

The Courier

FEBRUARY 2004

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Archaeological Dig Continues at Pitkin Glass Works

by John Spaulding

The archaeological “digs” at the Pitkin Glass Works, located at the corner of Parker and Putnam Streets, continued through the summer of 2003.

The digs started in the fall of 2001, co-sponsored by the Pitkin Glass Works Committee, the Manchester Historical Society, and the Manchester Middle Schools. The work was supervised by the state archaeologist, Dr. Nick Bellantoni, with assistance by the Friends of the Office of State Archaeology. Several other groups have also participated in “digs” at the site under the supervision of Dr. Bellantoni.

The purpose of the digs is to learn more about the Glass Works and how it was operated. Guided by a ground-penetrating radar survey performed by Fuss & O'Neill in November 2001, numerous test pits have been dug, both inside the building remains and elsewhere on the site. Although an abundance of broken glass has been found on the site, other artifacts have been found which indicate the use of the land in the 170+ years since the Glass Works closed in 1830. Trinkets, coins, and

the skeletons of pigs and a sheep are examples of the artifacts found.

The most significant artifact found in a recent dig is a small Pitkin chestnut bottle only 1.85 inches high.



Small chestnut-type bottle found at the Pitkin Glass Works. (Photo by John Spaulding)

This was found by a group of Illing Middle School girls who were being assisted by Historical Society President, Dave Smith. This is the only bottle of its type that can be attributed directly to the Pitkin site and was found almost eight inches below the surface of the ground. It is now being displayed in the Pitkin Glass Works exhibit at the Old Manchester Museum.

(see *Glass Works*, page 3)

Cheney Homestead News

by Mark Sutcliffe, Chairman

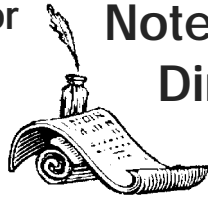
Upcoming work planned for The Homestead

The snowy winter and cold temperatures have been playing havoc with the Homestead's roof. Melting snow freezes at the roof edges, forming ice dams that cause the water to back up underneath the shingles and leak into the soffits. Brown icicles hang from the eaves and weep out from behind the clapboards. So far there has been no damage to the interior of the Homestead, or the collections, but we are keeping our fingers crossed that the plastic on the roof will hold up until spring.

We look forward to the roof replacement, repairs, and chimney work scheduled to begin April 15, although we are less than half way to our goal of raising \$55,000. The Cheney Family Fund of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving has generously given us a \$25,000 grant towards roof replacement. They have recognized the need to properly maintain Manchester's only historic house museum. Will you?

Nominations Sought for Cheney District Preservation Awards

The Cheney Brothers National Historic District Commission has announced the guidelines for the fourth annual Historic Preservation Awards Program, recognizing property owners in the district who have improved their property while preserving its historic character. From March 1-March 31, 2004, property owners or anyone else may nominate buildings that have had improvement work completed. Awards will be presented during National Historic Preservation Week, May 9-16, 2004. For more information, contact Awards Chairman Mary Tierney, at 643-2597.



Notes from the Director

by Mary Dunne

A few weeks ago a 22-year-old man came into the museum looking for a copy of our wonderful 1914 aerial view of Manchester. His grandparents had met while working in the Cheney Brothers Velvet Mill and he was about to move into one of the apartments located in that building. He wanted to find out all he could about what Manchester was like almost one hundred years ago when his grandparents met. Could his grandparents have ever imagined that the mill they worked in would one day be a sought-after place to live, and did they dare think that one of the future occupants would be their own grandson? We obviously don't always see history in the making, but with time and perspective we see that the most ordinary of events can take on significant meaning. This man's personal family history adds to the collective experience that builds the story of Manchester.

