



The Courier

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Society Receives Major Grant To Launch Ambitious Expansion Efforts

The Manchester Historical Society was recently awarded a substantial grant that will greatly assist the organization in its efforts to expand into a major cultural resource in the region.

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving awarded the Historical Society a \$90,000 grant to hire a full-time executive director, someone who will implement the organization's goals to convert the former Cheney Bros. Machine Shop building, at 175 Pine Street, into a comprehensive history center and the Society's new headquarters and to develop programming and increase membership. The grant will be disbursed over a three-year period.

"The Hartford Foundation grant is perhaps the most significant grant the Society has ever received," said Society President David Smith. "It will allow the organization to develop in a professional way and to take the big steps necessary for us to create the new history center."

The Society purchased the former Machine Shop building in 1999 with the long-term aim of making it a major piece in the town's efforts to develop the historical Cheney mills area into an arts and culture district.

(see Major Grant on pg. 2)

New Executive Director Prepares To Move In

The Manchester Historical Society's new Executive Director comes to the job with an array of museum and preservation experience from Hartford, New Haven, Boston, and the White House itself.

Mary Bellor Dunne will become the first full-time executive director in the Society's 38-year history, on October 1. She will spearhead a number of initiatives, not the least of which will be adapting the former Cheney Bros. Machine Shop building into a 21st-century history center and new headquarters of the organization.

"Bringing my professional experience to an organization with so much talent, energy, and vision is an exciting prospect for me," Mary said. "The Society has achieved so much as a volunteer organization, I look forward to building on the momentum already in place."

A native of San Antonio, TX, and raised in the metro-Washington, DC,

area, Mary will bring a variety of skills and experience to further the Society's many burgeoning strengths. During the Reagan and Bush administrations, she was a museum manager during the renovation of the Old Executive Office Building (since renamed the Eisenhower Executive

Office Building). She then gained valuable finance and administrative experience as Chief of Operations for a multi-million dollar resource-allocation facility for the General Services Administration. Closer to New England, after completing a graduate degree in Preservation Studies at Boston University, Mary worked in historic

preservation in Boston and New Haven, and as development officer and events coordinator for the Antiquarian and Landmarks Society, in Hartford.

Professionals from literally around the globe applied for the position, reports Society President David Smith.

(see New Director on page 2)



New Executive Director Mary Bellor Dunne, outside the Machine Shop.

New Director continued from page 1

“The search elicited applications from the west coast of the U.S.— Washington and California—Colorado, South Dakota, Virginia, New England, and even London, England!

“We set some high standards for our first executive director and were most fortunate that the most qualified candidate came from our own town,” he added. “Mary comes to us with the kind of well rounded experience that we need, and she will be a major factor in the growth of the organization over the next few years.”

The Society is facing many challenges as it nears its 40th year. Although the Machine Shop will radically increase exhibit space over what it now can display at the Old Manchester Museum, renovation of the building will be a multi-million dollar project. Mary said she will pursue various fundraising means, while at the same time increasing the Society’s visibility and gaining new members.

“There are certain grants available to fund programs and construction at the Machine Shop,” she said. “But, as everyone knows, grants account for only a small percentage of a project budget. I hope to find a lot of generous and interested people who want to be a part of making something that will become a great cultural asset not just for Manchester but for the entire region.”

Commenting on some of the Society’s recent events that have focused outside of South Manchester, such as talks on the future of Buckland Hills and guided tours of Union Village, Mary said, “This is part of what I hope to build on: reaching out beyond our membership and beyond what people might normally think of when they hear ‘Manchester History.’

“I believe there is a part of Manchester history that speaks to everyone living in this town.

Manchester is a town not just of famous people like the Cheneys, but also numerous other people who have contributed to its rich and diverse history.

“I am looking forward to addressing the personal experiences of those who have been here for generations as well as those who have only recently made Manchester their home.”

A major impetus behind the Society’s hiring of an executive director was a \$90,000 grant it received recently from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving (see related story). Additional staff will be hired in the coming months.

A resident of Manchester’s North End for over 3 years, Mary said about her new appointment, “I can’t think of a more perfect synthesis of my personal and professional interest.”



Major Grant, continued from page 1

For 38 years, the Society has been almost exclusively a volunteer-run organization. But with the help of the Hartford Foundation grant, the Society has just completed a search to hire the organization’s first full-time executive director (*see related story*). Dave Smith added “We are obviously extremely pleased that the Hartford Foundation has decided to invest a considerable amount of money to help us achieve our potential.”

