only recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor and a decorated veteran of World War II. A Lee native, Burt returned to the area especially for the weekend's activities. The parade attracted a large crowd, with viewers standing three to four deep near the viewing stand at the corner of Main and Park Streets.

Neither rain nor cool temperatures could keep local residents and late-season tourists away from the three days of the festival. Organizers Pat LaChapelle of the Chamber of Commerce and Aldo Pascucci of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 893 declared the event a "tremendous success" and planning for the next year's event started almost immediately.

The second annual Founders Weekend saw the introduction of the "Taste of Lee," highlighting the influx of new restaurants in town. "It's part of the new energy in Lee," said Jim Conroy, chef and owner of the Cactus Café on Main Street. "Ten years ago, who'd have thought you'd see an Indian restaurant and a Mexican restaurant in downtown Lee?" For the "Taste" Main Street was closed off Friday evening and featured food from local restaurants including Cactus Café, Rossi's, Paradise of India, Sullivan Station, the Morgan House, McClelland's and Angelina's.

Also incorporated as part of the Lee Founders Day Weekend for the first time, the second annual Berkshire Festival Latino was held in the park on Saturday evening. The festival



*Founders parade 2009*

featured dancing, music and food from various Latin cultures, with the musicians and dancers coming from all over the Berkshires.

From there Founders Weekend became an annual tradition for the town. Although the parade and “Taste of Lee” continued as cornerstones for the event the themes and programs changed from year to year. By 2001, Founders had moved into September and was scheduled to be held mere weeks after the devastating events of 9/11. Mary L. McGinnis that years Founders Chairwoman, penned a heartfelt article in the paper, it read in part:

“A new found resilience is waking up in our country. It is evident as you drive down any street you travel. Our forefathers really meant it when they said “Let Freedom Ring.” Over the past few days, we have seen the people of this nation unified for the first time since, perhaps, the Second World War. This unity displayed can never be taken away from the American Dream. You can see it for yourselves this coming weekend in Lee, Mass.”

That year the festivities included a Teddy Bear’s Picnic, an art exhibit titled: “Paul Robeson on Display,” and 85 children’s scarecrows displayed on the library lawn. In view of the tragic events the country had just experienced there was also a memorial dedication in the park for victims of the attack, and the Sons of Italy hosted a 50/50 raffle with proceeds benefitting the New York Fire & Police Department Victim Relief Fund.

Although the global pandemic in 2020 put a temporary halt on Founders’ and due to the slow national recovery the subsequent years saw fewer scheduled activities and lower attendance, the show does go on. The parade has gotten longer and events keep being added and considering the huge influx of tourists the town has seen this summer, this month’s festivities should again rival the size and scope seen during the glory days of this townwide celebration.



*Taste of Lee, 2018*

### **IN MEMORIAM** **MARY MORRISSEY**

The Town of Lee has lost a treasure who through her lifetime positively impacted practically everyone in town. In her career as a elementary and middle school teacher or in her leadership roles in the many committees she was involved in, Mary Morrissey was a cornerstone to life in town. She was part of the Historical Commission for over 25 years and was involved in the Historical Society from its inception and was thus the “go to” person for anything relating to the history of Lee. We owe her a debt that is hard to imagine.

In her memory we’re reprinting her “Meet the Board” profile that ran in an earlier edition of the newsletter.

### **MEET THE BOARD** **MARY HAYES MORRISSEY**

*Within minutes of sitting down at Mary’s kitchen table, strewn with books, papers, photo albums, newspaper clippings, it became evident that this was a lady who has led quite the life! It also became evident that there was no way that all her adventures, accomplishments, volunteer activities and just general life experiences could be encapsulated in a page or two.*

*It's been quite the task to pull out those that just cannot be excluded, so we hope we do justice in this article to Mary's exemplary life.*



To start right at the very beginning (a very good place to start according to Mary Poppins). Mary was born in Lee to Ned and Marie, and right away there's quite the story. In the June 2024 edition of the Gateway Gazette, we covered the "Great Epidemic of 1928". It was due to this tragic event that Mary's parents met. Dad (Edmund "Ned" Hayes) had a sister Mary (who later joined the convent and became Sister Marie Elizabeth). Mary became infected by the virus and, seriously ill, was taken to St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut where Mom (Marie O'Connell) was one of the nurses taking care of her. Dad would go to the hospital to visit his sister and that is where he became enchanted by Mom. They married at St. Thomas Church in Thomaston, Connecticut, Marie's home town, on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

Mary's education started at St. Mary's School where she was taught by the nuns who had arrived in Lee from Chambery in France. After finishing high school, she went on to Elms College in Chicopee and graduated from there with a Bachelor's degree in History and Education. On to the University of Connecticut at Storrs where she earned a graduate degree in U.S. History.

