















The Associated Press

**FUNERAL FOR EVACUEE** — Relatives carry the coffin of a three-year-old baby as evacuees leave for safer areas Sunday in Angeles City, Philippines, which was covered by mud from the eruption of Mount Pinatubo. The baby died of fever.

## 'Fighting words' ban upheld

**STORRS (AP)** — Students at the University of Connecticut face disciplinary action if they use derogatory language that is likely to provoke a violent response toward other students.

University trustees on Friday voted to retain a ban on "fighting words" in the school code. The ban includes derogatory references to race, religion, sex, disability and other personal characteristics.

University trustees initially were concerned that the ban may be interpreted as an infringement on students' First Amendment rights of free speech. But on Friday they concluded it was constitutional.

The university first moved to prohibit offensive speech after a 1987 incident in which Asian-American students were taunted and spat on. Then-UConn President John T. Caston III issued a statement prohibiting "derogatory names, inappropriately directed laughter" and "inconsiderate jokes" or "conscious exclusion from conversations."

UConn modified the rule in 1989 after a student filed a federal lawsuit challenging the code. Nina W. Wu, a student from Rockville, sued after she was expelled from her dormitory because of a sign on her door that warned "honors" and "timbers" would be "shot on sight."

The university agreed to change its conduct code after U.S. District Judge Peter C. Dorsey warned UConn it might be overstepping its bounds by prohibiting offensive speech.

The revised code limited the ban to "face-to-face use of 'fighting words' likely to provoke violence."

But one UConn trustee last month wondered whether even the revised code goes too far in restricting speech. Friday he was satisfied with the "fighting words" rule.

"It's difficult to describe what (fighting words) are," said Frank D. Rich Jr. of Stamford. "But I guess we know them when we hear them."

Christopher Long, a UConn senior and president of Undergraduate Student Government, said he supports any effort "to promote understanding and unity (among) the student body... as long as it doesn't infringe on freedom of speech. The students I have talked to feel pretty comfortable with the ban on."

The clash between such codes and First Amendment guarantees of free speech has led to legal battles at some of the nation's campuses, where officials have debated what kind of language one student may use toward another.

## Sununu defends limo trip

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — White House Chief of Staff John Sununu is defending his use of a White House limousine and driver to take him to a rare stamp auction in New York last week and run other errands in Manhattan.

"The White House counsel said that that travel was both proper and appropriate," Sununu said on ABC-TV's "This Week With David Brinkley" show.

"My job is a seven-day-a-week, 24-hour-a-day job. That's why I have a door-to-door car and driver assigned to me."

Newsweek magazine said in its June 24 edition, which goes on sale today, that Sununu had consulted his staff but not White House Counsel C. Boyden Gray before using a limousine to take him to New York last Wednesday.

The chauffeur drove 175 miles to Washington alone while Sununu attended a Republican fund-raiser in New Jersey, later flying back to Washington aboard a corporate jet, the magazine said.

Government regulations allow Sununu some personal use of White House cars, but say he must declare the cost as income.

After Sununu was rebuked by President Bush last month for using military aircraft for personal trips, the White House adopted a new policy requiring him to get approval in advance from Gray for airplane trips that mix official business and personal or political travel.

But Sununu said Sunday he doesn't have to check in advance with Gray for automobile travel.

"Boysen has said that it was both proper and appropriate," Sununu said. "I have to be able to communicate, to work on sensitive papers, to coordinate the White House activities, even while I'm traveling."

## BNE got help from state bank

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — The tottering Bank of New England in Boston turned to its sister bank, Connecticut Bank & Trust Co., in late 1989 for billions in emergency loans, according to a House Banking Committee report.

The newly released report outlines the events that brought down both the Boston and Hartford banks and their parent company, Bank of New England Corp. last January.

It portrays the Bank of New England, flagship of the bank holding company, as starving for cash as the real estate economy plummeted in the fall of 1989. And it shows the better-regarded Connecticut Bank & Trust propping up BNE to its own detriment.

"To combat this shortage of funds, BNE turned to one of the parent company's banking subsidiaries, Connecticut Bank & Trust for assistance," according to the report.

In a move common in the world of banking but here charged with the urgency of an institution on the brink of failure, the Connecticut bank went to the "overnight funds" market for cash. Working through the Federal Reserve, CBT took out

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## In Brief . . .

**Killer executed by injection**

**HUNTSVILLE, Texas (AP)** — A killer who had been on death row for 17 years was put to death by injection early today for the murder of an antique-gun collector.

Jerry Joe Bird, 44, was pronounced dead at 12:21 a.m., 12 minutes after the lethal drugs began to flow.

"Go ahead. Start things rolling," he said after mouthing "Hi" to his mother. He declined to give a final statement.

Bird was the 40th person put to death in Texas and the 147th in the nation since the U.S. Supreme Court in 1976 let states resume use of the death penalty. Texas has executed more people than any other state.

**Volcano's wrath starts to cool**

**MANILA, Philippines (AP)** — Thousands of U.S. military dependents were leaving bases covered with the ash of Mount Pinatubo today, but Filipinos confronted monumental chores that began with securing clean drinking water.

Raymundo Puno-Baybay, director of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology, said the volcano was "simmering down" after a week of violent eruptions.

The Philippine Red Cross said at least 101 people have been killed since the 4,795-foot volcano began spewing ash, steam and super-heated rocks June 9 for the first time in 600 years.

Most of the victims were killed in a huge explosion Saturday that dumped ash as far as 375 miles away. The damage was aggravated by rains, and scores of buildings collapsed in nearby towns and cities.

At least 20 people were missing today. Relief efforts have been complicated by impassable roads and ash clouds that grounded aircraft all weekend.

**Stricken teen dies after graduation**

**CHICAGO (AP)** — An obese, cancer-stricken teen-ager who attended his graduation on a stretcher after winning a battle to be there died the next day.

Jim Stan, 18, who had an inoperable brain tumor, died Saturday at Holy Cross Hospital.

"He told me... that he'd reached his goal..." said nurse Doris Johnson. "He said he was tired and he wanted everything over with."

One day earlier he had received a standing ovation from his 240 classmates when he picked up his diploma from Washington High School.

A month ago Principal Reginald Brown had banned Stan from the ceremony, saying his presence would be disruptive. But the principal relented after the ban was widely reported and students protested.

**China blasts papal honor**

**BEIJING (AP)** — China today accused Pope John Paul II of meddling in its internal affairs by appointing a Chinese priest as a Roman Catholic cardinal.

The pope disclosed late last month that he had secretly named then Bishop Ignatius Gong Pinmei a cardinal 12 years ago, while the former prelate of Shanghai was still in prison.

Gong, also spelled Kung, spent 30 years in jail for refusing to denounce the Roman Catholic Church in Rome. He now lives in the United States.

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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19, 1991

7:00 P.M.

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The Town is eligible to receive \$435,000 this year from the Federal Community Development Block Grant Program. The money can be spent in a variety of ways provided it benefits low and moderate income persons or helps prevent or alleviate slums or blight. Some examples of eligible activities include providing a pay town service, making buildings accessible to disabled persons, rehabilitating homes and apartments, restoring or preserving historic buildings, conducting planning studies, constructing public improvements or facilities, and buying property.

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**Giving the Past a Future**

**CHENEY HALL**

1867

This is a free souvenir edition published by the Manchester Herald June 17, 1991.

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 1991

# Cheney Hall: a landmark reborn

*The restoration: dedication, love, and pigeon droppings*

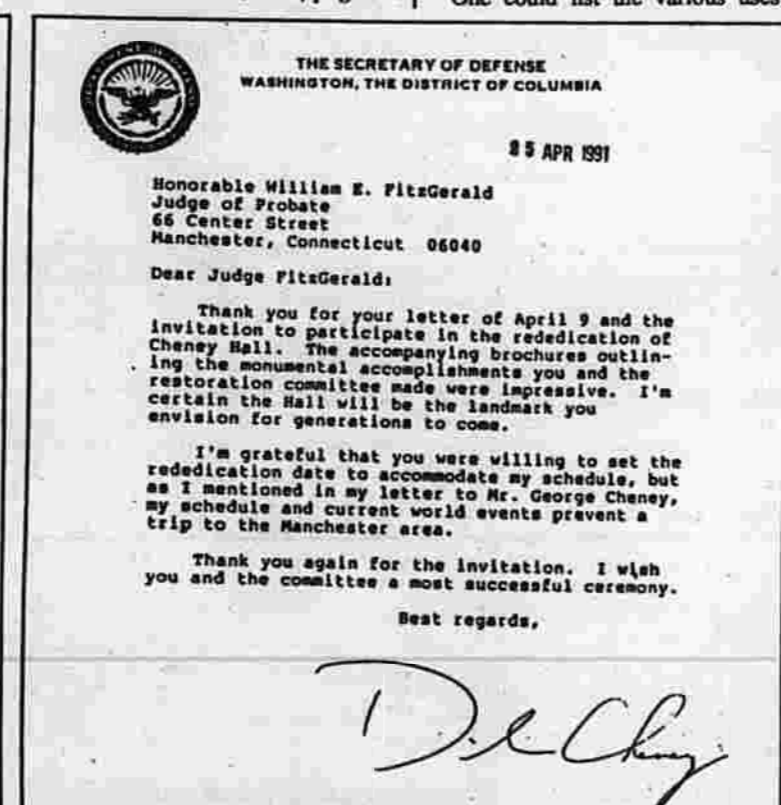
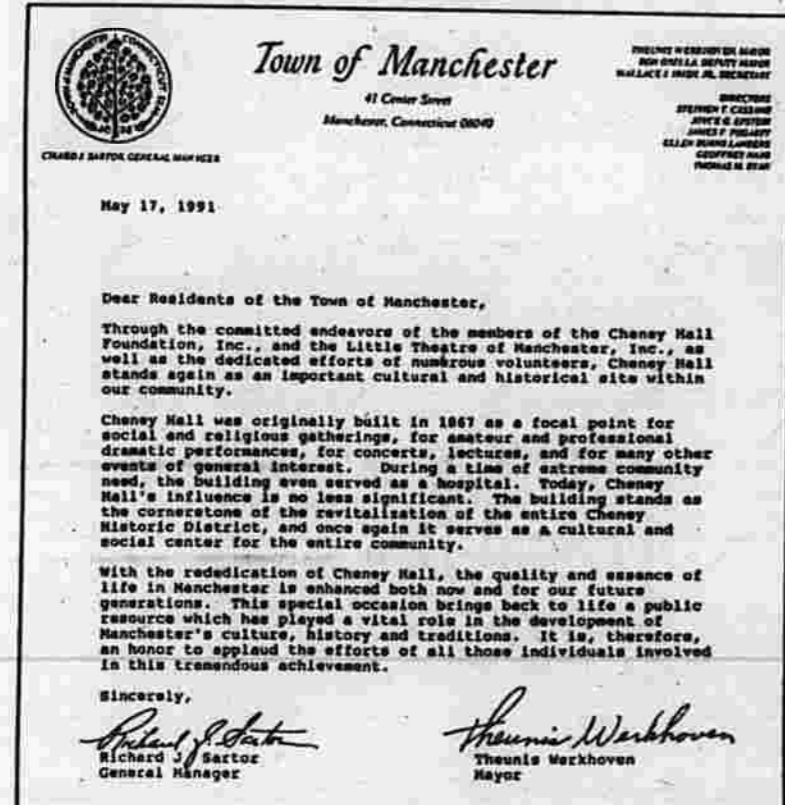
By ALEX GIARELLI  
Manchester Herald

The restoration of Cheney Hall began as a dream that some people feared would turn out to be a nightmare, but over the course of more than ten years, the enthusiasts have persevered and the hall is ready to resume its role as

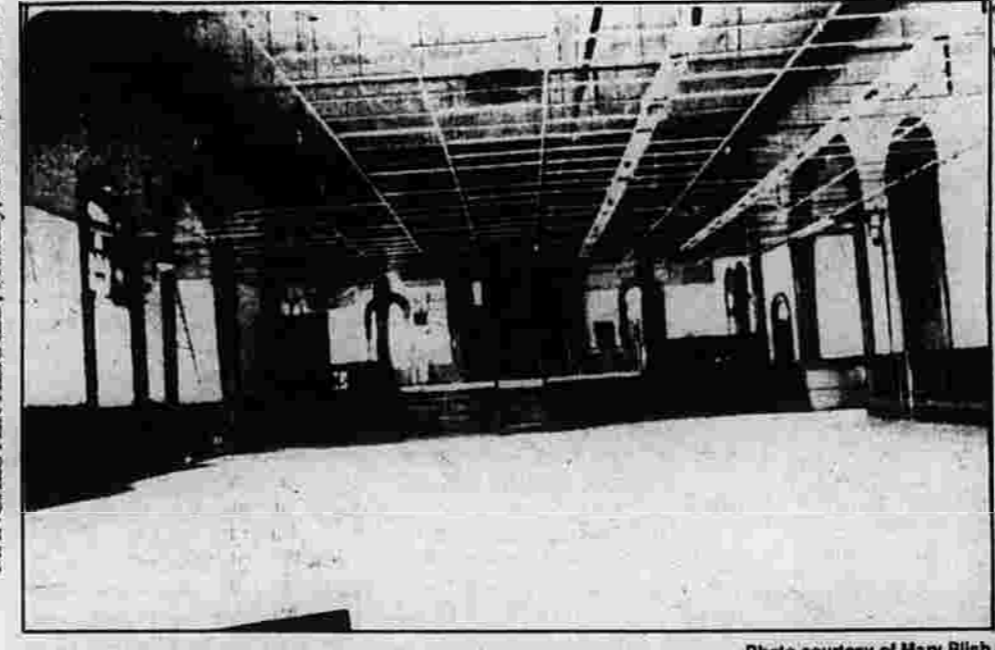
*Hall history: romantic days past*

By DAVID LAMMEY  
Manchester Herald

It is difficult to summarize the history of a place with so much history. One could list the various uses



that Cheney Hall has seen, and spend a long day doing it: as a dance hall, a banquet hall, a town hall, a library, an armory, a church, an opera house, a theatre, a school, a lecture hall, a hospital... even as a morgue. And that is a partial list. However, as the town grew, and other buildings sprouted up, the hall saw much of its use delegated to other locations. Eventually, it closed down altogether. But in its "heyday" — from 1867 to 1950, it was quite a place. Many happy souls passed through its arches and into its auditorium in those days — and who knows what sights they saw? Who knows what stories they knew? The young lady attending her first ball with her chaperone in 1905, who knows how she felt on that night? Or the old Civil War veteran, his uniform stiff

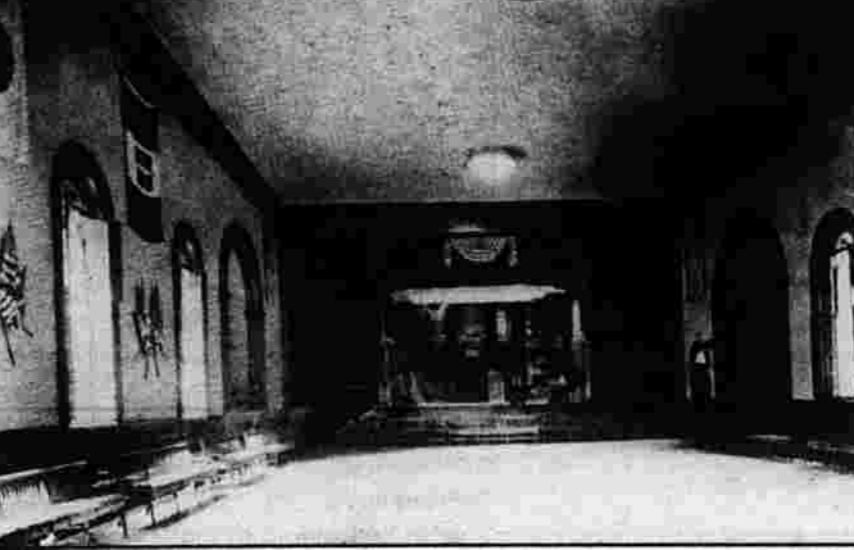


HALL INTERIOR, 1982 — This is how it looked just after the restoration effort had begun. The roof had been lowered by the fabric store that occupied the building until 1976.

