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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, June 11th at the Historical Society Office, Crossway Tower, Lee. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.



FROM THE EDITOR

With June's arrival perhaps we'll finally have some warmer weather, but even if the weather doesn't cooperate, we do have the flurry of events that the summer always brings. This month Josh Bloom's exhibit on Jacob's Pillow is on display in the library and he has scheduled several events around it including lectures and tours. Keep an eye out for these events, some details are included at the end of this newsletter.

In July, as usual, Phil Smith's Historical Society exhibit will go up in the library. This year's topic is transportation in Lee.

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

“LEE IS A GREAT TOWN FOR ANYONE BUT BOOTLEGGERS TO LIVE IN.”

In 1925, the Boston Post profiled towns across Massachusetts and opened its piece on Lee with a flourish: “*The best town in New England for everybody but bootleggers to live in is Lee... the squarest people, a monopoly of the world’s greatest scenery... a town so Utopian that people from other parts of the universe are begging for a chance to settle down here.*”



Part of a cartoon depicting Lee leaders from the August 1, 1925 Boston Post article on Lee.

Why the reputation for being so tough on bootleggers? The answer lies in Prohibition, and geography.

During Prohibition (1920–1933), illegal liquor flowed from Canada and New York into New England. From 1922 to 1924 (when an additional barracks opened in Cheshire), the State Police Barracks in East Lee served as the headquarters for all state police in Berkshire County. With only one local police officer in Lee, the state troopers became the primary force intercepting liquor shipments moving up Jacob’s Ladder and along the newly designated Route 20.

Smugglers used fast cars, hidden compartments, and tin maple syrup cans to disguise their cargo. Even so, troopers made frequent and dramatic seizures. In spring 1925 alone, more than 200 gallons of alcohol were confiscated between Hillsdale, NY, and the top of Jacob’s Ladder. In just two in days in July, officers seized another 182 gallons from two cars.

One arrest that summer involved Leonard Scarnici of Springfield, who fled when signaled to stop. A trooper pursued him by motorcycle, secured a search warrant, and discovered 102 gallons of alcohol packed into maple syrup cans in a specially modified Ford coupe.

These cases set the stage for a legal turning point. District Court Judge Bart Bossidy believed that not only the liquor but also the cars used to transport it should be forfeited. The law allowed officers to seize “implements” connected to illegal liquor sales, and Bossidy argued that automobiles, especially modified ones, fit that definition.

In Scarnici’s case, Bossidy fined him \$325 and ordered both the liquor and the car held until he was brought to trial. When the defendant’s bondsman tried to post bail for the car’s release, Bossidy refused.

That same day, Abraham Cohen of Boston was arrested with 80 gallons of alcohol in a Jewett sedan. Bossidy again ordered both the liquor and the car held, remarking that fines were merely “overhead” for bootleggers and that real punishment needed to reach those higher up the chain.

The following year, the stakes escalated. In one dramatic incident, state troopers fired shots



State Police Barracks, Chapel Street, East Lee. Courtesy of the Lee Library Association.

at fleeing “rumrunners” between Lee and Becket, ultimately arresting four men and seizing three cars and 440 gallons of alcohol.

Bossidy’s aggressive confiscation policy was controversial. Some argued the law did not clearly authorize seizing ordinary cars not specially fitted for smuggling. But in late 1925, when Anthony Ferrero and Charles Sincinito were arrested with 80 gallons of alcohol in a Cadillac, no appeal was filed, leaving the question unresolved, but the matter moved up the judicial chain.

By spring 1926, the issue reached the Attorney General. His ruling upheld Bossidy’s interpretation: automobiles used in illegal liquor transportation could indeed be forfeited as “implements of sale.” The Lee court soon turned over three such cars to the Commissioner of Public Safety.

Arrests continued in the Lee area until Prohibition ended, but the practice of confiscating vehicles continued well past the 1930s. What began in Judge Bossidy’s courtroom now survives in modern law as “asset forfeiture,” allowing authorities to seize property used in the commission of crimes.



Leonard Scarnici's 1933 mugshot.

Most of the bootleggers who passed through Lee left little trace, many used false names and fake hometowns. One exception was Leonard “Naldi” Scarnici, the man arrested in July 1925. His criminal career continued across the Northeast until 1935, when he was executed in the electric chair at Sing Sing for the 1933 murder of Detective James A. Stevens during a bank robbery in Rensselaer, New York.

Judge Bossidy summed up Lee’s reputation best in the Boston Post profile: “Why, this is a great town for anyone but bootleggers to live in. We capture them coming through here from New York. They are very bashful fellows. They never stop in Lee except on a very pressing invitation.”

