



LEEDS LETTER

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SEPT-OCT 2021

Smith College Landscape Studies Students Focus on Leeds

A note from the Smith Students: Hello! We are a group of seniors in the Landscape Studies program at Smith College. Informed by a variety of academic backgrounds, we share a passion for community-engaged landscape design. This semester, we are collaborating on a capstone design project. Working with the Leeds Civic Association, our goal in the coming weeks is to hear your vision for the village of Leeds. Guided by what we learn from this process, we will create a village-wide map and a portfolio of designs. Potential focus areas include the Hotel Bridge; circulation and river access; trails and plantings; and more!

Keep an eye out for upcoming engagement events, in-person or remote as conditions permit. We look forward to working with you!

A note from the LCA: We are thrilled that the village of Leeds will be the focus of the student's 2021 capstone project. The Smith seniors have an interest in wayfinding projects, learning how people get around or how they might get around, what ways do we want bikers and walkers to move through the village? The students are already becoming familiar Leeds. Jason Johnson and Karyn Nelson, LCA board members, will be touring different Leeds sites with the Smith students during the next few weeks. The students will create GIS mapping of Leeds in which parcel maps, flood maps, and trail maps can be overlaid. Which ever projects the students decide to focus on, the final product of print and digital landscape design portfolios could be presented by the LCA to the City for funding.

Japanese Stiltgrass – Aggressive Invasive Along Bike Path

Japanese Stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*) was once used as packing material to protect fragile porcelain and other stoneware shipped to the United States from Japan. It's leggy stilt-like roots help this invasive grass to spread quickly and it can get very dense and out-compete understory plant species and even tree seedlings. Each plant drops thousands of seeds in the Fall!

Laurie Sanders, local naturalist and co-director of Historic Northampton spotted several very large patches along the Grove Avenue bike path spur and by the Beaver Brook bridge. Unfortunately, the bike path provides an excellent means for stiltgrass's abundant tiny seeds to attach to shoes and paws and make their way into other natural areas and your backyards.

Tom Annese from the Planning Department flame-weeded the larger patches of stiltgrass. He also organized a small group of volunteers on a September morning to help pull some outlier populations from the bike path edges. Thank you, Jason Johnson, Penny Geis, Matt Verson and Heidi Stevens.

Once you know how to identify Japanese Stiltgrass, remove it by gently pulling out each stem and placing them in a plastic bag for disposal. For more information about identifying and removing stiltgrass here is a link to a Youtube video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lvijZw6AW0&t=167s>



Young Stiltgrass



Stiltgrass stem



Stiltgrass roots

Surprise on the Bike Path by Heidi Stevens

Henri had weakened, the rain had paused, yet the storm was still hanging over Leeds. A morning calm filled the damp, empty bike path north of Mulberry Street. Tree trunks and rocks were darkened by the previous night's rain, moss and leaves were more vivid green. In this landscape a solo figure squatted near a rock, focused and still. I didn't know what he was working on. Even though I interrupted his concentration, he was happy to address my curiosity and pointed me toward a singular stone across the bike path and the impossibility of its position blew my mind – The large stone was balanced point-side down on an existing stone! The sight of it immediately conjured up an intense feeling of happiness and awe. The stone balancer, Solvi, and I chatted for a bit, I snapped a few photos, hopped back on my bike and left marveling at his art form.

I returned to the same spot on the bike path about 90 minutes later and Solvi was further down the trail quietly working. He had completed balancing three more stones. This time, as I passed I left him in peace with his process.

I wanted to know more about how he does it but now I appreciate that part of the magic of coming upon a balanced stone is wondering how such a feat of silent beauty is possible. Solvi balanced nine stones along the bike path that morning. He said the stones he balances weigh anywhere from less than a pound to maybe 80 at the heaviest. Many of the stones he placed along the bike path withstood the heavy rains that Henri dumped later that evening. No stone, however, could stand a squirrel brushing past or the touch of the overly curious. Was the rock balancing on it's own? The answer...Yes, they were. One of Solvi's stones is still standing on the bike path near the intersection of the hairpin turn from Grove Avenue. If you have a chance, check it out...but don't touch!

UPCOMING EVENTS

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28
PRELIMINARY ELECTION

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 12
7:00 - 8:00 p.m.
LCA MONTHLY MEETING
Outside, behind Leeds School

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13,
LAST DAY TO REGISTER FOR NOVEMBER
MUNICIPAL ELECTION

SATURDAY
OCT 30
4:30 - 8:00

LEEDS
PUMPKIN
PARTY



PUMPKIN
ROLL

2021

Corner of
Upland Rd. and Chestnut St.

Last year's party was held on the bike path without a pumpkin roll or food and it was still a great success. The annual LCA sponsored party brings Leeds neighbors together and provides an opportunity to have fun as a community and flex our creativity! And this year, the much loved pumpkin roll is back!

Due to Covid-19, food will remain on the "back burner" again this year. A party without food harkens back to the pumpkin party's origin in 1997 when folks focused on carving pumpkins in secret, dropping them off in paper bags or with coverings, and gathering at party time to mingle, vote for favorites and cheer on the prize ceremony. Makes for good memories!

If you are a fan of this event, please come to the October 12th LCA meeting and share your ideas! Or, email the LCA about how you would like to help:
LeedsCivicAssoc@gmail.com.

Time to start thinking about
what to carve or sculpt!



Pictured above is the artist, Solvi and some of the balanced stones. Solvi lives in New Hampshire and was in Leeds visiting his mom and sister.

