



“50 YEARS OF PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY”

The Courier

JUNE 2016

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A Message From the President

by Dennis Gleason

I want to extend a big thank you to the volunteers who made the May Tea event and the third grade tours a success.

Without them we could not run events and host the students every year. Rebuilding Together (formerly Christmas in April) helped by clearing the Homestead grounds. Our daily helpers and the Thursday night work crew also deserve special mention. You are all invaluable to the Society.

Restoration of the exterior of the Cheney Homestead has been completed for the part of the structure that used to be the woodshed and was long ago converted to living space. When parts of the exterior wall were opened up termite damage from many years ago was discovered. Restoration of the Woodbridge barn is nearing completion with only minor work to be done. And at the Old Manchester Museum the Town has made additional repairs to doors and windows.

Fundraising is still below expectations. Our Annual Appeal is the lowest it has been in many years. Donations to help cover the cost of the Woodbridge barn restoration are still needed.

A new display at the Old Manchester Museum commemorates the 100th anniversary of America's participation in World War I. At the History Center is a temporary Gold Star exhibit honoring our veterans of all wars.

This year is the 100th anniversary of the Cheney Cemetery Association, which was created to care for the extensive family cemetery at the northeast corner of East Cemetery. Anyone can visit that peaceful part of the cemetery and experience just how large the Cheney family has been over the generations.

Third Graders Elect Our Next President

Throughout the month of May the museums hosted Manchester's third grade students. They learned first-hand of our town's history by visiting the Cheney Homestead, the Keeney One-Room Schoolhouse, Cheney Hall, the History Center's Loom exhibit, the Fire Museum and the Old Manchester Museum of Local History. At the Fire Museum they learned about bucket brigades, at the Homestead about rope beds and chamber pots, at Keeney Schoolhouse about learning the basics with many grades in one room, at the Loom Room about the town's textile heritage and how noisy the looms were, and at the Old Manchester Museum about the Spencer Rifle's importance during the Civil War and the current presidential election.

Every student had a chance to vote for president of the U.S.A. using the museum's vintage voting machine. They were surprisingly enthusiastic about the chance to vote and after each class voted the results were announced, to the sound of cheers and groans. Clearly many students had an opinion of the current contenders and let us know what they thought. After all schools had voted the results were: Clinton 244 votes, Sanders 184 votes and Trump 83 votes. A scattering of votes were cast for Cruz, Kasich and Johnson. Interestingly, before the last schools voted (Verplanck and Robertson), Sanders was narrowly ahead of Clinton. If these results are indicative of the November election it appears that Trump will have a hard time winning over Manchester voters.



Curator Dave Smith shows third graders how to vote.

This issue of *The Courier* is sponsored by
Eugene J. Riccio, Attorney At Law, Bridgeport and Greenwich.



Drop Us A Line...

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*A newsletter of the
Manchester Historical Society*

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Will You Leave a Legacy for Future Generations?

June is Leave A Legacy month, and it reminds us to think about how we can benefit future generations and help them to learn about and appreciate our history.

Help preserve our town's past by
Including a bequest to the Manchester Historical
Society – When
Thinking
Of your Last Will and Testament
Remember to include us in
Your estate plan!

The language in your will may be a plain as: "I give, devise and bequeath to the Manchester Historical Society, a nonprofit corporation in the State of Connecticut, Town of Manchester, the sum of \$ _____" OR "_____ shares of stock in _____ company"

Please consult with your estate planner/attorney.

The size of the legacy you wish to pass on to future generations is not as important as is the desire to do something that will have a positive impact.

The current and future members and friends of the Manchester Historical Society thank you for your support!

Society's Apron Tea Event

On May 15 the Society presented an afternoon of tea and treats at the History Center. Over 70 guests attended and enjoyed a floral-arrangement workshop and an apron contest. The event was part of the ongoing celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Society, which was organized in 1965 to preserve our town's rich past and to educate the public about that history. Donors for the event were Agway, Dunkin' Donuts, Garden Sales, Highland Park Market, John Cooney family, John Hovey, Starbucks and Peg Newton.