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Capitol Region devoted to building successful partnerships with donors and nonprofits to enhance the quality of life for people in our community. For more information about the Foundation, visit www.hfpg.org, or call 548-1888.



Old Manchester Museum’s New, Expanded Hours!

Since early summer, the Old Manchester Museum has expanded its hours! The Museum is now open Fridays from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., Saturdays 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., and Sundays 1 – 4 p.m. The new hours will translate into more visitors and greater visibility. See related story on our newfound need for more volunteers to staff the museum.

The Courier

A Newsletter for members of the Manchester Historical Society

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From The President...

by *Dave Smith*

This issue of *The Courier* comes with some great news for the Society. The grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for an executive director will provide our Society with a major impetus in its efforts to develop and expand into an organization that serves the community in a significant way. We have gone through a lengthy process to obtain the grant and the follow-on process to find a suitable person for the position of executive director.

We are excited to be able to announce that Mary Dunne will be the first full-time executive director in the Society's 38 year history. Mary comes to the Society with a wealth of experience in the field of museum and history organizations. She has worked with several Connecticut organizations, including the Antiquarian & Landmarks Society and the New Haven Preservation Trust; as well as the Boston Preservation Alliance. Her experiences include fundraising, program and event planning, volunteer training and museum management, and financial administration. We are confident that she will move the Society forward and help us realize our goal of creating a history center in the Machine Shop building.

The Antiques Auction in October is envisaged to be the first in a series of fundraising auctions held every few years. Its success depends on our members and friends and the public, both in providing items and in bidding on them. We have already had donated or consigned some interesting items, but we need more antiques. You can help.

We have some interesting programs lined up this fall and a bus trip to Lowell, MA, where we will visit two wonderful museums, which serve as examples of what we can do with our future history center. We hope you will participate in the many Society events this fall and visit the museum to see our new aviation history exhibit and the smallest known Pitkin bottle, which was found at the Pitkin Glass Works during the archaeological digs in May of this year.

Progress In The Machine Shop

Following a major environmental clean-up in the Machine Shop during the spring, work has commenced to prepare the western area of the second floor (facing the Pine Street entrance) for the Historical Society's new staff.

Work is also being done to prepare storage areas on the first floor to accommodate more tenant needs.

In May, contractors came in for removal of vinyl asbestos floor tiles on the western half of the second floor, where staff will be located, as well as removal of asbestos insulation on old steam pipes in the western half of the first floor. This work precipitated the valiant volunteer effort, led by John Dormer, to remove about 10,000 nails left behind on the second floor by the asbestos abatement contractor.

With the asbestos gone, work now remains to be done to create suitable office space: constructing three offices for the executive director and other anticipated staff, sanding and coating 2000 square feet of floor space, and painting ceiling beams and other touch-up details.

Since June, the Society's Board of Directors has been having its monthly meetings at the Machine Shop.

Cheney Homestead Tree Walk

by *Mark Sutcliffe*,
Homestead Committee Chair

Mark your calendars for 1 p.m. on Saturday, October 25th. Notable Tree Explorer Ed Richardson and I will be leading another tree identification walk on the south side of Hartford Road to benefit the Cheney Homestead. If you missed the one in July, here is your chance! Admission is \$5 per person and includes light refreshments and free admission to the Homestead after the event. The walk is appropriate for interested people ages 10 to 110. Come and see a Moss Falsecypress, the State Champion Littleleaf Linden, the State's sixth largest Honeylocust, and the twelfth largest Norway Spruce. Learn how big trees are measured, and a few tips on proper pruning techniques.

Pre-registration is not required, and the event will be held rain or shine. However, in the event of extreme weather, the walk will be canceled. For further information, call Mark at 647-7541.

Even More 2002 Volunteers

Our apologies go out to the following people, who we failed to recognize in an earlier issue when we honored our volunteers of 2002. Our many and sincere thanks are owed to **James Darling**, **Richard Lawrence**, and **Norman Grimason** for their volunteer efforts last year!

*****Correction*****

In our last issue, we incorrectly reported on a collection of oral history transcripts that were donated to the Mary Cheney Library. The collection was donated by the Cheney Homestead Committee.

WANTED: A Few Good Antiques

The accumulation of goods for the Society's first-ever Antiques Auction is still continuing. So far, over 100 items have been donated or consigned, but event organizers Tana Parselitti and Susan Shanbaum are hoping to present up to 300 items or lots for the auction, scheduled for Sunday, October 5.



One of many interesting donations for the Antiques Auction.

