



“OVER 55 YEARS OF PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY”

The Courier

JUNE 2023

VOL. 58, No. 3

A quarterly publication of the Manchester Historical Society, Inc. • 175 Pine Street • Manchester, Connecticut 06040 • 860-647-9983



President's Message

By *Dennis Gleason*

Our newsletter, The Courier, is to inform you about what has been happening at our properties and what is scheduled in the near future. The Annual Appeal has brought in about \$12,000 to date. Many thanks must be given to our members and businesses who donated to the Appeal. A new member has joined the board, Kevin Drake, who also volunteers at the Cheney Homestead.

The Woodbridge Farmstead and Cheney Homestead recently held volunteer clean up days. Thank you to the volunteers who pitched in. The History Center is being used for band practice twice a month, by a Poetry Group and by the Genealogy Group which meets the second Wednesday each month. Our library is open for research on local history and families.

Visitors have been very pleased with our Then and Now exhibit at the History Center and have left positive comments. We have now added an Art and Map exhibit focusing on the period between 1823 and 1923. The exhibit of Manchester business signs at the History Center has evoked memories in long time Manchester residents of days gone by. Many of these signs used to mark Main Street businesses.

Lastly, the Town's 200th birthday on May 29th, and throughout the year, will include events that can be found on the Town's website as well as the Society's website.

The Society's Annual Member Meeting will be held Sunday, September 24 at the History Center. This year the meeting will begin at 11:00 a.m. and will be followed by a catered luncheon at noon. Please plan to attend, and let us know ahead of the meeting.

Town of Manchester Created May 1823

By *Dave Smith*

After many years of agitation and several petitions to the Connecticut Legislature by inhabitants of this part of East Hartford, the Town of Manchester was finally created on May 28, 1823 when Governor Oliver Wolcott signed the official document approving the recommendation of the State Senate. The news of this action was published in the Connecticut Courant (predecessor of the Hartford Courant) on Tuesday June 3, 1823.

The process dragged on for many years prior to 1823, mainly due to the opposition of the inhabitants of East Hartford. For a long time the land between the Connecticut River and the Town of Bolton, (which was incorporated in 1720) was the eastern part of Hartford. In 1783, the area east of the river separated from Hartford and became East Hartford.

The center of the political, business and religious life was in the area closest to the river and residents of present day Manchester had to travel up to nine miles each way every Sunday to attend church and to participate in town meetings. This was a hardship for many in the easternmost part of town, particularly during the winter months. In 1772 the Parish (Society) of Orford was formed and a meeting

continued on page 7

Save the Date

Sunday September 24

Annual Member Meeting

Location: History Center

Time: 11:00 Business Meeting followed by lunch

The Courier

A newsletter of the
Manchester Historical Society

Online at: www.manchesterhistory.org

E-mail: info@manchesterhistory.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ManchesterHistoricalSociety

ManchesterHistoricalSociety

Tel. 860-647-9983

OFFICERS

President, Dennis Gleeson
Vice President, Robert Kanehl
Secretary, Carol Cafazzo
Treasurer, vacant

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dan Kimball
Stephen Penny
Bettylou Sandy
David Smith
Kevin Drake

STAFF

Administrator, Susan Crombie

Design & Printing by Fusion Cross-Media



Drop Us A Line...

You can contact us at
info@manchesterhistory.org

Weekly News

Subscribe using the red rectangle
on the home page of our website.

[Sign up for free e-news](#)

Newsletter Editors

Dave Smith
Bob Kanehl

Woodbridge Farmstead News

By Peggy Newton

Our first Open House Day was Sunday May 7 and the weather was picture perfect. Aided by the sunshine and a mild wind, children searched the grounds for over 200 eggs hidden by our Farm Volunteers! I have to praise all our volunteers and helpers. Without their dedication and hard work the Farmstead would be unkempt. Many volunteers helped with cleaning the Farmhouse inside and out. Friends dusted and washed and polished and painted inside. Others put up new and refurbished window treatments throughout the first floor. Thanks to Kris Miller, Maude McGovern, Deb Shaffer, Suzanne Mamet and Louise Krippenstahler for their help.

Outside we had weeders and rakers making our gardens look lovely. Thanks to Carol Zapadka, Ginny Wickersham, Yusuf Bawwab, Dan Kimball and Dave Smith. One enthusiastic volunteer even made an historic discovery on our property near the rear deck when she stepped into a depression close to the steps (she was unhurt). Thanks to Dave, Dan and Yusuf digging away at that spot we discovered a brick-lined circular well. Even Thelma, who lived there over 70 years never mentioned the well. We were all so pleased with our new find! It just made our day. The guys relocated two large slate well surround slabs and many bricks for a safer walkway.