One of the major goals of the Society is to take our mission outside the walls of our museums and literally bring it home to residents of Manchester. To that end we have an exciting spring calendar of events planned. This year we are taking a thematic approach to programming and will tie in a series of lectures with walking tours in May and June. The lectures will take a look at the history and architecture of various neighborhoods in Manchester. Our walking tours will take us out on the street to visit neighborhoods that you might not initially suspect are "historic." Among the neighborhoods we will visit will be "Hollywood," the early twentieth-century neighborhood developed by E.J. Holl; and then Union Village, and the East Side. I hope our members and especially res-

idents of these neighborhoods will come along with us to learn something new about where they live.

You may notice the "Leave a Legacy" logo we print in every issue of the Courier. LEAVE A LEGACY Connecticut is a statewide public awareness effort to promote charitable giving through wills and estate plans. June is LEAVE A LEGACY month and we will be bringing you more information on how you can make a lasting impression through a planned contribution to the Manchester Historical Society. It's easy and everyone can participate, regardless of income. Every gift is significant. As you will read in this issue, the Society has recently benefited from legacy donations. Your thoughtfulness and generosity will ensure that this organization stays strong and continuously evolves to remain relevant and meaningful as we carry out our mission to educate the public about Manchester's rich history.

*

As of this writing, two of Manchester's historic buildings will fall to the wrecking ball soon. A CL&P substation, built by the Cheney's around 1919, is being "retired" by Northeast Utilities, and the land will be used for new equipment. Located on Hartford Road on the edge of the Cheney Brothers National Landmark District, the building for some reason was left out when the district was formed. Architecturally the building takes cues from the nearby mills. Rounded arch windows and a corbelled cornice give it an elegant look for such a utilitarian structure.

The second building is located in the Union Village National Historic District. One of the first generation worker houses, it has a central chimney plan. The building has been vacant for some time and has fallen into disrepair.

(see Director, page 3)

The Courier

A newsletter for members of the Manchester Historical Society

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It is sad to lose important buildings such as these, but the time to act is long before the demolition permit is applied for. If we want to ensure that Manchester retains ALL the important structures that together help tell the story of our past, we need to be vigilant and proactive in helping property owners find alternatives to demolishing buildings. I've never walked into a building that was too far gone to be saved, restored and given new life, but it's far better for everyone to think ahead and put alternatives to demolition in motion before it is too late.

With this in mind, let's keep our eyes on the Elizabeth Bennett Middle School, which is currently being evaluated for renovation, with a possible demolition component being considered, too. Not only is the former "Education Square" complex significant to our local history, but the buildings were designed by the New York firm of Carrere Hastings, best known for their design of the New York Public Library. Manchester is fortunate to be able to boast having several buildings by architects of note, and we should protect such assets.

Glass Works, continued from page 1

The glass fragments found at the site are the property of the Pitkin Glass Works, Inc., incorporated in June 1978 to acquire, own, preserve, develop, exhibit, and maintain the historic site. The members of the corporation represent the Orford Parish Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Manchester Historical Society, and the Town of Manchester. The fragments are now being inventoried and cataloged by volunteers at the Old Manchester Museum. Call Dave Smith at 647-9983 if you can help in this task.

As the digs continue, the concentration has been on the interior of the building in hopes of finding evidence of the operation of the glass works. A pattern of brick structures and trap rock slabs is emerging that may eventually provide insight into the layout of the glass works.

Still Room for Museum Docents!

by Susan Barlow and Florence Johnson

What's the best part of volunteering at the Old Manchester Museum? Is it the free coffee and tea? Or the conviviality of serving with other dedicated members? Or the opportunity to examine the pictures, maps, postcards, and exhibits? Or to greet visitors from far and wide?

Well, whatever your favorite reason, we're glad that many of you have volunteered to staff the museum. This is a fun job, where you meet new people and always learn something new about Manchester history. We are still looking for people who can commit to a shift once a month, or once every quarter. We need two volunteers for each three-hour shift:

Fridays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Saturdays 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Sundays 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

The duties are interesting and easy—just ask any of our current volunteers. You would assist visitors, answer questions (or write them down if you don't know the answer), and do other pleasant duties. There are written instructions for each procedure at the museum.

