



NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2020

# LEEDS LETTER

PRSR STD  
ECRWSS  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
EDDM RETAIL

LEEDS CIVIC ASSOCIATION P.O. Box 114, Leeds, MA 01053 | LeedsCivicAssoc@gmail.com | LeedsCivic.org

## Meet the New Owners of St. Catherine's Church - Heidi Stevens

I met Kris Cobb in the winter of 2018 on the bike trail as she was collecting greens to use for her high school student's art class wreath project. She was excited about a new project she and her husband Bill, a high school math teacher, had taken on – the renovation of St. Catherine's, which they purchased that May. In the wake of Kris's can-do spirit, when I got home, I cut evergreen branches in my yard to contribute to her class art project. I left the green bundle with a note and a Leeds history brochure behind the church near their parked car, easy to spot. I didn't realize this couple from Sutton already knew quite a bit about Leeds!



\*\*\*\*\*ECRWSS\*\*\*\*\*

**Local  
Postal Customer**

The Cobbs are thrilled to have found an opportunity to be in Leeds, in part because of Bill Cobb's family history. Bill has a personal connection to the village in that his mother's family, Frederick and Philippine Faas resided on Chesterfield Road and survived the Mill River flood of 1874. The Faas family of 10 children worked in Critchlow's button mill, the Emery wheel factory, and the silk mill. Frederick died in 1908 and Philippine died in 1911, the year St. Catherine's was completed.

Many generations of Leeds residents have marked joyous and solemn occasions as a community at St. Catherine's. The hundred plus year old church closed in January, 2007 due to a shrinking population of parishioners. St. Catherine's church was vacant for 11 years and in need of major repairs.

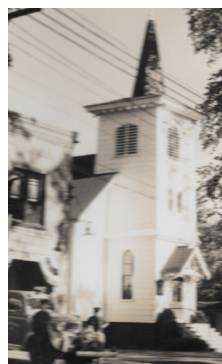
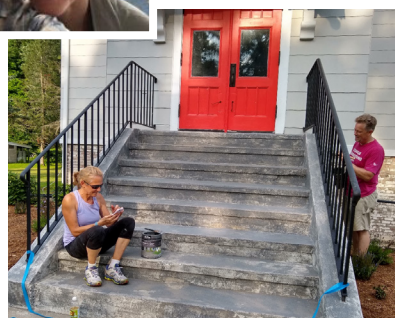
Kris and Bill's first goal for the building has been for preservation. They spent the summer of 2018 cutting and clearing growth from around the church and the parking lot. Kris says, they are learning as they go. Bill is quite handy already, having grown up on a farm in upstate NY where he and his family did a lot of maintenance on their property and equipment. Kris's dad, a woodworker and fine craftsman, also offers valuable advice. The couple taps into local businesses and even YouTube for inspiration and expert advice. They repaired and pointed much of the brick foundation and Bill continues to purchase more scaffolding so that they can paint the exterior of the church.

On one of last summer's 90 degree days I found the Cobbs painting the front steps that had been resurfaced. Bill gave me a tour of the interior showing me their progress (He has just as much enthusiastic energy as Kris!). The interior has been cleared out, literally from floor to ceiling. There had been rugs and kneelers that were removed as well as popcorn and drop ceilings. In the past 2 years they filled six 20 to 30 yard dumpsters! The iron furnace had to be cut into pieces so it could be removed. The organ is still in one piece and Bill and Kris would be happy to donate it to a good home.

The interior is big, bright, multi-leveled and full of potential. Bill even found a bell and installed it in the bell tower! The Cobbs have many ideas for the church. They have brainstormed ideas as well as asked members of the community for their input. Kris tells me, "So many wonderful people have walked past the church. It has been a pleasure to meet them and get their thoughts. It is exciting to think of sharing the space with the community." Some visions are to create artist studio/workshop space, a dance hall and even a coffee shop run by local students. The Cobbs recently had an elevation survey done of the church as the first step to figuring out possible functions and concrete renovations for the building.

The Cobbs are thoughtful, creative, community-minded people. Whatever the future holds for the church building, it will be a wonderful new chapter for the village of Leeds.

Even with her busy schedule, Kris started a blog about the church renovation. You can follow it here: <https://leedschurchpreservation.com/>



From top to bottom, left to right: Kris and Bill Cobb on sale day; Kris and Bill painting steps in summer 2020; Downstairs cleared out, ceiling removed; Upstairs, pews removed, sheetrock up; St. Catherine's in 1950 when the fire department building was beside it; Church at time of sale in 2018; Cleared overgrowth and painting started, 2019.

## 2020 RECAP - THE LCA CONTINUES TO MAKE EFFORTS FOR THE VILLAGE DURING THE PANDEMIC

**Annual Pizza Party** - Luckily, the party was held in early February before the pandemic hit New England. It was held at the Florence VFW and drew a healthy sized crowd...(Remember those?) DeeJay Dana Collins and emcee Jim Mias were both hilarious and the pizza was delicious. A 2021 "Beat the Winter Blues" pizza and raffle party will have to wait. We look forward to a safer time when our Leeds community can gather and spend a few hours together having fun.

**Beating Back Invasives Along Beaver Brook** - In early June, Steve McDonough led a group of volunteers who pulled invasive Japanese Knotweed from the banks of Beaver Brook. A dozen or so people turned out to clear several spots that had been mapped out by the LCA and the Planning Department. Knotweed was hauled out in black bags. Cut stems were also treated with an herbicide to help prevent spread. Knotweed is very difficult to eradicate and annual treatments will be required. Please stay tuned for workdays in 2021.