The photo shows our volunteers and tea committee members who organized and carried out the event. From left to right: Elaine Mistretta, Peg Newton, Gen Robb, Deb Starkel, Dennis Gleeson, Dorothy Tomlinson, and Clair Leighton.



We Will Miss

Shirley Swain - She and her husband Ed Swain have been long time members of the Society. She graduated from Manchester High School with the Class of 1946 and worked for many years at Manchester Memorial Hospital.

We encourage our members to support the Corporate Members of the Society.

Fuss & O'Neill, Inc.
Highland Park Market
Manchester Road Race Committee
Royal Ice Cream Company
Lofts at the Mills

To Our Readers

If there is something you would like us to write about, please contact Dave at 860-647-9742 or at info@manchesterhistory.org.

Christopher M. Spencer

Manchester Inventor

By Dave Smith

Manchester was among the centers of innovation and invention due partly to its many manufacturing enterprises as well as the "Yankee Ingenuity" of its residents. We have identified over 65 men who held over 150 patents (and still counting) between 1825 and 1940. This is the second in a series of occasional articles about Manchester men who had great inventive talent and whose genius had both local and national impact.

Christopher Miner Spencer was born in Manchester June 20, 1833, the son of Ogden and Asenath Spencer. At a young age he lived with his elderly grandfather, Josiah Hollister, on what is now South Main Street. Josiah had participated in the Revolutionary War and served under George Washington. Because of his woodworking skills Josiah had made an elaborate cabinet for Martha Washington. Young Christopher learned both woodworking and metalworking skills and enjoyed working with his hands.

When Christopher was 14 his grandfather gave him his musket which he had used during the Revolutionary War. In an attempt to make the gun more modern, he sawed off part of the barrel. This was the beginning of Spencer's long interest in firearms.

While still only 14, he began working for the Cheney brothers, whose own efforts in silk manufacture had begun only nine years earlier. At that time the company was known as the Mount Nebo Silk Manufacturing Company, and was located in a small mill building next to the creek near the Cheney Homestead. A year later he went to work for Samuel Loomis as an apprentice machinist at his shop on Main St. just north of the Congregational Church. He created his first machine which was a steam engine.

After 3 months of formal education at Wilbraham Academy he returned to Loomis and completed his apprenticeship. He then returned to work for the Cheney brothers in 1849 and was taken under the wing of Frank Cheney. During the next few years he developed several experimental machines for the silk company. With the encouragement of Frank Cheney, Spencer went west to New York where he made machine tools in Rochester and worked in the locomotive repair shop of the New York Central Railroad. He then came back to Connecticut and worked for Samuel Colt's firearms company.

In 1855 Spencer was persuaded to leave Colt and to rejoin the Cheney's as Superintendent of their new Silk Ribbon Manu-

factory in Hartford. Here he was given permission to use the company workshop for experimenting with firearms, "but only on his spare time". Spencer's first patents were granted in 1859 for spooling machines and for labeling them. His next series of patents, from 1860 through 1865 were for firearms and improvements to them. His perhaps most far-reaching patent was granted in 1860 for his improved repeating rifle, which incorporated the magazine in the buttstock which allowed for seven bullets to be fired without reloading.

As the Civil War began in April 1861, the Cheney's recognized a chance for the sale of military rifles and on May 10, 1861 with the first Spencer military only partly completed, the Cheney brothers entered into a contract with Spencer. The Cheney's were assigned all rights, patents and title to his repeating firearms and they in turn agreed to pay Spencer \$1.00 for every firearm produced. During the course of the Civil War nearly 60,000 Model 1860 rifles and carbines were produced.

After the war Spencer rifles were held by John Wilkes Booth in his attempt to escape after Lincoln's assassination and also were used by the Native Americans when they encountered General George A. Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn in Montana in 1876.

In addition to his interest in firearms, Spencer also built a steam powered wagon in 1860, one of the very first self-propelled vehicles and used it in the Manchester area. In 1901 he built another horseless carriage and drove it to New York. He had a keen interest in steam powered boats and owned several. At the age of 86 he rode in the airplane of his son Percival.

