

**HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF LEE,
MASS: A LECTURE, DELIVERED
BEFORE THE YOUNG MEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF LIFE, MARCH
22D, 1854**

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History of the Town of Lee, Mass: A Lecture, Delivered Before the Young Men's Association of Life, March 22d,1854 by Amory Gale

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AMORY GALE

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HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF LEE, MASS.

A

LECTURE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATION, OF LEE,

MARCH 22d, 1854.

BY REV. AMORY GALE.

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Lee, March 28, 1854.

REV. AMORY GALE:

DEAR SIR,—In behalf of the Lee Young Men's Association, I would respectfully solicit a copy of your interesting Lecture on the History of Lee, recently delivered before our Association, for publication.

Very respectfully yours,

JAMES T. LEONARD, Sec'y.

J. T. LEONARD, Esq.:

Your kind note of the 28th inst., requesting for publication a copy of the Lecture which I had the pleasure of presenting before your useful Association, a few evenings since, lies before me. I cheerfully comply with your request, not because it is what I wish it was, but because it contains information relative to the early History of Lee, which can be handed down to posterity in no surer way than on the printed page.

That the perusal of this Address may incite the young men of Lee to imitate the unbending integrity and sterling virtues of our fathers, and that your Association may continue to exert its elevating and instructive influence upon the masses of our people, is the sincere wish of

Yours, respectfully,

AMORY GALE.

Lee, March 30, 1854.

HISTORY OF LEE.

IN selecting a subject for a Lecture this evening, I could think of none that could interest and instruct the members of the Young Men's Association, more than a HISTORY OF LEE. I cannot hope to present anything upon this subject but what is within the reach of you all. The want of time, however, has probably prevented the most of you from investigating this subject, and thereby making yourselves familiar with the history of our town. The fathers are dead, and their sons are rapidly passing away, and unless our history is soon written, it will be too late. The sources of my information have been the Records of the town, and the scraps of historic facts that have been handed down from father to son. The citizens generally have very kindly furnished me with what knowledge they respectively had upon the subject. Allow me, however, to acknowledge my special obligations to R. Hinman, F. Sturgis, H. Bartlett, and Lemuel Bassett, Esqrs., for valuable information presented in this Lecture.

I propose to divide this subject into 10 Divisions.

I. ORIGIN AND GENERAL HISTORY.

Less than one hundred years since, the territory now included in this town was a howling wilderness. With the exception of a few families of the Stockbridge tribe of Indians, cultivating small patches upon the banks of the Housatonic, "Nature in all her solemn wildness reigned supreme." No voice of the White man echoed through these native forests; no hum of business was heard; no skillful work of Art or Science was seen. The majestic oak and genteel spruce reared their lofty heads with fearless defiance. The wild turkey and fearful eagle found here their native home. The wolf and the wild cat roamed our mountains unscared; the savage bear and bounding deer had possession

of our mountain glens and alluvial valley unmolested, save by an occasional dart, necessary to bring the needed fare to the Indian wigwam.

Our noble river, rich valley, and mountain peaks, rendered this a favored home for the romantic Red Man of the forest. Here he was "monarch of all he surveyed."

For twenty years the White man had lived in Tyringham, Stockbridge, New Marlborough, and Alford; and for thirty years he had been in Great Barrington, Sheffield, and Egremont.

Such was the state of things here in 1760, when Isaac Davis moved on to the farm now owned by John M'Allister, in the south part of the town, where he built the first frame house that was erected in Lee.

During the ten years from 1760 to 1770, only thirteen families had moved into town. They lived in small log houses, mostly located upon our mountain sides. No roads or bridges had then been built. Marked trees served for the former, and a tree fallen across the river served for the latter.

