



The Courier

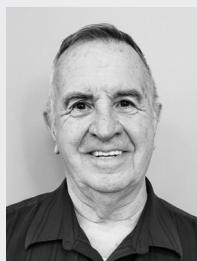
60 YEARS OF PRESERVING MANCHESTER'S HISTORY

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

President's Message

Dennis Gleason

Fellow members, we are thrilled to announce that the Historical Society has been awarded an \$8,800 matching grant from the 1772 Foundation for work at our History Center building. The work is for essential electrical upgrades to bring the building up to code. Being a matching grant means that we must raise an additional \$8,800 to unlock these funds. This critical project will help to ensure the safety and longevity of our History Center, a cornerstone of our community.



This brings us to our 2025 Annual Appeal, our most significant fundraiser of the year. Your generous contributions, alongside membership dues, rental income, bequests, and investment interest, sustain the Society as a vibrant community and educational asset. Your support keeps our historic buildings open, our programs thriving, and our mission to preserve Manchester's rich history alive for future generations.

As we approach 2026, America's 250th anniversary, we encourage you to explore local historic places, including cemeteries, with your children to uncover Connecticut's and Manchester's role in the Revolutionary War. This spring, Manchester's third graders were told about our town's past thanks to Bob Kanehl. Did you know that our town, then part of the Connecticut Colony, supplied men to the 19th Connecticut Militia? This regiment, which was active east of the Connecticut River from 1775 to 1783, played a key role in the Siege of Boston that began April 19, 1775 and lasted for over 10 months.

Let's inspire our youth to embrace this history as we commemorate the upcoming milestone. Your support through the Annual Appeal will help us to educate, preserve, and celebrate Manchester's legacy for generations to come. Please consider donating today to help us meet our \$8,800 matching grant goal and sustain our vital work.

Thank you for your commitment to preserving our shared heritage.

Leave A Legacy for Future Generations

June is *Leave A Legacy* month, when folks are encouraged to think about their own legacy for those who will come after us. How will you be remembered?

Now is a good time to think about how we can help others when we are no longer around to help in person. If you like history, including your own family's history, you can ensure that the work of our historical society will continue to preserve our shared history and educate future generations about your/our heritage.

If you have questions, please call us at 860-647-9983. We can suggest ways for you to provide a legacy for the future.



LEAVE A LEGACY®



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A newsletter of the
Manchester Historical Society

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Newsletter Editor

Dave Smith

Manchester's Most Destructive Storm

By Dave Smith

In October 1869 a great storm came through Manchester (and much of New England and the Canadian Maritime provinces) which resulted in widespread destruction throughout the area. Most of Manchester's water powered mills were destroyed and all the dams were washed out, with the one exception of the dam at Union Pond. This event became known as Saxby's Gale and the amazing part of the story is that this storm was predicted the year before!

In December 1868 a letter written by Stephen Martin Saxby was printed in the *London Standard* which warned that a disastrous storm would strike Eastern Canada. It even predicted the date, which was 10 months in the future, October 5, 1869! He stated: "with regard to 1869, that at seven a.m., on October 5, the moon will be at that part of her orbit which is nearest to the earth. Her attraction will, therefore, be at its maximum force. At noon of the same day the moon will be on the earth's equator, a circumstance which never occurs without marked atmospheric disturbance. In other words...nothing more threatening can, I say, occur without a miracle." In addition, the sun's attraction will be acting in the same direction.

Saxby had been an engineer and a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy. He had attended university in Cambridge and had taught at Greenwich Steam College. He had also invented a way to correct compasses on iron steamships. He was a respected engineer and scientist. However, he was not taken seriously by very many people in New England and Canada.

In eastern New England, including Manchester, the rains came. Monday, October 4 had been election day in Connecticut. As reported in the Hartford Courant, "on Tuesday there was not a water wheel in motion in the town of Manchester. The roadways and bridges along the streams in the town were devastated. Between the railroad station in North Manchester and Talcottville there was not a dam or bridge that remained. It was on what is now called the Hartford road running from South Manchester westward, that the principal devastation occurred. The paper industry, which had been founded by Charles Bunce at the beginning of the century, was practically wiped out of existence. The old Cheney mills suffered severe loss. West of the Cheney works the paper mill owned by Henry E. Rogers was more or less demolished. By the time the flood reached the mills owned by Lewis Bunce & Sons its course was irresistible. The dam east of the mills was swept away by the torrent.