**Leeds Spring Clean-Up** - The annual Leeds' Spring litter pick-up took place in April. Thanks again to those who volunteered to make Leeds roads litter-free!

**River Trail Clean-up and Improvements** - The Mill River trails north of Chartpak were horrendous again in summer 2020. The overuse of the area has been an issue for several years and the LCA has been frustrated by the City's lack of attention to the matter. After many consecutive years of indefatigable volunteers cleaning up after users, they took a pause. Instead, the piles of trash were photographed twice a week, made into albums with location descriptions. Weekly albums were emailed to every councilor, the Mayor, and to all the department heads in the hopes of getting some kind of help to deter the ongoing abuse of the river area. A picture can be worth a thousand words! Soon, the Planning Dept. offered to collect trash once a week on property they are responsible for: the bike path and the small conservation area south of Beaver Brook. An LCA volunteer surveyed both areas on Monday mornings and reported findings to the Planning Dept. and an employee collected it. Photos of trash at Chartpak dam were emailed to Chartpak and soon they began cleaning up their property on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. In addition to these efforts, Amy Stamm and Robin Forsyth often picked up the trash on the property that is north of Chartpak, referred to as "owner unknown." Thank you to both!

Since 2015, the LCA has urged the City to identify the owner of the "owner unknown" parcel so the City could take the necessary steps to make the land into conservation land. The city's solicitor conducted a successful title search in September. We now know that the most recent owner of the "owner unknown" property was August R. Tyrell, who died over 100 years ago! The 2015 plan to make it conservation land now has some momentum. The unregulated parcel has caused much concern about fires, alcohol use, noise and trash summer after summer. Wayne Feiden, the City Director of Planning and Sustainability attended a recent LCA meeting where we discussed how to manage the land if it were to be deemed conservation land. The LCA and Ward 7 councilor, Rachael Maiore support the taking of the land. Although the City's position is still undecided, our hope is that by making it conservation

land the City and the Leeds community can work together to make it a safe and healthy environment for users, while protecting the river and its ecosystem. The goal of the LCA continues to be to maintain free and open access for all to responsibly enjoy the river.

**Parking Survey** - This Fall, at the request of DPW director, Donna LaScaleia, the LCA developed an online survey for the public to comment on the proposed parking restrictions on Main St., Florence St., Grove Ave and Mulberry Street. The LCA sent out an invitation to comment to all members and to residents on the listed roads. Paper copies of the survey form and DPW maps were made available to those without internet access.

**The Welcome Garden Has New Caretakers** - The welcome garden along the bike path at Mulberry Street was gorgeous this spring, it's beauty endured a summer onslaught of garbage dumping and has since been turned over to a new group of volunteers to do the seasonal weeding. We wish Lora Sandhusen, original planter, a happy time weeding her own gardens now!

**Pared Down Pumpkin Party** - We managed to design and host a Covid-compliant pumpkin carving contest. The Health Department advised us on safety precautions which we implemented because the main concern was having everyone feel comfortable and be safe. People toured the display of 28 glowing pumpkins on the chilly night and voted for their three favorites. Thank you to all participants and by abiding by the safety rules. Winners: 1st prize, Tim Recuber; 2nd prize, Julie Akeret; 3rd prize: Tim Banks. Check out the 2020 pumpkin creativity at the LCA website, LeedsCivic.org.

**New Leeds Hats for the Holidays!** - New Leeds cotton-canvas hats have arrived. Three colors are available: brown with white letters, khaki with black letters, and ranger green with white letters. Hats have an adjustable metal closure in back. They are \$20 each. All proceeds go to the Hotel Bridge restoration fund. Hats can be purchased at David's Auto, 120 River Road, or contact Heidi at heidi@heidistevens.com.

**Holiday Lights** - Jim Ryan and a group of volunteers strung lights at the Mulberry Street welcome garden. The lights offer a bit of holiday cheer to Leeds. Thank you Chris Ulrich, Chris Sekaer, Chris Gazzara, Tony Brown, Jason Zellmer, Matt Zellmer-Brown and Jim Ryan.

**Supporting Our Schools** - Each year two LCA Bradford Memorial Scholarships are awarded to high school students choosing to continue their education. Congratulations to Mary Greene and Jamie Horton! The LCA usually makes an annual donation to the Leeds School for Nature's Classroom. That event was cancelled, so instead, \$320 was donated to the Northampton PTO fund-raiser, "We Are A Community Fund," which will help students, families and staff cope with the challenges of the pandemic, and help make both remote schooling and in-person learning more safe and effective. Donations will help to fund learning supplies, technology needs and the cost of accessing the Internet. Visit: [charity.gofundme.com/wearecommunity-fund](https://charity.gofundme.com/wearecommunity-fund).

HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL! STAY SAFE AND BE WELL!

**PLEASE RENEW YOUR LCA MEMBERSHIP OR BECOME A NEW MEMBER FOR 2021!**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ I would like to receive my newsletter electronically.
- ☐ I would like my newsletter hand delivered.
- ☐ I would like my newsletter mailed (Include additional \$2.50 for postage.)
- ☐ I am interested in volunteering. Please contact me.

New Renew

☐

\$10 Family Yearly Membership

☐

\$25 Business Yearly Membership

(1 year LCA website advertising, please enclose business card)

Additional Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total Amount Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to: Leeds Civic Association  
Mail to: P.O. Box 114, Leeds, MA 01053

Or, become a member and pay online at: [LeedsCivic.org](https://LeedsCivic.org)

Thank you! Your membership helps to keep our community connected!

