



LEEDS LETTER

MAY 2014



Folks view Leeds memorabilia at History Night

History Night - 50 folks turn out to party about the past!

Thank you to the many people who brought their Leeds memorabilia which helped to make History Night a big success. And, thank you, John Daniel for playing guitar at the start of the show. The music room at Leeds Elementary school was decked out with holiday lights and tables displaying old Leeds photos, postcards, maps and albums. The slide show was chock full of Leeds moments and people from the past. Guests were sharing tidbits about “back in the day” and having a good ol’ time as the slide images clicked along. After the first run of the slide show Ed Heon and Dick Quinn read funny stories about growing up in Leeds. Below is a story, The Bell, by Ed Heon which was read aloud at the event. For those of you who didn’t make it to History Night... read on and enjoy!

The Bell, by Ed Heon

A wonderful old Bell once hung in the tower of the upper Main Street mill in the Village of Leeds, MA. The Bell called workers to their places for many years. From World War II through the Cold War, it was rung every Saturday noon as the Village’s civil defense warning, taken very seriously by most of the residents – except perhaps for a few “active” teenage boys, affectionately known as the “Leeds Gang”.

During the summer months, The Bell could mysteriously ring at any hour of the night, and traditionally rang in the 4th of July with a loud and long midnight greeting. While never proven, this was generally believed to be the handiwork of the “Leeds Gang”. The Bell was rung by gaining access to the 4th floor hallway of the mill, where The Bell’s rope hung temptingly down through a hole in the ceiling.

One late June evening, circa 1953, the police conducted a meeting on Mulberry Bridge with a group of teens (presumed to include members of the Leeds Gang), and informed the group that there would be no ringing of The Bell on the 3rd of July, or at any other time by the likes of them. “The rope is gone, and the tower locked, so you guys might just as well stay home that night!” What an inviting thing to say!

At 12:01 a.m. July 4th, a miraculous event occurred in the Village of Leeds. A large group of villagers had gathered that evening in the common across from the mill, including representatives of the police, who were undoubtedly there to witness the undoing of the “Leeds Bell Ringers”. But at midnight, to “everyone’s” total amazement, The Bell began ringing in the 4th of July. The police unlocked the building, rushed up to the tower, with the deafening clanging of The Bell shattering their ears---and no one was up there! The Bell, to the delight of its young friends and most of the villagers, was ringing all by itself!

Many attempts that summer to coerce alleged Leeds Gang members never revealed anything beyond the answer: “It was a miracle”! The mystery was never solved; until almost five decades later, when the grandchildren of one of the alleged Leeds Gang somehow got hold of the story and “went public” with it.

It goes like this: The Mill River ran directly behind the factory, with a small wooded area across the river. On July 3rd, some of the alleged Leeds Gang members, who worked in the mill, got the janitor’s keys to “get some stock from the 4th

UPCOMING EVENTS FOR 2014

LCA May Meeting

Tuesday, May 13

7:00 -8:00 pm

Leeds School teacher’s lounge

Agenda:

Memorial Day Celebration

Sylvester Road clean-up--update

Main Street Green - Keep it Clean!

Village-Wide Tag Sale

Robert’s Hill Trail Map--Official

Mill River Greenway Presentation

Community Meeting

Tuesday May 20, 7:00 - 9:00 pm

Leeds School Music Room

Memorial Day Celebration

Sunday, May 25, 1:00 pm

Veterans Memorial Park

(across from Leeds School)

Village Wide Tag Sale

Saturday, June 28th, 8:00am - 12:00 pm

Rain or Shine

Leeds Civic Association

P.O. Box 114, Leeds MA 01053

leedscivassoc@gmail.com

www.leedscivic.org

floor". While performing that routine duty, they also unlocked the doorway to the bell tower. A bit later someone entered the tower, tied the end of a small spool of black wire to top of The Bell, and threw the spool down and across the river into the wooded area. Waiting "associates" tied the other end of the wire to a tree. The mechanics were quietly tested, the trick was set, and the tower relocked. At midnight, The Bell was gleefully rung from the woods across the river, with most of the suspected Leeds Gang Bell Ringers watching innocently on the common along with the other villagers.