Armed with her extensive degrees, Central School on High Street in Lee was very fortunate to have her there for thirty-eight years until her retirement in 1998 and where she taught Grades 5, 6, and 8, as well as Kindergarten. While still teaching, Mary chose another occupation as a Children's Activity Coordinator for Sitmar and Princess Cruises where she worked during February and April school vacations and some weekends, and this she did for fourteen years. She also was a Tour Director for Morgan Coach Lines. After retirement from Central, and obviously not one to let the grass grow under her feet, she moved on to the Berkshire Center, also known now as the College Internship Program, or CIP, where she was employed as an Academic Tutor for eight years.

She confesses that she loved to travel, which may have been the impetus for her to join the coach and cruise line companies. Off she went to Tahiti, the Hawaiian Islands, Alaska, many of the Canadian Provinces, many European and Caribbean countries, the Ukraine and Turkey!

During one of her cruises to the Caribbean in 1973, fate smiled upon her when she met William (Bill) Morrissey who was to become her husband. They married in July 1976 and were happily together until August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 when he sadly passed. His career was as interesting as Mary's as he was a Corporate Auditor and spent much of his time travelling abroad for his work, especially to the South American countries.

Mary is a very accomplished lady, but is much more proud of the accomplishments of those she has had an influence on than of her own. Here is an excerpt from some of her writings:

*"In 1993, one of my eighth grade students of history wrote a one thousand word essay titled Education in Early America". Her essay was named a local winner of the Lee Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The Chapter then forwarded it to the State where a panel of judges chose it as the best entry in Massachusetts. The young girl who received the award was the first State winner from Lee in the annual contest."*

Mary spoke of this event with much pride.



As a Girl Scout Leader, she tells of the achievement of three of her Senior Cadette Scouts who received the highest award in Girl Scouting at that time, the First Class Award, which is the equivalent of the Eagle Boy Scout Award.

Mary was a member of Central/Southern Berkshire Site Board of Massachusetts, which advocated an increase in the number of beds available at the Crisis Stabilization Unit located in Pittsfield and administered by Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services of the Berkshires. The unit opened in 1998. The three-bed CSU was a valuable resource, but more beds were needed so that the children that needed help could stay in the area for treatment and not have to travel out of the Berkshires to places as far away from home as Holyoke and Providence, Rhode Island.

Mary's love of history has led her to become one of Lee's chief preservers and recorders of our Town's history. She is a Founder Member of the Lee Historical Society and now has Emeritus status. She still continues her efforts on the Board for the preservation of Lee's amazing history.

### **LHS BULLETIN BOARD**

#### **LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY AT FOUNDERS WEEKEND** **SEPTEMBER 19 & 20, 2025**

When the Founders Weekend Hometown Parade steps off on Saturday, September 20 you will quickly notice our Lee Historical Society unit. It will feature the Adamsville Ancients trilling their flutes and rattling their drums as they come down Main Street. And what could be more appropriate than this fine marching unit from Delmar, New York, in their Revolutionary War naval uniforms as Lee celebrates its 248<sup>th</sup> birthday and the nation observes its 249<sup>th</sup>. Leading the procession will be board members Karen Norton and Dave Walker carrying the LHS banner. More members of our board will be riding with former LHS president Mal Eckert and greeting parade watchers following the band.



The Adamsville Ancients won't be finished when they reach Housatonic Street. They will re-assemble in the Park as the parade ends with the last police car. The Ancients will be offering a short concert, playing some of their favorite fife and drum numbers. Maybe they will play "The World Turned Upside Down," the song famously heard when British Lord Cornwallis surrendered to George Washington at Yorktown, cementing the independence of a new nation. Lee's proud history is closely entwined with America's.