Please review your calendar, and call us to volunteer for an ongoing shift. Bring a friend! Phone the museum at 647-9983, or Florence Johnson, home 643-4742 or 742-5850, to volunteer or to find out more. The Old Manchester Museum is at 126 Cedar Street, near Washington School.

News Notes

Machine Shop Update

Society Executive Director **Mary Dunne** will soon be able to move into the new offices in the Machine Shop building on Pine Street. Led by the herculean efforts of Board members (and 2003 Volunteers of the Year) **John Dormer** and **Ed Wait**, as well as **Gary Benson**, the renovations to part of the second floor are nearly completed. Floors and brickface have been cleaned and treated, lighting installed, and new doors ready for installation. In addition, Cox Communications has installed wiring for telephone and internet use. Recently, the building subcommittee met with town officials to get their recommendations for preparing other sections of the second floor for public gatherings. Once such work is completed, the Society's seating space for public lectures and events will triple that in the current museum.

High School Interns Hard at Work

Manchester High School students **Michael Boulay** and **Jennifer Brophy** completed internships for class credit by working at the museum during the fall semester. Michael worked as an archivist accessioning donated items to our collection and converting records on the Manchester Sports Hall of Fame to an updated data base program. Jennifer researched, designed and mounted an exhibit on early to mid-twentieth century sports equipment.

Working at the Old Manchester Museum is a great way for high school students to fulfill community service requirements, earn class credit, or just have fun! We welcome our young volunteers.

(see News, page 6)

Manchester on the Menu

The Riegs' Influence on Shady Glen and the Town

by **Robert Dunne**

When Shady Glen Dairy Stores founder John Rieg passed away last August, his two restaurants—on East Middle Turnpike and in the Manchester Parkade—were closed for his funeral services. Since then, they have gone on to sell thousands of servings of the famous Shady Glen ice cream and orders of the equally famous Bernice Original cheeseburgers. Over fifty years ago, John and his wife Bernice started a Manchester institution that has endured changing fashions and tastes and that will continue to flourish into the twenty-first century.

Named by John's mother Shirley Idella, Shady Glen started as an offshoot of the Riegs' dairy farm, which a 20-year-old John had begun to manage in 1934. Two years later John and Bernice married, and thus began a life-long partnership, whereby John would manage production and Bernice would take charge of the growing retail side of the business.

In 1952, largely due to the tremendous success of the dairy store that had opened four years earlier, the Riegs sold their cows and milk business, and two years later initiated the first of several renovations to enlarge their restaurant.

The Riegs opened their second store in the Manchester Parkade in 1965, and today both stores continue to serve a very eager public—not only from Manchester but all over. Along with some of the finest restaurants in the state, Shady Glen is prominently featured in Zagat's Guides.

John Rieg's presence will be felt in Manchester for as long as people still flock into Shady Glen to enjoy Bernice Originals and ice cream sundaes. He not only created an institution in his



Shady Glen restaurants, but his legacy also includes decades of support for many non-profit organizations in Manchester, including the Historical Society.

Society Receives Two Bequests

We have recently received bequests from the estates of two benefactors.

Ruth Edith Cheney Shepherd, who died over a year ago, made two bequests to the Society, one to the Historical Society, and a second directly to the Society's Cheney Homestead. Being a descendant of the Cheneys of Manchester, she had a life long interest in history and in the Cheney legacy. Her bequest will help us preserve Manchester's and the Cheney family history.

Margaret Olmstead, widow of Richard S. Olmstead, died in 2003. She directed that a portion of her estate be donated to the Society. Margaret and Richard were long-time residents of the town. Her father, R. Lamotte Russell, was Secretary, Treasurer, and finally President of the Savings Bank of Manchester until he retired in 1956, after 50 years at the bank. Margaret's unrestricted donation will aid the Society in its many

programs, including education, publication of books, and acquisition of artifacts.