## Project

gone to reclaim. The idea of restoring it with tax money was explored and rejected. Early in 1982, an expert said it could not serve well as a theater. But leaders of the Little Theatre of Manchester disagreed. Together with members of the Cheney Hall Foundation and many others who devoted themselves to the cause, they have worked their way through doubts and frustrations toward the reopening. In 1987 a water pipe broke, flooding the basement with about six feet of water. Later a hidden heating tunnel was found. It has been stuffed with asbestos back in the days when that material was considered innocent. It was discovered that the interior woodwork, a much admired detail of the hall, was not one wood but many, all made to look uniform by someone's art or by the passage of time. There was a problem making the hall accessible to handicapped people without doing violence to architectural history. But all the problems were solved. John Barnini and the estate of Leon Podrove gave the building to the town late in 1981, setting the movement in motion. In April of the next year, the Little Theatre of Manchester agreed to use the hall for its theatrical performances and to manage it as center for other performances and for community events. At about the same time the Cheney Hall Commission, later to become the Cheney Hall Foundation, was formed to represent the town in the restoration. Soon afterward, William Bayer, a Manchester engineer who volunteered his services, looked over the building and decided that despite a number of weaknesses, the hall was still structurally sound. One of the first chores was to clean the dirt and pigeon droppings that had accumulated over the years when the hall was idle. Much of that unpleasant work was done by volunteers. Another early job was temporary repairs to the roof to halt deterioration. At the end of 1982, the Glastonbury architectural firm of Malmfeldt Associates was chosen to design the renovation. About a year later, Metro Builders was awarded the contract for the first stage of major renovation, the exterior work. The job included new roofing, brick repair, replacing gutters, and replacing shingles in the same elaborate pattern used when the building was constructed in 1867. When the work was done, Cheney Hall looked proud again as it had looked for many years, but the interior work had to be delayed while some funds and pledges for funding accumulated. The next contract went to the Andrew An-

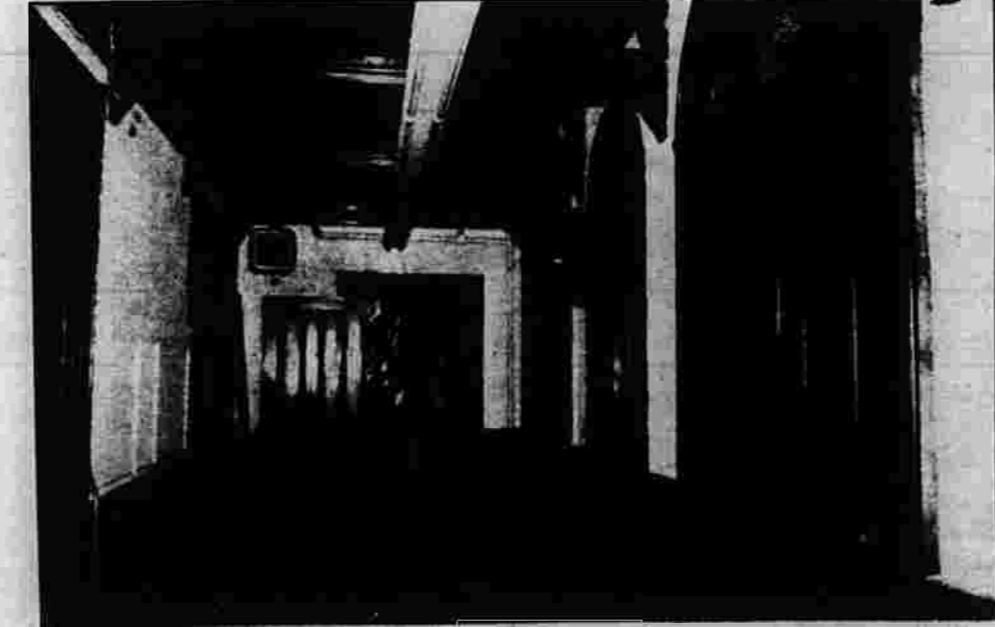
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\* Cheney Hall was donated to the Town of Manchester in 1981 by John Barnini and The Estate of Leon Podrove.



FRONT LOBBY, 1982 — Note the fluorescent lighting, also a remnant from the fabric store.

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### Project

From Page 3A

saldi Co. Analdi workers did some demolition work, and put a new floor in most of the basement, which has become a public area in the restoration.

Conyers Construction Co. went to work on the interior in July last year and, despite a few of the setbacks that always arise in a renovation project, has kept close to its schedule, making way for a preview June 15 for the many people who have had a part in the movement and for a rededication ceremony June 29.

But in one sense, Cheney Hall has not really been closed. A number of events have taken place there since the decision was made to restore it to its past beauty and vitality.

One of those events took place in June of 1989. A gala was held in the hall with a \$50-dollar ticket price. The gourmet dinner was cooked in a tent outside the hall and loaves were outside as well. But it was an elegant event, nonetheless, and participants enjoyed a cabaret performance by LTM.

About a year later, a vignette of the past was presented when "The Great Locomotive Chase," a Buster Keaton classic silent movie was shown with a piano accompaniment scored and played by Patrick Miller.

In the fall of 1985, Rose Jackson, a real estate broker who is a member of the Cheney Hall Foundation, included the hall on a tour of homes with the proceeds going toward the renovation.

In 1986, the Hartford Architectural Conservancy held its first Rehab Fair at which experts in rehabilitation displayed their craftsmanship.

And while work has been in progress over the past months, a number of visitors have been invited to the site, and some others have in-



Gary Tucker/Manchester Herald

**GENEROUS WORKER** — Peter Gedrys from Architectural Refinishing in Old Saybrook sprays a coat of stain on the original front doors of the hall. Meticulous care was taken to prepare the surface properly.

visited themselves to peer through the doors to check on progress of the community happening.

They have restored the main hall, in the basement, they have built a rehearsal room which will serve as a rehearsal room, a theater workshop beneath the stage, toilet rooms, a dressing room and a caterers' kitchen.

Conyers workers have enlarged and modernized the stage, restoring and relocating the proscenium arch.



Gary Tucker/Manchester Herald

**GRAND DONATION** — Judge William Fitzgerald, Robert Weiss, and Bonnie Barnini Krawiec, left to right, admire the piano donated from the estate of Lillian G. Grant by Elsie Emery. The piano, which now sits to the left of the stage, is a Mason-Hamlin grand. Miss Grant was very active in local real estate business.

### Historic details

Original organ, clock, velvet to return

By DAVID LAMMEY  
Manchester Herald

Among the hundreds of details the Cheney Hall Foundation and The Little Theatre of Manchester tended to during the restoration, one was the question of what to put inside the hall.

Thus began the effort, a story in itself, to bring back as much of the original instruments and artifacts as possible.

To restore the organ, an 1866 E. & G.C. Hook model which had been in the hall since it was built, required an operation that is perhaps best described as a microcosm of the entire project.

"Micro" is right. The organ, to be extracted from its chestnut frame in the rear stage wall, had to be taken apart, piece by piece. Each piece was catalogued, spread out over the hall floor, and after a few days, the entire hall, all 3200 square feet, was covered with organ parts.

The job was finished in five days by the Andover Organ Co. of Melham, Mass. The company took the parts to their workshop and commenced the restoration. The organ is expected to be

returned to its place by next summer, according to LTM Executive Director, Mary Blish.

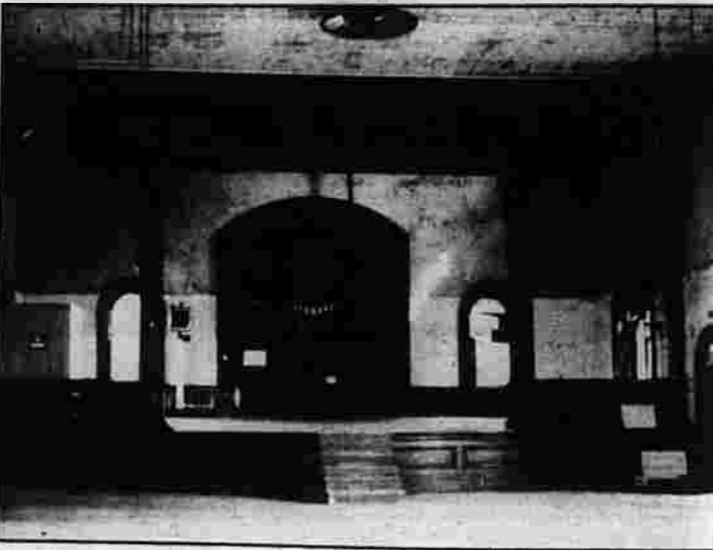
"It was quite a job," Blish says of the extraction. "I mean, this is no Hammond organ. This is quite an organ."

Another project involved the velvet curtains gracing the stage. The velvet is the same type first used in the original curtain, and was donated by the Francis Ceruti Company, the last owners of Cheney Mills, in 1982.

The liaison between the restoration organizers and Ceruti was John Robinson of Manchester, who worked for the Cheney Brothers for 43 years. Without his efforts, Blish says, the curtains may never have been obtained.

Another important piece was the original grandfather clock, which has been kept on the second floor of the Savings Bank of Manchester for safekeeping all these years.

It will be returned to the hall by the fall and placed in the green room on the lower level, Blish says. The clock was donated by the family of Edgar Clarke, and the green room will be dedicated in his memory.



Photos courtesy of Mary Blish

**ORGANIC CHEMISTRY** — Or, how to dissolve an organ in five days. Above, the organ and stage before restoration work; below, the organ has been removed piece by piece and spread out on the hall floor.



MANCHESTER HERALD, Monday, June 17, 1991—5A

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## Financing the project

By RICK SANTOS  
Manchester Herald

MANCHESTER — Almost a decade has passed since a group of industrious volunteers set out to restore the old and neglected Cheney Hall building. And now that the project is almost completed, the people responsible for raising funds for the restoration can probably take a break. Right?

Wrong. "It's not over yet," says Mary Bliah, who is one of the chief fund raisers for the restoration project. "It's not over because we still have to achieve paying off the loan."

The loan, which is for \$1.2 million, accounts for less than half of the bills generated from the \$2.5 million restoration project.

Of the remaining \$1.3 million, Bliah and other volunteers have raised slightly more than \$700,000 through federal and state grants. The first of that grant money was used to recondition the outside of the hall just after The Little Theatre of Manchester Inc. began renting the building from the town in 1982.

The initial grants — \$60,000 from the state Historical Commission and \$45,000 from the state Department of Economic Development — came from the state via the federal government.

That money, plus almost \$400,000 in private donations, was used by the Cheney Hall Foundation Inc. to pay for the half million in exterior renovations that were completed by late 1984.

The foundation is made up of volunteers who oversee the project and are appointed by the town's Board of Directors. Bliah, as a representative of the Little Theatre, assists the foundation in attaining its goals, which she describes as common with the Little Theatre as well as the town.

"The project will perpetuate a lot

of community activity, which enriches community life and makes living here that much better," she said.

Considered at one time as the most significant cultural place in Manchester, Cheney Hall — after the renovations are completed — will be rented for various functions, but used primarily as the home for the Little Theatre.

For its part in the revitalization, the town will continue leasing the building to the Little Theatre at \$1 per year; the same amount the group has paid since the then dilapidated building was donated to the town in 1982.

Two years later, when the outside had been refurbished, work progressed in such areas as pouring the concrete for the new basement floor and renovating water and electrical utilities.

However, from 1986 to 1988, work was slowed to a minimum while several state agencies boggled over the design plans, thereby holding up the project. The agencies were involved because state grant money was again being directed to the project.

Bliah and the others had garnered support from some state agencies that provided the initial grants. The Historical Commission contributed another \$400,000, and Economic Development contributed an additional \$200,000.

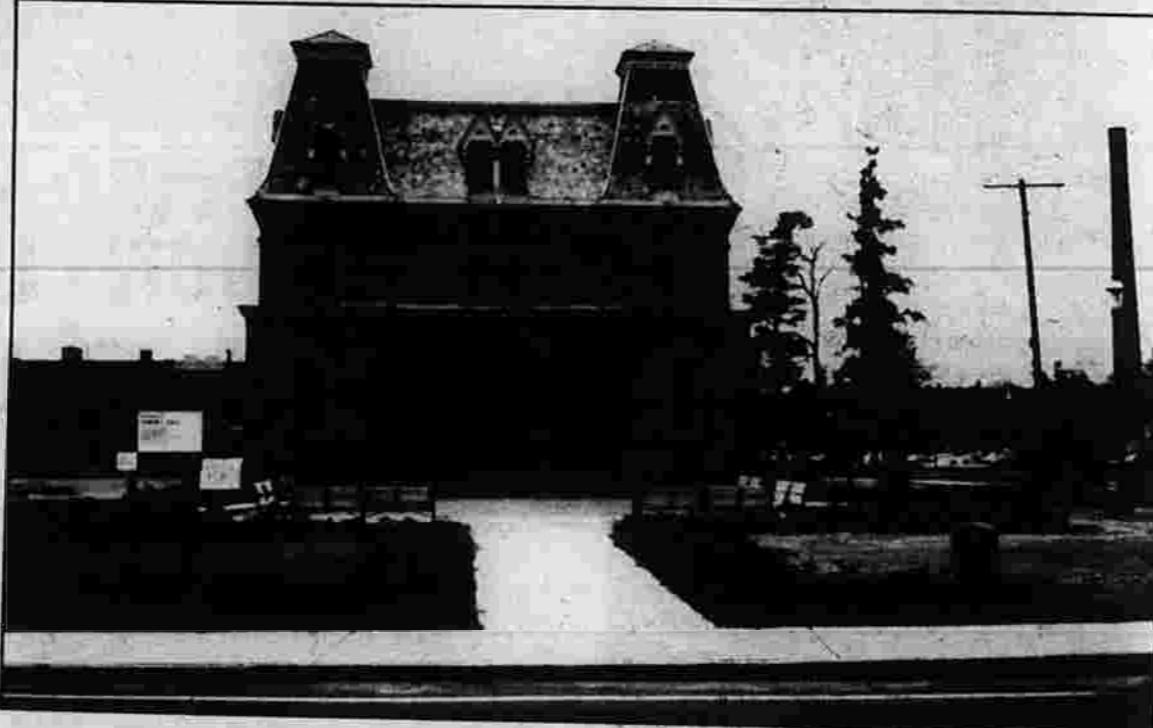
By 1989, the issues affecting the plans — primarily making the hall handicapped accessible — had been resolved.