In 1770, John Winegar, of German origin, grandfather of our citizen of that name, came into town, and built the first grist-mill in this region. It was located a few rods above Whyte & Hulbert's paper-mill. His log house, the eleventh log house in Lee, was built against a perpendicular rock on the east side of the road as we pass around the cove beyond the mill. That rock served as the back part of the house and chimney, which was so constructed that the wood could be drawn upon the hill in the rear and precipitated down the chimney to the place for the fire. This process saved the time and labor of cutting and splitting the wood. Mr. Winegar, five years afterwards, built another grist-mill, where Royce & M'Lafin's mills now are, and he also erected the dwelling-house in front of them, which is the oldest building in town. When Mr. Winegar built this house, the nearest place that he could find stone for the cellar was on the Pixley mountain. The leaves and moss in the native forests probably concealed the stone from public view.

When John Winegar was living at Crow Hollow, he was persuaded by an Indian to accompany him upon the mountain to hunt deer. The Indian soon left Mr. Winegar alone, and for three days, in mid winter, with the thermometer below zero, he wandered without fire or food, unable to find his home. When found by his friends, his feet and other parts of his body were so badly frozen, as to cause him to be a cripple for life. He, however, recovered sufficiently to attend to his ordinary business. This was deemed a great event in the early history of the town. In 1770, Isaac Davis was living on his farm; Reuben Pixley lived where Dea. Henry

Bassett now does; John Goffe the Irishman lived where Kenas Clark now does; Hope Davis in the old orchard about forty-six rods east of May & Dean's mills; near him lived Aaron Benedict and George Parker; William Chanter the Quaker, commonly known as "Friend William," lived on the Snow farm, next beyond Dea. Culver's; Mr. Atkins lived nearly opposite of the old Shailer tavern, in Cape street; Lt. Crocker found a home where P. Shailer now resides; Mr. Dodge pitched his tent on top of the mountain, one and a half miles east of P. Shailer's, which place was afterwards called Dodgetown. Mr. Stanley and others afterwards settled around him. This for many years was the centre of business. Here lived the blacksmith and shoemaker, tanner and currier; and here it was proposed to erect the church. Jonathan Foote occupied a rude structure where Lyman Foote now lives; and Elisba Freeman owned the farm where his grandson, John B. Freeman, now lives. Two rude log huts stood near H. Bartlett's, and in and around this village there were not five acres of cleared land. In one of these log huts lived Prince West. Kunkerpot occupied the Indian wigwam, standing in what is now the Park, and several other rude Indian huts were at the Quarry, occupied by the hardy sons of the forest. A log tavern, sixteen feet square, was erected about this time, where Oliver Kellogg now lives, on Mr. Hinman's lot, kept for a time by an uncle of the late Mr. Abner Taylor. You recollect the couplet in the old Primer,

"The Royal oak, it was the tree
That saved his Royal Majesty."

Nathan Foote, the grandfather of this Jonathan Foote, put Charles the Second, king of England, into the oak, to shield him from his enemies; and afterwards, when the king was in a situation to do so, he remembered his preserver, and granted him a tract of land in Connecticut. The Foote family have for their coat of arms, a design representing an oak and Charles the Second, and Nathan Foote endeavoring to assist Charles into the oak.

The men living in the Eastern part of the town were mostly from the Cape, and hence the principal road running through that part of Lee is called Cape street. Most of the others came from Connecticut; and a few families were from Germany.

To contrast the mode of travel then and now, I will state that Capt. Joseph Crocker, who settled on the William Cone farm, moved his family from Cape Cod in an ox cart. He and his aged mother came in advance of the rest of the family, both riding upon the same horse.

During the next ten years, from 1770 to '80, many valuable citizens of the town settled here, among whom were Nathaniel and Cornelius Bassett, Jesse Gifford, Jesse Bradley, William Ingersoll, Timothy Thatcher, Oliver and Prince West, Arthur Perry, Samuel Stanley, Amos Porter, Josiah Yale, Ebenezer Jenkins, Nathan Dillingham, Job Hamblin, and other honored names, of whose memory their children may justly feel proud. They were generally men, intelligent, good, and true, actuated by religious principles, strangers to fear, inured to hardship, strong in body and native intellect. They were peculiarly adapted to pioneer life.