HOW LEE AND FELLOW BERKSHIRE PATRONS SAVED JACOB’S PILLOW

Here’s another article by Joshua Bloom. He wrote this series about Jacob’s Pillow and its relationship with the town of Lee in the process of gathering the information for his exhibit that will be on display throughout the month of June in the Lee Library. Check out the LHS Bulletin Board section of this newsletter, below, for more information.

In October 1941, seven local citizens gathered at the Lee home of Mabel Dwight Busey to rescue the Jacob’s Pillow dance center located in Becket. The group proposed purchasing the property from founder Ted Shawn and forming a nonprofit corporation. They aimed to raise \$50,000, half to clear Shawn’s debts and half to construct a permanent dance theater.

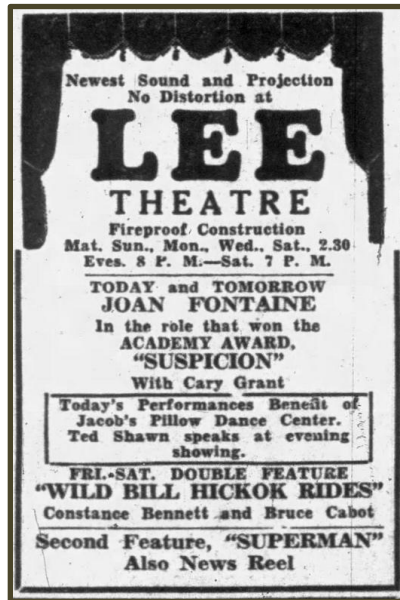
Three of the seven founding board members came from Lee: Busey, Lucile Foote Smith, and Frank J. Diamond.

In early 1942, Smith issued a public letter urging Lee residents to support construction of the theater. “Stockbridge has its Playhouse, Lenox its Tanglewood, and Lee—to complete the triangle of the Arts—is to have its Dance Theatre,” she wrote. She reminded readers that Shawn had “brought business to Lee and [used] our town as the center of his activities.”



1942 Board of Directors in front of the Ted Shawn Theatre under construction.
 "Joseph Franz, Fern Helscher, Mrs. Henry Wilds Smith, Reginald Wright, Mrs. Norval H. Busey, Jr., Frank J. Diamond, Miss Annabelle Terrell, Mrs. Eric F. Joslin."
 From How Beautiful Upon the Mountain: A History of Jacob's Pillow by Ted Shawn. Courtesy of Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Archives.

Smith assembled a Lee fundraising committee to encourage local philanthropy. The Lee committee displayed a model of the theater at the Lee Library and hosted a screening of an Alfred Hitchcock film, *Suspicion*, at the Lee Theatre.



The Berkshire County Eagle, May 06, 1942, Page 10. Used with the permission of The Berkshire Eagle.

The Lee Savings Bank stepped in to provide critical loans to complete construction.

Despite wartime shortages, the new theater opened in July 1942 with a program of American folk dance featuring Sammy Spring and Berkshire Dancers from Otis and Becket. Shawn said that audience members “came on foot, on horseback, or even used to hire a hay wagon to transport them to and from” Jacob’s Pillow during the war due to fuel rationing.



1942 Theatre Construction Crew; Warren Davis in the center holding an axe. Ted Shawn described this photo in his booklet *How Beautiful Upon the Mountain*: "I gave a party for all of the work men who had taken such an intense pride in this job and the picture...was taken that day. Actually, they worked not only up to the arrival of the first audience, but for many weeks afterwards finishing up details. Rights Holder: Unknown. Courtesy of Jacob's Pillow Digital Archive

Shawn never forgot the town's intervention. When Busey – the Pillow's single largest donor – died in 1947, he wrote that her generosity "made possible the building of the theatre."

REMEMBERING A LEE VETERAN **Lt Col. Peter McGoldrick (1912 -1942)**



Peter McGoldrick was born in 1912, the son of Peter and Virginia McGoldrick of West Street in Lee. An honor student at Lee High School he graduated in 1929 and joined the Army as a private in the infantry. Even at that time however, he held a keen interest to learn how to fly airplanes for the Army.

In 1932, when he was stationed in Oahu, Hawaii with the Thirteenth Field Artillery he was selected as one of four regular army soldiers to take the entrance examination for admission to the West Point Military Academy and he passed with flying colors. After his graduation from West Point in 1936, he was commissioned as Second Lieutenant. He married Blanche Anich of Flushing, Long Island the same year.

Together they proceeded to his first duty station in Puerto Rico, where he served with the 65th Infantry. When McGoldrick returned from Puerto Rico in 1938, he served with the 16th Infantry at Fort Jay and Camp Dix. Even after advancing in rank while serving in the infantry, McGoldrick achieved his dream of flying when he was accepted into the Army Air Corps and was sent to Kelly Field, Texas for training. He received his wings in 1940 and began his life as a pilot at Langley Field; Virginia. He moved on to Mitchell Field, New York where he took over command of the 66th Squadron when it was activated on January 15th of

1941.

