A SHORT HISTORY OF LEE

Space allows only the mention of some of the many important events of Lee's past--such as the mast trade or the anti-slavery movement--and of only a handful of names from the many local families who--in various degrees--helped to mold the character of our town. To find out more, one may consult Ursula Baier's "Lee in Four Centuries" (1966) and several writings by John Scales, a local historian active shortly after the turn of this century.

THE INDIAN PAST

Like other New England communities, Lee has countless ties to its Indian past. Not only have local farmers found Indian artifacts in their fields through the centuries, but as of this writing a University of New Hampshire archaeological team has been successfully excavating for the last two months a 7,000-year-old Indian site on an island in the Lamprey River at Wadleigh's Falls.

This prehistorical site is deeply stratified and appears never to have been disturbed in successive use, thanks to the yearly high flooding precipitating sediment and preventing agricultural cultivation by Indian and settler alike. The fieldwork so far has shown that the site has both Middle Archaic components--pointing to a large fishing camp as often found at fall lines, between 5,000 and 7,000 years old--and Late Woodland components--a semi-permanent village with seasonal occupancy, dating from about 3,000 years ago. As Professor Charles Bolian notes, the Woodland Indians occupied our area until the arrival of Europeans, after which they rapidly died out, largely as a result of epidemic diseases introduced by the colonists.

Artifacts encountered to date include both chipped and ground stone tools, and a small amount of pottery. The Wadleigh's Falls site was discovered by Gary Magnuson in 1969, and his materials from the site were donated to the Lee Historical Society.

In his 1958 article, "Historical Indian Trails of New Hampshire" Chester B. Price mentions an ancient Pentucket Trail, which entered Lee in the north at the Barrington line, crossed our town from north to south in an almost straight line, and continued through Epping. At the southern end of the trail in the vicinity of Wadleigh's Falls was once an ancient Indian village called Washucke; in 1659 the Sagamore of Washucke sold this village and all the land
between the Lamprey and Bellamy rivers to the English.

It was along this trail that on a hot July day in 1690 an encounter took place between a group of Kennebec Indians and a colonial militia. Known now in history books as the Battle of Wheelwright's Pond, it lasted several hours and left on the side of the settlers three officers and 12 privates dead, and seven men wounded. How many casualties were among the Indians is not known, since they took their dead and wounded with them.

Tradition associates Wednesday Hill, Lee's highest point, with Indians. Billee Hoornbeek, U.S. Forest Archaeologist, has said that about 10,000 to 11,000 years ago, when the glaciers were retreating, this hill, then bald, offered a splendid lookout for the Indian hunter who could follow from here the large herbivorous herds passing through the grasslands below.

Mentioned for the first time as Wednesday Hill in a 1723 deed, it is by now unclear why it is so called. One of the old traditions says that a skirmish with Indians took place here on a Wednesday; another says that it was on that day when the early surveyors were laying out land grants on the hill.

An Indian tradition is also connected with Peter's Oven, a small cave in the side of a steep ledge on Bennett Road, off Lee Hill. "Peter's Oven, soe-called" is first referred to in a deed from 1721. Tradition has it that an Indian named Peter was wounded at the above-mentioned Battle of Wheelwright's Pond, managing to crawl into this cave where he eventually died.

There is still another tradition, as yet unconfirmed, that there once were canals built by Indians leading from Wheelwright's Pond.

**COLONIAL TIMES AND THE REVOLUTION**

The settlement of our area by colonists began over 350 years ago, about 1623, when we were regarded as a part of ancient Dover. For a while the founder of Exeter, the Reverend John Wheelwright, claimed that the territory that is now Lee belonged to that town; today the pond with his name remains as a reminder of his assertion, but in fact Dover reasserted control.

The first two grants in what is now Lee were at Wadleigh's Falls in southern Lee in 1657, and at Newtown in North Lee in 1663. In 1668 Robert Wadleigh built the first sawmill at the "uppermost falls in Lampereel river" and as early as 1730 the small community which lies on both sides of the river was commonly called "Wadley's Falls."