Consignors of goods will receive 70% of the sold price, with the remainder going to the Society. The sold amount (or the assessed value) of items donated outright are tax deductible, as is 30% of the price or value of consigned goods. Goods valued at less than \$100 will be available through a silent auction also being held at the event.

Items donated or consigned thus far run the gamut: a signed Tiffany vase, a complete circa-1933 Atwater Kent radio, a cash register used in the old Blish Hardware store, quilts, antique tools of all types, vintage scarves, stamp collections, fine China, silverware, a plethora of Cheney memorabilia, furniture, jewelry, vintage American flags, even a certified lithograph by Delacroix.

But there is plenty of space for more auction treasures!

Time is running out, so go exploring in basements and attics for items like those listed above or other collectibles. Transportation of auction items is available. Call 645-2101 or 647-9983 for more details.

The event will be held at Cheney Hall, 177 Hartford Road. Previewing will be from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., with the auction beginning at 1 p.m. Auctioneer R. J. Weston, of Weston's Antique Auction, will lead the festivities.

NEWS NOTES

Upcoming Events

The Society has a full slate of events occurring throughout the fall, many of which are featured separately in this issue. Don't miss out on Eleanor Coltman's talk "Tobacco Was Good for Manchester!", on Sunday, September 21. Mrs. Coltman will remind us of how pivotal tobacco growing was to Manchester until recent years. On October 26, come in for Charles Gilbert's recollections of "Mr. Apel's Opera House." Mr. Gilbert, a descendent of

B. C. Apel, will recount stories of Apel's diversified businesses—all of which were located in the still-standing Oakland Street building—which ranged from the opera house to furniture manufacturing, to a funeral home. A few weeks later, on November 16, noted author Robert Thorson will discuss "New England's Disappearing Stone Walls." An endangered artifact throughout New England, stone walls may still be found in Connecticut, particularly east of the river. Mr. Thorson will provide a wide-ranging talk on the growing trend to tear down these historic structures. As always, lectures are free to members and \$2 for non-members.

All Are Invited to the Society's Annual Meeting

On Sunday, October 12, Town Manager Steve Werbner will be guest speaker at the Society's annual meeting. Come hear about the organization's future plans and meet the new executive director. Special award presentation by Yankee magazine. (See *Calendar of Events* for more details.)

Manchester Heritage Day

On a soggy June day, the town celebrated Manchester Heritage Day. However, the weather did not deter everyone, because the number of visitors to both the Old Manchester Museum and Cheney Homestead was considerably greater than in previous years. Board member Susan Barlow led several packed buses on driving tours of various historic sites in town.

Cheney Historic District Preservation Awards

Presented in May, the third annual Historic Preservation Awards were announced by the Cheney Brothers National Historic District Commission. This year's recipients were Silktown Roofing Co., on Pleasant Street, for its creative yet faithful renovation of its garage building; and the Connecticut Firemen's Historical Society and the Town of Manchester for their thoughtful façade renovations to the Fire Museum, located on Pine Street and Hartford Road. Congratulations to those who strive to maintain the historic integrity of the district!

Information Needed

Researchers for the Society are seeking information about children who were called Orphan Train Children. In 1913-14 children were sent from the New York Foundling Home to Manchester, with assistance from St. James Church. Anyone with knowledge of these children may call the Society at 647-9983.

Annual Fund To End This Month

The Society's first Annual Fund drive will end on September 30. Be sure to send in your donation if you haven't yet done so! We're very close to meeting our revised goal.

Museum Docents, We Need You!

by Susan Barlow & Florence Johnson

We have expanded our hours at the Old Manchester Museum on Cedar Street, and we need volunteers to help at the museum on a regular basis. This is a fun job, where you meet new people and get to see the latest exhibits at the museum. We are looking for people who can commit to a once-a-month, or once-a-quarter, shift. We need two volunteers for each of these shifts:

Fridays	10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Fridays	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 other pleasant duties. There are written instructions for each procedure at the museum, as well as an interesting training session, which we run from time to time, or can do on a one-to-one basis.

Please review your calendar and call us to volunteer for an ongoing shift. Bring a friend! You may phone the museum at 647-9983, or Florence Johnson, home 643-4742 or 742-5850, to volunteer or to find out more.

This new schedule represents a crucial part of the Society's strategic plan, for these reasons:

- In order to get a listing in the AAA guidebooks and other tourist publications, we must be open at least **15 hours per week**.

- The Homestead and the Fire Museum are already open similar hours, and we want to encourage **"crossover" visitors** to come to the



Louis and Jean Kocsis have served as volunteer Museum Docents for over five years.

