



The Courier

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Fate of Bennet Buildings Now Rests with Attorney General

by Robert Dunne

In a meeting on May 3, the State Historic Preservation Council voted to deny the town's request to raze three buildings of the Bennet School complex and to request State Attorney General Richard Blumenthal to intervene to preserve the buildings.

Located on School Street, the buildings in question—the Cheney building, a firehouse, and a boiler plant—are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as contributing resources to the Cheney Brothers National Historic District. Any individual or organization may petition the Preservation Council to intercede to prevent the demolition of buildings listed on the National Register. In this case, when the Town's own Cheney Historic District Commission filed such a petition, the Town was then required to ask the State Historic Preservation Council to reject the petition and allow it to demolish the three buildings, to make way for a parking lot and half a soccer field.

On April 26, the Council heard testimony from several Town officials who argued that demolishing the three buildings was part of a larger preservation project to renovate the other Bennet buildings into a sixth-grade academy. At that meeting, Town Director of Operations Louise Guarnaccia was denied the opportunity to argue that the buildings in question were not historically significant. Council chairman Timothy Beeble explained that the historical significance of the buildings was not in question: they were recognized as significant in 1978 when the historic district was originally designated, and that status was confirmed during a March 2006 meeting. This unequivocal decision put aside much of the town's argument in favor of razing the three buildings.

Several Directors had previously charged, in the April Directors meeting, that the buildings were not significant and that proponents of saving the buildings were guilty of spreading misinformation—specifically, that the buildings were not constructed by the Cheney

(see *Bennet Buildings*, page 3)



The three Bennet buildings at the center of the controversy: a firehouse, boiler plant, and Cheney Building.

Heritage Day TAG SALE Saturday, June 10th

Have you found unneeded books and other items during spring cleaning? Then please donate them to the Society for our Heritage Day Tag Sale, at the History Center on June 10th, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The Society is interested in books and other usable items (but no clothes, please) to offer for sale. Proceeds will help support the Society's operating expenses. You may drop off donations at the History Center, 175 Pine Street, on Tuesdays and Thursdays until June 6, from 10 a.m. until noon. For more information, contact Brenda Paullo at 643-2413.

From the President

by John Dormer

“Volunteers are the lifeblood of the organization.” How often have we heard that phrase? In the case of the Manchester Historical Society volunteers were the only source of labor for the organization for over 37 years. When an Executive Director and a part-time Development Director were hired as paid staff in 2003 and 2004, the need for active volunteers actually increased. As the staff developed programs and attempted to expand the scope of activities of the Society, the core group of dedicated volunteers has been unable to supply the hours required and meet the requirements of the different types of work. New

volunteers have been recruited for tasks ranging from office greeters to maintenance workers to docents. Manchester Historical Society members have also volunteered for work at special events sponsored by the Society, such as the recent Old House Fair. However, the need for many additional volunteers still exists.

When I became the President of the Manchester Historical Society in October of 2005, I stated that I would like to see the year 2006 be “The Year of the Volunteer.” It has become painfully obvious that the organization needs a greater percentage of the membership to volunteer for the activities and routine work needs of the Society. The Old Manchester Museum has had to be closed on several of the weekend days it is normally open because of a lack of docents. At least two people are required at the Museum when it is open. Some planned programs will be reduced in scope or cancelled if more volunteers do not step

forward. With increasing activity at the History Center (the former Cheney Brothers Machine Shop and the current office location for the staff), more people are needed to do cleaning work and assist with office work. Weekly household chores are among the tasks that need volunteers. The upcoming events associated with the Pride in Manchester Week and Heritage Day will also require volunteers. Volunteers for exhibit planning and preparation are also needed. The Keeney Schoolhouse is in need of replacement of rotted wood and major scraping and painting work as well as some window glazing. The History Center will be undergoing significant window repair, scraping, glazing, and repainting as well as frame caulking. Please contact Brenda Paullo at (860) 643-2413 to assist with these activities or to volunteer for ongoing work at the Society.

Thank you in advance for your much needed help.

The Courier

***A newsletter of the
Manchester Historical Society***

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Manchester Cooks!