By July of 1990, the Conyers Construction Co. of Manchester began renovating the interior of the soon-to-be-completed hall.

Besides donations from the state and federal governments, the hall has been the beneficiary of a \$100,000 grant from the Hartford Foundation of Public Giving



THEN AND NOW — The above picture shows the hall as originally built. Later, two small additions were built at the ends of the arched porch, as can be seen in the bottom picture, which is how the hall looks today.



## Future uses of the hall

By HAROLD C. SHAYER  
Manchester Herald

Cheney Hall is born again, but not as just another brownstone specimen or 19th century novelty. The \$2.5 million restoration is really a renaissance — the second life of a center once vital to the cultural and social center of Manchester.

"We didn't want a museum," says Judge William Fitzgerald, who along with the Cheney Hall Foundation and The Little Theatre of Manchester, spearheaded the drive for restoration in 1978. "I'm happy to report everything turned out the way we hoped it would."

Restored to its original architectural glory, but redesigned to be handicap-accessible, the hall auditorium will be the new setting for all upcoming LTM productions.

It will also play host to weddings and dances, banquets and ballads, lectures and concerts, political rallies and barbershop quartets as well. It will become an exhibition hall for area art and historical organizations. Its 400 seats, not permanently fixed, are easily moved to accommodate the multiple use.

The lower level will offer two large meeting rooms, a catering-kitchen area, a reception room and lobby, LTM's dressing rooms and offices as well as a scenery storage shop. A loft below the expansive Mansard roof will provide added space for scenery storage.

The rentals of the auditorium and meeting rooms will generate the necessary revenue for LTM to operate and maintain the hall and there will be a full-time rental agent

on the premises. "This is a start-up venture," says Mary Bliah of LTM. "We have nothing to compare it to."

The unique nature of the combination theater-community center has made it difficult, Bliah says, to establish rental fees as of now. Costs in such areas as mechanical and custodial services are still unknown. Consequently, there will be no reservations taken until the fall, after all the finishing touches have been completed.

The hall deed is specific in which groups get priority for hall use. LTM tops the list and other events must be set around their play schedule and rehearsals. The deed also specifies that 14 days of use each be allotted annually to UNICO, the Italian organization, the Rotary Club, the Temple Beth Shalom, and general town use. The hall is available for public and private events only when there is no conflict of schedule with these groups.

There are already tentative reservations booked well into 1992, and if they are any indication, the hall should be occupied over 90 percent of the year.

The town has a 30-year history of joint ventures with non-profit groups. The leasing of unused municipal properties to financially stable groups has produced three museums as well as educational and community services for retarded and handicapped citizens.

"Cheney Hall is a unique and valuable property," says Robert Weiss, town manager when the restoration project began in 1978. "For many years we tried to acquire the property, but couldn't get it." Weiss says. "Getting it as a gift was the key that turned the project on."

### THE CHENEY HALL FOUNDATION

and  
THE LITTLE THEATRE OF MANCHESTER  
wish to thank the many Manchester Families that have donated funds and services for the Benefactors Preview on June 15, 1991

and  
The Cheney Hall Rededication Ceremony on June 29, 1991

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Oct. 31, Nov. 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16.  
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## History

From Page 2A

and musty, what did he say to his fellow veterans gathered there as they gathered at the banquet? Most of them are gone now, and their stories have gone with them. But there are at least a handful of those still alive who remember the hall as it was, in the days when it was the center of social activity in a small company town called Manchester.

**The History**  
In 1863 as the Civil War continued for its third year, the Cheney Brothers Silk Manufacturing Company, which then had about 200 employees, adapted a section of one of their mills for performances by the South Manchester Dramatic Association to benefit Soldier's Aid. According to a Hartford Courant article from the time, the "handsome hall" was "fitted up... with seating, scenery, footlights, and all the paraphernalia of a theatrical establishment."

The Cheneys must have liked the idea, for in 1867 they went ahead and built a real hall — Cheney Hall. It was designed by Hammett Billings, a Boston architect, in the French Second Empire Style with medieval and renaissance characteristics. Outside, it had a mansard roof, segmented and full circle windows, with gold curtains, and brick and brownstone arches.

Inside was a spacious assembly and ballroom, with a stage at one end and a gallery at the other. Ornate woodwork of golden oak was carved in an elaborate Victorian style. Gas chandeliers, wire velvet curtains and a "delightfully springy" dance floor, laid in herringbone fashion, were highlights. It was not designed to be only an opera house, as was the Goodspeed Opera House in Haddam, or only a meeting place, as was the town hall, which was built later. It was designed to accommodate as many



**HORSE AND BUGGY DAYS** — This is an artist's conception of the hall the way it looked circa 1900. Notice the railroad depot across Elm St. to the right. It was built in 1880 as part of the South Manchester Railroad, which ran all the way to Hartford, carrying visitors to the hall. For example, the silk exhibit in 1908 saw thousands of visitors who came mostly by train. The depot was moved to Forest St. in 1910.

uses as it could — and in grand style. Particular attention must have been paid to its acoustics, which are excellent. An actor's voice, or that of an orator, could be easily heard in any corner of the place. The rectangular shape of the auditorium helps in this respect. In short, the building was the most imposing of its kind in the Hartford area, and word of its wonders spread all over New England.

**Before 1900**  
At the building's opening ceremonies, Horace Greeley, the editor of the New York Tribune, returned often to the hall via the "Cheney Goat" — the South Manchester Railroad train that ran from Hartford to the depot across the hall on Elm St. In fact, that train brought visitors to the hall from all over the world — for although it was privately owned, the building was virtually a public facility. Clergymen such as Phillips Brooks, Henry Ward Beecher, and Horace Bushnell all preached there. Susan B. Anthony spoke there on women's rights.

Extra trains were provided for the folks who came to see "The Brides of Garry Owen," put on by St. Mary's Church in celebration of St. Patrick's Day in 1884. And during the suffrage movement, hundreds of women came on the train to attend rallies at the hall. There is a 1906 issue of the Herald with a front page picture of ex-U.S. President Grover Cleveland sitting at the front table on the stage during a banquet. William H. Taft also came to the hall. And it is probable that Mark Twain visited the hall occasionally, since he was a good friend and regular visitor of the Cheneys. For an idea of some of the many events that took place in the late nineteenth century, see page 2A.

for original Herald articles covering the events. **1900-1918**  
At the turn of the century, the hall was as popular as ever. It continued to be used for any and all events that were deemed appropriate. The silk exhibit in 1908 attracted over 30,000 visitors. (See the story of that enormous spectacle on page 10A.) And minstrel shows, featuring performers in "blackface," were very popular at this time and for many years afterward. (See page 24A for a copy of a 1906 minstrel show program.) In "Silk Along Steel," Thomas R. Lewis, Jr. writes that in 1912, "a special train carried guests to the marriage, in Cheney Hall, of Ruth Cheney and Charles A. Goodwin. Please see HISTORY, page 12A.

## Historic district founded

One of the most important developments in Manchester's history was made possible through the efforts and initiative of John Sutherland, a professor of history at Manchester Community College. And that was the establishment of the Cheney Brothers National Historic Landmark District.

In studying the Cheney silk mill operations, Sutherland discovered that the factory buildings, working housing, the mansions and the Great Lawn all still existed substantially as they had in the last century.

Sutherland next spoke to (then) Mayor Stephen T. Ferry and the Manchester Board of Directors. He pointed out that Manchester was the only town where most of the complexes so common to New England still survived. He recommended that the town take steps to preserve this significant historic heritage.

As a result, an application was filed by the town with the federal government for an historic designation. And the Department of the Interior authorized the creation of its highest historic designation, namely a historic landmark district. That meant the area recommended for preservation was un-

dermined. There are only a few historic landmark districts in the country. Mayor Penny immediately called for the creation of an historic district commission to be charged with preserving and restoring the area as it appeared at the turn of the century, and finding viable economic uses for the buildings in the district. The directors of the town enacted an ordinance creating the commission in the spring of 1978. Judge William E. Fitzgerald became the commission chairman and served until January 1991.

Through the efforts of the commission and town manager Robert B. Weiss, major developers were attracted to the district. There are now approximately 970 apartments occupying the 1-1/3 million square feet of manufacturing space that existed in the mill buildings.

The principal streets have been restored and proper zoning protects the mill area, the exterior portion of the Great Lawn. The water housing is 90 percent intact, chiefly owner occupied and generally in excellent condition. Cheney Hall is situated in the center of the district and is its focal point.

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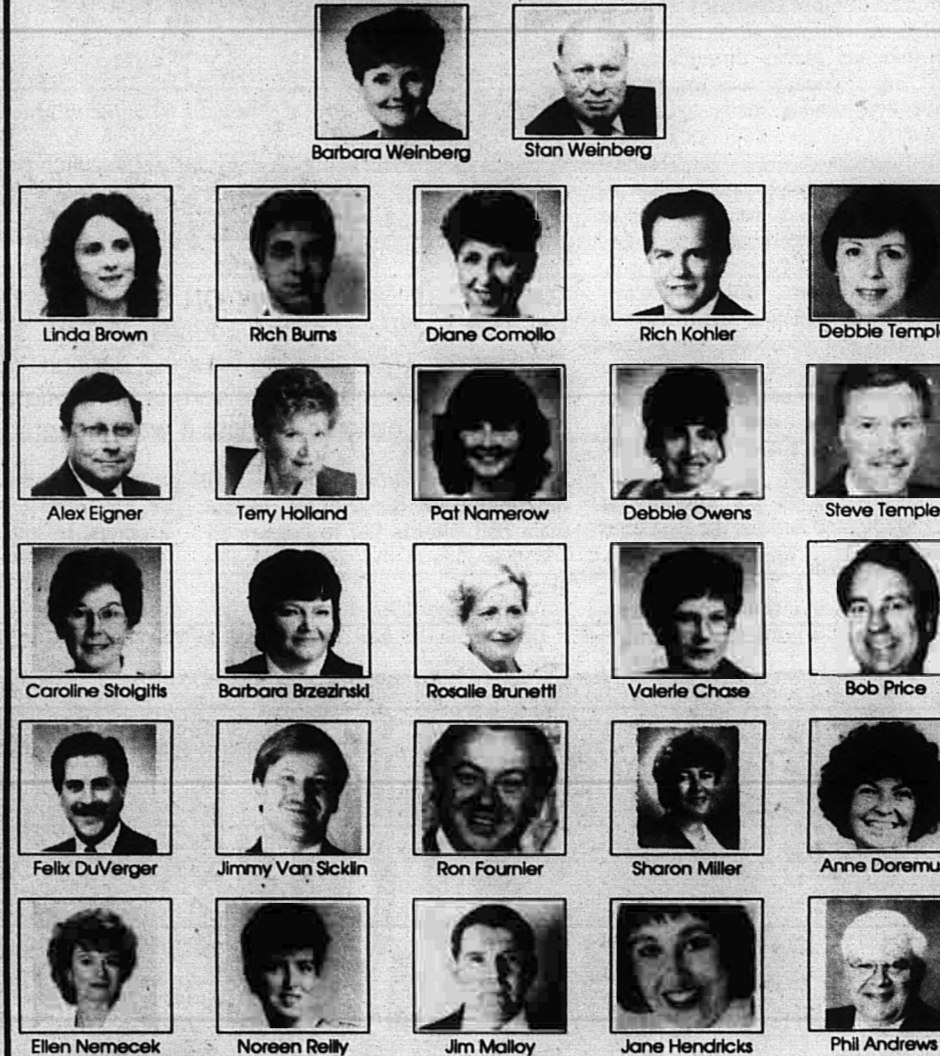


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1991

## 1908 silk show was something to see

On March 31, 1908, The Manchester Herald (then a half-weekly) ran a full-page spread, including photos, of the Cheney Hall Silk Exhibition. Some portions of the newspaper, located by the Manchester Historical Society, have been integrated, but the majority of the article is intact. What follows is that front page story as it exists:

### SILK SHOW OPENS

Two Thousand Admiring Visitors Yesterday.

WERE VERY QUIET UNTIL AN ORCHESTRA WOKED THEM UP.

Crowd Handled Without Confusion — Larger Ones Expected During the Week.

[All?] roads lead to Cheney hall this [week?]. The silk exhibition opened at [?] o'clock yesterday with fine weather and a large attendance. Everything was in readiness for the opening. The last work of preparation was the placing of crash on the floor of the aisles of the main hall. The floor is about the only surface that is not covered with silk. Firemen of Hose Company No. 1 in full dress uniform stood silently at conspicuous places throughout the hall and attendants wearing badges were everywhere, ready to answer questions and give directions. Every detail for the care of a large crowd had been attended to and the visitors walked up and down the aisles as quietly and soberly as if they had been attending a funeral. They even spoke in whispers. Colonel Cheney and other members of the firm were on hand and received many congratulations. Many of the visitors during the afternoon were from out of town. They came by train, by trolley cars, by automobiles and by teams.

The effect upon one entering the brightly lighted hall for the first time is awe-inspiring. Men doff their hats as instinctively as if they were entering a church and hush their voices as they would in a gorgeous cathedral.

