



“50 YEARS OF PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY”

The Courier

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Letter from the President

by Jack Prior, President

Dear Members,

Spring has sprung and summer will soon be here. We've had a few warm and sunny days and the flowers are blooming. Buds turn into leaves and that lush green canopy returns, invigorating all of us who are inspired by the newness that this season brings.

Our volunteers did not hibernate during the winter months but were very busy with Society projects. This early spring, we temporarily closed our Loom Room exhibit to visitors, in order to install a handicap egress ramp and new exterior door that is in keeping with the historic door style of the Cheney Mills. Thanks to the hard work of volunteers and others, we have opened the Loom Room once again. Continued up-grades to the electrical infrastructure have been on-going throughout the History Center. The library staff continued to work on genealogy and local history requests, all while putting in their time and energy preparing the Research Library for its grand opening later this summer. The History Center lobby has undergone some changes as well. Our spring cleaning consisted of rearranging the lobby to create open spaces for smaller exhibits. Anyone who has a suggestion for a new exhibit they would like to see at the History Center or would like to help to create an exhibit, contact the Society office or email me at president@manchesterhistory.org. We would love to hear from you.

Our Society Board of Directors has not been idle either this winter. We have listened to our members' concerns and questions that were brought forward at our February Membership meeting and we are addressing them. We formed a Bylaws Committee and are in the midst of clarifying and simplifying

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The Manchester Evening Herald Lives!

Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could search, for free, in the old Manchester Evening Herald archives, no matter where you live? Good news -- the Manchester Historical Society is working on this very project!

The goal is to have all of the 372 microfilm rolls converted to digital, indexed format and uploaded to the Manchester Historical Society's website by the end of 2019.

So! You are welcome to participate in the fundraising we are cheerfully doing to pay for the technology conversion. Any amount from \$1 up will be gratefully received. The overall goal is \$10,000 to cover all costs. We can do this!

All donations are welcome. We will make announcements when we reach the fundraising goal and when the searchable Manchester Evening Herald archives are available to you on the Manchester Historical Society's website.

You may send a check made out to: Manchester Historical Society, 175 Pine Street, Manchester, CT 06040. Please, you must put a note on the check that it is for the Manchester Evening Herald project! This is very, very important.

To make a credit card donation, please call the Manchester Historical Society at 860-647-9983.

Here we go!

Save the Date!

Saturday June 8th - 11am-3pm

Open House at all of our museums



www.facebook.com/manchesterhistoricalsociety • www.manchesterhistory.org



Drop Us A Line...

You can contact us at
info@manchesterhistory.org or
President Jack Prior at
president@manchesterhistory.org

The Courier

*A newsletter of the
Manchester Historical Society*

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Woodbridge Farmstead News

After what seemed like a long winter and wet spring the Farmstead is open again in all its glory. The crocuses were up and showy early in March. The magnolia tree and daffodil gardens were magnificent as usual. Unfortunately their bright flowers don't last long enough for us to enjoy as much as we would like. For weeks the creek was running almost full thanks to all the rain.

Now, as we are again open to visitors, the old barn still smells like a barn, which is very appealing to our city noses. The garden on the far side of the brook will be tilled and planted with appropriate period vegetables. We have plans to do something worthwhile about the old shed at the rear of the property. Stay tuned.

The ground floor of the house is open again for visitors. The Victorian parlor, den and dining room can be seen along with some of the looms that were collected and used by Thelma Woodbridge.

Sunday, May 26 we hosted "Building Healthy Families" in the yard with games for the kids. The younger visitors were given a chance to partake in our sunflower growing contest. They were given a small peat pot with soil so that they could plant their own sunflower seeds. At the end of the growing season we will compare the results of these "future farmers" to see who has grown the largest sunflower, with prizes awarded.

On Sunday, June 23rd we will be hosting some baby farm animals. They do like attention and kids will be able to pet them if they wish. Other activities will be available too. Other events coming up will include beekeeping, Colonial activities and A Day in the Life of a Colonial Woman.

Please plan to visit us at sometime this summer. The Farmstead is like a green oasis in the middle of town.



New Hours for History Center

Beginning June 1, 2019 the History Center will be open from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Tuesday through Friday.

Volunteers will be available to assist visitors and serve customers in the museum store.

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.

Your ad could be here!