A Sequel Is Heating Up

Attention, all cooks! The Society is accepting original recipes for a sequel to its first cookbook, *Manchester Cooks!* For this edition, the theme will be “Manchester Cooks for Special Occasions: A Collection of Heritage Recipes.” We’re looking for recipes that people have used for birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, Independence Day, religious events, and other “special occasions.” In addition, we’d love to have contributors submit photographs and a personal note about either the recipe, the person who has prepared it, or a memory about the occasion. The book will be as much a local history project as a cookbook.

The Society would like to publish the book in time for sale by November 15—so please send in those recipes and anything else by August 1. You may mail it to the Society at 106 Hartford Road, or (what we prefer), send it by email attachment to <mdunne@mhs.necoxmail.com>. Submit as many recipes as you’d like; however, the Society reserves the right to make final selections for the book. Start cookin’!

BENNET BUILDINGS *from page 1*

and that the Cheney building was not the first public technical school in the state. However, in no official announcements has the Historical Society ever made such assertions.

Such arguments illustrate how there has been a great deal of misunderstanding surrounding what constitutes an historically significant and contributing resource to the landmark district. According to the Statement of Significance in the landmark designation for this district, the listed buildings as a whole—including mill buildings, worker houses, churches, schools, and the Cheney family mansions—present an excellently preserved example of a nineteenth- to early twentieth-century paternalistic mill town. This was taken into account by the Federal Government when it included the School Street buildings in the district in 1978.

Unfortunately, no Director had previously consulted with the Cheney Historic District Commission prior to the Directors' 8-1 vote in January to demolish the three buildings, even though the Commission's primary function, as defined by the Town, is to advise the Town on matters pertaining to the historic district. In fact, in Directors meetings from January through March, several Directors said they based their decision to demolish the buildings solely on their own private visits to the buildings, without anyone from either the Town Historic District Commission or any other architectural historians present.

During the Directors meeting in April, however, several Directors, including Joseph Hachey and Lisa O'Neill (the only director to vote against the buildings' demolition in January), expressed reservations about proceeding to raze the buildings without ever having gotten input from either the town's Historic District Commission or the Historical Society. In addition, other directors, such as Louis Spadaccini, Matthew Peak and Cheri Pelletier, stated that perhaps the Directors were being hasty to raze the buildings.

What's Going On During Pride in Manchester Week?

On Saturday, June 10, the Society will offer an abundance of activities for the family during Manchester Heritage Day. The Old Manchester Museum, Cheney Homestead, and Keeny Schoolhouse will be open to the public from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Here are some of the activities planned:

- Book and Tag Sale at the History Center (from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.)
- Scavenger Hunt for children at the Homestead
- A new exhibit, "Manchester's Early Post Offices," at the Museum
- Display booth in Cheney Hall parking lot with other organizations
- Board Director Susan Barlow will also lead two bus tours of the town, originating at Cheney Hall, at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Seating is limited to 22 passengers per bus; meet at Cheney Hall and register at the information desk that morning.

Leading up to Heritage Day will be three walking tours, one specifically designed for children, that will provide educational experiences of the Downtown area, Center Springs Park, and Revolutionary War-era gravestones. The gravestone tour, of Manchester's West Cemetery, commemorates the 225th anniversary of the Washington-Rochambeau route.

Please support the Historical Society by visiting us and going on our walking tours during Pride in Manchester week.

At the April 26 Historic Preservation Council meeting, Society Executive Director Mary Dunne was adamant that an amicable agreement could be reached between the Town and advocates of saving the buildings. She called for open dialogue between the Directors and professional architectural historians to find viable alternatives that would preserve the buildings, as happened several years ago when the Salvation Army wanted to demolish the Citadel on Main Street. She maintained that the Historical Society would be more than willing to organize constructive meetings between the Town and the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, a non-profit organization established by the State, and to lend the Society's expertise in the maintenance of national historic districts to such a dialogue.