On our open day Rita Borden, Lucy Sweeney, Autumn Daub and Andy Main helped with preparations and staffing the barn.

Anything can happen at the Farmstead and maybe future farm friends may like to join us and discover an old treasure or help with our upcoming Bigelow Brook Duck Race or other events. If you would like to join the fun please call the History Center (860-647-9983) or Peggy Newton (860-305-7310).



We Will Miss ...

John Hovey was a valued volunteer for our Society for many years. John truly loved his town and its rich history and was devoted to the community. He retired from the Town Water Department several years ago where, during the course of his work, he saw much of Manchester and where he met many people with stories of the town. John volunteered with us in many ways over the years including helping us to maintain our properties. He enjoyed working with his grandson Andrew on the grounds of the Homestead. John's other interest outside of his family was with the Manchester Land Trust, where he could often be found at the Botti Farm property.

Out of the Past – Road Travel in the Good Old Days

By Dave Smith

Now that summer is upon us and thoughts turn to making a road trip to some far away destination, it is difficult to imagine how much more of an adventure it was 100 years ago to make a long automobile trip. A few years ago we reported on a cross country trip made in 1920 from Manchester to the west coast that took almost six weeks to cover the nearly 3,000 miles. Today it could be accomplished in four days of continuous driving.

We recently learned of two more Manchester men who, in 1920, bought a car in Detroit and drove west and then back to Manchester. Maurice Madden and Ward Atwood first went to Montana to visit Madden's sisters and brother. They then drove to Yellowstone where "they gazed in amazement at wonderful spouting geysers and many of the other natural marvels." Their new car performed so well that their only requirement was "the placing of one new shoe (tire) in commission. The other three shoes never showed the effects of the great wear to which they were subjected. Because of repairs being made to highways they were forced to make numerous detours which added greatly to the mileage traveled but did not get them forward very much. They traversed a considerable portion of the Lincoln Highway on the home trip. This national roadway lacks much of being completed. The work is being done in somewhat of a patch quilt pattern. The young automobilists saw much of Uncle Sam's domain and were greatly impressed with its vastness and marvelous wealth producing ability. They consider the pleasure of seeing the great natural wonders of Yellowstone Park sufficient reward for all the expense and discomforts experienced in making the long and tiresome trip both ways." The distance recorded on the speedometer was 6,200 miles. The report did not include how long they were away.

In stark contrast to that trip a 1906 edition of the Herald reported on road travel some 100 years earlier. It was titled "Passing of the Toll House." The old toll house at the foot of McLean Hill, which has stood guard over the Middle Turnpike from a time beyond the memory of the oldest inhabitants of this town, has

been razed to the ground. The old toll house stood in the highway and the highway commissioner required that it should be moved back before the road was macadamized (paved). The house has been in the possession of the Logan family since 1858. The property was originally in the hands of the McLean family after which the hill is named and a member of this family was, in all probability, the last toll-gate keeper. No toll has been collected there for about 54 years (about 1852).

The Middle Turnpike was, many years ago, part of the stage road from New York to Providence. This road was owned and built by the company operating the stages and they received revenue from other vehicles which used it by means of toll gates. These gates were placed at distances of about six miles. A fee of six and a quarter cents was exacted from one horse vehicles and a proportionate sum was added for more pretentious caravans. Pedestrians passed through a turnstile and paid a penny apiece. After midnight the gatekeepers were not required to be on duty. They might if they chose stay awake and charge half rates for all who passed between that time and sunrise. The keeper's children oftentimes earned pocket money by watching after midnight for belated travelers or those who waited for economy's sake until an hour when they hoped to pass through unchallenged.

Except for the three stages, which passed in either direction through the day, the Middle Turnpike was not a much traveled road. It was laid out in a straight line, or very nearly so, and abounded in steep hills. Many preferred the Tolland Turnpike, which was also a toll road, and the farmers in the south part of the town always used the Hartford road which was a free road.

Now when we travel on a toll road (turnpike) we don't even have to slow down to hand over money. And the toll fees are the same day or night. We hope you enjoy your road trip this summer.

[The story of the Toll House was also included the *The Storytellers*]

Calendar of Events

History Center Office, Museum Store and exhibits at 175 Pine St., open Wednesday to Friday from 10:00 to 2:00 and Saturday noon to 4:00 p.m. located in the former Cheney Machine Shop building. Our phone is 860-647-9983 and our email is info@manchesterhistory.org.