By the beginning of World War II, he had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and came back to Massachusetts where he served as a flight instructor out of Bedford, MA. In 1942, McGoldrick was assigned to prepare the newly formed 79th Fighter Group for entering into the war. On October 18th the Fighter Group joined the action in the African theater of operations. The unit trained with P-40's while moving westward across Africa in the wake of the British drive across Egypt and Libya to Tunisia. By escorting bombers, attacking enemy shipping, and supporting ground forces, the 79th took part in the Allied operations that eventually defeated Axis forces in North Africa.

On November 9th 1942, the McGoldrick family back in Lee received agonizing news that Peter was being held prisoner after having been shot down by German anti-aircraft guns while his unit was strafing a motor convoy near Charing Cross in Egypt. Tragically, by the end of the year McGoldrick's family learned that he had not survived the crash and had been killed on November 6th. He is buried in the US Military Cemetery in Carthage, Tunisia



Curtiss P-40 Warhawk from the 79th Fighter Group from the Schiffer Military History Books.



LHS BULLETIN BOARD

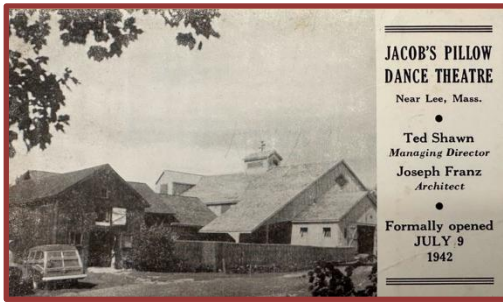
CANTARELLA SCHOOL OF DANCE IN LEE, 1950'S-1980'S



The Lee Historical Society invites you to a free event on Monday, June 22, 2026 at 4:30pm in the Lee Library. Madeline Cantarella Culpo, Director-Founder and Artistic Director of the Cantarella School of Dance and the Albany Berkshire Ballet, will take part in a conversation, together with past students, about the time of ballet in Lee from the 1950's to 1980's. Many young women from Lee studied ballet with Miss Madeline during this era and have forever memories of it.

This free event is presented as part of Joshua D. Bloom's month-long June exhibit in the Scolforo Gallery titled "Jacob's Pillow and Lee, Mass" (see below).

EXHIBIT - "JACOB'S PILLOW IN LEE, MASS." EXPLORES NEARLY A CENTURY OF SHARED HISTORY



A new public history exhibit, “Jacob’s Pillow in Lee, Mass.,” will open June 1, 2026, in the Scolforo Gallery at the Lee Library. The exhibit traces the long and often overlooked relationship between the internationally renowned dance hub Jacob’s Pillow, and the neighboring town of Lee from the early 1930s to today.

Researched and curated by Lee resident Joshua D. Bloom, a member of the Lee Historical Society and a former academic researcher, the exhibit will be on display June 1–30, 2026. It will be open to the public during the library’s regular hours when the gallery is not hosting other programming.

More information about the exhibit can be found at linktr.ee/jacobspillowinleemass.

Several public programs will accompany the exhibit throughout June:

- Tuesday, June 2, 4:00–5:45 p.m. — Opening Reception with Pamela Tatge at the Lee Library.
- Saturday, June 6, 12:30–1:30 p.m. — Family Dance Party with Dance Educator Sarah Daunt (sponsored by the Lee Youth Commission).
- Thursday, June 11, 11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. — History of Lee Seniors Dancing at Jacob’s Pillow (sponsored by the Lee Council on Aging, at 21 Crossway Street).
- Thursday, June 11, 4:30–5:45 p.m. — “Secret” Gay History of Jacob’s Pillow with Historian Norton Owen (sponsored by Lee Pride, a project of Berkshire Pride, and Berkshire Stonewall Community Coalition).
- Saturday, June 13, 12:30–2:00 p.m. — “Secret” LGBTQ+ History of Lee Walking Tour led by Joshua D. Bloom (beginning and ending at Park Square during Lee Pride; tour sponsored by Lee Pride, a project of Berkshire Pride, and Berkshire Stonewall Community Coalition).
- Monday, June 15, 11:45 a.m.–12:45 p.m. — OLLI Guided Tour of the Exhibit (sponsored by the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute).
- Monday, June 22, 4:30–5:45 p.m. — History of the Cantarella School of Dance in Lee with Madeline Cantarella Culpo and Her Lee Dancers (sponsored by the Lee Historical Society).
- Monday, June 29, 4:30–5:45 p.m. — Closing Reception on Marketing, Tourism, and Business Relations between Jacob’s Pillow and the Town of Lee (sponsored by the Lee Chamber of Commerce).

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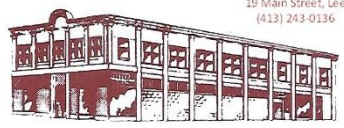
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