Contact us for details

Letter From President Cont. from page 1

them to allow for consistent and more membership engagement opportunities. We are opening up our different committees to all Society members and not just Directors. We are actively recruiting Society members to enhance and increase our board. If you would like to be part of building the future of the Historical Society please make your interests known. You may call the Society or contact any Society Director.

Activities have continued at the OMM, Cheney Homestead, and History Center with monthly openings. We had a successful mid-winter movie series at the History Center, starring Astrid Allwyn (a native of South Manchester), with historic commentary by MCC instructor and author David Garnes. A big thank you to Peter Millett for putting together this series. In March, architectural historian, preservationist, and author Christopher Wigren, introduced readers to his book "Connecticut Architecture, Stories of 100 Places", and which was well received by all those in attendance. Our traditional 3rd grade tours were once again a success thanks to our many returning and new volunteers. Peter Millett, and his team of dedicated volunteers at the Cheney Homestead have held several well attended programs this winter. The Woodbridge Sub-committee, under the guidance of Peggy Newton, has been busy planning and preparing for the new season of activities at the Farmstead.

We are all very excited about the Society's coming summer events. To ensure that you have all the details about these events, we encourage you, if you have not already done so, to follow us on the social medias: Facebook, E-News (link found on our website), www.manchesterhistory.org, and Manchester Matters. Looking forward to seeing you at the properties this year.

Pitkin Glass Works History

In 1783 William Pitkin, Elisha Pitkin and Samuel Bishop requested permission from the Connecticut General Assembly to produce glass. They requested a 25 year monopoly, which was granted because the Pitkin family had provided gun powder (from their powder mill in what is now East Hartford) to the Continental Army during the American Revolution and evidently had not been paid in full. The reason for the monopoly was to allow the company to get established and develop markets without competition from other Connecticut glass factories.

The stone building (still standing but minus the roof, at the corner of Parker and Putnam Streets) was erected by 1785 on part of the Pitkin family farm. The company was known as the East Hartford Glass Works as present day Manchester was then part of East Hartford and known as the Orford Parish Society.

It took several years to get the business up and running, and to find a person with experience in making glass to oversee the construction of the factory, recruit and train laborers and find sources of materials that are used in making glass.

After production began and advertisements were placed in the Hartford newspaper and other papers, it appears that the finances were shaky. In 1789 the company requested permission from the Connecticut Legislature to conduct a lottery to raise funds to help operate the company. That lottery turned out to be a failure as it raised only a small amount of money. A second lottery was held in 1791 and that lottery also failed to raise much money.

In spite of these setbacks, the company did manage to carry on for many years. Good quality sand was obtained from southern New Jersey, where many glass factories were in operation. It was brought by barge up the Connecticut River to East Hartford and hauled to the factory by ox cart. Wood to supply the fires for the kilns, which were kept burning 24 hours a day, seven days a week while glass was being made, came from the surrounding area. In time the supply of available firewood diminished as trees were cleared to create farm land. Reportedly the large crucibles in which the glass ingredients were melted to a molten form were also made at the factory site, although this has not yet been proven.

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Pitkin Glass Works History Cont. from pg.3

A wide variety of bottles, flasks, inkwells, demijohns and other glass products were made here. All were of a similar color, mostly olive green as well as other shades of green. This color was due mostly to the type of sand used in the glass. Almost none of the products were marked with the name of the factory, and now it is very difficult to determine if a particular bottle was made here. However, there were a very few flasks and inkwells that were marked with the name "Spencer" or the initials "JPF." Those items so marked command very high prices from avid collectors, some upwards of \$50,000.

By about 1830 there was increasing competition from other Connecticut glass factories, including those at Coventry, Glastonbury, Mansfield, Willington and a few others. This may have resulted in the Pitkin operation becoming less profitable, perhaps even a money loser. That is about when production by Pitkin Glass Works seems to have stopped. Over time the building fell into disrepair. It is quite probable that thrifty locals, including Pitkin family itself, used parts of the abandoned building for other purposes. The wooden roof structure and the doors and windows would have been attractive for reuse. It is not known what happened to the rear stone wall that is now missing.

In the late 1800's and early 1900's the site was a popular place for locals to visit and picnic on a Sunday. They came by bicycle and by foot.

In the recent past school students from Bennet and Iling Middle Schools have carried out limited archaeological digs at the site, under the supervision of State Archaeologist Dr. Nicholas Bellantoni. As expected much broken glass and shards have been unearthed. Also discovered have been a few coins from the late 1700's and early 1800's and some buttons. Most interesting was the discovery of a very small bottle, about 1 ¼" high and in the perfect shape of a chestnut bottle. It may have been made for perfume or smelling salts or just as a "whimsy."