Christopher Spencer held nearly 40 patents during his lifetime, the last issued in 1907. Over fifteen were for machines to make screws. After the Civil War Spencer lived in Windsor, Conn., where he died January 1922.

Excerpts from Roy Marcot's "Spencer Repeating Firearms" were used in this article.

Volunteer Coordinator Needed

We are in need of someone to help us coordinate the activities of our volunteers. Volunteers are used to staff the Old Manchester Museum and the History Center and without them we cannot be open to serve the public. The work consists basically of coordinating when the volunteers are needed at these two locations. We have a number of people who would like to volunteer their time but someone to plan their time is what we need. If you think you can help us with this important task, please call Dennis at 860-647-9983 for further information.

2015 Gala Donors

Our Holiday Gala was resounding success thanks to the many individuals and companies that donated goods and services. We thank them and recognize their generosity here.

AAA	Garaventa Portrait Photography	Massage Envy	Shapleigh-Brown, Ruth
Adams Mill	Gleeson, Dennis	McHugh, Nancy	Silk City Antiques
Agostinelli, Mike	Great Harvest Bakery	McParland, Rita	Smith, Dave
Allez Catering	Guardian Angels Treasures & Trinkets	Miller, Kristine	Spice Mill
Barlow, Susan	Hachey, Joanne	Mistretta, Elaine	Starkel, Deborah
Barrett, Rick and Nola	Hartford Distributors, Inc	Muse, Edith	Starkel, Robin and Matrick, Thomas
Bell, Ruth	Hartford Stage	Narkon, Neal	Stewart, Melanie
Best Wines & Liquors	Hevey, Maureen	Narkon, Virginia	Sweeney, Eileen
Bettylou's Gardening	Highland Park Market	Newton, Peg	Sweet Claude's Ice Cream Parlor
Body In Harmony	Hovey, John	O'Brien, Christiane	Sweet Frog Frozen Yogurt of Manchester
Bolton High School Students	Irish, W.J. Insurance Agency	Old Sturbridge Village	Tails-U-Win
Borden, Rita	Johnny Appleseed	Ostrinsky, Stanley and Mary	Taylor, Judy
Boston Market Store #572	Johns, Pat	Parkade Health Shoppe	The Country Butcher
Botticello Farms LLC	Kenny's Restaurant	Pastrami on Wry--A Sandwich Shop	Tyrol Automotive
Cosmic Omelet	LaFranchise, Martha	Penny Saver Thrift Shop	The Bovano Store
Czaporowski, Joan	Legeyt, Patricia and Victor	Perry, Bruce	Tomlinson, Dorothy
Dustin-Bray, AnnLinda	Leighton, Clair	Pterodactyl Pottery	Viscogliosi, Anthony and Paula
Economy Oil Change	Lewis, Pati	Prior, Janet and John	Walker, Constance
Edible Arrangements	Liquor World	Publick House Historic Inn	Wadsworth Atheneum Museum Shop
Firestone Complete Auto Care	Little Theater of Manchester	Quish, Tom	Waterview Cafe
First Niagara Foundation	Lucente, Ann	Robb, Genevieve	WFSB-TV (Sarah Dahlstrom)
Florence Griswold Museum	Maid Brigade	Robenhymer, Maureen	Woodland Gardens
Fogg, Jeanne	Manchester Country Club	Roberts, Jean	Wry, Corey
Fogg, Lori	Manchester High School Students	Royal Ice Cream	Zadnik, Jane and Rudy
Friendship Tours	Manchester Pizza & Grill	Ruff Cuts	
Friends of the Society	Manchester Senior Center	Schauster, Karen	
Friends of the Society In	Mansion Inn Bed & Breakfast	Scheutz, Tom and Dale	
Memory of Marsha Gunther		Schultz Design	
Fusion Cross-Media		Shady Glen	
Galligan, Matthew			

World War I Exhibit at Old Manchester Museum

A new exhibit commemorating the 100th anniversary of America's participation in "The Great War" is now open. The display depicts Manchester's contributions to the war effort and explains the events leading up to the war, the Homefront activities, a tribute to the men who died during the war and the Homecoming after the war. A great deal of research was done on the men who died by a small group of the Society's Genealogy Group, which uncovered detailed information and photos of some of the men.