Homestead, Keeney Schoolhouse, and the Old Manchester Museum.

- Expanded hours allow for **more visitors**. The number of visitors is a critical statistic for foundations that grant money to nonprofit organizations.

- We need to continue to get **financial support** so we can renovate the Machine Shop and make it into a community History Center.

- Our community History Center will bring more visitors and more financial support, and will help us **fulfill our mission** of preserving Manchester's past and educating the public.

**On Saturdays, our regular Saturday morning crew will staff the museum from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.*

25th Anniversary of Cheney Brothers National Historic Landmark District

by Vivian Ferguson, Chair, Cheney Bros. National Historic District Commission

The Cheney Brothers National Historic Landmark District was established 25 years ago, in June 1978. The Secretary of the Interior designated the area a Landmark District because it is considered a nationally significant historic place and because it possesses exceptional value and quality in illustrating the heritage of the United States. This is the highest honor available for nationally recognized historic places. There are less than 2,500 National Historic Landmarks in the U.S. and only seven Landmark Districts in Connecticut.

The town is indebted to Dr. John Sutherland, then a professor at Manchester Community College, who recognized the value and importance of the Cheney family heritage. He applied to the U. S. National Park Service for the district's inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Among the unique happenings which Sutherland described and which resulted in the Landmark designation was the fact that the Cheney family was unusual for mill owners, in part because they showed concern for their employees. Instead of constructing tenement housing—common in other mill towns—the Cheney family built attractive houses (some single-family, some multi-family, and rooming houses for single people). Pleasant neighborhoods were created and exist to this day. The Cheney family did not live away from the mills or from their employees, but chose to build their mansions in close proximity to them.

Preservation of the Cheney District is an ongoing concern as there have been threats to its integrity

(see Cheney Bros. on page 8)

New Exhibit On Manchester's Connections to Aviation Since 1854

by *Dave Smith*

To help commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Wright brothers' first flight, we have put together an exhibit showing some of Manchester's connections to aviation, including some of the lesser known individuals and events that were part of the march toward the aerospace business as we know it today.

The first documented flight over Manchester occurred in 1854! As part of that year's July 4th celebrations, two balloons took off from Hartford and landed in Manchester. Ballooning in America started not long before that, so you can imagine the surprise of many Manchester residents who witnessed their first view of men in the air.



Society Life Member Dorothy Miller, now of Glastonbury, admires a display about her husband, Pete Miller.

Other connections include Don Willis, who wanted to operate an air mail service from Manchester to Hartford; Matthew Batson, who married a Manchester girl and who built a seaplane to fly across the Atlantic 14 years before Lindbergh tried it; Howell "Pete" Miller, famous as the designer of the GeeBee Racers; and of course Manchester's own airfield where the barnstorming pilots landed and offered rides.

Perhaps the best known connection is that of Pioneer Parachute, begun as a division of Cheney Brothers and still in business today, far outlasting its parent company. Examples of Pioneer parachutes are on display, several courtesy of Pioneer Aerospace.

The display will run through December, so come and see it soon.

We Remember

Since the last newsletter, the Society is saddened by the loss of several of its members.

Most recently, in August, Shady Glen Dairy Store founder **John C. Rieg** passed away at 88. Famous for serving up cheeseburgers and home-made ice cream, John was also a long-time benefactor to the town of Manchester and the Society. A special feature on John and his legacy will appear in the next issue of *The Courier*.

In May, **Nancy (Kennedy) Pilver**, 69, lost her battle with recurring cancer. A champion of advocating breast cancer research and medical reforms, Nancy was also an instrumental activist for preserving Manchester's historic structures and was actively involved for many years with the Society and Cheney Historic District Commission.

The Society will also miss **Norman Narkon**, 74, who passed away in May; **Martha (Taylor) Besser**, 90, a Kansas City, MO, native who passed on in July; and the Hon. **David Barry**, 72, who also died in July.

We will miss all of these dear members.

Your Historical Society on TV

by *Susan Barlow*

The Historical Society's own local-history programs are now broadcasting twice a week on public-access television, Channel 15 on Cox cable, in Manchester, South Windsor, Glastonbury, Wethersfield, Newington, and Rocky Hill. We have two time-slots: 8 p.m. on Saturdays and Thursdays.

On Saturdays in September, we will air the tour we taped of the **Center Congregational Church**, with the **Rev. Terry Schmitt** describing the various church buildings that have served the church over the years. Four long-term parishioners tell of their personal connections to the oldest church in Manchester.