Dunne said, "The Town needs to recognize that neither the Manchester Historical Society nor the Town's own Historic District Commission is attempting to

obstruct the Town's interests in educating Manchester's children. We wish to assist the Town in every way that we can to best educate our children while preserving Manchester's unique architectural landscape. We don't want to see the School Street buildings become this generation's Depot Square, whereby historically significant buildings are needlessly demolished. Children need to know the history of their town, and historic buildings help tell that special story. Manchester's children will have a harder time recognizing what makes their town distinctive if their landmarks are reduced to parking lots and level fields. There are alternatives to demolishing the three buildings, and the Historical Society will do all it can to aid the Town in pursuing these alternatives."

As of this writing, the Attorney General's office is still gathering information on the case.

Curator's Column

Recently Added to Our Collections: *Manchester Green Post Office*

by Dave Smith

Last fall we received a call from Arthur England asking if we would be interested in acquiring the mailboxes and postmaster's desk from the old Manchester Green Post Office. Art's father, W. Harry England, had been the last postmaster at "The Green" and had saved the mailboxes and desk. We had heard that they were out there, somewhere, but did not know where. Amongst ourselves we had occasionally dreamed that someday we would find them.

Our response was, of course, "Yes, we are very much interested!" Within a few days we had brought them (thanks to Fred Lea and his truck) to the History Center for cleaning and minor repairs. They are now on display in the Old Manchester Museum as part of our newest exhibit, "Manchester's Early Post Offices." Thanks also go to Manchester Safe & Lock for making new keys and rekeying locks so that most of the mailboxes with locking doors can now be opened.

The first post office within Manchester's present boundaries was at Manchester Green, arguably the first business center in town, with a mill, store, tavern, and stage coach stop on the main road between Hartford and Providence. East Hartford's postmaster, Lemuel White, appointed to the office in January 1806 and keeper of the Tavern at Manchester Green, was the first postmaster 200 years ago, when Manchester was known as Orford Parish. The next year he was succeeded by the first official postmaster, Wells Woodbridge, and the name was changed to Orford. The post office was moved across the street to the general store. The town of Manchester was incorporated in 1823. Harry England was the last postmaster when the post office closed in 1944.

Thelma Woodbridge recalls that in the 1930s the Woodbridge family had P.O. Box number 17, and that number, as well as the others, is clearly visible. Interestingly, most of the mailboxes are without locking doors, but instead are behind a glass window so that the contents are visible but can be obtained only by asking the postmaster to retrieve them.

Manchester's other post offices from the past:

- Buckland (1833 to 1968), at one time located in what is now Gerich's Service Station.



- Oakland (1841 to 1850), which later moved to Manchester Station (1851 to 1861) and still later was called North Manchester (1861 to 1960).
- Highland Park, from 1887 to 1940. Those mailboxes have also been preserved and are now displayed on the wall of Highland Park Store, on Highland Street, the actual site of that post office.
- Hillstown (1892 to 1908) at the corner of Hillstown Road and Hills Street.
- The Main Post Office at the center of town still exists in its original building, now called the Weiss Center. Today the lobby looks much the same as it did in the 1950s

Envelopes with postmarks from every Manchester post office (except Orford Parish) are also on display, the oldest cancellation being about 1845 from the Oakland post office.

Welcome Our New Board Member

The Society welcomes Ezequiel "Memo" Alejandro to the Board of Directors. A native of Puerto Rico, Memo has lived in Manchester for over thirty years. He previously taught in the Hartford public school system and now substitutes in Manchester. As president of the Association of Puerto Ricans and Latinos United of Manchester, Memo became involved with the Society while working on our recent exhibit, "The Hispanic Experience in Manchester." Society Executive Director Mary Dunne said upon his election to the Board, "Memo is an energetic addition to the Board, and if he brings the same dedication and commitment to the Historical Society as he does to his many other volunteer efforts, we are lucky indeed."

New at the Museum Store!

Now available are Manchester Historical Society tote bags. The handsome black canvas tote bears the Society logo and the slogan, "Preserving the best of times." It's great for trips to the beach, shopping, carrying books or baby items, and will make a great graduation gift. Each tote bag is \$15. Please stop by the museum store at our offices at 175 Pine Street Monday through Friday, from 9-11:30 a.m., or call 647-9983 to order. Remember, when you make a purchase at the Museum Store, you are not only getting a quality product but also supporting the mission and programs of the Manchester Historical Society.