We are most grateful to these two individuals, whose foresight, generosity, and love of Manchester and its history will help the Society carry out its mission of education and preservation of the history of our town.

Society Acquires Large Postcard Collection

Acquisition Includes 1888 Town Directory

Recently we were fortunate to be able to purchase a large collection of Manchester postcards. This was made possible by a generous gift from an anonymous benefactor, which enabled us to buy the collection of 1,000 postcards. The acquisition also included a very good copy of the first Manchester Town Directory, published in 1888.

The postcards represent a wide variety of topics and scenes. Most are black and white but many are in color. They are currently being catalogued and it is expected that they will be available for viewing in a few months.

The Town Directory has been photocopied for the use of the public. We presented a copy to the Mary Cheney Library, and another copy is available at the Society's Research Library. It is interesting to browse the earliest directories and see the advertisements for businesses long gone. The directory includes ads for several livery stables, blacksmiths, horseshoers, and dealers in carriages and wagons in town, as well as manufacturers of light bulbs and paper products.

Great Lawn Update

by Mark Sutcliffe

The Great Lawn is a pastoral landscape surrounded by the Cheney mansions in the heart of the Cheney Brothers National Historic Landmark District.

Recognizing its historical significance and value as open space in an increasingly urbanized area, the Town of Manchester purchased the central 9 acres in late 2002 to preserve it as open space. In 2003, as the Town was planning to amend the zoning regulations to prohibit development on the remaining parts of the Lawn, a proposal was made to build condominiums on its west end. As the Historical Society was gearing up to oppose the development plan, Mr. Anthony Viscogliosi stepped in to purchase two of the Cheney mansions, thereby eliminating the threat of condominium development.

Meanwhile, the Town of Manchester Planning Department formed an ad hoc committee of interested local citizens to explore the possibilities of the Great Lawn. An inventory team was established to identify the important landscape features, and a design team was established to incorporate those features into a plan for public access and use. A number of meetings has been held and a conceptual plan formulated. Parks Department workers are currently in the process of clearing out dense brush and poison ivy that has grown up around the specimen trees. The Town and adjoining landowners have begun regularly mowing the lawn to help restore it to its historic appearance.

Several noteworthy trees have been discovered growing on the Great Lawn, including a large Cucumber Magnolia (*Magnolia acuminata*), Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), White, Pin, and Red Oaks (*Quercus alba*, *palustris*, and *rubra*), and European Copper Beech (*Fagus sylvatica 'Atropunicea'*). A most unusual find was a multi-trunk Horsechestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), one of whose four trunks is a double-flowered sterile cultivar called 'Baumannii' that was discovered in Switzerland in 1819. The 'Baumannii' trunk flowers later and for a longer period of time than the other three trunks which are "normal" and produce large quantities of nuts. Apparently the Cheneys planted a grafted tree that suckered from the understock. The tree is a spectacular sight in bloom in late May and has been written up in the Fall/Winter, 2003 edition of the *Newsletter of the Connecticut Botanical Society*.

Look forward to a better view of the Great Lawn and its magnificent specimen trees when the brush and dead trees along Hartford Road are cleared out this year as part of a bikeway and historic district improvement project.

History on Your Television

by Susan Barlow

"Pioneer Parachute, Then and Now," will re-air in February on Public Access television (Channel 15 in the Manchester area). Today's Pioneer Aerospace makes parachutes for the shuttle and Mars landings, and you have probably seen them on television, without knowing their connection to Manchester's history.

Participants in the show's panel discussion are members and friends of the Society: Jim Reuter, Martha Seavey, Grace Tedford, and Fred Ware. Fred Towle, who baled out of a burning plane in WWII, describes his "caterpillar pin," given to fliers whose lives were saved when they used a Pioneer parachute.

This two-part show runs throughout February: Part I, all Thursdays, 8-9 p.m. Part II, all Saturdays, 8-8:50 p.m.

