



LEEDS LETTER

LCA P.O. Box 114, Leeds, MA 01053 LeedsCivicAssoc@gmail.com LeedsCivic.org

SPRING 2024

LEEDS Spring Litter Cleanup

**SATURDAY, APRIL 20
8:00-11:30 A.M.**

Step 1. Between **8:00 and 9:30** come to the Leeds P.O. to sign up for a location and get trash bags. (Garden gloves are recommended.)

Step 2. Go to your chosen location, fill your bags, and leave them by the side of the road. The LCA will pick up the filled bags by 11:30.



UPCOMING EVENTS

**APRIL LCA MEETING
SEE LEEDSCIVIC.ORG**

7:00 - 8:00 p.m.

**CASCADE OF BELLS TO HONOR VICTIMS OF
THE 1874 MILL RIVER FLOOD
THURSDAY, MAY 16 AT 12:40**

As part of the relay of bells that will start in Williamsburg at 12:10 and end in Northampton, the Leeds Main St. church bell will ring 15 times starting at 12:40 p.m.

**LEEDS FLOOD COMMEMORATION
SUNDAY, MAY 19**

1:00 - 2:00 p.m.
Church lawn, Main Street

**MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY
SUNDAY, MAY 26**

1:00 - 1:30 p.m.
At the park across from Leeds School

**VILLAGE-WIDE TAG SALE
A SATURDAY IN JUNE**

DATE TO BE DETERMINED.
Watch for posters and LCA emails.

**ICE CREAM SOCIAL
END OF AUGUST**

DATE TO BE DETERMINED.
Free Mt. Tom's Ice cream served up at the Leeds Main Street Green. Watch for posters and LCA emails.

LEEDS IS A FRESH AIR FRIENDLY TOWN! by Lora Sandhusen

Are you interested in helping bring the joy of the outdoors to NYC youth? Volunteer as a host family to make a difference in a child's life as part of The Fresh Air Fund's Friendly Towns program! My family hosted a little girl from Brooklyn 30 years ago – and last summer, we hosted her daughter and nephew and had a blast! They will be invited again this year – for more swimming, bike riding, backyard camp-outs, and general silliness.

You can host a child for one week this summer and make memories that will last a lifetime. The Fresh Air Fund is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging and welcomes host families from all backgrounds to reflect the New York City communities we serve. Check out our website: <https://freshair.org/learn-about-our-friendly-towns-program/> and contact Lora Sandhusen at lorasandhusen@gmail.com to learn more.



150 YEAR COMMEMORATION OF THE 1874 MILL RIVER FLOOD

Several commemoration events will be held throughout the valley in May and June to commemorate the 1874 flood. An event schedule is included with this newsletter. All events are free and open to the public.

LEEDS 150TH FLOOD COMMEMORATION GATHERING

The LCA will host a commemoration gathering on May 19 at 1:00 on the Main Street church lawn across from the Flood Memorial. There will be a short introduction and a recounting of Myron Day's heroic ride down River Road from Haydenville to warn Leeds village about the approaching flood. His warning yells as he charged into Leeds and down Main Street saved many lives. A hero's memorial tree will be planted nearby to honor Myron Day.

An original song about the flood, written by John Daniel of Grove Avenue, will be performed, followed by a reading of the names of Leeds residents who perished in the flood. (We are looking for people of various ages to take part in the reading of names. We will have a microphone, so no worries if you have a soft voice. If you're interested in being one of the nine readers, please email LeedsCivic.org.)

Original art pieces that use glass and ceramic shards smoothed and sanded by years spent in the Mill River will be on display. Art pieces with themes specific to the 1874 flood will also be on display. If you would like to have an art piece included, please email LeedsCivic.org by April 20.



"Follow the Flood- Self-Guided Tour" markers will be posted in Leeds through May and June. A total of 21 markers will be along Mulberry and Main St. sidewalks, and along part of the bike path south of Mulberry St. Each marker is unique to its location, will have a historical photo and/or map, and a description of what took place at that site on the morning of May 16, 1874. A total of 85 markers will be posted from Williamsburg to Northampton.