Learn about Dynamic Civil War Chaplain

The Society is hosting a slide lecture on Civil War Chaplain Joseph Hopkins Twichell, on Sunday, May 28, at 1 p.m. at the Society's Manchester History Center.

Hartford Courant journalist Steve Courtney will deliver a slide lecture on Civil War Chaplain Joseph Hopkins Twichell on Sunday, May 28, at the History Center. The lecture comes on the heels of his recently published book, *The Civil War Letters of Joseph Hopkins Twichell*, which he co-edited with Peter Messent.

In 1861 young Joseph Twichell cut short his seminary studies to become a Union army chaplain in New York's Excelsior Brigade. A middle-class New England Protestant, Twichell served for three years in a regiment manned mostly by poor Irish American Catholics. As a noncombatant, he observed and participated in the momentous events of the Peninsula and Wilderness Campaigns and at the Second Bull Run, as well as at Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Spotsylvania.

In his letters, Twichell writes about politics and slavery and the theological and cultural divide between him and his men, in addition to accounts of a run-in with slave hunters, a massive withdrawal of wounded soldiers from Richmond, and other extraordinary events. After the war, Twichell became a prominent minister and reformer as well as Mark Twain's closest friend.

Steve Courtney is currently writing a biography of Twichell. Books will be available for purchase and signing by the author.

Get Out Your Walking Shoes...

In addition to the many walking tours planned during Pride in Manchester week (*see related story*), the Society will lead a number of other walking tours throughout the spring and summer. Led by Board Director **Susan Barlow**, these tours range from a walk along Boulder Road (July 8, accompanied by **Fred Blish**), to such familiar historical locations as Forest Street (August 19) and Center Springs Park (September 9, accompanied by Scott Sprague). The Society's walking tours are a great way of getting exercise while learning about Manchester's rich and diverse history.

We Will Miss...

T. S. Eliot wrote that "April is the cruellest month." For the Society, this past spring has been particularly hard, as a number of loyal members passed away.

In March, **Frank Rieder**, 108, a Centennial Member, passed away. A native of Hungary, Frank settled in Manchester with his family in 1907 and later worked at Colt Firearms and Pratt and Whitney, before retiring.

In April, another Society Centennial Member **Marjorie McMenemy** passed on at the age of 102. A graduate of Manchester High School and Ohio Wesleyan University, she was a long-time member of the Society who worked in the town's C. R. Burr Nursery for many years and lived in the house in which she was born.

Eldon "Corky" Coykendall, 74, passed away in March. A Korean War veteran and Manchester resident of 44 years, Corky was a long-time volunteer for the Society, serving as a docent and participant in several exhibits; his wife, Joanne, continues to be an active volunteer.

A resident of Manchester since 1917, **Mary Warren**, 94, passed on in March. Mary was an active participant in many Manchester organizations, including the Society.

W. David Keith, 84, also passed away in March. A practicing lawyer in Manchester for over 50 years, David was a long-time member of the Society.

A generous benefactor of the Society, **Orlando "Deano" Garrone**, 91, passed on in April. Deano was born in Manchester and a long-time resident of East Hartford, who was a Navy veteran of World War II.

A resident of Manchester for over 50 years, Rhode Island native **Leonard Anderson**, 90, passed away in April. A retiree from Pratt and Whitney, Leonard was active in many local organizations, including the Society.

The Society regrets the passing of these close members.

Key Board Directors Step Down

Since the last newsletter, two Board Directors resigned from the Society, though they promise to remain active members.

In March, **Mark Sutcliffe** resigned from the Board. Mark was the chairman of the Cheney Homestead Committee for many years and in that capacity performed countless activities on behalf of the Homestead: he kept up with the preservation of the Homestead's rare artifacts, including restorations of many fine etchings and paintings; researched and implemented the best architectural maintenance of the Homestead, including spearheading a new roof and historically accurate exterior paint job; documented and maintained the flora and fauna of the Homestead grounds; and served as all-around ambassador of the Homestead for Connecticut residents and beyond. In its April meeting, the Board honored Mark with the title of Board Director Emeritus, which will allow him to continue participating in Board activities as a non-voting member.