Our Mast Road recalls the pre-Revolutionary mast trade with England, in which New Hampshire supplied the British Navy with its great masts. Special paths were laid out for the transportation of these gigantic white pines, the
lengths of which were often in excess of 120 feet, and which had at their base
a diameter of 20 to 40 inches. Thirty to 40 pairs of oxen—which were at that
time much smaller than our contemporary breed—pulled the giants through our town
to Durham from where they were floated to Portsmouth for shipment by specially
constructed mast ships to England. Our "mast path" is mentioned as early as 1694.

At one time there were three garrisons in Lee. These large dwellings built
of logs, with loop-holes in the thick walls for the discharge of guns, served
as a place of refuge from Indian attacks for families from surrounding farms.
They were strategically located: one in Newton, in the northern part of the town;
one along Mast Road, about halfway between Durham and Lee Hill; and a large
cellar hole still marks the location of the third in the southwestern part of
Lee, near Fox Garrison Road. These buildings were all demolished during the
last century.

In 1716 the part of Dover called Oyster River was made into a separate
parish. Sixteen years later this parish was incorporated into a town called
Durham, which thus included the present-day town of Lee and part of Madbury.
During the following year—that is, in 1733-34—the Proprietors of Durham
divided its common land, which was largely located in the part of town that is
now Lee. It was voted that only persons who were inhabitants of the town and
upward of 24 years of age "should have part of share of the common or undivided
lands"; the shares were 25 acres apiece for eight shillings, and distribution was
by a lottery drawn by the Revered Hugh Adams. One hundred and sixty six persons re-
ceived land at this time, and additional grants were made in March of 1737.

With the subsequent increase in population one hundred men signed a peti-
tion 28 years later, in 1765, asking for the division of the town of Durham.
The petition was submitted to Governor Benning Wentworth, and on January 16, 1766,
"the town was divided and the westerly part incorporated as a Parish by the name
of Lee, with full town privileges."

Where did Lee get its name? This remains an unanswered question. No men-
tion is made of a name for the new parish in the petition. Possibly Governor
Wentworth named our town, as he did many of the 129 towns to which he granted a
charter, after a person or town in England. It may have been named after a
small town of the same name, now incorporated into Gosport near Portsmouth in
Hampshire, England. —Or is there some truth to the tradition that the local
resident John Cartland, a Quaker, had come from the hamlet of Lee in Scotland
and had the privilege of naming his new community after his native place? —Then
Elner Hunson Hunt suggests in his "New Hampshire Town Names" that Governor Went-
worth named the town for a friend and relative, General Charles Lee, an officer
in the English army during the French and Indian War. General Lee later joined
the Revolution and was at one time second in command to General Washington.

At the time of its incorporation, the population center of the newly founded parish was close to its eastern boundary with Durham. Here next to the old parish cemetery stood also Lee's first meeting house, where church services were held and town business conducted. By the early 1790's this first meeting house had been moved to Lee Hill, which from then on with its large common became the center of the town.

Among the 100 men who were active in setting Lee off from Durham as a separate parish we find many names of families--such as Durgin, Tuttle, Randall, Hill, or Snell--whose descendants 200 years later still are living in Lee. And many a man among the petitioners joined in the War of Independence ten years later. There are some 30 Revolutionary soldiers buried in Lee; among them are two surgeons, Drs. Samuel Wiggleworth and James Bracket; and in the old Layn burial place near the former Turnpike lies a Black slave, known as "Old Prince," who had attended Captain John Layn in the Revolution.

Before the Revolution there was a significant Quaker population in Lee, including the Meader, Jenkins, Cartland, and Hanson families. The small former Cartland schoolhouse on Cartland Road is a tangible link to those times. It was originally built in 1774 as a Quaker meeting house near today's Route 152, but was moved to its present location the following year. Because of their religious convictions the members of the Society of Friends refused to sign the Association Test in 1776 to oppose the British with arms.