Old Manchester Museum at 126 Cedar Street is open the first Saturday of the month, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. through December. It is also open by appointment. Please call our office at 860-647-9983 for further information. Exhibits include some early Manchester manufactures, our elementary schools, both past and present, Pitkin Glass Works bottles, and the story of the Spencer Rifle and its inventor Christopher Spencer. A new display of quilts is on exhibit. There is also a museum store in the lobby.

Cheney Homestead and Keeney Schoolhouse at 106 Hartford Rd. are open the second Sunday of the month from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. An early American home with period art and furniture. The Homestead was donated to the Manchester

Historical Society by the Cheney family in 1968 for the purpose of a museum to exhibit and explain the impact of the Cheney family on Manchester. Guided tours include the 1751 Keeney one-room schoolhouse, a partial restoration of one of Manchester's earliest one-room schools.

Woodbridge Farmstead at 495 Middle Turnpike East, is open the second and fourth Sundays of the month from 12 noon to 2:00 p.m. (except during June when it will be open Saturday June 10 and Sunday June 26). An 1830 house, Visitor Center and late 1700's barn on the site of the former Meadowbrook Dairy. Early farm equipment is on display along with a one-horse open sleigh and a pony wagon. The new Visitor Center has displays of the history of Manchester Green. Visitors can park at the municipal lot behind the Senior Center or along the side street to the east of the Farmstead.

Genealogy Group meets the second Wednesday of the month at the History Center 10 to noon.

23 Bicentennial History Walks throughout Manchester, commemorating our town's past and celebrating our future. The walks take place rain or shine. The series of free walks continues through November 25, with a December 2 rain date. Guests who participate in at least 10 walks will be eligible for a free commemorative coin (first 200 winners) and a reception at the History Center on Sunday, December 31 at 1:00 p.m. celebrating Manchester and its 200th birthday. Printed copies of the free booklet are available at Town Hall Customer Service and at the History Center during regular hours.

June

Saturday June 3 Old Manchester Museum open 10:00 to 2:00

Saturday June 10 Museum Open House Day All museums open 11:00 to 3:00

Saturday June 10 Pitkin Glass Works open for archaeological digs by children

Sunday June 11 Cheney Homestead open 1:00 to 4:00

Wednesday, June 14 Genealogy Group meeting, from 10:00 to 12 noon, at the History Center

Sunday June 25 Woodbridge Farmstead open noon to 2:00

July

Saturday July 1 Old Manchester Museum open 10:00 to 2:00

Sunday July 9 Woodbridge Farmstead open noon to 2:00

Sunday July 9 Cheney Homestead open 1:00 to 4:00

Sunday July 23 Woodbridge Farmstead open noon to 2:00

August

Saturday August 5 Old Manchester Museum open 10:00 to 2:00

Sunday August 13 Woodbridge Farmstead open noon to 2:00

Sunday August 13 Cheney Homestead open 1:00 to 4:00

Sunday August 27 Woodbridge Farmstead open noon to 2:00

Calendar *continued from page 4*

September

Sunday September 10 History Center Manchester's Men in the Civil War Society President Dennis Gleeson has done exhaustive research on local men who served in the Civil War. He will present some of his findings during this presentation with topics such as how the soldiers traveled and what they ate. We would like to hear from descendants of Civil War soldiers/sailors during this event.

Sunday September 24 History Center Annual Meeting of the Society Meeting will begin at 11:00 a.m. and will be followed by a catered lunch at noon. Reservations required.

Keep the date open Sunday October 8 for a 10:00 a.m. Revolutionary War Reenactment at Cheney Homestead. Details in our September newsletter.

Art classes at the History Center Following the artistic traditions of the Cheney family, classes are offered for children and adults at The Mill Studio of Fine Arts. For details visit our website at MillStudioofFineArts.com.

Board meetings of the Historical Society are held at 4:00 p.m. on the third Wednesday of the month at the History Center or at one of our properties. Members are welcome to attend and may speak or ask questions at the beginning of the meeting.

Where were you 25 years ago?

By Bob Kanehl

A time capsule buried in Center Memorial Park 25 years ago as part of the 175th Anniversary activities was dug up earlier this year, as planned, to be part of this year's 200th Anniversary observances. When opened, the time capsule offered its treasure of items and letters residents felt important to remember. Among the most interesting items and insights the activity provided the Bicentennial Workgroup members tasked with restoration were:

The fact that the senior center was providing classes on "how to use the new item – the internet," as well as basic computer training including how to load a floppy disk. The town and other entities were concerned with that computer bug (Y2K) feared to destroy computer systems across the nation with the turning of the clock from 1999 to 2000. Another major news item of the time preserved in the vault was the fact that John Glenn was making his second flight into space. The older astronaut had been one of the original Mercury 7. His return to space happened on the same day that the time capsule was buried in Manchester.