In that same April meeting, Society Vice President **Douglas Edwards** tendered his resignation from the Board, citing the demands of numerous other philanthropic activities that he has been involved in. A Board Director of over seven years, Doug was head of the Society's Programming Committee and a member of many other Board subcommittees, including the committee for restoring the History Center. An instrumental contributor in making the design plans for the future use for the History Center, Doug participated in many hands-on restoration projects at the History Center, as well as served as professional facilitator for several of the Board's special meetings concerning the use of the History Center and the Board's other responsibilities. As he demonstrated at the Society's 40th anniversary celebration last September and the subsequent reception for the Hispanic exhibit, he was also an accomplished dj.

Though no longer on the Board of Directors, Doug and Mark will continue to serve as Society members and experienced advisors to the organization.

Welcome Aboard, New Members!

The Society welcomes the following new individual or family members of the Society who joined between February 2 and May 1, 2006:

From Manchester:

Ezequiel and Amy Alejandro
Robert Blanchard
Daniel and Diane Burns
Frederick and Dorothy Cannon
Bess and Charles Covin
Mary Lou Danahy
Bill and Jo-Ann Dorn
Deborah Heneghan
Melaine Ho
Susan Holmes
Mr. and Mrs. Collins Johnston
Lynn Kozin
Joseph and Lillian Krukak
Robert Lazzerini
Pat Matrick
Kevin Murphy
Michael Nimirowski
Deborah and James Palmer
Jonathan Rel
The John Rowe Family
Pamela Thomas
Christine Wallen

From Elsewhere:

Charles Adams (Glastonbury)
Rita Borovicka (Coventry)
Elizabeth Burke (South Windsor)
David Gregorski (Coventry)
Robert Waldron (South Windsor)

DAR Honors Society Members

In February, the Orford Parish Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution honored Society members **Susan Barlow**, **John Spaulding**, and **Kathryn Wilson** for their efforts in teaching and preserving the history of Manchester. Chapter Regent and Society member **Mary Jane Cooper** presented each with the Chapter's Nutmeg Award. Congratulations!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Spring and Summer 2006

*Unless otherwise noted, admission to lectures and walking tours is free for Manchester Historical Society members and \$3 for non-members.
All lectures will take place at the Manchester History Center at 175 Pine Street.*

May 28 **Civil War Chaplain Joseph Hopkins Twichell**
Sunday Slide lecture by *Hartford Courant* journalist Steve Courtney
1 p.m.

PRIDE IN MANCHESTER WEEK:

June 3 **Downtown Walking Tour**
Saturday Led by Susan Barlow
1 p.m. Meet at corner of Pearl and Main Streets
(Rain date: Sunday, June 4) Free to the Public

June 5 **Kids Walk (Healthier U)**
Monday Led by Susan Barlow
6 p.m. Meet at Lodge Drive, Center Springs Park
(Rain date: June 6) Free to the Public

June 7 **West Cemetery Revolutionary War-Era Gravestones**
Wednesday Led by Susan Barlow and Ruth Shapleigh-Brown
5:30 p.m. Part of Washington-Rochambeau events
Meet at commuter lot across from Wendy's at 250 Spencer Street

June 10 **Heritage Day**
Saturday Tag Sale at History Center, Scavenger Hunt at Homestead and other activities
at the Old Manchester Museum and Keeney Schoolhouse
Free Admission to all Society Properties
(see related story)

July 8 **Boulder Road Walking Tour**
Saturday Led by Susan Barlow and Fred Blish
1 p.m. Meet at the very end of the road
(Rain date: Sunday, July 9)

August 19 **Forest Street Walking Tour**
Saturday Led by Susan Barlow
1 p.m. Meet at Chamber of Commerce, 20 Hartford Road
(Rain date: Saturday, August 26)

September 9 **Center Springs Park Walking Tour**
Saturday Led by Susan Barlow and Scott Sprague
1 p.m. Meet at Lodge Drive parking lot
(Rain Date: Sunday, September 10)

The Manchester History Center, at 175 Pine Street, is open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays



The Manchester Historical Society
106 Hartford Road
Manchester, Connecticut 06040

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Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

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

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

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

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is the
"Year of the Museum" –
support your
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