In 1777 Captain Robert Parker, called merchant and mariner in early deeds, began to build in Lee, five miles from salt water, the privateer "General Sullivan." Recent access to a "journal" written by James Creighton Emerson may have supplied us with more information about this ship. Born in Lee in 1827, Emerson recalled in 1898 of the Lee Hill Cemetery that "these broad acres where the dead rest in the days of our grandparents were the ship yard where vessels were framed." Moreover, he mentions the old Bartlett mill (now gone) on Little River as "the spot ... where once was the saw-pit where ship planks were sawed from the solid white oak."

Parker used old oak and pine from his own woods, and when the ship was completed the numbered timbers were taken apart, and brought by ox team to the Newarket shipyard, where the members were put together again for the launching of the ship. In 1778 "General Sullivan" made its first voyage from Portsmouth; she had 14 guns and a crew of 100. That year she captured one prize selling for 162,000 pounds, and another in 1780 that brought in 350,000 pounds. The prize monies were divided among the ten owners and the crew.

About this time if not earlier, Captain Parker probably began to build
the lovely Georgian-styled mansion today known as the "Green Dream Farm."

THE 19TH CENTURY

By the 1800's Lee had operating numerous grist- and sawmills, one clothing-
mill at Wadleigh's Falls, and several tanneries and brickyards. The 165-acre
Wheelwright's Pond was still supplying the angler with two- and three-pound
sea or white perch in large quantities up into the 1820's.

As in the previous century, agriculture continued to be the principal occu-
pation of the Lee inhabitants. In the many "New-Hampshire Gazeteers" of the
1800's we find information about some economic aspects of our town. So we read
that "the soil of Lee, in some portions, is hard, but by careful cultivation, is
made very productive, and the farmers are well rewarded for their efforts by
good crops of corn, oats, barley, &c." In the middle of the century the "produc-
tion of the soil" was listed as: Indian corn, 7,605 bushels; potatoes, 24,725
bushels; hay, 1,428 tons; wool, 2,642 pounds.

From the earliest time the town showed great interest in excellent schools.
Besides having two private academies--Timothy Hilliard's in the early 1830's at
Lee Hill, and Moses Cartland's Walnut Grove School 1847 to about 1862--Lee was
divided throughout most of the last century into seven public school districts.

Cartland's Walnut Grove School was located in the former Quaker meeting
house. Because of its teaching quality it attracted students from as far away
as Ohio, New York, and Rhode Island. The Quaker Cartlands were fervent aboli-
tionists, and not only were public discussions on the slavery issue held but
the old homestead was an important way station on the underground railroad.
Among the Cartlands' friends who visited Lee at this time were the famous fugi-
tive slave Frederick Douglass and the poet John Greenleaf Whittier, who was
related to the Cartland family. Along with many other Cartland visitors, they
carved their initials or names on a beech tree located in back of the homestead.
When the venerable tree fell down in the 1930's, Lee Cartland Tyler cut off
pieces to give to relatives and countless friends. One of these fragmanets has
been preserved in the collection of the Lee Historical Society.

In view of the agricultural basis of Lee's life, it is perhaps not surprising
that as late as 1874 the average length of the school year was only 19 weeks.

In 1814 a social library was incorporated, accumulating about 100 volumes by
the end of ten years. In 1929 Lee's first Sunday School was established with
the help of Elizabeth Hale Smith, and by 1874 its library numbered 700 volumes.
The Hale Smith family belong to the leading citizens of 19th-century Lee. Elizabeth, daughter of the Honorable William Hale, was born in Dover, but the family bought the Captain Parker farm on Main Road in 1825. Just before the move to Lee she had used her fluent French to help entertain General Lafayette and his son when they had stayed overnight with the family during the famous American tour noted in the "Historic Marker" on Route 4 in Northwood. In 1831 she married the Honorable Jeremiah Smith of Exeter, who in his lifetime was member of Congress, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New Hampshire, and Governor of the State. After she was widowed in 1842, Elizabeth settled permanently on the Lee farm with her son Jeremiah, who was to become well-known as Judge Jeremiah Smith Junior. The two did much for the community, including the founding and development of the present-day Lee Congregational Church. Mrs. Smith was a fervent abolitionist and her conscientiousness forbade her to use any products of slave labor. At the time of the Civil War she took into her Lee household Lavinia Halloway, a Black girl who, brought North in 1860, attended a local school in Lee and as a 12-year-old joined the Lee Congregational Church as one of its 14 charter members.