Letters were found addressed to the future leaders of the town, its departments and schools. Letters written to individuals were preserved, and handed to those individuals by the workgroup at the May 13 event.

The group took the time to track down as many of these people as possible.

Needless to say, the capsule had its collection of items classified as "things we thought would last forever – but are no longer found." Among these things were: film and film cameras, actual printed 35 mm photos and Polaroid shots; a 3 inch floppy disk; an AOL disk introducing the user to a free account; a telephone book; Electronic Games, and longingly remembered magazines and newspapers such as the Manchester Evening Herald, and the Rockville Reminder.

Unfortunately the time capsule did not weather as well as the coordinators had wanted. Moisture seeped into the container over the 25 years, destroying several of the pictures, mildewing the papers, and leaving a sad collection of Manchester in 1998.

The Bicentennial Workgroup is hoping that this does not happen to the new Time Capsule it buried May 13, 2023 along side of the Civil War Monument. This time capsule was filled with school student memories and letters, as well as mementos from various town officials, and of course letters and articles from the general public.

Cheney Homestead News

By Bettylou Sandy

Much has happened at the Cheney Homestead Museum since the March newsletter! As of this writing, we are preparing for *the first* “**Third Grade Tour**” since Covid-19 in 2020 canceled the tour that year as well as 2021 and 2022. With this delay and loss of momentum for planning, it was decided to reduce the complexity of the tour by hosting the whole tour at the Cheney Homestead Museum property. There we will experience a “**Historical Time Travel Adventure**”

In May, the whole third grade of the Manchester school system will be studying why we are called the “Silk City”, as well as the lifestyle of the early inhabitants of Hartford, that became East Hartford, and then became Manchester, Connecticut. The Homestead Museum property contains the 1785 homestead itself to illustrate the Early American lifestyle, as this farm family lived in 1818, the last year when all eight Cheney brothers were still living at home. Here we also see how each boy was inspired to choose their own career for their livelihood. Each boy was encouraged to do what they were best suited for shown by their own interests.

On the second floor of the homestead are three “special interest” exhibits to highlight some of the legacy of the Cheney family. “**The Cheney Art Gallery**” was established to highlight the fine art of John and Seth Cheney, Russel Cheney, and now Kate Cheney Chappell.

The “**Women of the Cheney Family**” exhibit was completed this past March, to highlight the impact that the Cheney women of the family had upon their family, the community and the greater world around them. as so much emphases were always on the men, the response to this exhibit has been very well received.

Work is also being done to complete the “**Ingenuity and Industry of the Cheney Family**”, beginning with Timothy Cheney’s “**Clock Shop**”, his grist mill, saw mill, then the first silk mill in 1838, all on the Cheney Homestead farmland.

The students will also see what it was like to be a student in the 1751 one room “**Keeney Schoolhouse**”, then visit the school outhouse (nonfunctioning), followed by the “baby” of the original “**Charter Oak tree**”.



The school tours will take place the week of June 5-9; we think this will be a nice beginning for the renewal of the third-grade tours.

If anyone *not* in third grade, would like to take a tour of the Cheney Homestead, we will have tours available on June 10, 10-3p.m., for open museum day, focusing on George Cheney. We will also be open on June 11, 1-4, for our regular open house, focusing on Electa Cheney and playing “old fission games”.

On August 13, 1-4, we will focus on the 1751 **Keeney one room schoolhouse**. The Homestead will also be open for tours, then on September 10, 12:00-2:30, the **Timothy Cheney wooden clock history and demonstration**.

Also, that day, an open house of the Cheney Homestead Museum from 1-4.

P e r s o n a l tours are available for groups and individuals. If you would like to make special plans to visit

the homestead, please call the Historical Society at 860-647-9983 to make arrangements.

If you would like to **get involved in the Homestead** in any other way, we always need help with painting, maintenance, and gardening. Maybe you would like to be a docent to help other people enjoy the museum, training is available. Again, please call the Historical Society at 860-647-9983 to make arrangements.

We are also looking for **new members of the Cheney Homestead committee**, to help with planning, hosting and representing the museum.

We look forward to seeing you for your own “Historical Time Travel Adventure”!