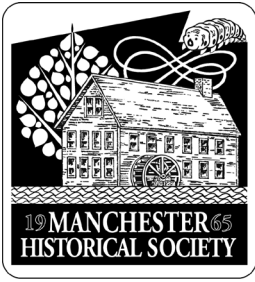
Woodbridge Barn Restoration

The barn restoration project is virtually complete with only a few minor items to be finished.

During the last month the barn was painted and concrete aprons were installed at each of the doorways. After the contractor finishes his work we will display some old farm equipment from our Woodbridge collection as well as equipment from other Manchester area farms.

Calendar of Events

- **The Old Manchester Museum** at 126 Cedar Street is open by appointment only for the time being. Please call 860-647-9983 to schedule a visit. The research facility is also available by appointment.
- **The Museum Store** at the Manchester History Center, 175 Pine Street is open weekdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Local history items are available such as books, copies of vintage maps, Manchester Herald cookbooks, t-shirts with historic scenes of Manchester, mugs, notecards, and limited-edition ceramic tree ornaments with Cheney Homestead and other landmarks. Visitors can conduct research using old city directories.
- **Mid-May to mid-June, "Gold Star Families: 50 Years Later" exhibit** at the Manchester History Center. Traveling exhibit of the Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) Veterans History Project, about families who lost a son, brother, or husband in the Vietnam War. Several Gold Star families were interviewed by CCSU students, who then transformed the transcripts into content for a six-panel exhibit.
- **Saturday, June 11, Museum Open House Day**, open 11 to 3:
 - Cheney Homestead at 106 Hartford Road • Old Manchester Museum, 126 Cedar Street • Loom Room exhibit, enter at 199 Forest Street • Woodbridge Farmstead barn and grounds, backyard of 495 Middle Turnpike East. Also, the Pitkin Glass Works, co-owned by the Historical Society, the Town and the Daughters of the American Revolution, located at the intersection of Parker and Putnam Streets in the Manchester Green section of town will be open 11 to 3.
- **Saturday, June 11, Great Lawn walking tour** starting at 12 noon at the Historical Society's loom exhibit, 199 Forest St. This free walk is part of Pride in Manchester week. View the town-owned nine acres facing Hartford Road. We will walk up Forest Street, and with permission from a mansion owner, cross their private property, and make our way across the lawn, over rough and hilly terrain. Takes about 75 minutes, with commentary on the history of the area. The walk will end at the Cheney Homestead on Hartford Road. Many of the mansions on the Great Lawn look substantially the same as 100 years ago. The home of Frank Woodbridge Cheney, "Big Red," is no longer there.
- **Tuesday, June 14 at 10:00 a.m., the Genealogy Group** holds meetings for both amateur and more experienced genealogists. Roundtable discussion of members' progress in genealogy research, in an informal sharing of questions and problems. We learn from each other! The Genealogy Group consists of Historical Society members, but nonmembers are also welcome, \$3.00 fee. The group usually meets on the second Tuesday of the month at the History Center. The group will not meet during July and August.
- **Saturday, June 25 at 1:00 p.m., The World of Charles A. Platt**, illustrated program about artist and architect Charles Adams Platt (1861-1933), who had a national reputation as an etcher, painter, landscape designer, and architect. Platt was a member of the Cheney family and is buried in the family cemetery in Manchester, which celebrates its 100th anniversary this year. Keith N. Morgan, author, scholar, and professor of the history of art and architecture at Boston University, will present the lecture, discussing Platt's multiple careers and his work for the nation at large, as well as for Cheney family members in Manchester – including several of the mansions on the Great Lawn along Hartford Road. Platt was a central figure in American art and architecture from the late nineteenth century until the Great Depression. The free lecture, sponsored by the Cheney family, will be held at Cheney Hall, 177 Hartford Rd. Questions may be directed to the Manchester Historical Society 860-647-9983.
- **Saturday, June 25 from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m., special walking tour of the Cheney Historic District** with commentary by John Sutherland and Chris Paulin, exploring the streets and locations of the former silk mills, private railroad, and worker houses with Manchester Community College professor emeritus John Sutherland, who initiated the annual District walks 40 years ago, and professor Chris Paulin, who has continued the tradition of this informative and sociable event. The public is welcome to attend this very special walk, sponsored by the Cheney family, which will be visiting Manchester this weekend for the 100th anniversary of the Cheney Cemetery Association. The walk will cover about one mile, with stops along the way to hear about the mills, the people, and events of the past.