The story of riding a horse across the river upon a string-piece of the bridge, I think I am able to state correctly. When Asahel Foote, father to Lyman Foote, left the Revolutionary army, at the proclamation of Peace, he was a young soldier of sixteen years old, of a daring spirit, and when he came to the river near Mr. Ballard's, he found the string-pieces had been put into their places, but there was not a plank upon them. He determined to ride his horse upon one of them over the river, in which he was successful.

II. THE FIVE GRANTS.

The town of Lee is made up of *five* Grants,—Hopland, Watson's, Williams', Laraby's, and Glassworks.

1st. **THE HOPLAND GRANT** is a strip of land extending almost across the southern portion of the town. The northern line commences near the Stockbridge boundary, about half a mile north of William Blake's, running a little north of J. C. Stephens', and thence nearly with the road to R. Hinman's, and John Baker's in Cape street; thence southerly to the Tyringham line. The name is derived from the great quantity of hops that formerly grew upon the banks of the river which flows down from Tyringham. This territory includes six School districts,—the two at South Lee, the one near C. Hinckley's, the two in Water street, and the one at East Lee. This tract belonged to the town of Great Barrington, in 1777, and was included in this town at the time of its incorporation.

William Ingersoll owned about one quarter of this grant, which was enough to furnish himself and each of his seven sons with a farm of no mean dimensions.

2d. The history of **WATSON'S GRANT** is as follows. In 1757 and '8, Robert Watson of Sheffield, assisted by David Ingersoll, Esq., a Tory lawyer of Great Barrington, purchased of the Indians a tract of land now comprising the town of

Washington, and parts of the towns of Middlefield, Hinsdale, Lenox, and Lee. That portion included in the corporation of Lee was in the eastern and northern parts of the town. Its western line began at the south-east corner of Hopland, running northerly to John Baker's; thence westerly to near R. Hinman's; and thence northerly following the old road from Mr. Hinman's to the Housatonic river.

Mr. Watson purchased this land of Benjamin Konk-ke-we-nan-nant, John Pop-kne-hou-an-wah, and Robert Nung-hau-wot, Chiefs of the Stockbridge tribe of Indians. What they paid for it I am not able to say, only so far as that a part of the consideration was to be in the "fire water" of that day. They called this territory Watsonstown, after the name of its owner.

Soon after this purchase, Mr. Watson sold his title to this grant to a company of sixty men, the most of whom resided in Hartford, Ct. This company divided their land into sixty-three shares, one for each of the proprietors, one for schools, and two for their minister. They also changed the name to Greenock, for what reason I have not been able to learn.

These proprietors soon found that Watson had failed to fulfill the obligations to the Indians; and the Indians, therefore, retained their right to the township now called Greenock. The Greenock company re-purchased of the Indians the town, for which they paid £173 York money; and applied to the Governor of the colony to establish their title to the town.

On the 22d of Dec., 1760, the proprietors held a meeting in Hartford, Ct., and, among other votes passed at that meeting, was the following:—"Voted, That each proprietor shall clear three acres of land on each of his settling lots, girde seven acres, and build a log house 16 feet square, on or before the 16th day of Oct. next."

Action on the above petition was delayed till Sept. 8, 1763, when "Francis Barnard, captain-general and commander-in-chief of the province of Massachusetts Bay in N. E., the Honorable his Majesty's Councillors, and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, Jan. 13th, 1762," granted the petition, and again changed the name of the town to Hartwood. The more common name by which this part of the county was known was "Mount Ephraim." It had borne, therefore, *four* names.—Watsonstown, Greenock, Hartwood, and Mount Ephraim; by the last of which it was more widely known.

A year before the time of the above action, the Hartford company sold their right in the land to Samuel Brown, jun., of Stockbridge, and Ephraim Kidder, of Yoakintown (now Lenox); and it is probable that Messrs. Brown & Kidder also sold soon after their purchase, as they are not included