



“OVER 55 YEARS OF PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY”

The Courier

MARCH 2021

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Are you ready for 2023?

Would you like to be part of something big for Manchester?

The last 12 months have been challenging, to say the least, with the Covid-19 pandemic transforming nearly every element of our lives, social distancing us from friends, family and neighbors; coping with heartbreaking loss; and now the rush to vaccinate as many as possible.

One year later, as we see hope on the horizon, the Manchester Historical Society is looking ahead to Manchester's bicentennial, in 2023.

We invite you to join us.

The Society is in the process of planning what we will look like when Manchester turns 200. Society staff, volunteers and directors have been working hard to lay the groundwork for our bicentennial celebration. We want you to be a part of this exciting spotlight on Manchester.

Introducing the Main Street Project

To prepare for our upcoming town-wide celebration, we have been hard at work over the past several months at the Society's History Center, where we have created innovative special exhibit space modeled after the windows of Main Street. Visitors of all ages will be invited to stroll through the visually compelling space to learn about various facets of the town, from over the years to present day. If you are interested in volunteering to help organize the exhibit space examining Manchester's evolution, please let me know.

If your family or business would like to be a part of this special space by sponsoring a Main Street window, please let me know. Sponsors will be recognized in plaques beneath each window. We also invite families and businesses to consider sponsoring the entire exhibit room. I would be happy to provide you additional sponsorship information, if you are interested in supporting this special project ahead of our 2023 celebration.



Looking for Handy Volunteers

This spring we invite volunteers to help us spruce up Society spaces. Skills include painting, window repair, sound wiring, and more.

Projects include scraping and painting the Silk Vault doors, wiring our projectors from the ceiling, and more. Please reach out and let us know your skills and how you can help!



Looking Ahead

As we rev up planning for Manchester's bicentennial, we invite you to help us create a memorable celebration in 2023 and ensure the Society's properties remain among Connecticut's premier destinations for history lovers for many years to come.

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A newsletter of the
Manchester Historical Society

Online at: www.manchesterhistory.org

E-mail: info@manchesterhistory.org

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ManchesterHistoricalSociety

Tel. 860-647-9983

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Drop Us A Line...

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

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.

Welcome New Members

We wish to extend a warm welcome to the following new members who joined the Society during the most challenging and historic year of 2020. We hope you will take full advantage of your membership and join us for our upcoming events and visits to our properties.

From Manchester

Ed Boland
Thomas Danahy
Martha Freimuth
Per-Erik Johansson
Dennis Schain & Karen Foley
Maxwell Toth

Jay and Carol Anderson
Mana Zarinejad
Brian C. Foley
Christopher P. Greene
Doug & Kathi Sanborn
Rick and Sarah Spencer
Melvin Wilson

From Elsewhere

Denise Boratgis – South Windsor
Linda Fish – Andover
Dan Kimball – South Glastonbury
Dr. Tanya Millner – Hartford
Peggy Scribner – East Hartford
Dave Ware – West Hartford
Laurie R. Coursin – Massachusetts
Mary F. Pongratz – California

Kenneth A. West – New Hampshire
Shari Diamond - Glastonbury
Michael H. Hayden – South Windsor
Susan Marks - Glastonbury
Michael J. Scanlon - Newtown
Dr. Deborah Simmons – East Hartford
Dustin Wood – Vernon
Connie Belfiore – Maryland
Stephen G. Pongratz – California



Museum Reopenings

Old Manchester Museum closed for the winter season. Will reopen May 2021 on the first Saturday of the month from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m.

Woodbridge Farmstead Museum will reopen Sunday, May 9 from noon until 2 p.m. See related article.

Cheney Homestead Museum will reopen in April with outdoor events and limited tours of the house. Open second Sunday of the month from 1 until 4 p.m.

History Center closed until further notice. Interior renovations ongoing and exhibits closed. Office and Museum Store open by appointment. Please call 860-647-9983.

Virtual Events will be announced through our website, our eBlasts and our Facebook page for topics and schedules.

Face masks and social distancing are required at all of our properties until further notice.

Genealogy Group News

The Genealogy Group meetings are on hold through June 2021. At which time, there will be an announcement about meetings for the rest of the year. Look for that announcement on Facebook or via our eBlast messages which come out on Fridays.

Research Projects Underway at the Cheney Homestead

By Peter Millett

During the quiet months of winter here at the Cheney Homestead, we have been gathering our thoughts and resources in an effort to bring alive the fascinating people connected with and whose lives were touched by this unusual place. Starting with the parents George and Electa, and including nationally known portrait subjects of artist Seth Cheney, we are trying to bring the personal stories alive in their historical contexts. Also, we are beginning a new effort to tell “History Through Art”, using the portraits and artwork of the Homestead. Here are our current projects:

Electa Woodbridge Cheney

Bettylou Sandy has begun an exhaustive life study of Electa Woodbridge Cheney (1781-1853). We want to know more about her early American girlhood, being raised in the Woodbridge family, and perhaps working in her father’s tavern on the busy Middle Turnpike in Orford Parish. Later, as the wife of George Cheney and the mother of 9 children at the Homestead, we want to learn about the active life of a woman on a bustling Connecticut farm. Finally, among her grown children as a widow, we want to know how she was cared for by them during the time of their successful artistic and business endeavors. We welcome all contributions of information about this remarkable woman.