A small crew of volunteers is needed to put up the Leeds markers during the last week of April. If your skill set includes working with a hand drill or auger, email: heid@heidistevens.com.

Please see the event sheet included with this newsletter for times and dates of other flood commemoration listings.

LOCAL DOCUMENTARY, SMALL LIVES, MAKES A BIG IMPRESSION

by Heidi Stevens

Two local filmmakers, Colin Hodgson and Lucas Fappiano (now both 26), spent their childhood in Leeds. They were surrounded by nature, good friends, and interesting neighbors, all helping to shape their creativity. They found an understanding of what makes a strong community – its people and how they connect with others. From the early Leeds pumpkin parties and pizza parties to playing Little League to the highlight of their summers – “Summer Ball” – Jim Mias was a big presence in their lives.

For many years, Summer Ball happened three times a week throughout the summer after the normal town baseball season ended. It was pick-up baseball for kids managed by Jim Mias and was more than just fun – it was a destination on summer mornings for kids (and parents!) that guaranteed to produce wild plays, hilarious challenges, camaraderie, and lifelong memories.

Lucas and Colin both studied film in college, and Colin had neighborhood mentors who worked in film (Julie Akeret and Tricia Reidy). Colin says learning about people and discovering a story makes documentary filmmaking exciting for him. So, when Lucas called Colin and said he wanted to make a documentary about Jim, Colin immediately said yes!

Colin explains, “Before we started filming we decided on a few major categories: family, early life, Summer Ball, Little League, the VA, etc. Due to the constraints of the short format, we had to leave out many aspects of Jim’s life, such as his sculptures, his jobs at Leeds Mart and Birds, and his early childhood. We filmed two interviews with Jim on consecutive days (each two hours long). Those two interviews helped guide me when I was editing, and from there, we were able to build the film’s structure.”

Lucas and Colin did 99% of the filming. Colin’s brother, Rowan, filmed a few beautiful drone shots. The film moves through different landscapes: local street scenes, along the bike path, talking by the fire pit. The film is peppered with interviews of Summer Ball kids (now grown), neighbors, and Robin Forsyth - Jim’s wife and best friend. Colin and Lucas manage to capture the essence of Jim Mias and his free-form, non-conforming happy spirit and the wonderful simplicity of it.

In December 2023, Colin and Lucas organized a free local documentary film festival at the Academy of Music. “Small Lives” was one of six short films that played to a packed house. So many attended that they had to open the balcony! I asked Colin and Lucas how it felt to have a packed house. Colin says, “It felt amazing, much better than I was expecting! It was great to see so many people come out and support local filmmakers, although I have a suspicion that a large percentage of people came to see Jim. I can’t blame them for that, that’s what would have brought me too.” Lucas says, “I have never had a feeling like that night. I am so happy we could give Jim the appreciation he deserves, happy we were able to bring the community together for a night to support local art.”

Recently, the filmmakers launched a film production company, Blue Heron Productions. They have submitted “Small Lives” to eight regional film festivals and will continue to submit to more festivals as they open up. Unfortunately, they cannot share the film publicly until after “Small Lives” premieres at festivals (or is denied). “Small Lives” was submitted to the Easthampton Film Festival, and they’re very hopeful that it will be accepted. Once they’re done with the festival run, they will release it publicly online.

You can view the *Small Lives* trailer here:

<https://vimeo.com/923926371?share=copy>

ATTENTION CONSERVATION AREA HIKERS AND DOG WALKERS!

While you’re out and about on Leeds conservation area trails you may come across a tree blow-down that’s blocking a trail or a dangling branch that could be dangerous (often called a “widow maker”) or large debris that doesn’t belong there. We’d like your help reporting these obstacles to Tom Annese, Northampton’s Land Planning Assistant. Tom will come with his chainsaw and cleanup the blockage. It’s best to give as precise a location as possible so Tom doesn’t wander the woods carrying a ten pound chainsaw! Tom’s cell phone number is 641-260-1796 or email him at: tannese@northamptonma.gov. For years, Tom has helped the LCA deal with all sorts of trail and bike path issues. He’s a great guy and will appreciate your communications.

