



LEEDS LETTER

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2021

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View from a Canoe By Heidi Stevens

Most of us experience the Mill River from its shore, so the sight of a man carrying a canoe down Main Street peaked my curiosity. I am always thankful when I run into someone doing cool stuff in Leeds!

When I met Galen Hammitt, he was on his way to rejoin the river below the dam after Hotel Bridge. I accompanied him down the slope near Marney Electric to the river bank to find out more about his voyage. He had started in Haydenville and was heading to Paradise Pond in Northampton. Galen clearly knew what he was doing. I later caught up with him via email and he was kind enough to explain more about his canoe, his background, and his preparation for the Mill River trip on that October day.

His canoe weighs just 14 lbs.! The Nessmuk solo canoe from Hemlock Canoes is built to be ultra-light, and easy to "portage" or carry around obstacles like dams or rapids. It is 10'6" long, made from a simple wooden frame and a kevlar hull. Galen says he finds the canoe experience elegant and different to the kayak. As an experienced canoe paddler, he uses specialized paddle strokes (called a c-stroke or a j-stroke) to control the canoe while keeping the single paddle on his dominant side. Using these techniques, a great paddler can have excellent control of the canoe while appearing to do very little. Galen admires the skills of indigenous peoples of the region who built canoes and navigated these waterways long before European colonizers arrived.

Galen grew up on water. His parents were avid sailors and took him aboard when he was a baby! In his teens, he kayaked on the Sudbury River, explored woods, wetlands and rivers. During college years, he was a white water rafting guide on the Kennebec and Penobscott Rivers and learned how to "read" whitewater: interpret the currents and waves in rapids and what they tell about the rocks or channels below. In 2012, using satellite imagery from Google Earth, Galen studied the Sudbury River's 60-mile journey to the Atlantic Ocean at Newburyport, MA. He and a friend kayaked 60 miles over four days on the Sudbury River to the Atlantic Ocean, spending nights camping on shore.

Galen prepares for a paddling trip by studying the river's course through satellite imagery, and noting hazards such as dams and rapids to be aware of. He explained that in addition to satellite imagery, he checks whether there is a USGS Data Collection Station located on a river (<https://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/rt>). Data from these stations can be used to understand whether a river is running high or low compared to its usual flow. With a shallow river like the Mill River, he planned his paddle for 1-2 days after a heavy rain, so the river would be flowing higher and be easier to navigate without running aground. Galen says, a river's character can change dramatically based on the volume of water it is carrying, and can become more or less dangerous in different places at different water levels. He says, navigating the Mill River by boat is demanding due to the shallow, rocky channel and the many dams. He carries his cell phone in a waterproof pouch around his neck and checks his location periodically on Google Maps to understand where he is relative to dams or other hazards. He says, it is very important to be familiar with the number and location of dams, as they can be almost invisible except for a tell-tale "horizon line" as one approaches from upstream. At a higher water level, anyone trying to boat the Mill River should be prepared to navigate shallow rapids, and will likely end the trip with a few more scratches on their hull than they started with. At low water levels it is probably impossible to travel the Mill River by boat. The Mill River is not one that you will find recommended in paddling guide books because of the many natural and man-made hazards.

Galen's 5 portages around dams were relatively short except for portaging Cook's dam, where he carried the boat about a quarter of a mile partially in the woods of Robert's Hill Conservation Area and on the sidewalk of Spring

- Continued on back



From top to bottom:
Galen's canoe below Chartpak dam
Portaging Main Street dam
Galen checks next dam's location
Rapids in Florence, a spot where Galen swamped!

UPCOMING EVENTS

SATURDAY, NOV 20
HOLIDAY LIGHTS SET-UP
10:00 a.m.
Mulberry Street garden-bike path
All volunteers welcome!

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14
LCA MONTHLY MEETING
7:00 p.m.
Location to be determined.
Check the LCA website

TUESDAY, JANUARY 11
LCA MONTHLY MEETING
7:00 p.m.
Location to be determined.
Check the LCA website.

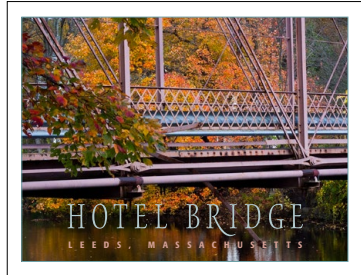
Street. He fell out of the boat twice when it “swamped” in rapids, and he’ll have to make some minor repairs to the canoe’s hull. Galen’s trip took close to 7 hours. He says, paddling a semi-urban river like the Mill River lets you see the place you live from a unique perspective, and can feel like a trip through local industrial history. He enjoyed attempting this trip as a unique adventure and to pay tribute to this river, which is still the heart of the city.

Holiday Gift Ideas: Hotel Bridge Note Cards and Leeds Hats

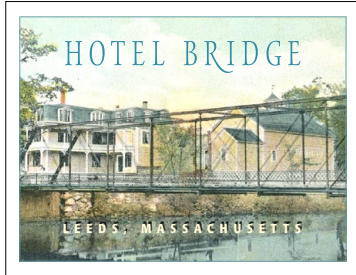
Hotel Bridge note cards are available in a 4-pack that includes one of each image (\$10) or as singles (\$3 each).