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Woodbridge Farmstead

By Peggy Newton

June is such an exciting time at the farm! We have so much to be thankful for and to celebrate. We have such hardworking volunteers who have all helped to create a beautiful green space with lush garden beds amid verdant lawns...our touch of rural life amid a suburban setting! We never tire of hearing the visitors comment..."I never knew this was here!"

New sights to see include our newly redesigned garden beds thanks to the efforts of our volunteer Suzanne Mamet. Our abundant green lawns are due to the efforts of volunteers David Smith and Dan Kimball. Our beautiful brook areas and two new bridges are due to the hard work of Yusuf Bawwab. Our biggest new project would be the restoration of our upper barn which was accomplished through efforts of David Smith and Steven Blanchard, one of our newest volunteers and a Woodbridge descendant.

Events planned for this summer include a visit from Shady Glen, Assakita Farm animals, and an old-fashioned card game day facilitated by another new volunteer Georgie Melrose. Other new events

scheduled include a visit from The Weaving Guild of Hartford and a talk on Connecticut Barns both arranged by volunteer Debra Shaffer. Our longtime volunteer Beverly Logan will host a new program on birds for young and old. And of course we hope to have our friend Bruce Perry here to demonstrate the art of Knot tying.

We must also thank Volunteers Carol Zapadka (our Flower girl) Ginny Wickersham (our intrepid archaeologist) and Louise Krippenstapel (Welcome Table guardian). Many volunteer hours have been put in by Andrew Main (Visitor Center Host) and Autumn Daub, our youngest and most energetic volunteer.

One of our Volunteers must be mentioned as one of the most rigorous researchers of the Woodbridge Family. Maude McGovern has spent countless hours working on the many generations of the family.

We have also welcomed a new volunteer Andy Bushnell to our group! If you would like to volunteer with us please call the History Center at 860-670-9983.



"Smokey" in his new home on Pine Street

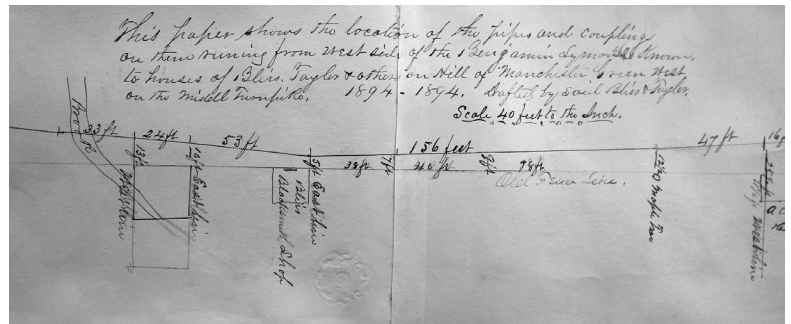
Work on the North End exhibit has been progressing. Smokey is anxious to see everyone in late September, 2025 for the grand opening.

Recent Acquisitions

By Dave Smith

Over the past 12 months we have received a number of donations of objects, textiles and documents. Among the more interesting items are:

1. Bass drum from the Tall Cedars of Lebanon band donated by Greg Gunn
2. Silver trophy presented by the Cheney Brothers Athletic Association to the Machine Shop volleyball team in 1923. Donated by Tom Schuetz
3. Bench lathe for metal working donated by Paul Shamonis
4. Parachute made by Pioneer Parachute Co. in 1941 and donated by J Melchreit
5. Notes and map of the Lyman Aquaduct company which brought piped water from Lyman Spring to a number of homes in the Manchester Green area in the 1850's. Donated by E. Cook Gabel



America250 in Connecticut and in Manchester

By Stephen Armstrong

July 4, 2026, will be the 250th anniversary of the birth of the United States. Commemorations and celebrations are being planned at the national, state and local levels to honor and discuss “America 250”. Events will take place to discuss and honor the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Revolutionary War. In many states, including Connecticut, speakers and others will discuss the events of 1776 as well as how the ideas from the Declaration and the Constitution have been interpreted over time.