LEEDS SPRING LITTER CLEANUP-APRIL 20

Let’s start springtime with litter-free streets and trails! Please schedule time to help out at this annual cleanup. It’s a family friendly activity. Details are in the graphic on the flip side.

LEEDS BASEBALL HATS AND COTTON T-SHIRTS FOR SALE

Shirts - \$25, adult sizes: S, M, L, XL

Colors - brick red, light purple

Hats - \$30, Black with white type

There are two ways to purchase hats and shirts: Contact Marc Freedman to arrange a time for pickup at 774-219-4290 or email him at mfreedman65@gmail.com. Or, pick up a shirt and/or hat at David’s Auto, 120 River Road.

Make payment with cash or check made out to Leeds Civic Association at time of pick-up.



LEEDS MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY - MAY 26 AT 1:00 pm

The Annual Leeds Memorial Day Ceremony will take place at the Veteran’s Memorial Park across from the Leeds Elementary School. Activities will include a color guard from the V.F.W. Post 8006, a Wreath Laying Ceremony, and the playing of Taps. There will also be a reading of the Gettysburg Address by a Leeds Elementary student.

SUMMER 2024 - MILL RIVER CLEANUPS

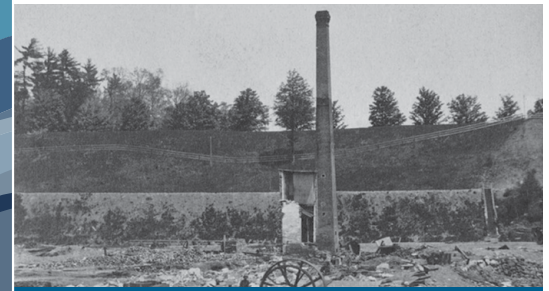
Keeping the new conservation area north of Chartpak dam and the bike path leading to it as free of trash as possible during summer is important. The city provides us with trash bags and hauls away the filled bags. If you would like to help the LCA in this effort, please contact Heidi Stevens: heidistevens.com. or call or text 413-588-1327. If you visit the river conservation area on weekdays and notice trash issues, please contact Heidi so we can get volunteers to pick it up before wildlife or rain makes it worse. The efforts of all the “freelance” trash cleaners who pick up and remove litter as they enjoy the trails is greatly appreciated. Thank you!

GREEN TIP by Amy Stamm

One of our urgent responsibilities in lessening our energy and fossil fuel usage is electrifying our homes. One step toward doing this when you need to replace appliances is purchasing electric appliances instead of gas-fueled ones. If you’re in the market for a clothes dryer, the most efficient dryers on the market are heat pump dryers, which are 60% more efficient than conventional electric dryers. In a heat pump dryer, electric condenser coils heat the air that moves into the rotating drum, while the hot air in the drum absorbs the moisture from the clothes. This air is cooled by evaporator coils as it leaves the drum, and the extracted moisture drains into a tray or drainage hose. These dryers require only the same outlet as any electric dryer to install, and they don’t need any venting to the outside. A perfect solution for those times you can’t air dry your clothes!



Leeds button mill before the flood



Leeds button mill after the flood

The sudden collapse of the Williamsburg dam in western Massachusetts let loose a flood that swept away parts of Williamsburg, Skinnerville, Haydenville, and Leeds. It killed 139 people, all within an hour.

150 YEAR COMMEMORATION

ALL EVENTS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

EVENT SCHEDULE 2024

Cascade of Bells

May 16, starting at 12:10 p.m.

Listen to the relay of church bells from Williamsburg to Northampton, ringing a total of 139 times, once for each flood victim.

Floods Past and Present

May 16, 5:00-6:30 p.m.

