

The Courier

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The Green Was Manchester

by Tanyss Ludescher

“Don’t forget, at one time the Manchester Green was Manchester.” It was these words by the late Raymond B. Woodbridge that led Milton K. Adams and Anthony J. Thibeau to publish *Old Manchester III Manchester Green... a Picture Book* in 1997. The book, which was revised and reprinted in 2003, is dedicated to **Ray Woodbridge and his wife Thelma**. It is a fitting tribute, for the couple knew the history of the Green better than anyone else in town. From their residence at the Old Woodbridge Farmstead, located directly across from the Green, they were in an ideal position to appreciate the value and importance of this historic area. Ray was the fifth generation of his family to live in the homestead. His ancestors owned the Woodbridge Tavern, which was torn down in 1938, as well as five other family homes near the tavern. Only two of the houses remain, the Farmstead and a modest house across the road on Woodbridge Street. Although Ray died in 1997, Thelma, aged 97, still resides in the Farmstead. An active member of the

Manchester Historical Society for many years, she is still one of the Town’s most interesting and informative sources on Manchester history.

What did Ray mean when he said that Manchester Green was Manchester? In its early days, Manchester was not a united community as it is today. Instead, it consisted of a cluster of population centers that grew up around paper and textile mills, the region’s major employers. Throughout its history, despite the disjointed nature of the various self-contained “villages” the town had what local historians like to call three major retail centers. The second and third centers are most familiar to the public. When the railroad came in 1849, a town center grew up around Depot Square on North Main Street. Later, as Cheney Brothers grew in importance, the business center moved down Main Street to its present location below Middle Turnpike. But the very first town center, the one that Ray Woodbridge said really was Manchester, was at Manchester Green. See **GREEN**, page 3

December “Historical” Doings

GIFT FESTIVAL A BIG SUCCESS

Thanks to all who participated in the fifth annual holiday gift festival on December 5! The festival set a new fundraising record—netted over \$5000 for the Historical Society, made some new friends, and welcomed new members. Over 100 people attended the fine and fun evening of socializing, shopping, auctioning, and surprises. Another 100 or so volunteered with organization, set-up, wreath decoration, gift-basket creation, and clean-up.

Sandie Burse, chair of the event, acknowledged the creative efforts of the volunteers and members of the Event Planning committee who helped make it such a success. The History Center was beautifully decorated for the gala evening.



Guests at the Holiday Gift Festival, held on December 5, 2008, peruse the teacup auction choices and shop for wreaths.

Be sure to put this festive event on your calendar for the first Friday in December 2009!

NEW MUSEUM STORE DEBUTS

We introduced our new and expanded Museum Store in December, filled with items of historical interest such as books, tote bags and boxed notecards. The store is a sight for artistic eyes as well as for shoppers! The antique display cabinets and mirror, donated by Paula and Tony Viscogliosi (and moved into the History Center at their expense), are worth a visit.

The Museum Store, located in the History Center at 175 Pine Street, is open Thursdays and Fridays from 10 AM to 2 PM, and Saturdays from 10 AM to noon (except on holidays). Parking is available along Pleasant Street, with handicapped parking is available in the small lot north of the building.

See **DECEMBER**, page 4

President's Message

by John A. Dormer

I would like to wish all Society Members and readers of the *Courier* a very Happy New Year. I look forward to this year which promises to be a challenging one in many aspects of both the day-to-day operations and the mission of the Society.

The 2009 Annual Fund began October 1, 2008 and concludes on September 15, 2009. The money raised by this drive is used to pay the operating costs of the Society such as natural gas and heating oil expenses, electricity, water and sewer charges, insurance, telephone and internet charges, maintenance and repair of Society properties, and the salary of our part-time Development Director/Preservation Officer. Money collected from tenants, who rent portions of our property, is also used to pay these expenses. As of December 31, 2008 a total of \$9805.00 had been donated to the Annual Fund with more than half of that coming from one very generous donor. A total of 74 individuals from our 600+ membership have contributed. Last year the Annual Fund provided \$23,012.50 for the operation of the Society. I would like to encourage those Members who have not yet made a donation to consider helping the Society to the extent that their financial situation allows. Thank you to those who have already helped the Society with their donation.

The window restoration project at the History Center is under-

way. A matching grant from the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism in the amount of \$140,000 is allowing the Society to move forward on this project. Crosskey Architects LLC has been hired to create restoration specifications and drawings and has provided us with preliminary documents. It is hoped that the actual restoration phase of the project will start by April 15, 2009 and be completed by August 15, 2009.