In March, we'll broadcast the City of Village Charm show, most of which was filmed at the Cheney Homestead. Susan Barlow, the show's producer, asked people what town location makes Manchester charming, and why it's their favorite. This show will run Saturdays at 8.

On Thursdays in March, we visit Joe Camposeo, Town Clerk, to learn about the historic records at Town Hall available to the public. Some of these are even available from your home computer, through the Town web site www.ci.manchester.ct.us/. The Historic Records show airs at 8 p.m., channel 15.

Other recent shows include:

- "Conversations with the Dobkin Family," an interview with Audrey Brett and Adler Dobkin, whose family moved into a Cheney mansion in 1942, the first "non-Cheneys" to live in a house on the Great Lawn.
- "Visiting the Jacobsons," a house tour of a lovely home on Wyllys Street and conversation with homeowners and long-time Historical Society members, Dr. and Mrs. Charles Jacobson.
- "Growing Tobacco in Connecticut," with Eleanor Coltman's slide show, using photos from the 1970s, when tobacco was still grown in Manchester. Our major thanks to Society member John Spaulding, who digitized the photos and created a CD, which we used throughout the television show. The show includes commentary by Richard Tambling, Living Section Editor of the *Journal Inquirer*, and Dick Jenkins, web master of MHS1955.com, a web site with many vintage Manchester photos and stories.

Some of our previous shows can be borrowed at Mary Cheney Library, or purchased at the Old Manchester Museum on Cedar Street. Your comments on the shows are welcome. Call the Society at 647-9983, or visit the web-site at manchesterhistory.org.

Village Charm "Ballot" Available at Museum

by Susan Barlow

What Spot Makes Manchester A City of Village Charm for YOU?

Manchester has used the nickname City of Village Charm for as long as I can remember. Despite the growth over the last few decades—houses, the mall, I-384—many believe the town still qualifies as a charming city.

During the snowy Open House on December 14 at the Homestead and Museum, intrepid visitors had the opportunity to "vote" for a favorite charming place in Manchester. Some who explained why it was their favorite were interviewed for the Society's TV shows (*see related story*).

How can YOU participate in this unscientific poll? We have ballots at the Museum on Cedar Street—just drop by and complete one. Members have free entrance to the Museum and the Homestead.

So far, the poll has shown that folks found the Cheney Historic District, including Cheney Hall, the area that continues to make Manchester live up to its nickname. Several people commented favorably on the town's purchase of the Great Lawn, the wise and attractive re-use of the mills as apartments, the lovely mansions, and especially Cheney Hall. Those who knew the Hall in the 1970s and 1980s are still amazed that it was saved.

Voters selected as their second choice Downtown Manchester, with its old-fashioned buildings. Several people commented on the recent renovations there. We are fortunate not to have demolished our Downtown, as other New England towns have done. Many of those Colonial Revival buildings date to the turn of the last century, and are still in use today.

The next three highest vote-getters were so close as to be tied for third:

- The view from Case Mountain, with spires of churches and Town Hall
- The bridges and stone walls at Highland Park
- Center Park, near Mary Cheney library.

The public libraries were only 38 votes behind the third-place tie.

The most popular write-in on the ballot was Porter and Howard Reservoirs, in the southeast side of town. The Cheney's constructed these reservoirs between 1889 and 1905.

Other popular write-ins were Center Springs Park, Manchester Green, Northwest Park, the churches in the Downtown area (South Methodist, Center Congregational, The Salvation Army Citadel, St. James Roman Catholic, and Emanuel Lutheran), Oak Grove Nature Center, Meadowbrook Farm, and Shady Glen restaurant. Hockanum River trails, especially the Adams Mill area, and Union Pond were popular also. Several people noted Pitkin Glass Works, the East Cemetery, and Union Village.

We have 143 responses so far, and will continue to solicit opinions through June, when we'll announce the results of our charming, but not necessarily scientific, study.