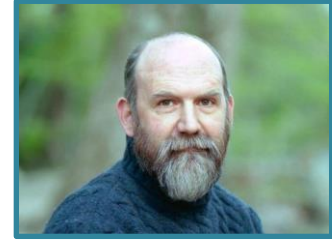
And there is more good news: the popular and informative Cemetery Tours are back, led by our ace researcher and tour leader Tracie Etheredge. Our St. Mary's Cemetery Tour will be Thursday, September 18 and we will be at Fairmount on Friday, September 19. Both tours start at 10 a.m. and pre-registration is not required. Just wear sensible shoes and come and join us.

The society will be hosting its usual booth in front of Memorial Hall throughout the Taste of Lee, the Hometown Parade and beyond. Please stop by and see our collection of Lee historical items for sale. And yes, tickets will be available for the popular Calendar Raffle conducted by President Gary Allen. Come celebrate with us!



**LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY SPEAKER SERIES:**  
**DANIEL SHAYS'S HONORABLE REBELLION**

Author Daniel Bullen will give an illustrated talk from his book, *Daniel Shays's Honorable Rebellion*, on Thursday, September 25, 2025 at 6:30pm at the Lee Senior Center, 21 Crossway Street, Lee. In 1786 thousands of Massachusetts farmers, including hundreds from Berkshire County, angry about the flagrantly unjust taxation policies that were forcing them off their land, rose in protest across the Commonwealth.



Bullen will tell the story of the protests from the people's perspective, including those certain events which took place in Lee and surroundings. Today historians largely agree that Shays's Rebellion was one of the events that precipitated the Constitutional Convention and the writing of the Constitution. Bullen will have copies of his book available for sale at the conclusion of the presentation.

This presentation is free and open to the public and is part of the Lee Historical Society Speaker Series. Look for the lanterns near the entrance. Parking is available along the North entrance to Crossway Village as well as on Academy Street. Refreshments will be served.

**NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING OF THE**  
**LEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, OCTOBER 9, 2025**

The Lee Historical Society's Annual Meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 9 at the Lee Senior Center at 21 Crossway Street. (Look for lanterns at the Crossway Street entrance. Refreshments will be served.) The Society is doing the important work of preserving the history of our town and your attendance and participation is welcomed. This will be the only notice regarding this meeting.

All members in good standing are eligible to attend, to make motions from the floor and to vote on any matters that come before the meeting. Election and re-election of members of the Board of Directors will take place at this time. Reports will be given. Under current By-laws, a quorum will consist of those present following this required notice.

Anyone interested in joining us in this preservation work is invited to attend any board meeting to learn about our work. Our next board meeting will be on Thursday, September 11 at 6:30 p.m. at our Crossway Tower office, 130 High Street. Please note that this building has security precautions and it is necessary to come to the rear door and knock loudly to be let in. A call or email to any board member in advance is advised.

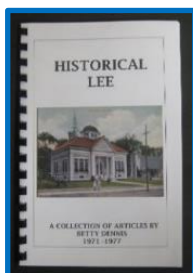
**WHAT'S AT OUR BOOTH**

*As a prelude to Founders Weekend, here are the items we have for sale, be sure to stop by our booth (on the corner in front of Memorial Hall) to pick up a bargain on Lee memorabilia!*



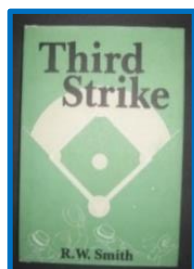
**MUGS** depicting various places of historical interest in Lee, including the covered bridge, Memorial Hall and the Kilbon Fountain. At just **\$5** each, this would normally be a steal, but on offer at BOGO, how can you not take advantage? Rumor has it that the morning coffee tastes extra delicious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

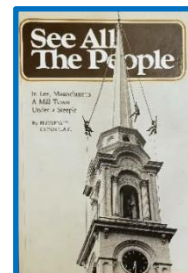


**“HISTORICAL LEE”** If you’ve read any of beloved Lee Librarian Betty Dennis’ articles reprinted in our newsletter from time to time, you know what a great gift this will be for anyone interested in our Town’s diverse and fascinating history, so pick one up for just **\$12** and get it wrapped!

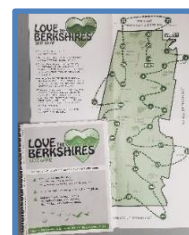
**“THIRD STRIKE”** by R.W. Smith. This is a wonderful book chock full of stories of the everyday people of Lee. An incredible bargain for only **\$5!**



**“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

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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, 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](mailto:kf23Smith@yahoo.com).



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