The project that will provide a modern heating and cooling system for the three rooms in the History Center at 175 Pine Street, presently used by the Society for functions, has progressed through the design phase with the Society currently in possession of the final design documents. This project will be paid for by a grant from the Town of Manchester through the Community Development Block Grant program. This grant of \$50,000 is not a matching grant, so if we can hold the project costs below \$50,000 there will be no cost incurred by the Society.

I would like to encourage all of our Members to support the Society by attending our events such as walking tours, lectures, and special fund raising activities. With the active support of our Members, your Society can continue to provide programs and activities of interest as well as work for the preservation of historic structures and memories of Manchester.

The Courier

*A newsletter of the
Manchester Historical Society*

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History on Your Television

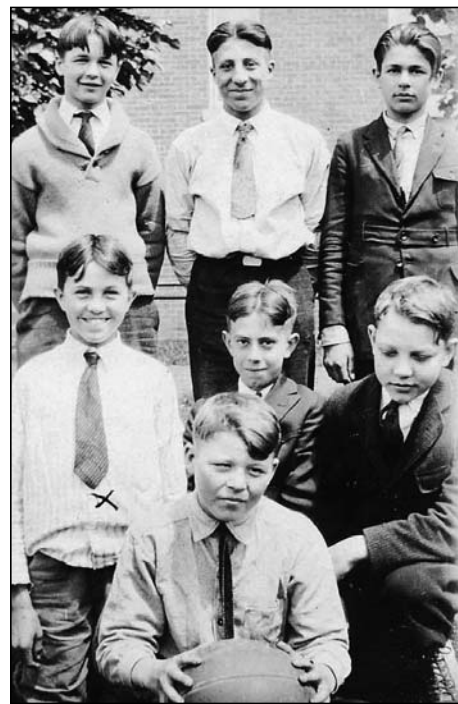
by Susan Barlow, Producer

The Manchester Road Race was the January 2009 offering on the Historical Society's television show. For those who didn't attend the November lecture, we taped the presentations and put them together with other pictures and commentary in a 58-minute broadcast. Pictures of Joe McCluskey are featured in the show.

Upcoming shows will include a "Pre-History" of Manchester overview, with the story of what was here before Manchester became a town in 1823.

Our Society's TV shows air on channel 15 at 8 p.m. on Saturday; running time varies from less than an hour, up to two hours. Each show runs for a month. Cox public access, Channel 15, broadcasts in Manchester, South Windsor, Glastonbury, Wethersfield, Rocky Hill, and Newington. Some programs are available at the Mary Cheney Library and some are for sale at the museum gift shops.

Your comments on the shows are always welcome. Call the Society at 860-647-9983, or call me directly at 860-643-9776.



This wonderful photo shows Joe McCluskey (second row, X on his shirt) and members of his junior high school basketball team.

[PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MCCLUSKEY FAMILY]

MANCHESTER GREEN, from page 1

Located at the junction of Middle Turnpike, the area’s major thoroughfare, and East Center Street, it was home to the Woodbridge Tavern, (a hub of activity and news in the days before modern communication) as well as numerous shops, and the town’s first post office.

Manchester Green...a Picture Book contains a treasure trove of information on this historic area. Included in the book are maps, drawings, historical documents and most important of all, photographs. It is the photographs of homes, businesses, and people, carefully collected and reproduced by the late Anthony J. Thibeau, that make this book so priceless. In addition to the graphics, historical lore, humorous commentary, and colorful vignettes written by past MHS president Milton K. Adams bring the area to life in vivid detail. We learn, for example, that the Green had an important connection to one of our nation’s most important figures.

FAMOUS CONNECTIONS TO THE GREEN

On February 22, citizens across the country will celebrate the birthday of George Washington, the nation’s first, and many say its greatest president. However, the residents of Manchester Green will have their own reasons to celebrate. According to the *Picture Book*, Manchester Green had several unique connections to General George Washington.

One connection concerned a cabinet maker named Josiah Hollister, who worked for Washington at Valley Forge, where he created a lovely upright wardrobe for the General, which delighted Martha, the General’s wife. In 1777, Josiah Hollister married Asenath Sweatland, who came from the prominent Lyman family in Manchester Green. Some years later, their grandson, the famous inventor Christopher Miner Spencer, created a seven-shot repeating rifle, which is widely credited with helping the North win the Civil War.