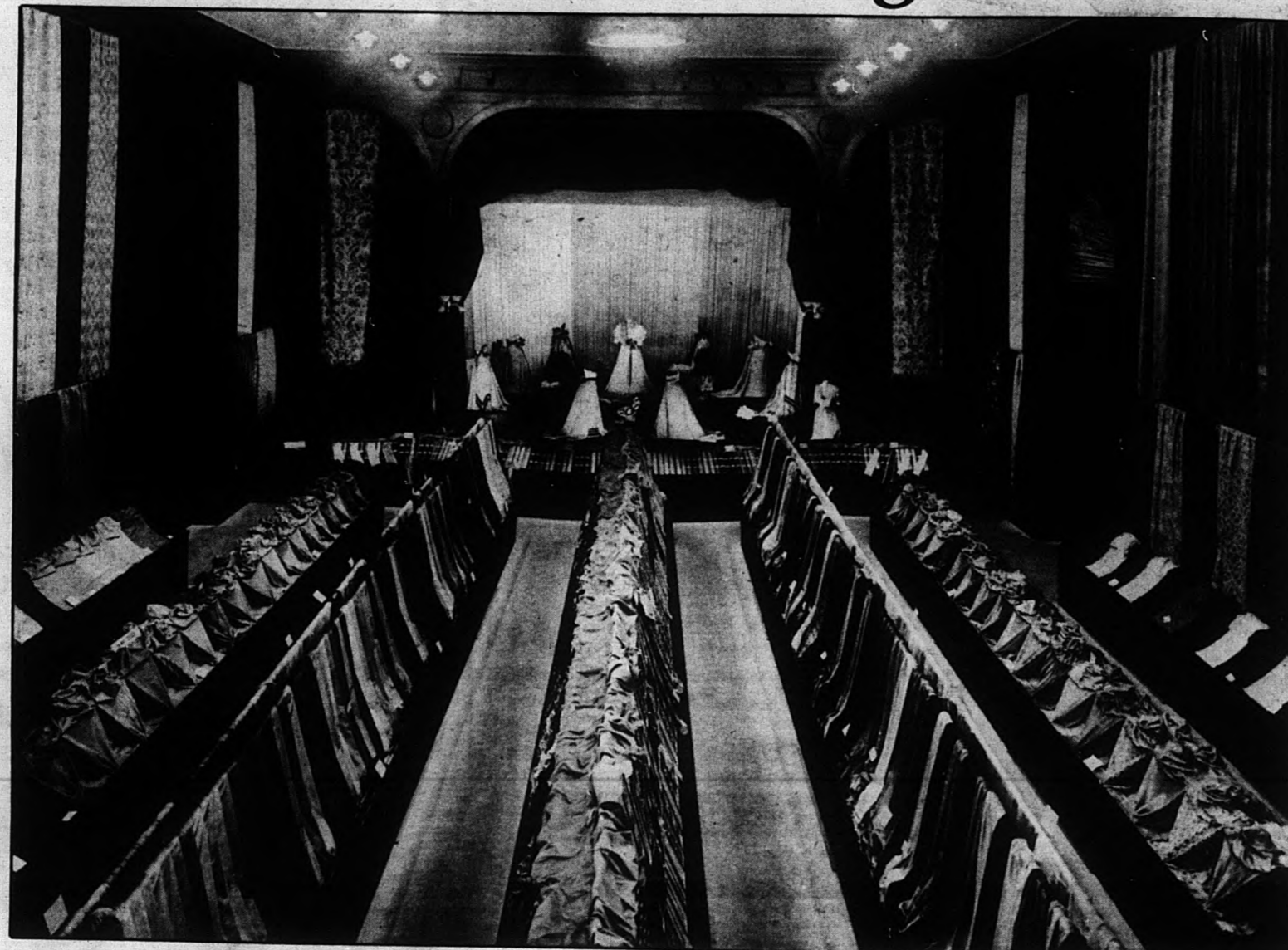


Photo courtesy Manchester Historical Society

**GRANDEST SILK SHOW ON EARTH** — This is the photo used on page one of the Tuesday, March 31, 1908 issue of the Herald. The following was the caption: "This photograph is somewhat remarkable. There is no daylight in the hall, and owing to the delicate fabrics, it was thought unsafe to use a

flashlight. The photograph was therefore taken with no other illumination than that of the incandescent lights. It was taken Sunday evening and required an exposure of 45 minutes. E.M. Ogden made the picture. The original is 12x14 inches and the print was ready for the engraver Monday morning."

The Herald has already given a short description of the exhibit in the main hall. Words fail to convey an adequate idea of the completed display. [lost passage] Last night the hall was thronged with sight seers, the large majority being employees of Cheney Brothers. In spite of the crowd there was no disorder, owing to the system of handling the people. The vestibule with the two outside doors has been divided by a railing. One door

is used for entrance and another for exit. Once inside, the line is directed by attendants into the different aisles and through stairways and doors to the exit so that all move in the same direction. It is estimated that 1,500 persons saw the exhibit last night and about 500 in the afternoon, the Beeman & Hatch orchestra gave a musical program during the evening from seats in the gallery. The lively music relieved the funeral aspect which had characterized the afternoon gathering and it will be continued as a feature of each evening of the week.

The most attractive part of the hall, to the ladies, was the stage. Here an admiring group always lingered over the stylish costumes and hats. The exhibit of raw and spun silk shown in the stages of manufacture in the basement was also a fascinating spot and that section was always filled. The fine view of the main hall from the gallery drew many spectators to that place where they stood long in wrapt attention. [lost passage]

The wealth of color and design, spread out in a display such as mortal eye never saw before, absorbs attention. There is nothing practical or useful in the view, it is purely aesthetic and appeals to a sense so little cultivated in every day life that for

Please see SILK page 32A.



Photo courtesy Manchester Historical Society

**OPPOSITE VIEW** — Here is a view from the floor facing the other direction. The rear balcony can be seen to the right. The tiny placards scattered in various locations over the silks read: "Please Do Not Handle the Goods."

1661 '11 2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, 10th, 12th, 14th, 16th, 18th, 20th, 22nd, 24th, 26th, 28th, 30th, 32nd, 34th, 36th, 38th, 40th, 42nd, 44th, 46th, 48th, 50th, 52nd, 54th, 56th, 58th, 60th, 62nd, 64th, 66th, 68th, 70th, 72nd, 74th, 76th, 78th, 80th, 82nd, 84th, 86th, 88th, 90th, 92nd, 94th, 96th, 98th, 100th

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restoration of  
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Restoration Of  
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**History**

From Page 8A

Engine #3, its brass polished to brilliance, stopped at a canopy of red Cheney velvet that sheltered guests during their brief walk from the station to Cheney Hall.

Cynthia Cheney Childs, in her booklet "Memories of Memorable Days," recalls the hall at this time:

The Hall stood on a rectangular lawn thickly surrounded by elm trees. It was completely invisible from our house, only one hundred and fifty yards away. Yet on summer nights, when all the workers were open, you could hear the music distinctly, the German waltzes, the Polish polkas, the Irish jigs, the Swedish and Italian music sounded clear as a bell. To a little girl lying in bed listening, it was irresistible.

Local resident Anthony Urhanetti, born in 1913, remembers the hall at this time:

We immigrated to Manchester from Magliano Sabina, Italy, in 1913, living first in a house on Hackmatack Street. The easiest way to town was by Prospect Street, Hartford Road and Elm St., always passing Cheney Hall and the Train Station. I remember the first time that I went into the Hall. My father, Alessandro, who was a musician, brought me on his shoulder one late fall evening to a performance of colonial Russian bell players.

My mother, Dora (Calabrinis), worked in the mill transferring the Japanese silk from skeins to bobbins. There was a grassy knoll between Hartford Road and the Yarn Mill. I would wait and watch for her there to come out at her lunch break. We would go over to the Hall where there was a hot soup cafeteria in the basement for employees. Although I remember seeing it once, children, unless workers, were not allowed in. My mother always brought me out a piece of cake or a cookie. She

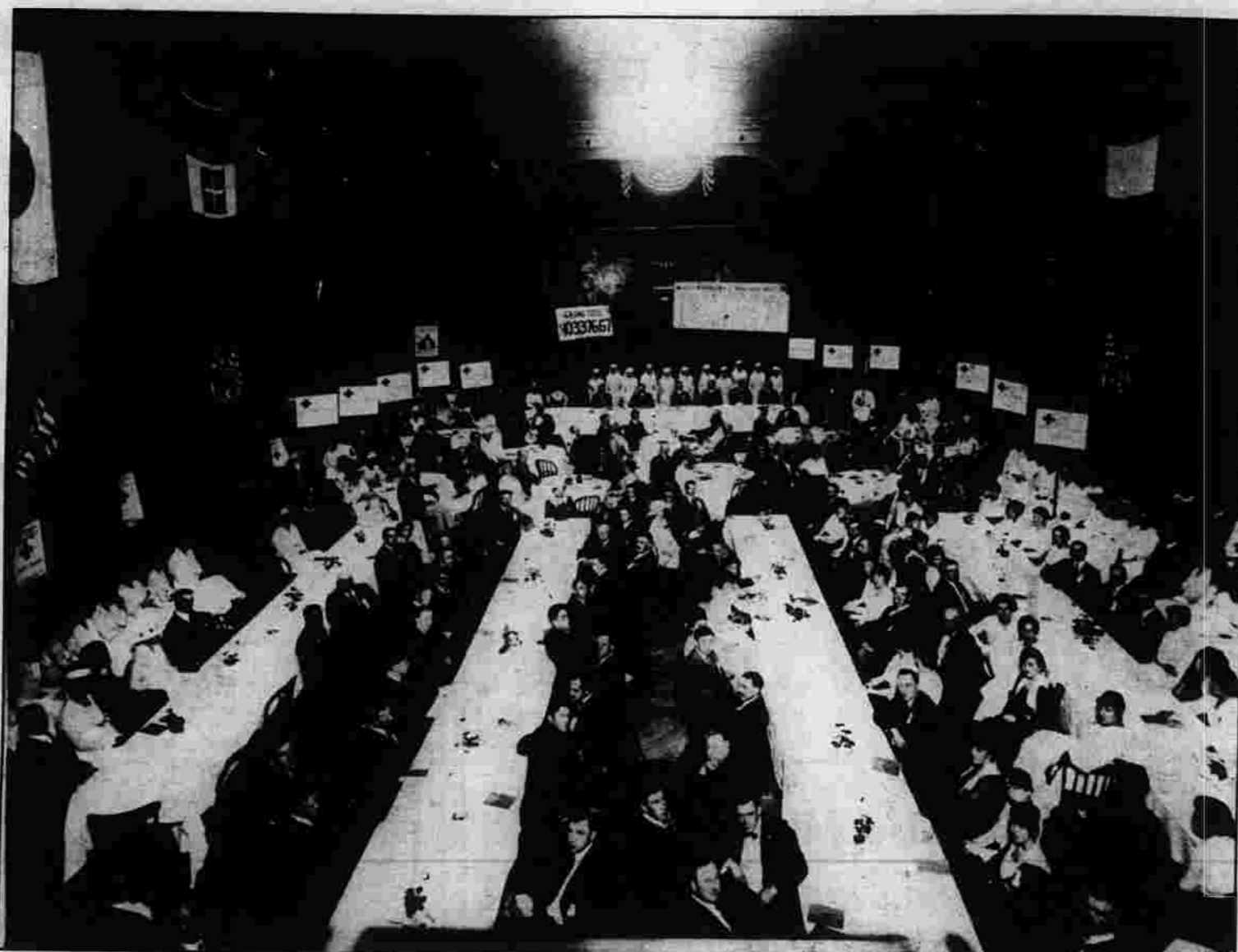


Photo courtesy Manchester Historical Society

**FUND-RAISING HALL** — This is an American Red Cross bond rally held during World War I. Note the grand total on the placard to the rear: \$103,376.67, an enormous sum in those days. Red cross nurses are sitting along the walls. The photo was taken from the rear balcony.

another function, as Cynthia Cheney Childs relates in her booklet: "Something had to be done. My uncle threw open Cheney Hall, commandeered beds from the Army, and called on trained and untrained women to nurse the sick. Several of my aunts responded. I remember answering the telephone one biting, windy day, and being sent to the drugstore 'up street' on an emergency call for some medicine. On my return, when I first came into the dark, hot ballroom with my package, I hardly knew where I was. I finally made out the rows and rows of beds, with here and there subdued lights. The lovely

big room that I always thought of as gay and sparkling was dim and silent. It smelled of carbolic and ether, and the unfamiliar odor of illness. It was frightening. The sounds of groaning and heavy breathing made me tremble. I did not associate sickness and helplessness with grownups. I got out as fast as I could.

**Fireman's Ball a memorable event**

By JOHN G. ROBINSON  
Special to the Herald

The upcoming reredication of Cheney Hall brings to mind many of the happy events which took place back in the late teens, 1920s and 1930s, many of which I attended or was involved.

The most outstanding of these events was perhaps the "Fireman's Ball" which was held on Thanksgiving Eve for many years. This was sponsored by Hose Company #1, whose members were all volunteer firemen and employees of Cheney Brothers, including some of the Cheney family.

The outstanding feature of this ball was the raffling of a turkey, goose and a pig, for which thousands of tickets had been sold prior to the ball.

Other events that come to mind are the annual Masonic ball, amateur shows and also minstrel

**TURKEY -- GOOSE -- PIG\***

No. 932

HOSE & LADDER CO. NO. 1  
CHENEY HALL, THANKSGIVING EVE.  
NOVEMBER 26, 1913  
10 Cents

shows were very popular in those days. Music for these and other events was often provided in those days by what was known as the Paramount Orchestra of which I was a member for many years under the direction of Albert Bebrand.

There was also a club within the Cheney Brothers complex

consisting of supervisory male employees known as the "Get Together Club," who met once a month in the evening during the fall and winter months in the basement of Cheney Hall.

Here they were served a delicious dinner (often prepared and cooked by one or more of the Cheneys) followed by either a

musical program or a prominent speaker.

For many years over a period of several weeks Cheney Brothers put on a display of their finished fabrics made up of silk. This display was open to the public who came from far and near to see it.

John G. Robinson worked for Cheney Brothers for 63 years. After attending textile school he started to work for the company as an apprentice in the former Ribbon Mill. Over the years that followed, he worked his way up, holding several important positions including controller of materials.

Following the sale of the company to J.P. Stevens Co. in 1955 he was appointed a director. Following the sale of the company in 1956 by J.P. Stevens to Geril & Co. he was appointed treasurer and plant manager. In 1962 he was appointed president of the company. He retired in 1975.

\*Please see HISTORY, page 14A.

MANCHESTER HERALD, Monday, June 17, 1991—13A

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CHENEY HALL, THURSDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 12th, 1899.

**THE EPWORTH LEAGUE**

FRED J. BACON, President  
HARRY H. LARKUM, Secretary  
HARRY P. MONTGOMERY, Treasurer  
BACON'S BAND QUINTETTE

**PART I.**

- (a) Whistling Rufus. (By request), Miss Berthold
- (b) Amerydy.
- Casey at the Bat. BACON'S BAND QUINTETTE
- (a) Polka de Concert. Glyn
- (b) Old Folks at Home. Fred J. Bacon
- Two Grenadiers. HARRY P. MONTGOMERY, Shuman
- Blue Ribbon March. HARRY H. LARKUM, Hall
- Madly, popular air. BACON'S BAND QUINTETTE, Arranged by Bacon
- Putting Up the Stove. HARRY H. LARKUM.