The Bell is long gone from the tower now, but a few 60+ year-old kids claim they can still hear it ringing in the 4th of July every year.

Thank You Robin Forsyth, Jim Ryan and Sue Carbin for taking down the holiday lights at Mulberry Park and from the Hotel Bridge. It's one of those village chores that has to be done. You are much appreciated.

Memorial Day Celebration

The Annual Leeds Memorial Day Celebration will take place on Sunday, May 25th at 1:00pm at the Veterans Memorial Park across from the Leeds School. Activities will include a color guard from the V.F.W Post 8006, A wreath laying ceremony, a cannon salute, and the playing of taps. There will also be a reading of the Gettysburg Address. The Reverend David Whitely, chaplain at the V.A.M.C, will officiate. All are welcome to attend.

Mill River Greenway - Community Meeting

Love the Mill River? Want to see it restored and revitalized as the ecological and historical heart of Leeds? Help make it happen with the Mill River Greenway Initiative!

The Mill River Greenway Initiative is working toward the vision of a non-motorized path roughly following the course of the Mill River from downtown Northampton to Williamsburg center. A greenway is more than a bike path – it seeks to restore the ecology of the lands it passes through, highlights cultural and historic features along its route, links to open space and other recreational opportunities, provides safe passage to schools, and promotes community revitalization.

There are already active groups in Williamsburg and Bay State Village tackling the array of interesting questions and challenges that must be addressed to make such a broad scale project come to fruition. Now we are looking to start a chapter in Leeds, to consider the stretch of the Mill River between the Northampton Country Club and the junction with the existing rail trail at the foot of Grove Avenue.

Please join us at an introductory meeting on Tuesday, May 20 at 7pm at Leeds Elementary School Music Room. No ex-

perience or special skill set is necessary, all it takes is folks who care deeply about the river.

Village Wide Tag Sale

Your unwanted items from the basement, attic, and garage may be useful for someone else. The Leeds Village Tag Sale will be held on Saturday June 28th, so you have plenty of time to get organized. The LCA will run a Tag sale notice in the Gazette and Hampshire Life, and post a large "Village-Wide Tag Sale Today" sign at the beginning of Florence Street (Rt 9 entrance). If you plan to set up a "Tag Sale" you are encouraged to add your own signs at each entrance to your street.

Main Street Park and the Doggie-do Problem

The LCA and our Ward 7 City Councilor, Alisa Klein have taken steps to curb the dog-do problem at the park. The city will be posting 2 dog ordinance signs at the park this month. We have scheduled an outreach meeting for residents at Leeds Village apartments and ask every dog owning reader to be responsible with their dogs deposits. We encourage dog owners to carry with them a bag to scoop up their dog's poop. If you don't clean up after your dog you are breaking a city ordinance and leaving a mess for others.

After the snow melted a small group of people including, Alisa Klein, Amy Stamm, Heidi Stevens, and two young boys from the Village Apartments cleaned up close to 10 pounds of doggie doo in the park. Gross! The volunteers had the chance to talk to a few passing dog walkers about the problem. If you happen to see a dog owner leaving dog mess, kindly remind them to carry a bag and please clean it up.

Green Power

If you want to make sure that the electricity you're purchasing is green, you can join National Grid's GreenUp program. When you join this program, you pay a small surcharge on your electricity bill to guarantee that the energy your household uses will come from renewable sources. The surcharge pays for renewable energy initiatives that have changed the landscape of Massachusetts energy use over the last several years. You can choose from New England Wind, which costs 3.8 cents/kwh, and derives 100% of its energy from wind, or New England GreenStart, which costs 2.4 cents/kwh and derives its energy from wind, solar, and low-impact hydro-power, as well as methane reuse. The entire cost of participating in either of these programs is tax deductible. Furthermore, towns with enough resident participation in the GreenUp program benefit from grants for municipal renewable energy projects. To join, visit the following website:

<http://www.massenergy.org/renewable-energy/national-grid> or call the Massachusetts Energy Consumers Alliance at 1-800-287-3950.