Portrait by her son Seth

George Cheney

The words and thoughts of a clever, hardworking and hard thinking American farmer. George left a Common Place Book, or diary, of thoughts and ideas. Held by the CT Historical Society, we have taken the first steps in obtaining access to the thoughts of this remarkable and enterprising farmer, so as to be able to copy and print the entire book for public access. Fact: in 1820 George won first place in a Hartford County competition for grain yield per acre, receiving a “Creamer Cup of Silver” worth 10 dollars.

Silhouette paper cutting



Seth Cheney’s Final Art Studio

Seth passed away at the Homestead in 1856 after a long illness. Around 1900, his wife Ednah Dow Cheney turned the contents of his art studio over to The Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. to better preserve Seth’s artistic legacy. We have contacted the gallery to inquire of the archived contents, and to possibly exhibit them in the History Center’s art studio space. We are hoping to learn the whereabouts of his diaries and other writings.

Margaret Swan Cheney

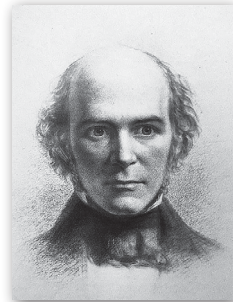
Born at the Homestead in 1855, a year before her father Seth’s death, we are endeavoring to add to our limited knowledge and artifacts of her life. An early woman graduate of MIT, a room at the Institute was dedicated in her honor in the 19th century following her death at age 28. A current professor at the school has been contacted to help research and reveal new facts of her life and possibly identify materials and journals.

Early photograph, in Ednah’s “Reminiscences”



Theodore Parker

History Through Art: A progressive Boston minister, abolitionist and reformer, he officiated at Seth’s funeral in the parlor at the Homestead in 1856. Famous nationally for his moral and democratic ideals, he originated the phrase used by Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address, “government of the people, by the people and for the people”. Also, he is the author of the phrase, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice”, quoted by Martin Luther King, Jr.



Portrait by Seth Cheney

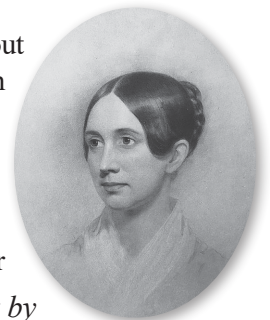
Dorothea Dix

History Through Art: A 19th century mental illness patient and then early reformer, a rare image of Dorothea was drawn by Seth in 1850. A gentle and deeply sensitive artist, Seth was employed by the Boston Atheneum as the curator of engravings, where the original portrait still hangs. A visit was made to the Atheneum in 2020 to make a connection and to begin discovering facts of this important part of Seth’s life.

We are excited to learn more about these life stories, and what they can share in the context of our town, New England and American histories.

Please let us know if you have a special interest or information that could be of help in these or future research projects.

Portrait by Seth Cheney



Thank You

FOR

YOUR SUPPORT

To all who supported our fundraising efforts last year including the Annual Fund Drive, donations to specific purposes, memorial donations in honor of those no longer with us, bequests and in-kind support, we thank you. As a result of your financial donations we have been able to build out a new gallery/exhibit area in Room 2 of the History Center. We hope to complete this by the end of April. The exhibit team is in the process of determining what to highlight in the new space.

When this is completed and if the pandemic guidelines allow, we will have an open house showing off the renovations in Room 2, which besides the new exhibit gallery, also contains our new offices, conference room and expanded research library. If we cannot have an in person open house, we will arrange a virtual tour of the room. In addition, we will include a tour of the Art Studio on the ground floor. Watch for an announcement on our website, Facebook and our weekly Eblast.

Seasons at the Woodbridge Farmstead

By Peggy Newton

Brrrr – while the chilly winter winds are still blowing and the gardens have been covered in snow, thoughts of the farm in spring are not far away! The crocuses are already appearing. As you may know our open season runs from May through October (the second and fourth Sundays of each month). We had a late start last year due to Covid, but we are optimistic our first Open Barn Day will be Sunday, May 9 from noon until 2 p.m. (We will still be adhering to the health regulations as for last year.) This year it falls on Mother's Day, which we will celebrate with flowers and treats, and all are most welcome to join us. Come in and breathe the beautiful farm air and enjoy the grounds, with flowers and signs of spring popping up! We can't wait to see our Sunken Gardens with new pathways and the flowers and perennials in bloom.