Grow Food Northampton Community Farm, Florence
Registration begins April 1 at growfoodnorthampton.org/events/

John Sinton and Gaby Immerman of the Mill River Greenway will lead a discussion on the natural and human-driven hydrologic cycles of life on a floodplain farm. From the era of Glacial Lake Hitchcock through 10,000 years of Indigenous land stewardship, to the colonial era, and to our current period of global warming, attendees will reflect on the natural cycle of flooding along the Mill River.

The 1874 Mill River Flood

Talk by Eric Weber

May 16 at 7:00 p.m.

Meekins Library, 2 Williams St., Williamsburg

Commemoration of the Mill River Flood

May 18 at 2:00

First Congregational Church of Williamsburg, 4 North Main St., Williamsburg

The program will feature new musical compositions by Nick Reid and Louise Mosrie, the "May 16th, 1874" ballad by Lynne Bertrand and Penny Schultz, with cellist Stephen Katz, and the story of the disaster in the words of witnesses (arranged by Elizabeth Sharpe) with a reading of the victims' names. A re-enactment of dam keeper George Cheney's frantic horseback ride to warn the village will follow on North Main Street. Two trees will be planted at the church honoring the first two victims of the flood.

Leeds Commemoration Gathering

May 19 at 1:00 p.m.

Church lawn, 195 Main St., Leeds

There will be a recounting of Myron Day's heroic ride warning Leeds, a reading of the names of the 51 Leeds victims, and the performance of an original song by John Daniel. River-inspired art pieces by Leeds artists, original illustrations from *Millicent* and *The Day it Rained Buttons* by Nancy Meagher, and an art piece made by the Leeds After School Enrichment River Arts Club will be on display. A memorial tree will be planted to honor Myron Day.

Who Was Responsible for the Mill River Disaster?

May 31 at 7:00, June 1 at 1:00 and 4:00

Old Hampshire County Courthouse, Main Street, Northampton
Registration begins April 1 at historicnorthampton.org

A readers' theatre presentation about the coroner's inquest into the cause of the Mill River disaster will take place in Hampshire County's historic courtroom. The audience will be invited to participate by reading some of the testimony and commentary from the inquest. Elizabeth Sharpe, author of *In the Shadow of the Dam: The Aftermath of the Mill River Flood of 1874*, will narrate.

Paintings by Frances Kidder

Mill River Disaster of 1874

May 1 - May 31

Talk by Frances Kidder, May 11 at 1:00 p.m.

Meekins Library, Neil Hammer Gallery

Artwork and Poetry Exhibit by Dunphy School 3rd Graders

Curated by Nancy Meagher

May 1 - May 31

Meekins Library

Guided Walks to the Dam Ruins

May, June, and September

Registration begins May 1 at historicnorthampton.org

Historians, naturalists, and engineers will lead walks and discuss the design and construction of the dam, the dam break, and the changes in the natural landscape.

Videos about the Flood

May and June

Historic Northampton, 46 Bridge St.

Wednesday to Sunday, 12:00-4:00 p.m.

Visitors can select from among five videos about the disaster, its impact, and its artistic representations, including the 18-minute 1993 film by Art Donahue for Chronicle, WCVB-TV Channel 5 Boston.

Follow the Flood - Self Guided Tours

May and June

An interactive, online map, designed and hosted by Smith College, will show the length of the Mill River, the span of the flood, and the locations of 75+ historical markers that describe what happened at each site. Markers will be posted in the villages of Williamsburg, Haydenville, Leeds, Florence, and Northampton and at victims' graves in five cemeteries. Click the QR code in the bottom corner (will be live May 1) to access the online Story-Map.

Flood Memorial Tree Project

May 2024 - 2029

A total of 144 trees (one for each of 139 victims and five heroes) will be planted along the river as a living memorial. Each tree will be dedicated to an individual flood victim, the entire family that perished, or a hero of the day. The plantings will take place over five years as the Mill River Greenway shared-use path along the river is developed.