These discoveries and other examples of Pitkin bottles are now on display at the Old Manchester Museum at 126 Cedar St.

The glass works site is overseen and maintained by the Executive Council of the Pitkin Glass Works, Inc., which is comprised of representatives of the Town of Manchester, the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Manchester Historical Society. The property has been on The National Register of Historic Places since 1979.



School Tours

This past May we again hosted over 700 third grade students and adults over the course of four weeks. This is made possible thanks to our many volunteers who organize and plan the program as well as greeting, guiding and explaining some of the history of the town and the significance of our museum properties. Without these dedicated folks the tours would not be possible.

Thank You!



Upcoming Events

Saturday, June 1 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Old Manchester Museum open, 126 Cedar Street.

Saturday, June 8, Connecticut Open House Day and Manchester museums open free from 11 to 3: • the History Center at 175 Pine, the former Cheney machine shop • Cheney Homestead & Keeney Schoolhouse at 106 Hartford Road and newly planted kitchen and herb gardens • Old Manchester Museum at 126 Cedar Street • Woodbridge Farmstead barn and house, 495 East Middle Turnpike at Manchester Green • Pitkin Glass Works at the corner of Parker and Putnam Streets, where glass experts will be available to answer questions. Pitkin glass items will be available for purchase.

Sunday, June 9 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., Cheney Homestead open, 106 Hartford Road. Visit this early American home, including the recently opened Homestead Art Gallery and be inspired by Manchester's rich history in art. Tour the 1785 Homestead which was donated to the Manchester Historical Society by the Cheney family for use as a house museum. Guided tours include the 1751 Keeney Schoolhouse, history of the Homestead and its contents, and of the family who lived there.

Tuesday, June 11 at 10:00 a.m., the Historical Society's Genealogy Group will meet at Center Cemetery, East Hartford, at 10:00 a.m., for a tour and talk by Ruth Shapleigh Brown, founder of the Connecticut Gravestone Network; she will also provide help with photos and give gravestone-cleaning tips. Learn about early settler monuments and burial sites -- Center Cemetery was the cemetery for East Hartford and Manchester, since Manchester wasn't established as a separate town until 1823. Park behind the Save-A-Lot grocery store, 954 Main Street, East Hartford, near the cemetery entrance.

Saturday, June 15, Great Lawn walking tour starting at 11:00 a.m. NOTE TIME! Starts at the Historical Society's loom exhibit, 199 Forest Street, near the intersection of Elm Street. View mills, machine shop, and the town-owned nine acres of lawn facing Hartford Road. We'll walk from the looms, up Forest Street, and with permission from a mansion owner, we'll cross their private property, and make our way across the lawn, over rough and hilly terrain. Slow pace, some uneven and hilly terrain; takes about 90 minutes, with commentary on the history of the area. Extreme weather cancels, but the walk will be held in light rain, so please bring an umbrella. \$10 for non-members, \$7 for members, and free for children under age 16.

Sunday, June 23 from 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m., Woodbridge Farmstead barn and house open, with baby animals and activities for kids, 495 East Middle Turnpike. Visit the restored eighteenth-century barn, house, and the grounds. Visitors can park at the municipal lot behind the Senior Center, or along the street between the Senior Center and the farmstead itself.

Saturday, July 6 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Old Manchester Museum open, 126 Cedar Street

Saturday, July 13 at 1:00 p.m., Cheney Railroad history hike starting at the north end of Main Street in Manchester, on the north (right) side of Farr's Sporting Goods, 2 Main Street, Manchester, CT 06042. Park at the nearby shopping plaza or Eighth Utilities District office building (please do not park in Farr's parking lot). Hikers will have an easy, fairly flat, walk along the former railroad, built in 1869 to connect the Cheney silk mills to the main rail line in the North End. At

2.5 miles, it was the shortest freight-and-passenger railroad in the United States. We will hike at a moderate pace along the one-mile portion owned by the Manchester Land Conservation Trust and on to the bridge overlooking Center Springs Park, which will take about 2 hours round trip. Participants will hear about the history of the railroad and see maps and old pictures. A special favor will be given to children who attend the hike, co-sponsored by the Land Trust and Connecticut Forest & Park Association, and open to all. We will hike if light rain -- bring an umbrella -- but extreme weather cancels. No dogs, please. FREE.