Green Tip: Stoves by Amy Stamm

In this era of planned obsolescence, it is no longer a given that your stove will last a lifetime. Instead, the average lifespan of a modern stove is 13-15 years. So, if you find yourself in the market for a new stove, please consider purchasing an induction stove instead of a gas stove. Gas stoves are bad for both your health and the environment. Burning gas produces nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, and particulates, risk factors for asthma, heart disease, and other illnesses. In terms of their environmental impact, gas stoves are a source of global warming through the greenhouse gases they emit and the unburned methane they leak. In addition, they are only 40% efficient vs. an induction stove's 84% efficiency in terms of delivering energy directly to the pans cooking your food. Induction stoves heat through electromagnetism, a process that is much faster than gas heating and much safer because induction doesn't require heating coils. For maximum efficiency, power your new induction stove with solar panels, and you will be helping playing an important role in our communal climate mitigation movement.

That Ole Gang Of Mine by Edna Greene

Growing up in Leeds in the 1950s and 60s, post WW2, the Baby Boom era was in full mode. With approximately 4-6 children per household, a conservative estimate of just between Reservoir Rd and Water Street, within a 10-year age range there were, wait for it.....67 kids! This count doesn't even include the rest of Leeds, Main Street, Yankee Hill, Irish Town etc... This made for an enormous number of agemates.

In 2018 an idea was started by Joel Emerick, who called 'Red' Greene and the ball began to roll. Now in 2021 a core group of about 10-13 "Leeds guys" as they have always been known, now in their 70s, meet once a month at the Williamsburg Snack Shack Restaurant for breakfast. Covid 19 did put a pause on their breakfasts for a while, but they began again when it appeared safe to do so. Never at a loss for stories and escapades of their past, the group delves into the Leeds of their time, and all come away with smiles that last until their next breakfast. Some come from surrounding towns, and those from as far away as Florida and Tennessee have been able to join their old friends while they are in the area visiting their families. Whether they are reminiscing about hanging out at the Leeds Reservoir as teenagers or meeting at 'The Center' every night, there is never a lack of the "remember when" stories. They talk about their old cars, many of which they wish they still had. They remember going to Sarazzin's Store or the Fire Station on Main Street often, or meeting up for a pick-up football or baseball game. They have also talked about the old and new Leeds Schools they attended in the 1950s. It has been chuckled about how when fishing season would open in April, they would try to plot the route of the trout stocking truck hoping for a great catch. The group is never at a loss of topics when it comes to growing up in Leeds. It wasn't necessarily Mayberry RFD, but it was otherwise a great little village to grow up in, with many, many friends and memories.

Summer Clean-Up at the Mill River Greenway-Leeds

The "Unknown Owner" property has a new name: Mill River Greenway-Leeds. The City owns the parcel and LCA holds the conservation restriction. The management partnership of 2021 was a huge improvement from past years when just a few LCA volunteers cleaned up. The 2021 summer clean-up collaboration included volunteers from 3 groups; LCA, Friends of Northampton Trails (FNT), which is headed by former Leeds resident and former LCA president, George Kohout; Inclusive Group (IG). The field worker from the Planning Department, Tom Annese disposed of the collected trash. Groups rotated every third weekend for clean ups. Of the 15 weekends from Memorial Day through Labor Day, it rained for 8 and was clear for 7. The river tested high for E. coli three times and warning notices were posted twice. The 2021 level of trash was less than the past four years, yet matched 2016. There was less foot traffic--most likely due to bad weather. In total the three groups collected 25, 30-gallon bags of trash; 5 small grills and broke up 19 fire pits.

The fact that many people stepped up to help steward the Mill River Greenway-Leeds shows its value to the local and greater community. Many thanks to FNT volunteers: Reid Bertone-Johnson and his daughter, Anna; Wendy and John Sinton; Karen Beyel; Benjamin Spencer; and George Kohout. And a big thank you to IG volunteers who brought along their families to help: Ray Sylvester, Kristen Elde, Meghan Steed, Shanna Fishel, Kelly Silliman, Jenna and Tim Recuber, Hannah Durant, and Dale West. And finally to our LCA volunteers: Julie Akeret, Steve McDonough, Shawn Drewitz, Heidi Stevens, and Jason Johnson...Well done!

Tom Thumb Miniature Golf in Leeds by Ed Heon

In the 1930's a "Tom Thumb" miniature golf course flourished on the site of the present Florentine Manor. It was a franchise that provided all of the materials and equipment for the operation. The Leeds franchise was operated by a partnership of local friends Les Heon, Pat Lamica, Joe Laurion and Ed Ryan.

Garnet Carter of Georgia was a man of many business talents. Among them being responsible for the American introduction of mini-golf, which he called "Tom Thumb Golf" after the English folk character.

Carter's vision was spurred by the already thriving fairytale gardens at Rock City, Georgia. Instead of simply adding putting greens, his idea added obstacles, including hollow logs to hit the ball through, and he added fairy tale characters throughout the course that added to the excitement for the entire family.



Before the "Florentine Manor" houses were built, this open field at the base of Florence Street held the Tom Thumb miniature golf course franchise, in the 1930's.

He also happened to be the first to franchise the sport, leading the way for similar courses throughout the nation. By 1930, it was America's newest craze. It is believed that 50,000 courses were built to accommodate the growth, including the one in Leeds. As the world depression deepened, unemployment, poverty and bankruptcy made people feel helpless. The Tom Thumb golf course helped reverse these feelings. You became Gulliver in Lilliput, a Titan towering over the tiny fairways. 25 cents gave you egress to a wonderland, a fantastical world far removed from the worries of real life.

Eventually the depression even made the 25 cents to play the Tom Thumbs difficult, the fad was waning, and by the mid-thirties most of the franchises had closed, including the one in Leeds.



Information for this article was sourced from the February 9, 2017 issue of Smithsonian Magazine. Related information is from a USA Today article dated June 11, 2014.