**PART II.**

- (a) Minuet a l'antique. Padewski
- (b) Cavalletta Rusticana. (Intermezzo) Fred J. Bacon, Mascarp
- Myself When Young. HARRY P. MONTGOMERY, Lisa Lehman
- Sounds from Africa. BACON'S BAND QUINTETTE, Glyn
- Character Impassioned. (By request) HARRY H. LARKUM, Hall
- Overture to William Tell. (Allegro Vivace). Rastel
- And Long Sym. (Variation). FRED J. BACON.

**LOOK YE**

**Public Examination.**  
OF YE DEEBRICK SKULF WILL BE HELD AT

Ye Cheney Hall, South Manchester.  
Wednesday Night, ye 11th of February, 1891.

Under ye Auspices of Manchester Grades, No. 51. Old style costumes will be worn.

SCHESES— I. On ye Ware to Skale. II. Ye Morryage Bession. III. Ye Noose Hysse. IIII. Ye Afternoon Bession.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS.**

**SCENARIOS COMMITTEE.**  
Henry Barrows  
C. Johnson  
John Whitcomb  
Orin Bolister

**BOY SCOLLERS.**  
J. F. Collins  
Lars Miner  
C. O. Woodcock  
Frank Dink  
Wolcott Green  
J. C. Thompson  
Fred Shaw  
G. A. Collins  
Henry Bolister

**MAYDEN SCOLLERS.**  
Mrs. P. W. Shaw  
Mrs. C. O. Woodcock  
Mrs. J. C. Thompson  
Mrs. W. P. Green  
Mrs. Charles Johnson  
Mrs. Harry Miner  
Mrs. Gertrude Dink  
Mrs. Sarah Collins  
Mrs. Frank Dink  
Mrs. W. W. Green  
Mrs. O. H. Hall  
Mrs. Henry Barrows  
Mrs. Annie Wiley  
Mrs. C. E. Colby

Ye doors of ye Hall will be belatched at ye twelve light, and examination will begin at eight by ye clock.

Ye parties to go into may be Aid as ye following: (National being the time to ye kids, two and one-half hours, and here ye old time ye help with.

N. B. Ye young folks that are speaking may do ye ye young mayden's home, which is opposite.

N. B. Ye goods people who come early may do ye ye old time, and avoid ye night ye ye Sunday clothes in ye evening.

**History**  
From Page 12A

He remembers the Cheney's themselves sometimes attending, to mingle with the people. He recalls several of their telling stories to the gathered employees.

Robinson said the Cheney's were very friendly to everyone. "But they were kind of... well, aloof," he says. "But they had to be—they owned the company!"

And James W. McKay also remembers the hall during this time—he played piano and organ there regularly. He recalls playing piano accompaniment during silent films which were shown in the hall.

"It was a wonderful place—wonderful acoustics," McKay says. And he also admired the hardwood dance floor.

McKay was particularly fond of the minstrel shows, for which he would play piano and horn. Joining him in this affection was Herb Bengtson, who is now President of the Manchester Historical Society.

Back in 1926 or 1927 our Boy Scout troop presented a minstrel show at Cheney Hall. Troop committee members and Senior Scouts were the major characters. Junior Scouts formed a chorus conducted by Helge Pearson, Scout Master and organist of Emmanuel Lutheran Church. This chorus performed between scenes of the show. This was my first and only appearance on the stage at Cheney Hall.

And Herb Bengtson remembers this of the Fireman's Ball:

Hose and Ladder Company #1 was located at the fire house at the corner of Pine Street and Hartford Road. Every Thanksgiving Eve they held a dance at Cheney Hall. It required a lot of work by the firemen. They had to move all the tables and material used by the Cheney salesrooms to the basement after it had closed at 3 o'clock. The dance was semi-formal, the women in their long evening gowns and the men in their tuxedos.

**After 1930**

In 1930, the demand for the hall shrank. It was only used a few times a year. So the Cheney decided to use it as a salesroom for their silks and fabrics.

By 1955, the Cheney's were struggling so much, due to several factors, including a decreased world demand for silks and a new emphasis on synthetic fibers, that they decided to sell their operations, including the hall, to J.P. Stevens Company.

A year later, the company was again sold, and the hall was then owned by John Barnini. The hall was used as a fabric salesroom until 1976, when it closed its doors, seemingly for good.

Over the next few years, the hall was empty until Barnini donated it to the town in 1981. And thus began another story.

The following is an excerpt from an F. Scott Fitzgerald story called "The Jelly-bean." It is hoped that by transposing a few names, and changing the locale of the story to Manchester, this might capture some of what the hall was like in the

Please see HISTORY, page 16A.

**Wesleyan University Glee Club**  
CHENEY HALL  
Thursday Evening, March 24, 1893.

W. R. HAYES, Leader. A. R. W. GILLIES, Treasurer.  
W. T. LEE, '94. W. L. SNOW, '94.  
W. N. SWAN, '94. L. M. BROWN, '94.  
T. H. HARRIS, '94. T. H. HARRIS, '94.

**FIRST TENOR.** W. T. LEE, '94.  
**SECOND TENOR.** W. L. SNOW, '94.  
**FIRST BASS.** W. R. HAYES, '94.  
**SECOND BASS.** W. L. SNOW, '94.

**PROGRAMME.**

- WEDMAR-PILGRIMS. List.
- GONDIOLERS WALTZ SONG. Judo.
- THE BIRD FISHERMAN. Judo.
- SELESTON. Mr. A. R. W. GILLIES.
- AN INTERRUPTED SERENADE. Mr. JOHNSON AND THE CLUB. Back.
- ON THE SEA. Back.

**PART II.**

- KORRY DANCE (Hobby). Arr'd by Barrows.
- SPINNING SONG. MISSORS SMITH, SNOW, DAVIS, JOHNSON.
- TWO SHAKLETS.
- DAIDY AMYEL PIES.
- SELESTON. Mr. A. R. W. GILLIES.
- (a) BROWN (C. H. B. A. J.). Mr. A. R. W. GILLIES.
- (b) TINKERS' CHORUS. Miss Hood.
- HOME, SWEET HOME. Mr. DAVIS AND THE CLUB.


Cheney Hall,  
Monday Evening, March 27, 1899.

Pupils of the Ninth District School.

**Program**

- SONG—Sweet and Low. Barnby  
Pupils of the 8th Grade.
- MARCHING. Gols of the 7th and 8th Grades.
- DUMB BELLS. Boys of the 7th and 8th Grades.
- OXFORD MINUET. Girls of the High School.
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## The hall turns silk salesroom

The following article appeared in the Cheney Silk News in 1930, after the hall was made into a Cheney silk salesroom:

CHENEY HALL — A MARVEL OF THE SIXTIES

When Cheney Hall was built by Cheney Brothers in 1867 as a mill community center, it was the most imposing structure of its kind in all Hartford County. It was generally regarded as a wonderful thing, and there was nothing like it for many miles around. Seeing it today, after 63 years, the Hall is still imposing, so it can be imagined with what marveling its construction was viewed in the sixties.

On the great occasion of the dedication of the hall, upon its completion in 1867, no lesser a man than Horace Greeley delivered the formal lecture.

In those days when there was no automobile, entertainment had to be had right at home, and the hall was a boon. The common custom, when one wished to go to Hartford for an evening's entertainment, was to hire a coach (unless indeed one could own a coach) at the price of five dollars the evening to go and to come. There could also be had a special arrangement whereby one might take the coach as often as one wished at the monthly rate of ten dollars. Such prohibitive expense made journeying a rare experience and kept people in the town. True, there was the railroad, but its last trip brought one homeward near seven o'clock.

For many years the South Manchester public library was located in a basement room, until it was removed to a building near the Ninth District school on Wells Street. This library took its origin from a small collection of books which were read to the reading girls while at work.

During all this time, Cheney Hall was the only place of its size in town and was naturally needed for many occasions. But during the last years, the development of recreational facilities in other parts of the town has interfered with its hold upon the activities of the townspeople. With the exception of the use of the basement as a restaurant and banquet hall, and of the main hall for a few parties a year, Cheney Hall has not been much in demand.

The Hall is the natural place, therefore, to house the enlarged remnant salesroom which the increased volume of sales has made imperative.

The salesroom equipment, however, is being arranged in such a way that the entire hall can be cleared for an evening event. The steel cabinets which will hold the stock, the display tables and counters will all be removable.

The new salesroom will be open to the public on or about October 22.

### The New Cheney Hall Salesroom

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On or About Oct. 22

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Enlarged Stock  
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The Floor, As Well As In Remnants

CHENEY BROTHERS SALESROOM  
SOUTH MANCHESTER, CONN.

Made the News in every issue of Cheney Silk News  
By Editor's Assistance

## History

From Page 14A

twenties. The scene takes place at a hall.

Jim walked out on the porch to a deserted corner, dark between the moon on the lawn and the single lighted door of the ballroom. There he found a chair and, lighting a cigarette, drifted into the thoughtless reverie that was his usual mood. Yet now it was a reverie made senseless by the night and by the hot smell of damp powder puffs, tucked in the fronts of low dresses and distilling a thousand rich scents to float out through the open door. The music itself, blurred by a loud rumble, became hot and shadowy, a languorous overture to the scraping of many shoes and slippers.

Suddenly the square of yellow light that fell through the door was obscured by a dark figure. A girl had come out of the dressing-room and was standing on the porch not more than ten feet away. Jim heard a low-breathed "daggone" and then he turned and saw her. It was Nancy Lamar.

Jim rose to his feet. "Howdy?"

"Hello—" She paused, hesitated and then approached. "Oh, it's— Jim Powell."

He bowed slightly, tried to think of a casual remark.

"Do you suppose," she began quickly, "I mean— do you know anything about gum?"

"What?"

"I've got gum on my shoe. Some-

utter ass left his or her gum on the floor and of course I stepped in it."

Jim blushed, inappropriately.

"Do you know how to get it off?" she demanded petulantly. "I've tried a knife. I've tried every damn thing in the dressing-room. I've tried soap and water—and even perfume and I've rubbed my powder-puff trying to make it stick to that."

Jim considered the question in some agitation.

"Why—I think maybe gasoline—"

The words had scarcely left his lips when she grasped his hand and pulled him at a run off the low veranda, over a flower bed and at a gallop toward a group of cars parked in the moonlight.



**HALL DONORS** — From left to right, Bettina Barnini, John Barnini, and Pearl Podgrove stand in front of the hall on a sunny day recently. In 1981, John Barnini and Podgrove, representing her late husband Leon, who was Barnini's business partner for thirty years, donated the hall to the town. Barnini had purchased the building from J.P. Stevens company in the late 1950s.

MANCHESTER HERALD, Monday, June 17, 1979—17A

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to those citizens who care about the quality  
of life in our community."

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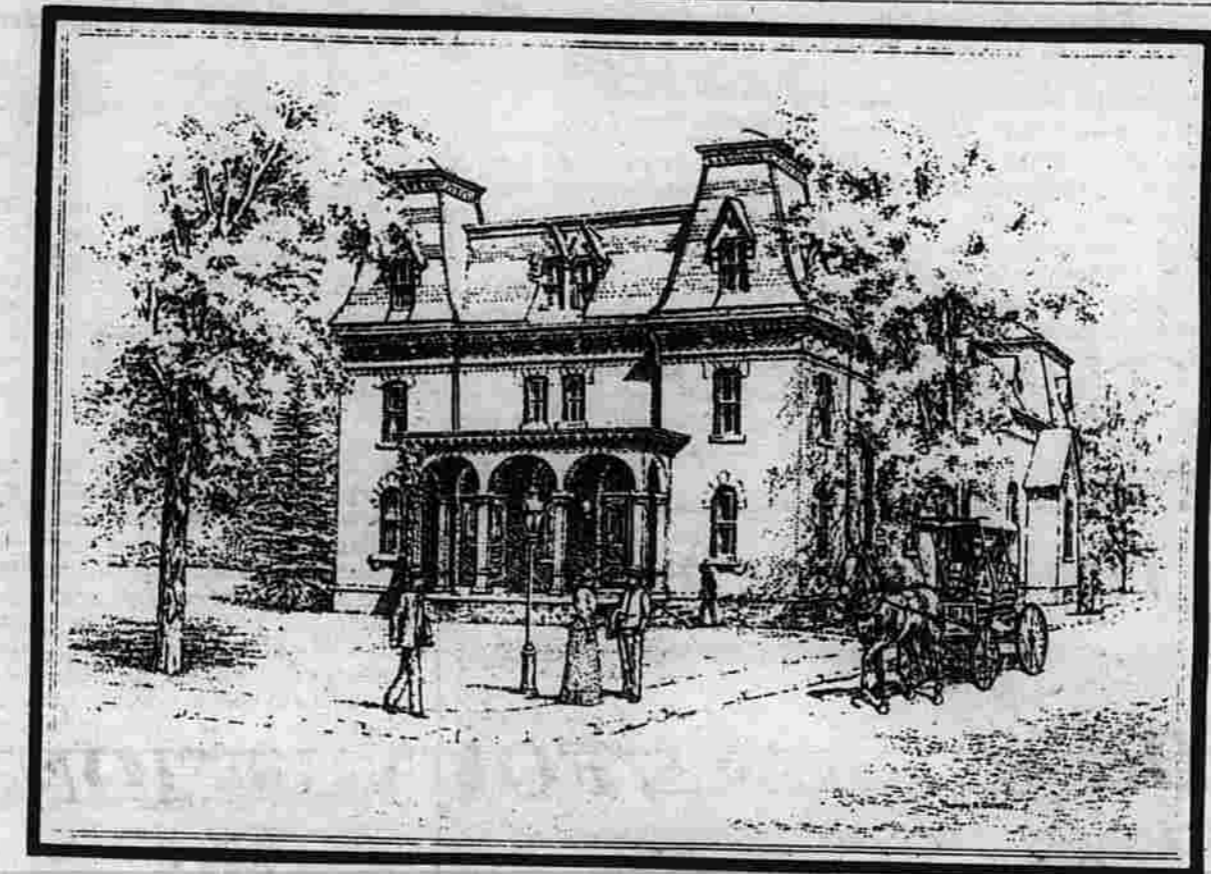
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**CHENEY HALL**

## CHENEY HALL: A STAR IS REBORN

Cheney Hall, the cultural center of Manchester from 1867 through 1930, will be a revitalized center for theatre and cultural activities when it opens in the Fall of 1991. The generosity of hundreds of people who have recognized the Hall's historical importance, as well as the dire need for this facility as a community resource, have made this project a reality. They are the real stars of Cheney Hall. Join them and join us as we enter a new era of enrichment for the Manchester area. Cheney Hall belongs to Manchester as part of its heritage, and to those citizens who care about the quality of life in our community.

Since 1982, over \$1.5 million of this \$2.5 million project has been raised. We need your interest and support to achieve this final fund raising goal. Make a contribution and claim your starring role in the Cheney Hall restoration. This architectural gem in the heart of the Cheney Brothers National Historic Landmark District will be the oldest operating theatre/cultural facility in the State of Connecticut.