- **Saturday, June 25, tentative time 2:00 to 5:00 p.m.**, Cheney Homestead open to visitors. View this 1785 house at 106 Hartford Road, and hear commentary about the residence, which was donated to the Manchester Historical Society by the Cheney family in 1968 for use as a house museum. Guided tours include history of the building and its contents, and of the family who lived there. As with many New England homesteads, the house is built into a hill, with doors opening out to the yard on both the upper and lower levels. The Keeney Schoolhouse is on the grounds of the Homestead.
- **Saturday, July 23, Hidden Gems walking tour** starting at 1:00 p.m. on the front steps of the Town Hall, 41 Center St. We will stroll and view some historic treats of Manchester, usually not seen when driving by in a car -- the Revolutionary War fountain in Center Memorial Park, a former parsonage, buildings on the National Register. Takes about 1-1/4 hours and includes some Downtown buildings and the hidden mansard roof of Dr. Burr's house and office. Rain or shine, but extreme weather cancels. Please bring bottled water if the weather's especially hot. No dogs, please. We may also stop at a Downtown bakery, so bring some change if you want to shop! Cost is \$5 for Historical Society members, \$7 for non-members, and free to children under 16 years of age.
- **Saturday, September 10, the 40th annual walking tour of the Cheney Historic District with commentary by Dr. Chris Paulin** of Manchester Community College, 1:00 p.m. Popular history walk starting at Fuss & O'Neill, 146 Hartford Road (plenty of parking in their lot west of the building). Find out about those huge brick buildings that remain from the days of the world-famous silk mills. Who worked there? Who owned the mills? Where did workers and owners live? This event is co-sponsored by Manchester Community College and the Manchester Historical Society. We'll see Cheney Hall, the former silk mills, the location of the defunct South Manchester Railroad, the Loom exhibit at the former Cheney machine shop, neighborhoods of worker housing, and the Old Manchester Museum. The walk takes about two hours with a distance of a mile or so. No rain date, so bring umbrellas if weather is iffy. Extreme weather cancels. The walk is free, but donations to the Manchester Historical Society are welcome.
- **Tuesday, September 13 at 10:00 a.m., the Historical Society's Genealogy Group** -- a meeting for both amateur and more experienced genealogists. Topic to be announced. We usually meet at the Manchester History Center. The Genealogy Group consists of Historical Society members, but nonmembers are also welcome, \$3.00 fee. The group usually meets on the second Tuesday of the month.
- **Friday, October 14, 5:00 p.m. til 9:00 p.m. Society's Annual Membership Meeting and Annual Dinner** will take place at the Manchester Country Club.



The Manchester Historical Society
 175 Pine Street
 Manchester, Connecticut 06040

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The Manchester Historical Society, 175 Pine Street, Manchester, CT 06040

Name: (Mr.) (Mrs.) (Miss) _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Home Phone: () _____ Email: _____

Type of Membership	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$25	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$50	<input type="checkbox"/> Contributing Individual	\$60
	<input type="checkbox"/> Senior Individual (65+)	\$20	<input type="checkbox"/> Couple	\$40	<input type="checkbox"/> Contributing Family	\$100
	<input type="checkbox"/> Student (under age 18)	\$5	<input type="checkbox"/> Life Couple	\$1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate	\$500
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I would like to make an additional contribution for

<input type="checkbox"/> Manchester Historical Society Building Fund	\$ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Woodbridge Farmstead Endowment	\$ _____
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<input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted	\$ _____		
<input type="checkbox"/> I have enclosed a matching gift form			

Make checks payable to: Manchester Historical Society