Sunday, July 14 from 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m., Woodbridge Farmstead barn and house open, 495 East Middle Turnpike. Visitors can park at the municipal lot behind the Senior Center, or along the street between the Senior Center and the farmstead itself.

Monday, July 22 through Friday, July 26, from 9:00 to noon, Monotype Printing and Book Arts at the Cheney Homestead, 106 Hartford Road. A special art class to inspire you as you create your own paper and book, exploring color and design, using Gelli Plates to print papers for hand-made journals. Participants will spend three mornings printing and may use leaves, combs, and found items to build a stack of textured papers which will be used in the creation of books on the last two mornings. Taught by artist Trudy Mitchell of Bolton. Cost is \$180. Classes are open to all, no experience necessary; adults and children age nine and up.

Sunday, July 28 from 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m., Woodbridge Farmstead barn and house open, 495 East Middle Turnpike. Visitors can park at the municipal lot behind the Senior Center, or along the street between the Senior Center and the farmstead itself.

Saturday, August 3 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Old Manchester Museum open, 126 Cedar Street.

Sunday, August 11 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., Cheney Homestead open, 106 Hartford Road. Visit this early American home, including the recently opened Homestead Art Gallery and be inspired by Manchester's rich history in art.

Sunday, August 11 from 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m., Woodbridge Farmstead barn and house open, 495 East Middle Turnpike. Visitors can park at the municipal lot behind the Senior Center, or along the street between the Senior Center and the farmstead itself.

Sunday, August 25 from 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m., Woodbridge Farmstead barn and house open, 495 East Middle Turnpike. Visitors can park at the municipal lot behind the Senior Center, or along the street between the Senior Center and the farmstead itself.

Sunday, September 8 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., Cheney Homestead open, 106 Hartford Road.

Sunday, September 8 from 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m., Woodbridge Farmstead barn and house open, 495 East Middle Turnpike. Visitors can park at the municipal lot behind the Senior Center, or along the street between the Senior Center and the farmstead itself.

Sunday, September 22 at 1:00 p.m., Annual Member Meeting of the Manchester Historical Society at the History Center, 175 Pine St. The business meeting will include the president's report on the past year's activities and the schedule for the next year, financial report and voting on the proposed slate of directors and officers.

2019 Preservation Award Winners

by Susan Barlow; photos by Starr McClean and Susan Barlow

Four Manchester properties received recognition for their owners' efforts to preserve the historic character of their buildings. The awards were presented by the Cheney Brothers National Historic Landmark District Commission, an advisory commission appointed by the town to promote, encourage, and secure the preservation and rehabilitation of the Cheney Brothers National Historic Landmark District. The awards were presented at a May 22 reception at the Town Hall. May is National Preservation Month, and the Commission has presented local awards since 2001. Commission members and Mayor Moran thanked the award winners for their work to preserve Manchester's history and charm. The purpose of the awards is to recognize property owners who "have maintained their property in a manner that preserves its historic values and character." The Commission looked at properties throughout town, searching for examples of buildings restored to condition similar to the original.

The 2019 winners are pictured with Mayor Jay Moran:

1. A c.1830 wood-shingled building at 21 Hartford Road, owned by South Methodist Church. The structure was originally the home of George Wells Cheney (1799-1840). The church purchased the property in 2003, and restored it to house a youth minister and church offices. Architect and church board member, Jim Hoagland, left, said of the renovation, "This project helped to re-establish this wonderful old home's presence at the eastern end of the Great Lawn. The preservation efforts will allow the home to serve the church for many years to come." Earle Bidwell, right, music director, who also serves on the church's board, said, "this renovation was made possible by a gift from lifelong church member Virginia Ryan (1919-2015)."



2. A 1926 craftsman-style bungalow at 20 Green Hill Street, owned by Gary Cesca and his wife, Sarah, for about 15 years. They have worked on preserving the house, using materials appropriate to its historical period. The couple were told that this was a "kit house," popular in the 1920s and 30s – Sears, Montgomery-Ward, and other companies sold them. Kits were sent by

train to the homeowner with instructions on putting them together, like assembling furniture. Gary said they looked at many houses, but it wasn't until they saw this one that they made an offer. They liked it from the very beginning. Green Hill Street was promoted by realtors E. J. Holl and G. Bidwell beginning in 1912 as "Greenhurst," in the Manchester Green area, between Munro and Parker Streets.