All contributions are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Checks may be made payable to: LTM/CHARM (The Little Theatre of Manchester/Cheney Hall Artistic Restoration of Manchester), 20 Hartford Road, Manchester, CT 06040.



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## Mission possible: the project organizers

### Little Theatre of Manchester

By RICHARD RANGOON  
Manchester Herald

MANCHESTER — If the Cheney Hall Foundation is the rudder, then the Little Theatre of Manchester is the outboard motor driving the restoration of Cheney Hall.

The LTM, the largest community theater east of the Connecticut River, will kick off its grand opening on October 26 with a performance of "The Fantasticks."

The group has presented three productions each year since it was formed 32 years ago, drawing upon the acting talent of people in the Greater Manchester area.

But this performance of "The Fantasticks" will have special significance for the Little Theatre, because of its part in leading fund-raising activities for the hall's renovation.

The Theatre has held a lease from the town of Manchester since 1982, when it agreed to renovate the building, and is scheduled to sign a 15-year lease, once the date of occupancy is set by the Cheney Hall Foundation, which represents the town.

"We're delighted" with the theater's pending use of Cheney Hall, said Mary Blish, executive director of the Little Theatre. "We had looked for our own facility for years."

She predicts that Cheney Hall will become "the East of the River cultural center."

The Little Theatre will be in charge of coordinating the activities of the many cultural groups that want to use Cheney Hall and will charge small rental fees to be used toward maintenance and utilities costs for the building.

Little Theatre subscription chairman Fred Blish, husband of Mary, said he believes that regular performances in Cheney Hall, the state's oldest cultural building, will build an increasing audience for the theater's productions.

Currently, the Little Theatre has about 2,400 subscribers and sells tickets for its productions at \$9.00 a piece general admission, \$6.00 for students and seniors.

Although there are more than one hundred members of the Little Theatre, "open castings" are held for each show, in which the general public is invited to audition for parts.

"The Fantasticks" will run a total of 12 times at Cheney Hall. The Little Theatre will then begin its 1992 season with a production of "The Lion in Winter."

The Little Theatre is awaiting its certificate of occupancy for Cheney Hall and hopes to move from its current location, The Train Exchange building on Hilliard Street, within the month.

The theater has helped raise \$1.5 million of the \$2.5 million needed to

complete the restoration of Cheney Hall. Money has come from numerous foundations, the state and federal governments, local businesses and individuals.

A further challenge faced by the Little Theatre was how to accommodate handicapped individuals without significantly altering the original historic architecture of Cheney Hall. But after the review of seven architectural plans, an acceptable plan was adopted and implemented.

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### The Cheney Hall Foundation

By JULIAN FREUND  
Manchester Herald

In 1950, Donald Kuehl came to Manchester and worked for the Cheney Brothers when Cheney Hall was used as a sales room for their fabrics and other products.

Nearly 35 years later, Kuehl was president of the Cheney Hall Foundation and the hall "had deteriorated to the point where the gutters didn't funnel water properly, plaster was falling off the walls, and the place was pretty much a real mess," Kuehl says.

So, the Board of Directors changed the commission into a foundation. Since that time, the Foundation has raised about \$1.5 million in grants, donations, and pledges. Kuehl says that they need to raise about another \$1 million to finish paying off the mortgage to the banks.

In 1983, the town gave the Foundation permission to use their lease as collateral to borrow money to fix the building. The Foundation decided, on advice from engineering consultants, that the first step would be to protect the outside of the building. Structural repairs were begun and the building was made water-tight.

They then began working on the inside of the hall one step at a time, raising more money each time a new project was begun. Each step was running about a quarter to a half

million dollars. After some inside walls were demolished, and a new floor and new columns were put in the basement, the Foundation decided that it could take twenty years to finish renovations in this piecemeal manner. They went back to the banks to see if they could get the work done all at once.

"The banks were generally quite enthusiastic," Kuehl said. "We had seven banks signed up to loan us the money."

The Foundation had to meet certain requirements to get the loan. Blueprints had to be approved by the state, they had to raise an additional \$200,000 in grants, pledges, or donations, and they had to get approval of a \$400,000 grant from the state of Connecticut.

The agreement to these and some other minor stipulations was signed in June, 1989, and construction was expected to finish around December, 1990. But it took almost a year to get all the blueprints approved by the various agencies.

The drawings were finally approved and the contract was awarded in July, 1990. In addition to the \$400,000 grant from the state, Manchester gave \$200,000 to the renovation project which it had

run for almost two dozen LTM musicals over the past thirty-two years. In addition, she is an accomplished costume designer, having executed costumes for more than a score of LTM's productions.

She also served as the chairman of the Cheney Homestead renovation, supervising its initial opening to the public. It was Blish who located the Keeney Street School house and made the arrangements to move it to the Cheney Homestead property.

She currently serves as the chairman of the Manchester Arts Council, secretary of the Manchester Community Council Foundation, and is a commissioner of the East of the River Tourism and Convention District. She has accomplished all of this while raising two children and taking care of a home.

"If you ask Mary what's next," says Cheney Hall Foundation member Rosemary Jackson, "she'll tell you that she's working on an idea for a new project."

### The guiding force



Mary Blish

When there is a job to be done, look for someone who is too busy and you'll find the right person. That person is Mary E. Blish, who for the past nine years has served as the Executive Director of the Cheney Hall Fundraising Campaign.

In 1982, Robert B. Weiss, then town manager, identified Cheney Hall as a possible home for the Little Theatre of Manchester Inc. The LTM was delighted, having been looking for their own place for years.

But LTM needed someone to lead the fundraising effort. That was a challenge which Mary Blish could not let pass. For the past nine years, she has been the inspiration, the worker, the drive, who has kept the effort always moving forward.

Born and raised in Manchester, Blish attended Manchester schools before receiving a bachelor of arts degree from Hillier College (now the University of Hartford). An accomplished pianist, Blish has been the musical

director for almost two dozen LTM musicals over the past thirty-two years. In addition, she is an accomplished costume designer, having executed costumes for more than a score of LTM's productions.

She currently serves as the chairman of the Manchester Arts Council, secretary of the Manchester Community Council Foundation, and is a commissioner of the East of the River Tourism and Convention District. She has accomplished all of this while raising two children and taking care of a home.

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THE ORGAN WILL RETURN — Thanks to the efforts of the following: Left to right, Rosemary Jackson, Pearl Podgrove, John Barnini, Bonnie Barnini-Krawiec, Judge William Fitzgerald, Betina Barnini, Mary Blish, and Robert Weiss.

20A — MANCHESTER HERALD, Monday, June 17, 1991

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From limited beginnings in rented space at Manchester High School to the present 160-acre campus with 12 buildings, MCC has responded to the needs and interests of a changing community by providing a broad range of educational opportunities.

Today MCC offers associate's degrees in over 30 areas of study, as well as one-year certificate options and transfer programs for bachelor degree studies at other colleges and universities.

As MCC continues to grow and build upon its traditions, we salute others in our community who choose to build upon the past with a vision towards the future.

*Congratulations to the  
Cheney Hall Foundation and  
the Little Theater of Manchester!*

MANCHESTER

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1991

## Cheney

From Page 20A

received from the Department of Economic Development.

Since Cheney Hall is a historical landmark, one requirement is that the historical significance of the building be retained as much as possible. Kuehl says that the construction is meeting all of their expectations, coming as close as possible to the previous "architectural character."

But there have been some changes in the building. There is now handicapped access, fire codes have required some new doors, and the stage has been enlarged.

Kuehl says that the building will be used for the same kinds of activities as when it was a community center. As a public building, the Hall was a place for dramatic performances, concerts, lectures, religious and political gatherings.

The Little Theatre has a lease

from the Foundation and should begin performing in the fall. They are required to put on at least two shows each year. The rest of the time they will act as rental agents for the Foundation, renting the building out to as many groups or people as often as possible.

28 days out of each year are set aside for use by the town of Manchester and by organizations affiliated with the previous owners of the building.

The composition of the foundation has changed very little since its birth in 1983, so there has been a continuity in the project. Next Saturday, volunteers who worked on the building and those who donated money to the project will have the opportunity to see the inside of the renovated Cheney Hall. On June 29 the building will be rededicated.

### Period costumes worn

On June 15, members of The Little Theatre of Manchester will be dressed in various period costumes to host the June 15th tour of Cheney Hall, courtesy of Fierberg's, a theatrical Hartford-based company.

Fierberg's was established in 1900 and is presently operated by the fourth generation of the Fierberg-Jacobson families. It was

started by Mendel Fierberg, once rober to the King of Romania, as a tailor shop, and later expanded into a business for bridal/taux rental, all types of costumes and accessories for all occasions, and theatrical make-up and wigs.

Fierberg's owners are Joshua and Lynn Dee Payne-Jacobson and they are located in a new facility at 907 Wetherfield Ave., Hartford.



21A—MANCHESTER HERALD, Monday, June 17, 1991

**FOUNDATION MEMBERS** — Here is a large portion of the Cheney Hall Foundation gathered in the hall auditorium recently; left to right, Rosemary Jackson, Fred Blish, Foundation President Donald Kuehl, Vivian Ferguson, Gloria DellaFera, George Cheney, Jr., Herb Stevenson, Mary Blish, David Newirth, Alan Lamson, and Jay Giles.



### Foundation members

The Cheney Hall Foundation, originally The Cheney Hall Board of Commissioners, held their first meeting on May 12, 1982 in the Probate room of the Municipal Building. Then Mayor Steven Penny and then Town Manager Robert Weiss were in attendance. Meetings have been held each second Wednesday of the month since its inception.

**Foundation Members**  
Eleanor Colman, 1st Chairperson 1982-1984; The Honorable William E. Fitzgerald 1982-present; Jack Hunter 1982-1983; Alan Lamson 1982-present; Jay Giles 1982-present; Donald Kuehl 1982-current president; David Newirth 1982-present; Herbert Stevenson 1982-past president; Mary Blish 1982-present; Arnold Kleinschmidt 1983-1987; Gloria DellaFera 1983-present; George Cheney, Jr. 1985-present; Rosemary Viola Jackson 1986-present; Fred Blish 1987-present; Bonnie Barmini Kawacic 1988-present; Alex Girelli 1991-present; Vivian Ferguson 1991-present.

**Rededication Committee**  
Rosemary Jackson Chairperson; Donald Kuehl, William Fitzgerald, Bonnie Kawacic, Steven Penny, Gloria DellaFera, Beverly Malone, Alan and Janet Lamson.  
**Rededication Program Committee**  
Rosemary Jackson, Steven Penny, William Fitzgerald, Megan Fitzgerald Edgington.

**IN THE MIDST OF IT ALL** — Here are the foundation members again, but from the perspective of the hall's rear balcony. Note the workers to the right; minor work will probably continue throughout the summer until the fall production of "The Fantasticks," and possibly thereafter.

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## The many lively happenings at the hall Theater productions

The following is an article from the Saturday, June 10, 1893 edition of the Manchester Herald, a review of a play that was performed in the hall the previous Wednesday. Even before the days of Frank Rich, critics could be merciless.

**AMATEUR THEATRICALS.**  
The Fidelity Dramatic company gave the standard drama "A Celebrated Case," in Cheney Hall last Wednesday evening, and strengthened the good impression they had made at their former performances. The only thing to criticize about the performance was the casting of the parts. The actors were competent, and all did well, but unfortunately the juvenile parts were given to those better adapted for mature characters, while the parts of mother and grandfathers were given to young ladies. Mr. P.J. Touhey, in the leading role, confirmed the good opinion of his admirers. He has natural ability for the stage, and is steadily developing his talent by conscientious study. Miss O.C. Johnston, who has been heard with great pleasure many times,

labored under great disadvantages in the role which she assumed. Her acting would have been far more acceptable in either the part of Duchess D'Aubierre, or that of the college coquette. Miss Berah Staye made a grateful and charming Duchess, but appeared far too youthful for the mother of grown up children. Mr. Fred Staye acted the dual parts of the rapacious (?) follower and a bogus count with marked ability. Miss Emma Keating made a pretty and lovable child. Mr. Abram Donnelly was the comedian of the company, and created much merriment in his part of Sergeant O'Rourke. The remaining parts were all well acted, and were not for the unpardonable error in casting the parts, the entire performance would receive our hearty commendation. The Fidelity is the strongest combination of amateurs ever heard here, and is capable of doing better than it has done. We hope it may be heard again to better advantage. The audience was not large, the hall being about two-thirds full.

The following advertisement appeared in the Herald on January 5, 1889, when the Eiffel Tower was the tallest structure in the world and magicians still mystified:

**CHENEY'S HALL**  
Wednesday Evening, January 5  
**A NIGHT OF MYSTERS!**  
Prof. R.H. MOYER,  
In Feats of  
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LEVITATION,  
The Great  
JUGGLER and BALANCER,  
in his wonderful acts.  
Under auspices of Village Improvement Society of South Manchester.  
Admission, 25c, 35c, and 50 cents.

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INTERLOCUTOR, Harry C. Anderson.	Miss Marie Martin.	1 "Oases in Time or Love in a Corner." Miss Zetta McGee. Miss Alice Dixon. Tweed Clemens. Mr. Ous Nelson.
WELLERS OF THE BONES. 1. Mr. Sam Nelson. 2. Miss Wilhelmine Stone. 3. Mr. Alex. Johnson.	FOUNDERS ON THE CALIFORNIA. 1. Mr. Edw. J. Smith. 2. Miss Cornelia Beck. 3. Mr. William Dixon.	2 "For and Against." Character Monologue by Mr. Albert T. Dewey.
<b>Musical Numbers.</b>		3 "A Little of Everything and Nothing in Particular." Being Mr. Robert J. Smith's Celebrated Imitation of Coy Bobby's Musical Band.
1 Grand Opening Overture. 2 "Only Mother's Picture." 3 "When You See a Kiss or Two." 4 "It's a Wonderful World." 5 "A Very Far to Heaven." 6 "The Bonneted My Old Husband, and She Forgot to Bring Him Back." 7 "Don't Worry." 8 "The Looking for the Man That Wrote the Merry Wives' Wale." 9 "Poor Little Mary." 10 Finale—"Under Any Old Flag at All."	Edwin Company. Mr. Ous Nelson. Mr. Sam Nelson. Miss Stone. Mr. Dixon. Miss Annie Veach. Miss Black. Mr. Thos. Fairbairn. Mr. Sam Nelson. Miss H. C. Anderson. Assisted by the Chamberlaid Quartette. Mr. Alex. Johnson and Edwin Company.	4 "Pleasantly Mixed." Hed. H. C. Anderson. Edw. F. Taylor. Wend. 5 Readings. 6 A Humbug Performance on "UNCLE TOM'S CABIN." Cue. Miss Devere. Miss Adams. Miss Waldgrave. Miss Thompson. Miss Thompson.