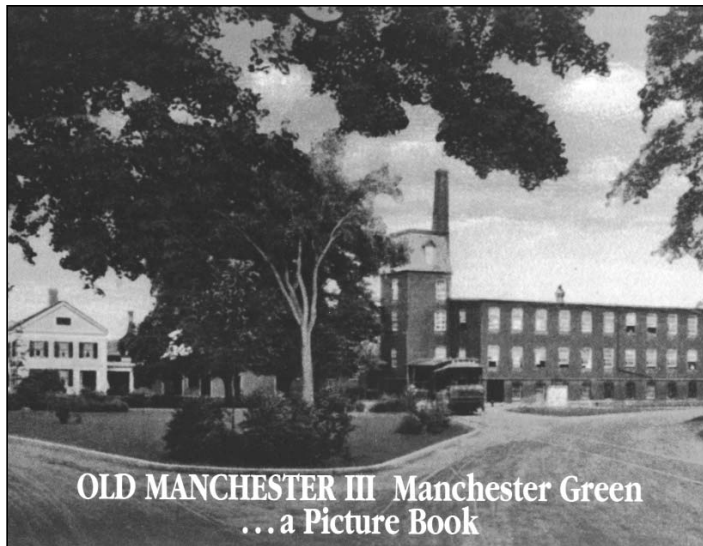
Another connection between Washington and the Green concerned a Revolutionary War pensioner named Hannah Jacklin, who, according to local records, was living in the Henry C. Woodbridge house near the Tavern in 1840. Hannah’s husband

John Jacklin, a former slave of white, black and Narragansnet Indian ancestry, served as a waiter to George Washington during the war. He is buried in East Cemetery, where his tombstone is frequently pointed out during walking tours of the cemetery.

Some of the most important connections with Washington concern the Pitkin family. During the Revolutionary War, General Washington asked Captain Richard Pitkin to return home to produce gun powder, which was desperately needed in the war effort. In return, Pitkin’s son William and two partners were granted an exclusive 24-year “patent of monopoly” by the state assembly in 1783 to make glass in Connecticut. The ruins of the Pitkin Glass Works are still visible on Porter Street.

Near the Glass Works was another site with an important connection to Washington and the Revolutionary War, the Pitkin Tavern, which was owned by Captain Pitkin and his wife Dorothy. At this tavern, according to an historical plaque near the intersection of Porter and Parker Street, Dorothy Pitkin served meals to American militiamen who were on their way to answer the Lexington alarm in 1775 and later to members of Rochambeau’s French army, who were on their way to Yorktown in 1781. The exact whereabouts of the tavern are not known and are still a matter of speculation.

It is only fitting, considering our topic, that the most famous connection to Washington concerns a member of the Woodbridge family. According to information gathered from the diaries of both Washington and Deodat Woodbridge, (the owner of the Woodbridge Tavern and Ray Woodbridge’s ancestor), the General, now President Washington, made a stop at the Tavern while traveling through Manchester Green on November 9, 1789. During the stopover, Deodat’s young daughter, Electa Woodbridge, gave the President a glass of water to drink and received a sixpence by way of thanks. Later, this same young girl married George Cheney and moved to the Cheney Homestead, where she produced nine children. In 1838, five of her sons built a mill on the Hop Brook, which later became the Cheney Brothers Silk Manufacturing Company. Like so many things in Manchester, it all started at the Green. *[Thanks to Tanyss, great job!]*



Old Manchester III Manchester Green...A Picture Book is full of pictures of the “Green” covering the past 200 years. It contains stories of many of the families intimately associated with the area, including the Woodbridge, Cook, Chapman, Alvord, Bliss, Cone, Pitkin, Lynch, Sweatland, Williams, Landfear and, of course, the Reig families. You can read about George Washington’s visit too.

The book is available for purchase at the Museum Shop, or by mail using the form below.

Name _____
Address _____
City/State Zip _____

I wish to order _____ book(s) @ \$28.00 ea. = _____
Shipping/Handling \$5.00 per book = _____
Total Enclosed = _____

Above prices include 6% sales tax
Make checks payable to “Manchester Historical Society”

HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

We had excellent attendance at the Historical Society properties during our free open house on December 7:

The Cheney Homestead, with fresh greenery and creative decoration by the Manchester Garden Club, members of the Fireside Patriots taking roles as Cheney family members and docents providing commentary on the various rooms.

The Manchester History Center provided coffee, refreshments, and a well-received slide show, "Armchair Tour of Manchester."

The Old Manchester Museum hosted a bake sale, and a special tree with free Beanie Babies to the first 20 children.