3. A 1926 wood-shingled four-square style house with hip roof, at 32 Westminster Road, owned since 1992 by Tim and Debra Gurski. The house was built for Henry Smith, a salesman for the Watkins Brothers Furniture Store located on Downtown Main Street. The couple has carefully preserved the house, which is near the East Cemetery in the "Hollywood" section of town, named for real estate developer E. J. Holl. Debbie said they "used to drive around to look at houses, and always liked this one," and were very pleased when it came on the market.



4. A 1904 traditional wood-clad house with decorative shingles at 44 Ridge Street, owned by Pat and Richard Cannon since 2009. They bought the house from the Krause family, who had bought the land from Cheney Brothers in 1901. Krause family members lived in the house until the Cannons purchased it. The renovation and improvements have been extensive. Their friends Joanne and Rick Meier were so impressed with the effort and work that Pat and Richard put into the house that they nominated it for a preservation award. The exterior wood has been restored and painted, and original historic features kept in place both outside and in: porch decorations, coffered ceiling and beadboard walls. Richard has done 90 percent of the work himself. Patricia said, "We are so honored by this recognition. The charm of an older home is what we wanted. The process has been enjoyable and rewarding – there is always more to do."



The Cheney Homestead Artists' Studio

Among the many ongoing projects at the Cheney Homestead, one of the most recent initiatives is to restore the historic art studio which was the domain of twin sisters, Dorothy and Marjorie Cheney. Located at the top of the original staircase, the studio space is washed by the cool north light so favored by artists throughout the centuries and is dominated by a large triple window in the center of the studio flanked by two dormers offering views of the Cheney grounds. Last used at the end of Dorothy's life in 1971, the studio has remained untouched for nearly 60 years inhabited only by writing tools, a sculpture stand upon which smocks are draped, and the plaster drawing casts/busts critical to the classical drawing tradition in which Seth Wells Cheney was so precisely trained.

An inventory of the studio this winter turned up a letter from a student of Jacques Maroger who was the technical director of the Louvre Museum laboratories in the early 1900s before emigrating to America in 1939. The letter, written by one of his students in 1940, detailed the exact mixing of Maroger painting medium. There were also calligraphy tools, an armature of a sculpture, and, of course, the drawing casts. We knew that the casts had a history of their own that required investigation.

Peter Millett and I contacted Giust Gallery (now called The Caproni Collection) in Woburn, MA in order to learn more about their possible history. The Caproni Collection is the premier destination for ateliers to acquire drawing casts of historical and mythical figures. These casts allow students to learn from a motionless form prior to drawing and painting from life. Of immediate importance for the Homestead was the need to repair one of the largest of the Cheney casts which had, at some point in its history, snapped off its pedestal. We were directed to the casting division, Skylight Studio, where we had the good fortune to meet restorer, Robert Shure. He determined that the figure, believed to be Hera, wife of Zeus, was not one The Caproni Collection possessed, and so he offered to repair it in exchange for the right to make a mold for future replication.

Many questions are yet to be answered. When did the casts enter the artistic tradition of the Cheney family? Who ordered them and from where? How

old are they? There are some clues. Many of the figures have oval metal plaques on their pedestals. The words are somewhat corroded; however, the letters spelling out "Maison d' . . ." and "Musee IMT" are visible. They have come from France. French teacher, Joanna Guinan was able to fill in the missing information. They originate from "Maison de l'Emperor" at the Musees de Imperiaux. Restorer, Robert Shure, after consultation with a French colleague offered the possibility that the casts were created at the plasterwork of the Louvre. Letters written by John Cheney indicate that he and his brother, Seth, traveled to Europe in 1855 where they ordered the casts for John's studio. We wonder now about the casts of children's hands and feet which are also not part of The Caproni Collection. Will these also be candidates for their own reproductions? There are many discoveries yet to be made.

In September, the physical restoration of the Cheney Homestead Studio will be complete and we look forward to having Robert Shure visit the studio to participate in its dedication on Saturday, September 14. Mark your calendars!

As part of the living arts tradition of the Cheney Homestead, we are also happy to announce that students of all ages are invited to study classical drawing among the casts in this historical north-light studio. Trudy Mitchell will teach sight-size drawing in the 19th Century tradition starting the first week in September. The classes will run for six weeks in an ongoing schedule and will be held Wednesday and Saturday mornings from 9:30 - 12:00. Class descriptions and registration forms will be available on the Manchester Historical Society's website.