The following was an article in the October 18, 1890, edition of the Herald:

### Choral society

The first rehearsal of the South Manchester Choral Society, for this season, commenced at Cheney Hall last Tuesday evening. The rehearsals of last season were held on Monday evenings and the change of evening for the first rehearsal [?] to have proved inconvenient for a good many old members some of whom were prevented from attending. But after all plans had been made for beginning on Monday it was learned at a late day that the hall had been engaged long in advance for an entertainment on that day so it was deemed best to have the rehearsal on the following evening, rather than postpone it a week. Considering the difficulty and the unpleasant weather the opening was highly satisfactory, nearly sixty people being present, including many new members, twenty of whom came from Manchester and returned by special train. The principal work for this series of rehearsals is Joan of Arc, "The Maid of Orleans," an historical cantata by Alfred R. Gaul, performed by the Birmingham Festival Choral society in England. Mr. Loveland played some of the principal [?], which were tried in turn by the chorus and studied sufficiently to give a good idea of their character and of the movement of the parts. The great interest and beauty of the work could only be appreciated through this first attempt of the singers and Mr. Loveland's leading on the piano, and, from the expressions of enjoyment already heard from members, there can be little doubt that the study of it will be pursued with increasing pleasure and enthusiasm. After the intermission Mr. Loveland read an interesting paper on the history of Joan of Arc, to make the text of the cantata more intelligible to all the singers.

The following appeared in the Saturday, June 3, 1893, edition of the Herald:

### Memorial Day

The veterans never had a more satisfactory day for their memorial services than last Tuesday. The sky was clear, the air was cool, and all vegetation was fresh and beautiful. The streets were a little dewy for marching, but a watering cart was sent over the route of the parade in the forenoon, and that made the dust less offensive. The celebration followed the usual order. The exercises at Cheney hall began at half past two, a large audience was present and there was a noticeable absence of children. The audience was therefore more attentive, and the speakers found their task easier than in preceding years.

For the first time in many years, Commander M.S. Chapman was absent. The new commander, Warren S. Gammans conducted the exercises, however, in a soldierly and dignified manner.

Following the memorial service by the officers and members of Drake Post, addresses were given by Rev. Thomas Simms, Rev. A. G. Olson and Rev. James Tregaskis. Prayer was offered by Rev. C.H. Harbor and the benediction was pronounced by Rev. Father Doolan. All the local clergymen occupied seats at the platform, together with members of the citizens' committees. Miss Carrie Kauffmann provided at the organ and a male chorus of eight voices rendered several patriotic selections in an acceptable manner.

The first address was by Rev. Thomas Simms, who paid an eloquent tribute to the memory of William A. Buckingham, Connecticut's war governor.

He characterized him as a man who never carried a musket nor buckled on a sword, and yet whose loyalty, pre-eminent gifts and barole spirit enabled him to render invaluable service to our country in its time of need.

He was a man in whom our businessmen had such confidence that they guaranteed him financial support, and with whom the President of the United States conferred for counsel. He loved the soldiers, had personally visited the outgoing regiments, contributing of his own means for their equipment and comfort.

[Here the article goes on to describe Mr. Buckingham's various attributes in lengthy detail.]

Brief extemporaneous remarks were made by Rev. James Tregaskis, and in preparing the benediction Rev. Father Doolan expressed his thanks for the freedom of

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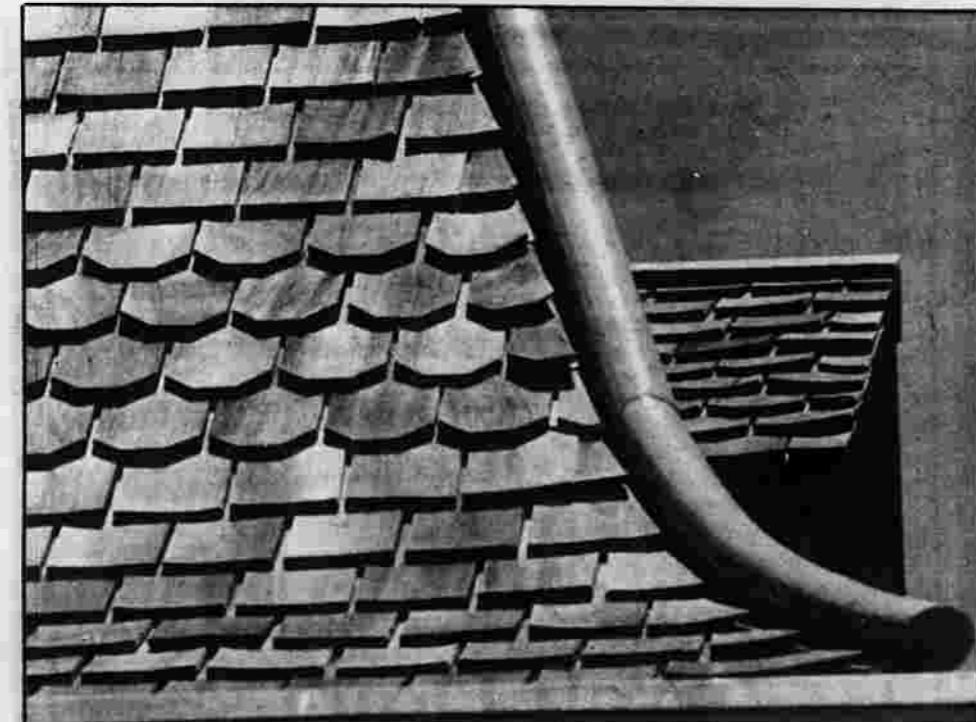
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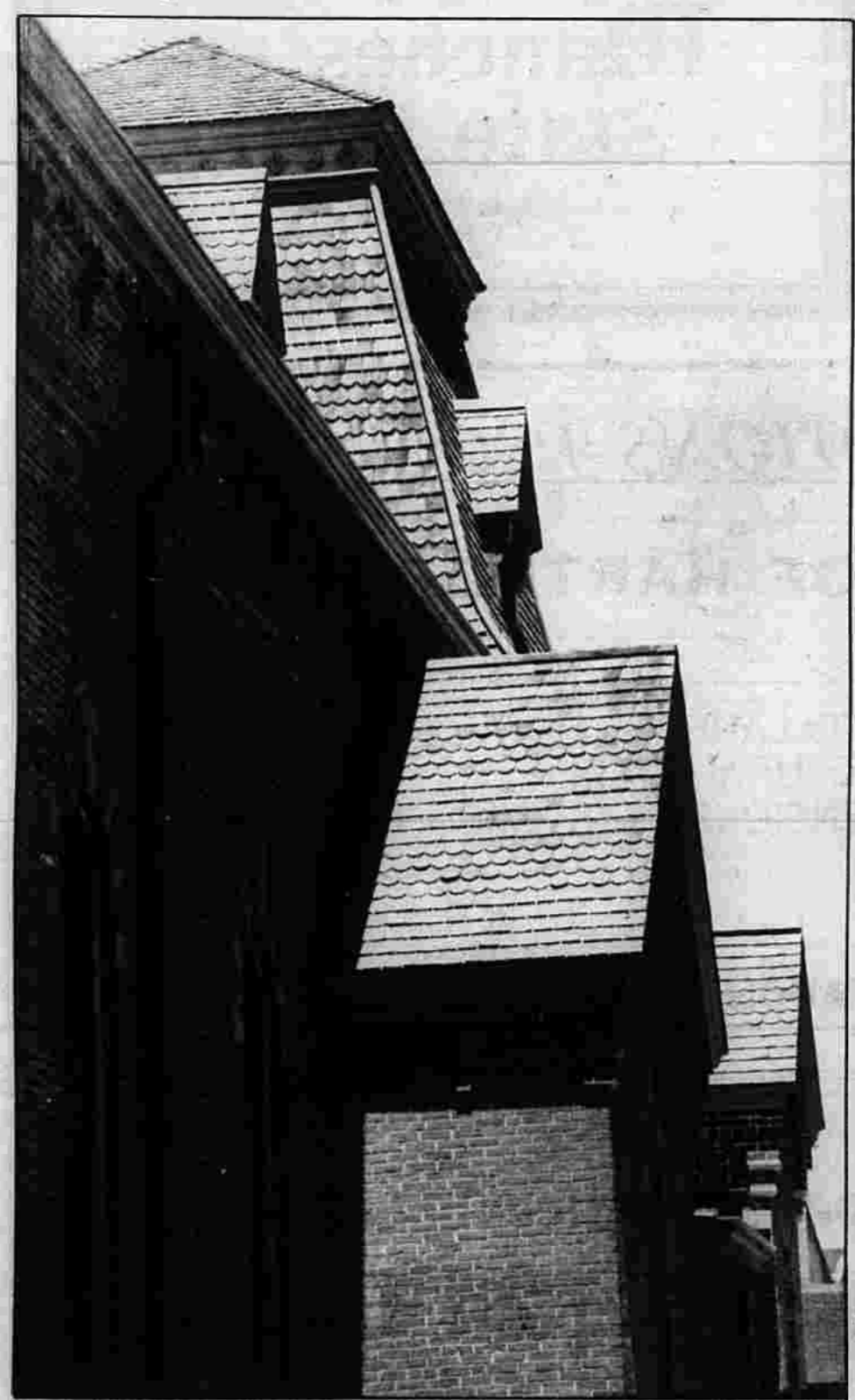
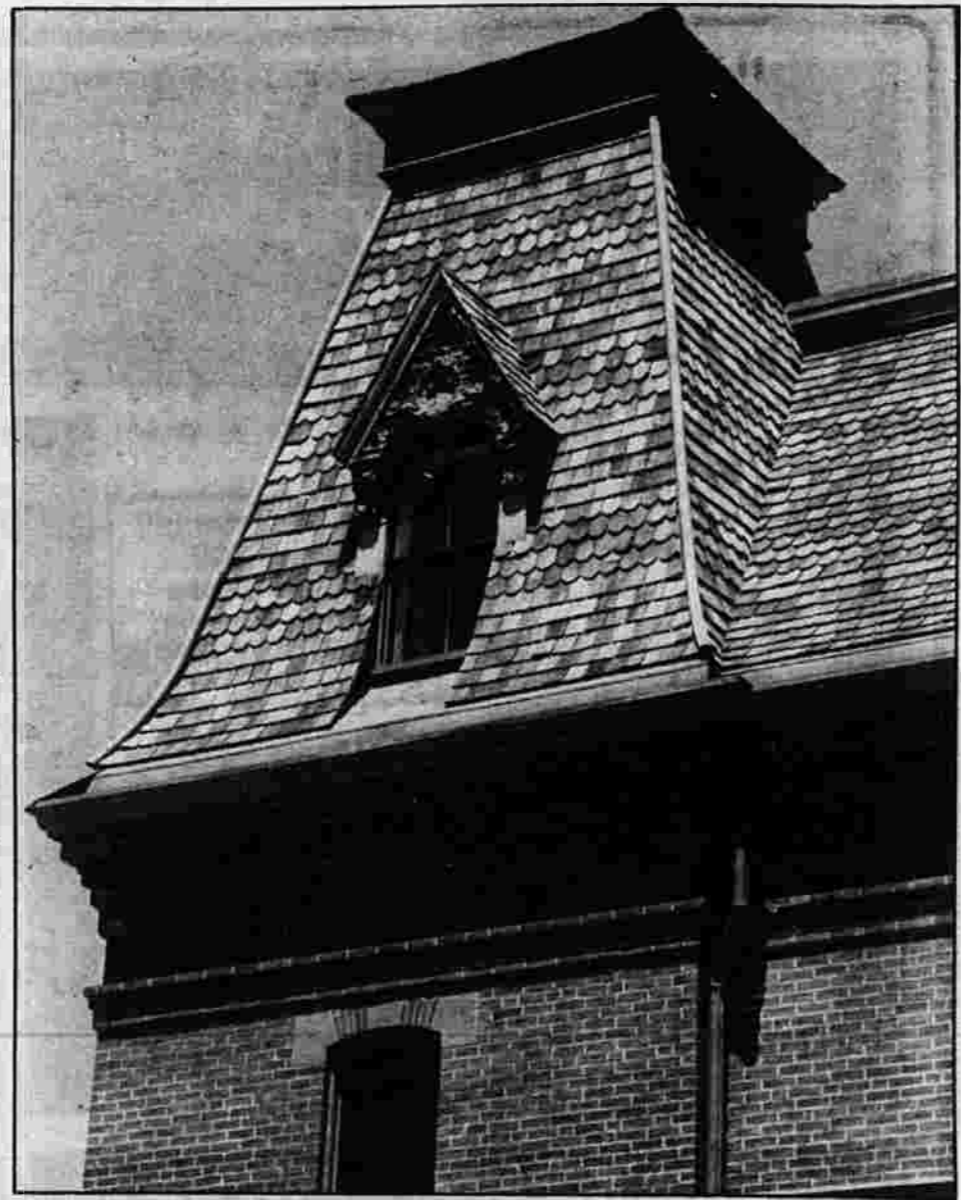
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26A — MANCHESTER HERALD, Monday, June 17, 1991