Town of Manchester Created May 1823

continued from page 1

house and church were authorized near the center of today's Manchester. (Note that the church was not completed until 1794 but the meeting house was used as a church before that)

Agitation continued for a political separation from East Hartford and several petitions were submitted to the State Legislature. Among the proponents of separation were John Olds (considered by some as the "Father of Manchester"), and members of the Bunce, Olcott, Keeney, Griswold, Pitkin, Lyman, and Cheney families and many others. (For a detailed description of the events leading to separation refer to the Spiess & Bidwell "History of Manchester") Finally, on April 30, 1823 a petition was submitted to the State Legislature signed by Benjamin Wolcott, William Cooley and Ralph Phelps. Their arguments for separation from East Hartford were convincing. They described the inconveniences suffered by the inhabitants of the eastern part of town: the distances they had to travel to attend meetings and elections, the required maintenance of highways (many lived in East Hartford and were not obliged to pay for highway maintenance in Orford Parish (Society of Orford) so that burden fell on the residents of the less populated parish), manufacturing concerns in the parish had increased (especially textile and paper mills and the Pitkin Glass Works), and finally that the Society of Orford was larger than many towns in Connecticut and held 240 electors. These arguments won over the State Legislature (but not residents of East Hartford). Even after the Legislature approved the petition, there were attempts to have it continued to another session of the

Assembly. That was defeated and Governor Wolcott signed the document.

It was still necessary to determine the exact boundary between East Hartford and Manchester and to divide the property of the town, the support of the poor, and the outstanding debts of the town. These were all finally settled and Manchester stood proud as the newest town in Connecticut.

Petition of 1823

To the Honourable General Assembly of the State of Connecticut to be holden at Hartford on the first Wednesday of May A. D. 1823

The petition of the Society of Orford in the Town of East Hartford in Hartford County by their agents Benjamin Wolcott, William Cooley and Ralph R Phelps humbly sheweth

That the inhabitants of said Society in consequence of their being united as a town with the first Society in said East Hartford, suffer many inconveniences that the town of East Hartford from East to West is eleven miles in length, that the Society of Orford constituted and is situated in the Eastern part of the town, that the place of holding Electors meetings and town meetings, is near the West line of the town, and some fifty inhabitants of Orford are obliged to travel twelve miles to attend such meetings and that the average travel exceeds seven miles, and many of the inhabitants of said Society in consequence of the distance have found it extremely inconvenient to attend such meetings.

The petitioners would further represent that by a resolve of the General Assembly each Society in said towns are required to maintain the highways within their respective limits by taxes on the inhabitants thereof respectively; and as much of the land in the Society of Orford is owned by inhabitants of the first Society in said town, a very great and unequal burden falls upon the inhabitants of Orford, in repairing these highways

Your petitioners would further represent, that the manufacturing concerns of said Society have within a few years, very much increased, and that therefore, the convenience of town privileges extending to the limits of said society, would to them be very important.

And your petitioners would further represent that the Society of Orford is about five miles square, that their assessment list is greater than that of many towns in this state, and that there are about two hundred and forty electors within the limits of said Society.

The petitioners therefore pray the honourable General Assembly that the said Society of Orford may be constituted a distinct town, with all the powers & privileges of other towns in this State, or that your honors would in some other way grant them relief, and they as is duty bound, will ever pray

Dated at East Hartford the 30th day of April, A. D. 1823

<i>Benjamin Wolcott</i>	<i>Agents of</i>
<i>William Cooley</i>	<i>the Society</i>
<i>Ralph R. Phelps</i>	<i>of Orford</i>
<i>By their Attorney</i>	<i>Nathan Johnson</i>

continued on back page



The Manchester Historical Society
 175 Pine Street
 Manchester, Connecticut 06040

Non-Profit Org
 U.S. Postage
PAID
 Hartford CT
 Permit No 502

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Your Membership Expires on:

In Senate May Session 1823
 Concerning with an amendment by inserting in the 10th
 line of the 2^d page after the word East Hartford the word
 by "or not" - also next after the word Oxford in
 the 12th line of the same page these words viz And
 in case the two towns do not agree as to dividing
 the property of said town, in the division of the
 poor - or as to amount of duty - the County
 Court for the County of Hartford are hereby au-
 thorized to empower to make said division
 or apportionment, giving no greater notice
 to the parties concerned -
 Attest W^m Bondman Clk
 W. B.
 Their vote however att. W. Johnson Clk
 May 28th 1823 approved
 Oliver Wolcott

Bill in favor
 of the
 of Oxford
 in a New Town
 W. B.
 W. B.
 Attest W. Johnson Clk

Approval of Governor Oliver Wolcott