Homestead decorated for the Annual Open House.

Volunteers are the Backbone of the Historical Society



Volunteer Coordinator Brenda Paullo describes opportunities for volunteers at a breakfast meeting in October 2008.

Many of our volunteers have been active in the Society for years. It's fun and it gives you a great sense of accomplishment. You frequently learn something new, and meet new people.

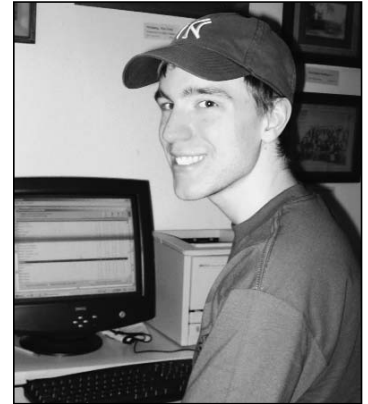
Please join us at the next Volunteer meeting on Saturday March 7th at 9:30 A.M. to learn about upcoming opportunities: tour guides, tag sale workers, exhibit designers, cataloguers, indoor and outdoor work crews, and convivial people to staff our events, assist with parking, decorate tables and booths, etc. There really is something for everyone.

RSVP for the meeting, so we'll have enough coffee and breakfast fare. If you can't make the meeting, but want to volunteer, give us a call. To RSVP, or volunteer, contact volunteer coordinator Brenda Paullo at 860-643-2413.

History Major is Our Newest Intern

by Dave Smith

Joe Sobanski, a junior at the University of Connecticut, has been working with us as an intern during his winter break. He found the Historical Society on the internet and decided he wanted to do volunteer work while school was out of session. He has been working on inventorying several collections of items that have come in over the past few years and entering the items into our computer database.



Society intern Joe Sobanski.

Several Civil War and World War I artifacts that were originally given to the Lutz Children's Museum, before the Manchester Historical Society existed, are among the things being cataloged. When the Lutz decided these items no longer met their mission dedicated to children, they were offered to us, as many were of Manchester origin. Several will go on display to enhance our Civil War exhibit when the museum reopens in the spring. Handling objects that were used over 140 years ago and may have seen action during the Civil War gives one a deep respect for preserving our history.

Joe grew up in Manchester where he attended Verplanck, Bennet and Manchester High School. He is now a history major at UCONN and intends to go on to postgraduate work. Joe credits one of his history teachers at Manchester High School for instilling an interest in history. This teacher gave Joe some books to read which he found very interesting. He also earned a history award at high school as a result of his desire to learn more than the standard course provided. In addition to history, Joe is into music. He plays both the guitar and piano.

Did you know...

The Cheney Brothers National Landmark Historic District Commission was established in 1978. The Historical Society and the Commission are two different entities, with the common goal of preserving our important town treasures. The Commission advocates for preserving property within the District, where the three Society properties are located. The Commission is appointed by the Town and has an advisory capacity, whereas the Historical Society is a non-profit organization.

100 Years Ago...

From the Hartford Courant

FATE OF OPERA HOUSE

Apel's Opera House has been for sale since the death of B.C. Apel who built the place, but up to last night there was no buyer and no prospect of one. While the members of the Apel family will not say what disposal will be made of the building if it is not sold, there is a general feeling at the North End that the ultimate fate of the building will be that it will revert to tenements. —January 20, 1909

ICE STORM

Connecticut's mid-February ice storm was at the height of its splendor and destructiveness yesterday and every tree and bush labored under a mantle of frozen crystals crackling stiffly as they swayed to and fro in the light wind. By day, against a leaden sky wonderful traceries of silver were outlined, each branch and twig resembling pure white coral. By night under the blaze of arc lights the glistening white foliage shimmered like myriads of diamonds. That was the picture. —February 17, 1909

WHERE DO THE MARBLES GO?

There have been many complaints about boys who mark up the streets with rings and holes in playing marbles and few are the streets that have escaped being cut up on this account. But why shouldn't they be cut up when it is considered that there are about 75,000 allies sold in town each season. One dealer yesterday informed the reporter that he had disposed of 25,000 of one kind alone and about half as many of the other kinds. From reports secured from other dealers it was learned that already about 75,000 have been sold in town with the season only starting.

—March 22, 1909

Information, Please!

by Sandie Bursey

The Society wants to establish a "Reference Bank" with photos and articles of historical interest, or information pertaining to Manchester that may be used in future issues of the *Courier*. To contribute, please contact Sandie Bursey at 649-9085. All submissions become property of the Historical Society to be used at our discretion. Credit will be given to the submitter if printed.