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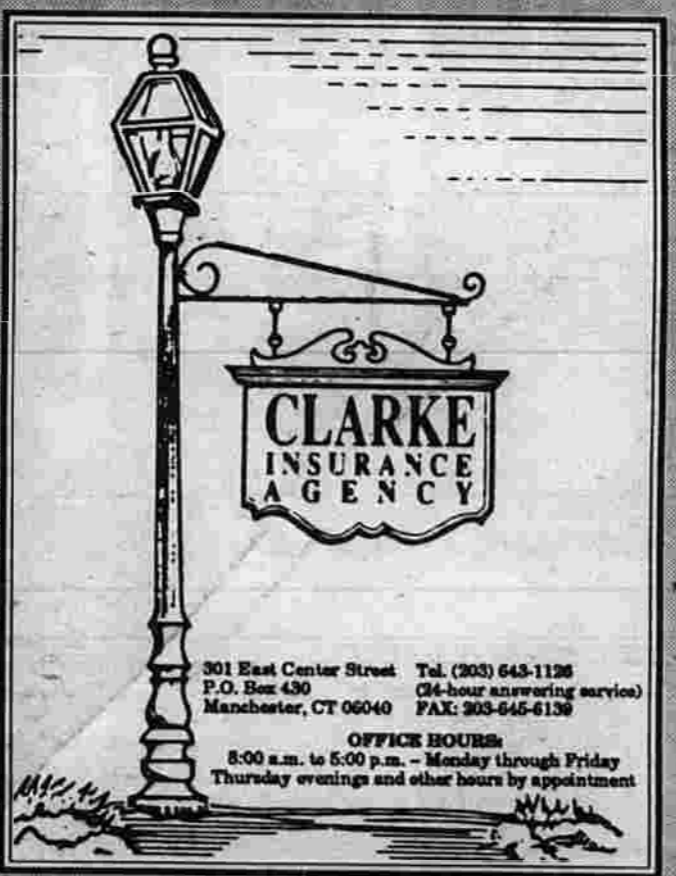
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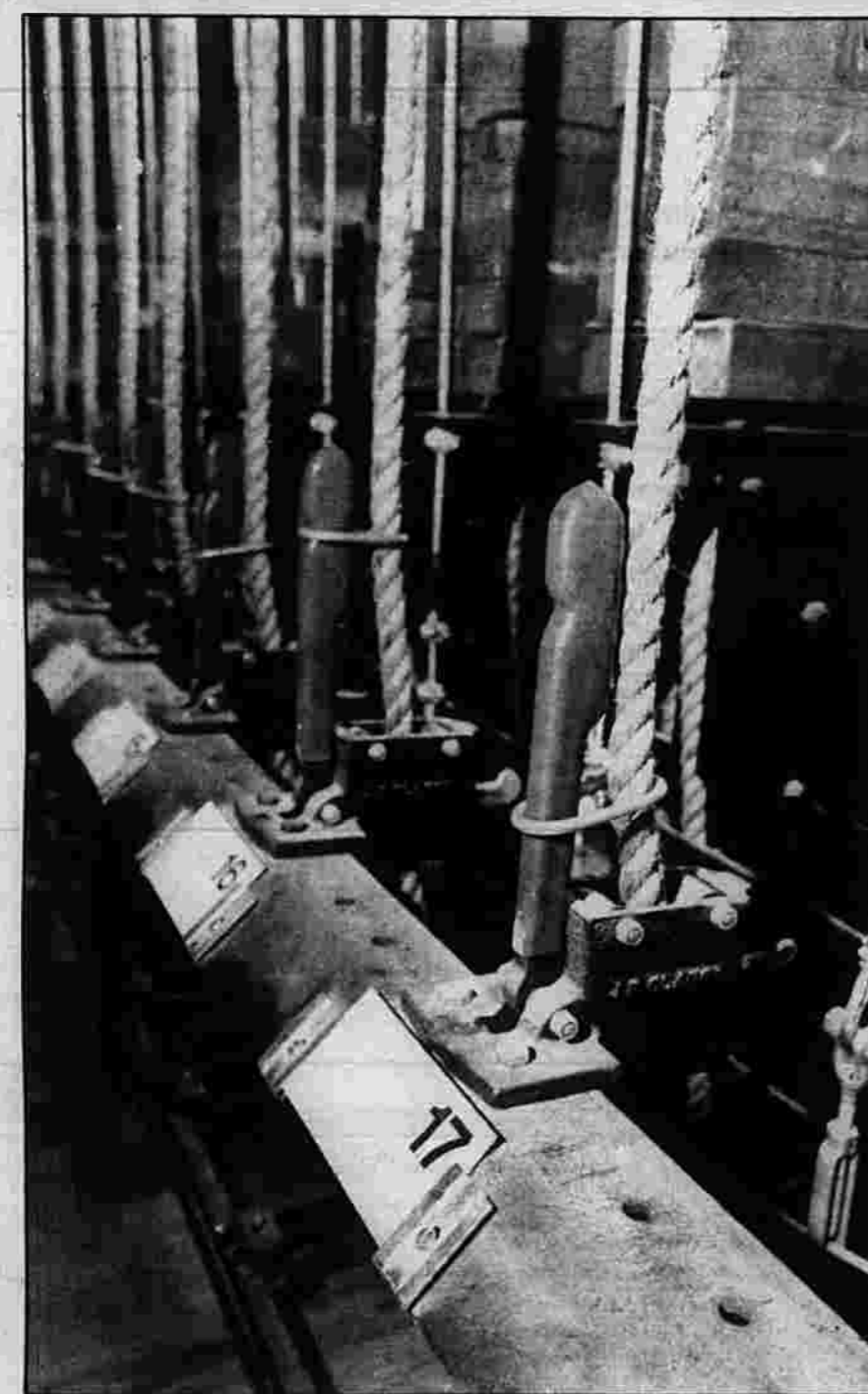
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All photos Gary Tucker/Manchester Herald  
 INTERIOR DETAILS — In the photo at top left are Robert Weiss, William Fitzgerald, and Bonnie Barnini Krawiec, left to right, admiring the work completed on the window shutters at the hall. The shutters were originally hand-crafted in the Cheney millshop, as was the rear balcony front facing in the picture above. To the left, theatrical lovers wait for the first Little Theatre of Manchester production, due this fall.

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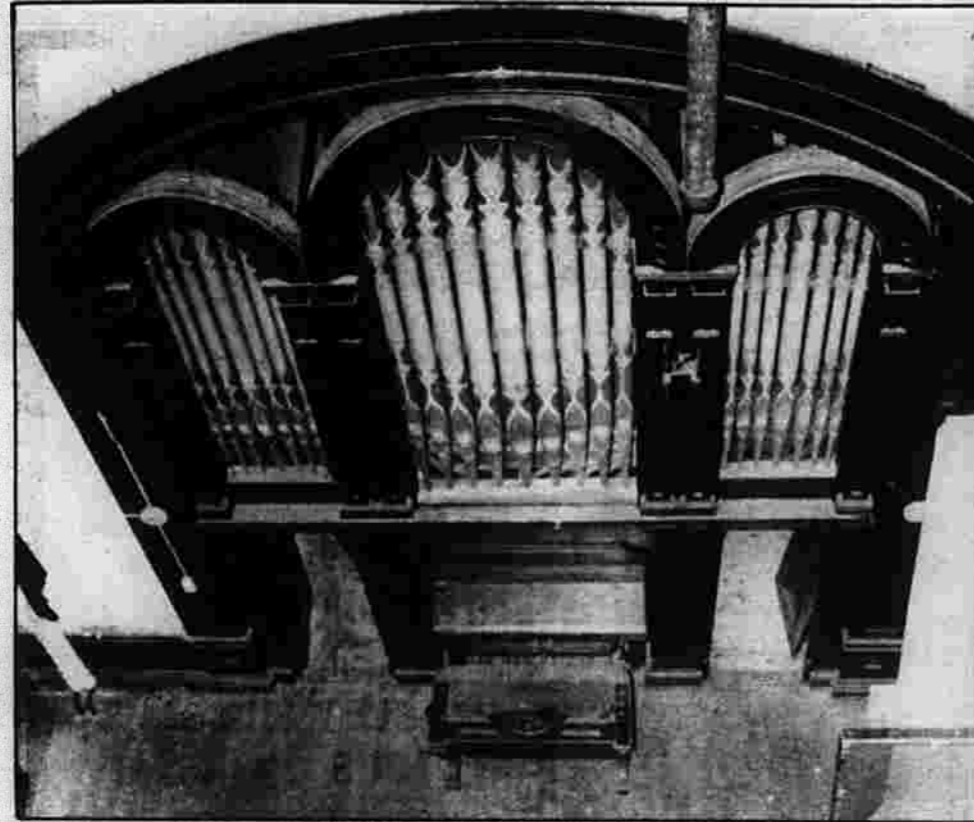
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**ORGAN BEFORE EXTRACTION** — This photo was taken in February of 1985, a few years before the organ was taken out for restoration. See story on page 4A.



**WINDOW WORK** — A pair of workers puts finishing touches on the hall auditorium windows recently.



**ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL** — Standing near the handicap-access entrances at the front of the Cheney Hall is Bettina and John Barnini with Pearl Podgrove, left to right. Access will be available to the lower level, the main hall, and the balcony, and providing such access was a major undertaking in itself. See restoration story, page 2A.

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**Silk Show**

From Page 10A

where it was once the property of Marie Antoinette. Beside it is a reproduction of the fabric and design, woven at Cheney mills.

The walls of the main hall are covered with heavy goods — tapestries of large and small figures, velvours of rich brocades and velvets. In our picture the drapery of many varying colors merges in one dark mass save where a cloth of gold is reflected instead of absorbing the light.

On the long tables shown in the foreground are grouped in harmonious or contrasting colors hundreds of pieces of silks, satins and velvets, no two alike. Some are as thin and light as a cobweb; others are plush with a pile almost like fur. Ribbons of silk and velvet are displayed in boxes as they are placed on the market. On one table are shown 140 pieces of one kind of velvet all of different tints. The effect is like that of a brilliant rainbow as the colors are arranged in the order of the spectrum. An especially attractive exhibit to the ladies is that of the light silken scarfs so much in vogue, of which there is an endless variety of tints and designs.

Conspicuously placed placards direct the spectators to the continuation of the exhibit downstairs. After the magnificence of the display in the main hall it is a relief to turn to the practical features of silk production. Here are shown the two raw materials from which the goods upstairs are made — on the one side

of the aisle a bale of pierced cocoons and on the other the lustrous hanks of raw silk from Japan and Italy. The difference between these two crude staples is far more evident than that between the finished goods, and it is the final resemblance of the one to the other that marks one of Cheney Brothers' greatest achievements. The imported raw silk is made from unpierced cocoons. In this case the fibre is unrolled in one continuous thread from the cocoon by hand labor and placed on a reel. [?] the worm has eaten its way out of the cocoon, as it eventually does it severs this silken thread in many places and makes reeling it impossible. So the pierced cocoons are not used by the orientals and were formerly thrown away as useless. But Cheney Brothers discovered a way of treating these cocoons, something after the fashion of a cotton boll, and by carding, combining, reeling and spinning it made it into a strong, continuous thread, which may be dyed any color and woven into many fabrics.

Silk novelties are also shown in the basement. Among them are national and college flags, covers for sofa pillows, bed quilts and blankets, handkerchiefs, mufflers and scarfs. A demonstration of "shower proof" silks is shown in an alcove where beneath a strong light a revolving cone built of silk is subject to a constant drip of water without injury.



1861. U. Starr. America. CITY OF NEW YORK. MANCHESTER, Monday, June 17, 1901. 10A

**ENORMOUS UNDERTAKING** — Above is a scene from the hall basement during the 1908 silk show, and below left, one of the many gowns on display for thousands to admire.

In the small hall beneath stage and arrangement of the main hall is reproduced, only here the wall draperies are of plain and figured light weight dress goods. On a platform in the center of the room are forms showing the silk made up into kimono. Guests of the firm will come from Boston by special train Friday and from New York Saturday. Governor Woodruff has accepted an invitation to visit the exhibit. The day of his visit has not been positively fixed but he will probably come tomorrow. When it was decided to carpet the aisles somebody asked if they were going to cover the floor with silk too.



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## But what's it really like?

By DAVID LAMMEY  
Manchester Herald

The editor of the Cheney Hall "tabloid" sits down at his keyboard with a problem. He knows readers are curious of one thing at this point, namely, what is Cheney Hall like? In the flesh? What is it like to visit a legend?

The editor, who must now be a writer, pauses. It's been said that a writer should never describe, he should show. This writer would like to show readers the hall. Through words. It sounds doubtful but he'll try.

Cheney Hall is on Hartford Road, he writes. It's a rather large building, oblong and brick red. Because there are bricks, you see. Some have called the building ugly — in fact, it was Cynthia Cheney Childs in her story "Memories of Memorable Days: Circa 1918" that called it ugly. I didn't call it ugly. I would call it ... honest. Honest, unpretentious, and yet ... strangely dignified ... almost avuncular ... yes, it reminds me of my uncle — or at least the uncle I wish I had ...

The writer pulls his hands from the keyboard. This isn't writing — it's describing, he thinks with disgust. Not even good describing. Now Thomas Wolfe, now there was a good describer. The writer taps a few more keys

and the offending paragraph is erased. What about statistics? He's got a few. People like statistics. They don't mean anything but they sound interesting. He looks at some notes scribbled on a pad: the hall auditorium, 45 by 65 feet, 3200 square feet including stage. Ceiling, 25 feet high. Meeting room in lower level, 37 by 50 feet. Entire building, 12,000 square feet.

Nash, won't do, he thinks, folding his pad up. This isn't Jeopardy, for gosh sakes, this is a landmark. This is a way of life preserved, this is a time capsule, this is ... Aw, quit trying to write it, he says aloud. No one in the newsroom hears, luckily. Then the writer starts thinking like an editor. Where are those photographs? He shuffles through the pile on his desk. He's heard it said that a photograph is worth a thousand words, or something like that. He pulls a few up and examines them closely. They are magnificent photographs. Spectacular. Taken by the best of photographers. An editor couldn't ask for better photographs. Gosh, he thinks, these are great photographs.

And he tosses them back on the heap. It's no good, he thinks as he rubs his eyes with his palms. Photographs won't do it. Not here. Like watching a baseball game through a peephole. Photographs may be worth a thousand words,

but in this case, even a thousand words won't help. Not even two thousand. So why am I trying? he wonders. How can you write about the Cheney Hall and hope to capture even a fraction of its essence? How can you write about the feeling you get when you walked inside the first time? It was a sunny day, and when you passed through the front arches and through the front vestibule, the ceiling shot up into the sky and the walls pushed back. The floor was enormous. You walked across the floor toward the stage at the other end — it took a long time. Plastic covered the floor. The place smelled faintly of varnished wood. A workman's radio was playing softly somewhere, the tiny music filled the hall.

Mary Blish stood in the middle of the hall with Robert Weiss and Judge Fitzgerald. They were talking and looking around the place, and smiling.

"You know," Robert Weiss was saying, "this just goes to show what you can do if you believe in something."

That was how it was that day, the editor thinks. Then he turns off his keyboard. Aw heck, I give up. There's no way to communicate that. Let 'em see the hall on their own. It's the only way to understand it.

## Donors honored in the hall

Two rooms in Cheney Hall will be named in memory of outstanding Manchester citizens. The green room, or reception room, in the lower level, will be named in memory of Edger H. Clarke, a prominent insurance man who was well-known for his love for antiques, especially antique automobiles. The Clarke family donated a large sum in his memory to the project, as well as the original grandfather clock, which will be in the lower level of Cheney Hall will be named in his memory.

## Memorial

From Page 24A

speech and thought and liberty to worship God as one's conscience dictates which is characteristic of this nation.

The line of march was then formed. The Talcoville drum corps of 22 pieces headed the procession, and Company G, with full ranks, escorted the veterans.

Drake Post turned out 87 men in the ranks, and those who were unable to march followed in carriages. The usual long line of private convalesces followed the soldiers.

At the monument the male chorus sang. Rev. J.M. Taber offered prayer, and after a brief memorial

## Choral

From Page 24A

the [?] the [?] lay, by letter or in person, with the secretary, Mr. Charles C. Ashbury, Manchester. The endorsements can generally be arranged for by introductions. All the singers should, if possible, appear at the next rehearsal, when

work will begin in earnest, and attend regularly through the series. Rehearsals will regularly occur on Monday evenings at 7:30, the next on Oct. 20th. A special train will return to Manchester after each performance.



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And so today the hall stands, as it always will, in an atmosphere that is always afternoon." Author Unknown  
August 30, 1920

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