News continued from page 3

Board of Directors News

The Society welcomes **Sean Lindsay** as a new member of the Board. Sean, owner of Economy Oil Change on Broad Street, will bring a long-time interest in history to the Society; his father Bert was Vice-President of the Society from 1993 to 1995. We also send our prayers and best wishes to Board member **Leslie Nieves**, who will be on a leave of absence from the board, as she will be engaging in military service in Iraq.

Wish List

Copy of the November 1925 issue of *National Geographic*, which contains a special piece with connections to Manchester; also, old photos of cars and motorcycles from the 1900s to 1930s.

We Remember...

Several dedicated members passed away in recent months. The Society will miss Life Members **Robert E. Beach**, **Sara Stone Haugh**, and **Marco Squatrito**, and long-time members **Warren Thurnauer**, and frequent volunteer **Aileen (Wilson) Tinti**.

Corrections

In our list of donors from the last issue, we misspelled the names of two generous contributors: Evelyn Clarke, under the Annual Fund; and Alexandra Learned-Preston, under the Homestead Fund. We apologize for the error.

Please Return Those Surveys

Hundreds of surveys were included in a previous issue of *The Courier*, but not many have been returned to us. Responding to the survey will allow us to better gauge the needs of our members, in terms of programming and what to include in the newsletter. Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey; you may return it by mail or drop it off at the Old Manchester Museum. Thank you!



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Spring 2004



Feb. 15 ***From Manchester to Mars***
 Sunday
 2 p.m.
 Speaker: Jim Reuter,
 Pioneer Aerospace Consultant
 Location: Old Manchester Museum

Mar. 21 ***A History of Development
in Manchester***
 Sunday
 2 p.m.
 Speaker: Mark Pellegrini
 Location: Old Manchester Museum

Apr. 18 ***The Story of Hollywood, Manchester***
 Sunday
 2 p.m.
 Speaker: Mary Dunne
 Location: Old Manchester Museum

Apr. 30 **Manchester Historical Society
Annual Dinner**
 Friday
 Look for details in the mail

May 15 ***27th Annual Cheney Walking Tour
of Cheney Bros. Historic District***
 Saturday
 1 p.m.
 Guide: Dr. John Sutherland
 Meet in front of Cheney Hall

May 16 ***Manchester Memories***
 Sunday
 2 p.m.
 Speaker: Susan Barlow
 Location: Old Manchester Museum

May 29 ***Walking Tour:
Hollywood Section of Manchester***
 Saturday
 1 p.m.
 Guide: Mary Dunne
 Details in Next Newsletter

June 5 ***Bus Tour of Waterbury-area
Museums including Timexpo***
 Saturday
 Details in Next Newsletter

June 12 ***Manchester Heritage Day***
 Saturday
 Details in Next Newsletter

Manchester Historical Society Gift Membership

I would like to give a Historical Society membership to:

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Home Phone () _____

This gift is from:

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

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Family (\$25) Contributing Family (\$75)

Life (\$250) Life Couple (\$400)

Student (\$5) (age 18 and under)

Make checks payable to: ***Manchester Historical Society***

Mail to: ***Manchester Historical Society***
106 Hartford Road, Manchester, CT 06040

A Lifetime Gift: Leaving A Legacy

***You Too Can Leave a Legacy and
Make A Difference***

The Manchester Historical Society is in the early stages of a major expansion that will make it an enduring and prominent historical and cultural resource in eastern Connecticut. Are you interested in making a gift that will stay with us well into that bright future? Then consider naming the Society in your will or as a beneficiary of your life insurance plan. Bequests will help ensure that the Society continues to carry out its mission of preserving the town's history and educating the public, all while acknowledging the generosity and support of your legacy. To discuss planned giving or other donor options, call or have your estate planner contact Dave Smith, President, at 860-647-9983. *(See related story in this issue about two recent legacy donations.)*



The Manchester Historical Society
106 Hartford Road
Manchester, Connecticut 06040

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

*Join us for tours and events
during Pride in Manchester Week
June 5-12, 2004*