Cards are 5 1/2” x 4 1/4. Backs have a brief description of the bridge’s history and the name of the artist. Proceeds go to the Hotel Bridge Restoration Fund. You can order by emailing:

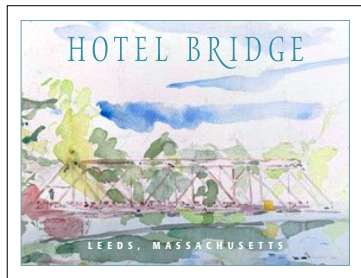
LeedsCivicAssoc@gmail.com or contact Heidi at 588-1327 or heidi@heidistevens.com. Supplies are limited.



Photograph - Penny Geis



Tinted postcard image - LCA archives



Watercolor - Tim Martin



Illustration - Heidi Stevens

Leeds Hats

Cotton twill hats with an adjustable clasp in back are available in brown, khaki and army green. Hats cost \$20.00 each. You can order by emailing: LeedsCivicAssoc@gmail.com or stop by David’s Auto at 120 River Road to pick one up and pay with cash or a check made out to LCA. All proceeds go to the Hotel Bridge Restoration Fund. Supplies are limited.



Holiday Light Helpers Needed - Saturday, Nov 20 at 10 a.m.

It’s a fun community-minded activity for families to participate in. New volunteers needed, the more helpers the merrier! Meet at the Mulberry Street garden along the bike path at 10:00 on Saturday.

LCA Membership Renewals Coming Up

In January 2022 all Leeds residents will receive via snail-mail a Leeds newsletter with an LCA membership form. If you would like to take care of business early, feel free to renew your membership at LeedsCivic.org. Family memberships are \$10. Business memberships are \$25.

Green Tip - Being Lazy Can Be Green! By Amy Stamm

Every year people in the U.S. bring an estimated 10.5 million tons of leaves and other yard trimmings to landfills, where the leaves break down and produce methane. Methane traps heat in the atmosphere and is one of the biggest contributors to global warming. What’s the solution? Don’t remove leaves from your yard. When leaves are left in place, they fertilize your grass and provide wildlife habitat for thousands of species.

Earthworms, pill bugs, and other creatures break down the leaves so that they don’t emit methane. The food sources of salamanders, toads, birds, chipmunks, and countless other species originate in this leaf layer. Leaves also protect the roots of plants and trees by suppressing weeds, providing warmth, and composting over time to return nutrients to the soil. Mulching leaves helps to break them down and reduces the volume blowing around your yard, so one solution is to use an electric, zero-emissions mulching lawnmower to make your yard look nice while preserving habitat for the creatures who depend on it. Or just be lazy and let those creatures do the mulching. Whatever you choose to do, please take into account the environment that depends on your actions: the plants, the animals, and the air above.

LCA’s 15th Kids Pumpkin Roll - 2021

In 2020 the pumpkin roll was canceled due to the pandemic, yet the pumpkin carving contest went forward in a Covid-safe way on the bike path. This year, due to rain the pumpkin contest was canceled, yet the pumpkin roll went forward on Halloween afternoon.

The LCA provided a sugar pumpkin for each contestant, and hot cider and cider donuts were available for kids, cheering parents, and neighbors walking by. A total of 42 kids rolled pumpkins in 6 heats to determine who would be the pumpkin roll champ of 2021. This year is unusual in that the first place honor went to the same guy who won in 2019, Mykola Vovevidka (remember the 2020 roll was canceled), so Mykola is a back-to-back winner! The second place honor went to Ben Dambrov. Congratulations to both!

Nine year old, Mykola shared some of his rolling strategies with the LCA. When choosing a pumpkin he looks for “one that is big and round!” What about stems? “It’s best to have no stem at all, if the pumpkin is exactly round. And everyone always rips the stems off, so I guess the stem doesn’t matter.” He doesn’t check the course for bumps. He says, “I know there are bumps so it won’t go exactly down the hill, and you can’t really avoid them, so I just let the pumpkin go and run after it.” He’s tried launching from the end of the starting line, but prefers starting at the center. As far as holding the pumpkin for launch he says, “I hold it on its side, not the bottom or the top, so that when it rolls, it’s rolling on its side, not bumping over the top and bottom.” According to Mykola, “the best part of the pumpkin roll is that you can let the pumpkin roll at the start, and then watch it and run after it down the hill. I like that I do the pumpkin roll with my friends.” Mykola’s brother who is 12 won first place in his heat this year, so Mykola says, he’s a winner, too!

In Memoriam

Arlene Hines loved Leeds. She enjoyed walking and stopping to talk with people. She hand-delivered the LCA newsletters door-to-door for many years. Arlene knew the neighborhood kids and every dog’s name. As a widow living alone, she was happily drawn into her Leeds community and thankful to be part of it. Arlene never missed an LCA pizza party, pumpkin party or ice cream social. At the block parties held on the Village Green she would always show up with a basket of candy dangling from her arm ready to offer the sweets to the kids.



Arlene rocking her new Leeds hat

She cared about her neighbors and her neighbors cared about her. Arlene was included and looked after; doors were fixed, tub faucets were repaired, bouquets of lilacs were delivered, rides were given, and invitations to neighbor’s holiday parties were extended and accepted.

In late September, when neighbors learned of her passing after a long illness, an impromptu candlelight gathering was held in her driveway on Leonard Street. More than 24 people came and shared memories of Arlene. The gathering ended with David Rondina singing *Can’t Help Falling in Love*, by Elvis Presley because along with loving Leeds, Arlene adored Elvis. She will be missed.