As at the beginning of the century, 1800-1840, the stagecoach era had brought prosperity to the town, so by the establishment in 1874 of the Nashua & Rochester Railroad a boost was given to the local farmer, particularly through regular milk pickups for H.P. Hood Company of Boston and the delivery of lumber southwards. With the introduction of special excursion trains during the summers a new industry, the tourist trade, was born.

THE PRESENT CENTURY

The railroad continued to serve Lee successfully until the arrival of the automobile, and by 1934 train service came to a halt. Soon afterwards the tracks were taken up and by 1938 Caleb Highway was opened in the former railroad bed. The coming of electricity to our town in the late 1930's and early 1940's likewise brought fundamental changes to the community.

These major technological advances have changed the economic and occupational structure of our town. Gone were the local mills of Wadleigh's Falls and elsewhere a basically agricultural way of life. A higher and higher proportion of Lee's citizens found their occupations outside the town, in Newfields, Dover, Portsmouth, and even as far away as Boston. In particular, the rapid increase in the size of the University of New Hampshire in nearby Durham during recent years has had a profound impact upon the surrounding communities. Old farmhouses, which in the 1920's and 1930's had become summer residences for tourists, were now bought up
as year-round residences. And to accommodate the continuing influx of population, old farmsteads have been converted into housing developments.

In 1954 Lee joined the Oyster River Cooperative School District, and in November 1960 the new East Way Elementary School was opened.

Since 1930 the population has grown from 376 to well over 2,000. This precipitous growth has not only started to threaten the rural beauty of the town but has also increased the town budget. The building of fire stations and the establishment of a regular police force became inevitable.

We are fortunate that many of the old houses have survived through the centuries, although countless cellar holes throughout Lee's woods and along old roads indicate how much we have lost. Fire was the great danger. During the last century farms along the railroad bed were exposed to sparks blown by wind some distance from passing locomotives, and both fields and buildings often caught fire.

A number of old public buildings have been preserved for our use today. The Town Hall was built out of brick in 1846, while its underpinnings and granite doorstep came from Lee's first meetinghouse, built about 1766. Two old meetinghouses are found in the former Free Will Baptist Church, built in 1841 and now occupied by the Grange; and the older Quaker meetinghouse, built in 1774, used for some years as the Walnut Grove School, and now a private residence. Two of the old schools are still in use as public buildings; the old Stepping Stone, or Caverno, school house was bought for $50 by the church in 1896 and serves today as its Vestry; the Center School, which was built in 1897 on Lee Hook Road south of the Grange, is now the Lee Library; it was moved from its original location in 1962 and enlarged in 1974. The former South Lee Depot freight house, built about 1874, serves today as the Lee Historical Society's Museum; it was moved in the 1970's to its present location on Lee Hill.

Among the important historical sites are Lee's 75 old family burial yards. Scattered throughout the town, they point to the location of the early farmsteads. There are two public cemeteries—the old Parish Cemetery that grew around the first meetinghouse close to the Durham-Lee town line, and Lee Hill Cemetery, which was established in 1877 by the Reverend Albert G. Conings, who gave two acres of his property for this purpose. With its founding many graves were removed from the farms to this centrally located graveyard. The gravestone inscriptions in all these cemeteries are an important source for genealogical research.

Lee's architectural heritage has been well preserved in its 130 identified historical structures, which will be treated as resources as perishable and as valued as
wetlands or soil conservation in drawing up a master plan.

Many a visitor to or a resident in our town today is delighted by its rich architectural and historical inheritance, as the traveller of the past was smitten by Lee's rural serenity and the beauty of the old farmsteads. One of those who succumbed to the loveliness of our town, the Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier, wrote the following lines in an 1863 Memorial poem to one of Lee's distinguished citizens, Moses Austin Cartland:

Green be those hillside pines forever,
And green the meadowy lowlands be,
And green the old memorial beeches,
Name-carven in the woods of Lee!

Summer, 1980

Renata Dodge
Lee Historical Society