Future farm events are in the planning stage, but

we will continue to hold our favorite activities including the Bigelow Brook Duck Race in the spring. A new event we hope to feature will be an ongoing Badminton Tournament for all ages. The farm grounds are well suited for this activity, so begin practicing your serves and rallies.

A member of the Cheney Homestead committee is now conducting research on early members of the Cheney family, including Electa Woodbridge Cheney, who grew up at the farm. She also helped at her father's tavern across the street from their house on Middle Turnpike. We hope to find

new information about her and her early years.

Farm Friends (volunteers) are always needed and most welcome. For more information about volunteering and the Farmstead, please call the History Center (860-647-9983) Tuesday – Friday, or call Peggy Newton (860-649-4420) or email at peggynewton47@att.com.



Remembering Miss Hazel Lutz

By Art Reichenbach

I remember Hazel Lutz, probably the first time, from the 6th Grade at Washington School in the early 1940's. She was like a gypsy art teacher who journeyed from school to school teaching the heathen about the world of art. Catherine C. Shea, our principal and teacher would have paper and pencil/crayons laid out on our desks when Ms. Lutz would burst into the room full of cheer and bubbling over with enthusiasm. Tall, dressed conservatively with greying hair and rimless glasses, she would march to the blackboard and with chalk make a scribbling line on the board. We would follow this action on our paper. Next another line, then another as we quickly followed suit until, lo and behold, we had a flower, a church a landscape, etc. A marvel. Then she would pass among us, making edits to our work and suddenly with a wave of her hand, like Mary Poppins, she would disappear.

One day she asked me if I would like to go to Hartford for art lessons. She needed my parents' permission. This was at the Avery Memorial (the Wadsworth) and was a program for promising school children interested in the arts. With 20 cents (10 cents at hand, 10 cents knotted in the corner of my handkerchief so it wouldn't get lost) I got the bus from Center Street to the Isle of Safety in Hartford.

Assembled at the Avery were about 12 young people my age from various towns around Hartford. We were there for art lessons on Saturday mornings. Every week we had a different teacher. The program started with a visit to the galleries, where a specific painting would be discussed in detail: artist, media, light, shadows, composition etc. Then on to the old carriage barn, a large, long, dark green structure on that small street across from the Avery entrance, built originally in Victorian times for carriages and later automobiles. Upstairs were empty rooms (probably for the drivers) where we would sit on the floor with a postcard of the painting we had just viewed, and following instructions we drew our artistic impressions of it. By noontime we were ready to critique all our work both by the teacher and fellow students. Then we left until the next week.

Ms. Lutz followed my art training into high school, particularly when an exhibit was planned of artwork by children of all ages called "Young Manchester Paints." Some of us older students were given pictures of various sites in town to interpret on canvas or paper. I was given an early blurred photo of Cheney Hall from the collection of the then



aged town historian (perhaps Mathias Spiess). This was a challenge. On my way to school I would walk by to view the building in situ, trying to get the light and shadows in the proper locations. The hall at that time was not being used and was overgrown with large fir trees on all sides. Anyhow, my oil painting won first prize at the exhibit and then it somehow disappeared. I wasn't concerned and figured it had gone on to other exhibitions in town. I did not continue my "art career" and did not pick up a paint brush again until 40 years later when I was living in Vienna, Austria and began to the study of art restoration.

Miss Shea kept in contact with me wherever I was living. There were always greetings from Ms. Lutz. Both were interested in life in that particular country and I recall she would write me letters in the most beautiful cursive script with tidbits of Manchester news. One year she included a Polaroid photo of herself holding my painting of Cheney Hall. It had been found somewhere in a closet. She had donated it to the Historical Society, telling me that it was now hanging near the entrance of the museum (I believe it was in the white building next to Washington School.) It has by now certainly been "deaccessioned" by the museum. However, I record this as a bit of my early memory of Manchester.

We Will Miss

John Cooney was a life member of the Society and served on our Board of Directors. Professionally, he practiced law in town, served as Town Attorney and later as Probate Judge from 1994 until 2011. He also was involved with several town organizations including the Cheney Hall Foundation, the Human Rights Commission, and the town's 175th Anniversary Committee in 1998.

Horace Brown was a life member of the Society and active in both town and state affairs over many years. He served with the State Development Commission and Office of Policy and Management, among other positions. In Manchester he was on the Manchester Planning and Zoning Commission and the Manchester Ethics Commission and represented Manchester on the Regional Planning Commission.

Geri Lemelin, a life member of the Society for over 35 years was active in civic affairs. She was a member of the Manchester Land Conservation Trust, Manchester Women's Club, the hospital Auxiliary and the Manchester Square Dance Club. Her interests included museums, art, travelling and playing bridge.



The Manchester Historical Society
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	<input type="checkbox"/> Senior Individual (65+)	\$20	<input type="checkbox"/> Couple	\$40	<input type="checkbox"/> Contributing Family	\$100
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