In Connecticut an America250 Commission has been established to plan statewide events, to provide educational materials for students and teachers, and to assist local communities as they plan townwide/citywide events. The four statewide themes of America 250 are:

- Tell Inclusive Stories
- The Power of Place
- Doing History
- For the Common Good

Many local communities, including Manchester, have established local planning committees to create sessions where historians and others can explain ways that the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence still impact on us today. Susan Barlow and others are planning a series of events; a schedule will be released in the fall. Manchester residents will have multiple opportunities to hear about events from 250 years ago and their importance.

Calendar of Events

History Center Exhibits, Office, and Museum Store 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. Exhibits include **Manchester Then and Now** and **business signs** and the **loom room**. There is a research library and museum store. 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. May through December. It is also open by appointment. Please call our office at 860-647-9983 for further information. Exhibits include Manchester manufacturers Cheney Brothers, Bon Ami, Iona, and Norton Electric, our elementary schools both past and present, Pitkin Glass Works bottles, and the story of the Spencer Rifle and its inventor Christopher Spencer. There is also a museum store in the lobby.

Cheney Homestead and Keeney Schoolhouse at 106 Hartford Rd. are open the first and third Sundays of the month, May through December, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. The house is an early American home with period art and furniture a new clock making exhibit and an art gallery. 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 May through October, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. The Farmstead includes a ca. 1830 farmhouse, a Visitor Center in a barn salvaged from North Manchester, and a late 1700's English barn as well as foundations of several barns from the days of farming, 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 Visitor Center exhibits the history of the Manchester Green area in photos. 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. The public is welcome to come and ask questions about genealogy research.

See also our website at www.manchesterhistory.org for more information and possible changes.

Sunday, June 1 and June 15, Cheney Homestead open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, June 8 and 22, Woodbridge Farm open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Saturday, June 14, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Connecticut Open House Day
All of our museums will be open to the public. Also, the Pitkin Glass Works site will be open.

Sunday, July 6 and July 20, Cheney Homestead open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, July 13 and July 27, Woodbridge Farm open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, August 3 and 17, Cheney Homestead open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, August 10 and 24, Woodbridge Farm open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, September 28, Annual Member Meeting 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. at the History Center

A Manchester Native Shares Hometown and Veteran Experiences

By Maude McGovern

Earlier this spring, Dave Smith and I had the privilege of conducting an oral history interview with James (Jim) Britton, age 99, who grew up in Manchester. A born storyteller, Jim, shared memories of two key periods of his life.

First, Jim discussed his Navy experiences in WWII and the Korean War. Along with several other Manchester High School students, he was given his diploma early in his senior year in 1944 before enlisting in the armed forces. His mechanical aptitude earned him a spot in the engine room of a Landing Ship, Tank (LST). Conveying a sense of the urgency the nation faced equipping its armed forces for wartime, he described how his ship was being built while he was in training. Sent to the Philippines, the ship delivered men and materiel until after the war had ended. Jim's account of that time included a range of wartime experiences from pranks to a harrowing incident at Okinawa. As a reservist, he served stateside during the Korean

War, once coming closer than ideal to the Staten Island Ferry.

The other part of the conversation featured his childhood in Manchester. For a while he lived in an apartment in the building (now a pizza restaurant) next to the Woodbridge Farmstead. He remembered fondly how Arthur Woodbridge let him play on the farm and feed apples to his horses. Of note was the time a horse ate little Jim's mitten along with an apple. Terrified that the animal would die, Jim was reassured by Mr. Woodbridge that the horse would be fine and that he should come back in a few days to get his well-washed mitten.

That and other childhood adventures (the fire next to the lumber pile!) and memories of his teen years give texture to our picture of an earlier Manchester. All of which is saved on tape and as a transcript in the Society's collection. Thank you, Jim!