On Thursdays in September, we will air an **interview with Ted and Betty Bidwell**, who grew up in the North End, and have many fond memories of playing, shopping, and going to school there.

Some previous shows can be borrowed at Mary Cheney Library, or purchased at the Old Manchester Museum.

The Historical Society's video production volunteers need additional camera-operators. Cox Public Access provides free training classes and on-the-job training, too. When you've completed the classes, you can help us by running one of the big cameras in the television studio on Parker Street in Manchester. Please phone the museum or Susan Barlow if you can commit to taking the classes, 647-9983.

Calendar of Events – Fall 2003

Sept. 21 Sunday 2 p.m.	<i>Tobacco Was Good for Manchester!</i> Speaker: Eleanor Coltman at Old Manchester Museum
Oct. 5 Sunday 1 p.m.	<i>Antiques Auction</i> Auctioneer: R. J. Weston at Cheney Hall - Preview begins at 11:30 a.m. (<i>see related story</i>)
Oct. 11 Saturday 7:30 am-5 pm	<i>Bus Trip to Lowell, MA</i> American Textile History Museum, Boott Cotton Mills, and Lowell National Park Meet at Cheney Hall parking lot, 177 Hartford Road (<i>see related story</i>)
Oct. 12 Sunday 1 p.m.	<i>Annual Meeting of the Society</i> Speaker: Steve Werbner, Town Manager Presentation of Yankee Barn Raiser Award at Arbors, 403 West Center St.
Oct. 25 Saturday 1 p.m.	<i>Cheney Homestead Tree Walk</i> Led by Ed Richardson and Mark Sutcliffe beginning at the Homestead, \$5 (<i>see related story</i>)
Oct. 26 Sunday 2 p.m.	<i>Mr. Apel's Opera House</i> Speaker: Charles Gilbert at Old Manchester Museum
Nov. 16 Sunday 2 p.m.	<i>New England's Disappearing Stone Walls</i> Speaker: Robert Thorson at Old Manchester Museum
Dec. 6 Saturday Evening	<i>Concert: "Haydn's War Time Mass"</i> at Concordia Lutheran Church More details to follow
Dec. 14 Sunday 12 p.m.	<i>Holiday Open House</i> at Old Manchester Museum & Cheney Homestead More details to follow

Take A Day Trip To Historic Lowell, Massachusetts!

The Historical Society is organizing a day trip to tour historic textile and mill museums in Lowell, MA, on Saturday, October 11.

Experience the world of American textiles, from elegant gowns to space-age fibers at the Textile History Museum, America's largest and most complete museum about textiles. The exhibit "Textiles in America" will take you from an 18th-century weaver's cabin to scenes of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island to work in the mills.

Following the tour there will be a buffet lunch in the Gazebo Café, at the museum.

After lunch the tour continues at the National Park Service for an introductory presentation, entitled, "Lowell:

The Industrial Revolution." From there we will visit the Boott Cotton Mills Museum. At the cotton mills complex, we will experience the roar of a 1920s weave room-with operating power looms!

The tour bus departs from Cheney Hall parking lot, 177 Hartford Rd., Manchester, at 7:30 a.m., and returns at approximately 5 p.m.

The cost of \$52 per person for Society members, \$57 per person for non-members, includes: transportation, entrance fees, gratuities, and lunch (featuring bread, rolls, soup, salad, quiche, beverage, & dessert).

For more information, contact Society board member Tony Thibeau, at 860-649-4872. Act now—space is limited!



The Manchester Historical Society
 106 Hartford Road
 Manchester, Connecticut 06040

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106 Hartford Road, Manchester, CT 06040

Cheney Bros. continued from page 5

over the years. Also marking its 25th anniversary is the Cheney Brothers National Historic District Commission, whose mission has evolved into acting as an advisor to the town concerning the preservation of the historic district. In 2002 the town purchased almost nine acres of the so-called "Great Lawn" to be preserved as open space. Shortly thereafter, the Cheney Commission requested that the Planning & Zoning commission change its regulations to no longer permit any construction in the Mansion Zone of the District, and also not to permit conversion of the Cheney mansions to multi-family homes. These new regulations are now in effect.

The preservation of this historic district for all time must be carefully monitored, which is a major function of the Commission. With vigilance we will not only retain the Landmark designation, but also provide an area of interest for residents and visitors, and for the education of school children and adults. Many of Manchester's residents have in the past, and still, come from other areas and countries. By guarding our history, citizens will be able to learn about the town where they have chosen to live and can take pride in it.