"Dr. Weldon's Downtown"

by Susan Barlow



Join us for something new (actually, the buildings are old, but this special Downtown walk is new) on Saturday, March 14, at 1 p.m. Led by Susan Barlow. \$1 for members, \$3 for non-members. We will retrace the route of Dr. Thomas Weldon (1861-1939) from the Weldon Block at roughly 901 Main Street, to his residence on Wellman Road. This 2¼-mile round-trip walk will explore neighborhoods east of Main Street.

Extreme weather cancels.

Check www.manchesterhistory.org for other upcoming events.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Unless noted, admission to all lectures and walking tours is \$1 for members and \$3 for non-members. All lectures and events will take place at the Manchester History Center, 175 Pine Street, or as noted.

Saturday, January 31, 1:00 p.m. FREE *Extreme weather cancels.*

Cheney Railroad History Walk

An easy, but bumpy walk along the former railroad built to connect the Cheney silk mills to the main rail line in the North End in 1869. At 2.5 miles, it was the longest private freight and passenger railroad in the United States. We will hike along the one-mile portion owned by the Manchester Land Conservation Trust, which will take about 1-1/4 hours round trip. A special favor will be given to children who attend the hike, sponsored by the Connecticut Forest & Park Association's family hike program. Meet at the North End of Main Street in Manchester, behind Farr's Sporting Goods, 2 Main Street. Park at the nearby shopping plaza or Eighth Utilities office building. There are no restrooms along the route. For questions, phone hike leader Susan Barlow at 860-643-9776.

Saturday, February 14, 1:00 p.m. FREE *Extreme weather cancels.*

Salter's Pond Walk

Did you know that Lorenzo Salter had a paper mill and lent his name to Salter's Pond? Meet at parking lot of town swimming pool on Lydall St., east of intersection with Coleman Rd. Sponsored by the Manchester Land Conservation Trust and open to the public, especially Historical Society members. Walk takes about 1-1/4 hours and has some wet and bumpy spots, so participants need to be agile. If questions, phone Susan Barlow at 860-643-9776

Saturday, March 7, 9:30 a.m. FREE

Volunteer Meeting and Breakfast

RSVP for the meeting, so we'll have enough coffee and breakfast fare. If you can't come to the meeting, but want to volunteer, give us a call. To RSVPs or volunteer, contact Brenda Paullo, volunteer coordinator at 860-643-2413. (See article, pg. 4)

Saturday, March 14, 1:00 p.m. *Extreme weather cancels.*

"Dr. Weldon's Downtown" History Walk

Explores neighborhoods east of Main St. Led by Susan Barlow. (See above)

Sunday, March 15, 1:00 p.m.

"The Civil War Energizes the Industrial Development of the CT River Valley"

(See article, pg. 6 for details)

Saturday, March 28, 6:30-9:00 p.m.

Bi-Annual Art Gala and Auction

Features a live and silent auction, wine, hors d'oeuvres, coffee, and dessert. Tickets must be purchased in advance. Ticket sales and a portion of artists' sales help raise funds for the Manchester Historical Society's Loom Exhibit.

Civil War and Industry

THE CIVIL WAR ENERGIZES THE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONNECTICUT RIVER VALLEY

How did the Civil War affect industry in New England? Find out about the importance of gun technology in this lecture by historian and author Richard Meyer on Sunday, March 15, at 1:00 p.m.

Mr. Meyer will discuss the involvement of Christopher M. Spencer of Manchester, Gideon Wells, Gen. George A. Custer, and others in the mid-nineteenth century push for interchangeable parts, for which America was becoming famous. He will bring examples of the technology with him.

Mr. Meyer says, "It was the Old World craftsmen of firearms that contributed so much to the success of industry in the Connecticut River Valley. Although preceded by steam engine technology and the manufacture of clocks, the gun was the first precision product made in production quantities in New England."

Mr. Meyer, a retired engineer, is active in the Granby Historical Society, the Connecticut Gun Guild, and the Hartford Civil War Round Table. He conducts research and writes about industrial history. He and his wife, Ruth, live in Granby.

The program is \$3 for adults, \$1 for members of the Manchester Historical Society, and is free for children under age 16. Light refreshments will be served. Parking is available along Pleasant Street, as well as in a small lot next to the History Center. Questions may be directed to the Historical Society at 860-647-9983.



*Advertisement for Spencer rifles in the collection of
the Manchester Historical Society.*