Manchester's Most Destructive Storm | *continued from page 2*

The Lewis Bunce mills were the finest in the valley. They were painted white, and equipped with the most modern machinery for the manufacture of paper. These mills were crushed as easily as an eggshell by the volume of water. There were hairbreadth escapes, but no loss of life on the Hartford road. Welles Forbes was on the bridge near the Walter and Edwin Bunce mills when it was carried away. He was landed in the branches of a tree on the Olcott meadows half a mile from the bridge and was obliged to stay there through the night.

The Lewis Bunce mills were not rebuilt. In fact the flood was the death warrant for the paper industry that had been founded by Charles Bunce, who was the pioneer in paper making in Manchester."

From the Manchester Herald: "Bigelow Brook [which still runs through the Woodbridge farm ed. note] let itself out that day. Near the Center Spring a small machine shop and its contents were completely washed away. At the North End the site of the Lydall & Foulds mill on Parker street was occupied by a cotton mill. This dam went taking with it a section of the railroad track and the dam of the E. E. Hilliard Company followed.

That night found the town with all of its ponds empty and all of its bridges gone. It was a decidedly disastrous day for Manchester manufacturers but they faced the situation bravely and started in at once to repair the damages."

Cheney Cemetery Association and Manchester Historical Society

By Susan Barlow

The Manchester Historical Society and the Cheney Cemetery Association announce a new arrangement intended to support the continued operation of the Cemetery Association, which manages the private two-acre family cemetery adjacent to Manchester's East Cemetery. The collaboration will also move Cheney books, objects, and records to the History Center, making Cheney history accessible to the public. The two organizations have worked together for many years to preserve both Cheney and Manchester history. This arrangement brings the organizations closer together, including setting up a more permanent office for the Cemetery Association in Manchester. A part time administrator will be engaged to manage cemetery operations and maintenance.

The Cheney family and the Cheney silk mills touched thousands of lives in Manchester from 1838 to 1954, and their legacy remains prominent in town. Cheney Brothers built many important elements of the town's infrastructure, including reservoirs, the electric system, schools, fire stations, and extensive employee housing. The family donated the 18th century Cheney Homestead to the Historical Society in 1968.

The Cheney cemetery has served as a burial site for the original family members and their descendants and relations – farmers, clock makers, artists, authors, and producers of quality silk textiles. The private cemetery is a unique part of Manchester's history which can be visited by the public. It will benefit from the closer link with the Historical Society, which serves to preserve and protect the whole history of Manchester.

A welcome open house will be held at the History Center in September.



Carol Cheney and society president Dennis Gleeson in front of Carol's great grandfather Knight Dexter Cheney

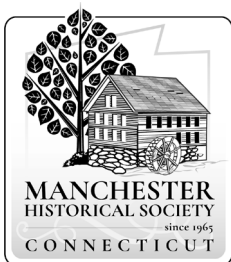
Sports Hall of Fame Plaques



President Marcy MacDonald of the Manchester Sports Hall of Fame is looking for recipients of the annual awards who would like to retrieve their plaques that used to be exhibited at the Old Manchester Museum of the Manchester Historical

Society. Since the plaques are no longer on exhibit at the new Hall of Fame venue at the Mahoney Recreation Center on Cedar St. recipients or their families are welcome to obtain the plaques.

Please contact Marcy MacDonald via email at macechan@gmail.com



Manchester Historical Society
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Manchester, Connecticut 06040

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We Will Miss

Patricia Hetzel was a long-time member of the Society and a loyal volunteer for many years. Pat and her late husband Robert were involved with many of our special events.

Gordon Howard worked for Cheney Brothers as a textile engineer for many years. After retiring he helped us with our large mechanical looms which we acquired in 2005. He was an avid fan of Franklin automobiles and owned two of them.

Mildred Kos was one of our devoted volunteers and served as a docent for many years. She worked for the Town of Manchester, was a member of the Red Hat Society and was active in St. Bridget Church affairs.