



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

It is with great pleasure that we can report during 2024 the Society made significant improvements to several of our buildings. The Cheney Homestead received a new roof, the Woodbridge Farmstead upper barn began the process of restoration and some of the gardens were reconfigured and replanted, the History Center had some sorely needed new front stairs installed, the parking lot graded with asphalt millings and electrical improvements with new main circuit breakers installed. The welding shop had new wood siding installed and was painted and will be completed this year. We owe many thanks to the Board of Directors, the many volunteers and generous donors who made these things happen. Thank you, many times over.



In addition, a new group of volunteers from the Manchester (Eighth District) Fire Department brought to us new knowledge of the northern part of town and an extensive new exhibit at the

History Center which is still a work in progress. Other civic groups have made use of the space in our building for their meetings.

Now 2025, will bring with it the completion of the Woodbridge barn and opening the lower level to the public. Also, the North End display will become an important new exhibit in the History Center building. In October the Society will observe its 60th anniversary, growing from having only the Cheney Homestead and one small room for an office to our current four museums and meeting and gathering spaces and offices in the History Center.

All of this is made possible by having a group of enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers who make it happen. Ideas are great but it takes people to make it work.

There is much history to be researched and taught to younger generations. We all wished we had asked our parents and grandparents more, but we can pass on our knowledge to the future in simple ways. We should identify family photos and

record family stories. We, the Society, can help with finding your roots and creating a family tree. Perhaps the history of your house is worth noting. The histories of the churches and organizations which are closing should be recorded.

Volunteers are needed to help us collect this kind of information. To do this takes time from our daily life schedules, but it will be worth it. Ask us how you can help.

This year we will be hosting an expanded Family History/ Genealogy Day in conjunction with the Town Clerk's office, and which will include our neighboring towns of South Windsor, East Hartford, and Glastonbury. Many Manchester families had members in nearby towns. The event will be held at the History Center on Pine St. on Saturday, April 5 beginning at 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.



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A newsletter of the
Manchester Historical Society

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Newsletter Editor

Dave Smith

We Will Miss

Rita Borden was one of our most active members and volunteers. She was a regular member of our Monday morning museum exhibit staff and lent her artistic and decorative talents to many of our exhibits and society events.

Tom Duff has been a recognized expert on all things Pitkin Glass for many years. In addition to being a passionate collector, he has shared his vast knowledge and passion over the years with many groups of school children as well a mentor to past and current members of the Pitkin Glass Works Council.

Bob Gorman was a true treasure and source of much information on the earlier days of Manchester. He was born 102 years ago and remembered so much of his time growing up in town. He had many stories to share and was interviewed for the town's 200th anniversary in 2023.



Korean War Certificates

The Society is holding over 200 certificates that were awarded to Manchester men who served in the Korean War. In 2009 a ceremony was held at Manchester High School honoring those men, but unfortunately many of the honorees or family were not present to receive their certificates.

The Town Clerk has given us the task of trying to find these men or their families so that the certificates can be presented to the intended recipients or their families.

If you or a family member served during the Korean War, please contact us at 860-647-9983 to find out if we are holding your/their certificate which can be picked up at the History Center.

Woodbridge Farmstead

By Peggy Newton

This winter of 2025 is proving to be a cold and windy one with a moderate amount of snow. It may be difficult to think of warm Spring days on the farm, but we have been thinking about the coming season of welcoming visitors. Our volunteers have already been meeting and developing plans for the May through October season.

We have come up with some new ideas and cannot wait for the first Open Farm Day on Sunday May 4. The First Signs of Spring will be our theme and we hope Mother Nature will cooperate. If you happen to drive by the Farmhouse in mid-March, look for the crocuses in the front yard (they are some of the first to appear in Manchester). The daffodils will be in bloom soon after.

Other open days will feature a weaving demonstration (Thelma Woodbridge was herself an excellent weaver and some of her work is on display in the house), Country style music, informational talks about our barns and an antique car show. Of course we will have farm animals visit (baby goats, pigs or rabbits might show up), an ice cream Sunday, the Bigelow Brook Duck race (water level permitting) and visits from Susan Barlow (Town Historian) and Bruce Perry, our antique tool expert who tries stump our visitors with unusual old tools.

We hope these events will bring you to the farm and you will return often. New volunteers are always welcome (if you are interested, please call the History Center (860-647-9983) or email Peggy Newton at peggynewton47@att.net).



One of our youngest guests, Maggie, enjoying our visiting rabbit



Apple Cider Sampling



Eighth District Exhibit Update

By Ken Roback

I am proud to report some good news regarding the progress of our future exhibit at the History Center. Construction has been completed for the display of life and events within Manchester's North End. Work started over a year ago when five former members of the Manchester Fire Department met with Society staff, looking for space to hold records, artifacts, and memorabilia from the Eight Utilities District. The Eighth District merged with the Town in 2023 and Fire Department members did not want the rich history of the North End to be lost or forgotten.

Space in the large fourth room on the top floor was assigned to house this new exhibit. Bernie Niedzielski, Jim Sarles, Emmett Gemme, Charlie King, and Ken Roback began working, one afternoon a week throughout the year, to improve and prepare the space which has been dedicated to this new exhibit. The construction included

insulating and blocking up the windows and building walls to segregate the space from other museum storage and exhibits. The ceilings and walls were then prepped and painted. A large mural of Depot Square will be installed soon.

During this time both Emmett and Bernie spent many hours cataloging all the memorabilia and scanning the photos, records, and documents from the Eighth District and North End. With this work now completed, the members are excited to start on the next phase of determining which items will be displayed and developing the stories and describing the items in the new exhibit.

Ed. Note: If you have or know of items or photos depicting the old North End/Depot Square and would like to share them with us please contact Dave Smith at info@manchesterhistory.org.

Cartoonalities

By Bill Whitaker

Bill's "Cartoonalities" ran in the local newspaper for many years. He was the editorial cartoonist for the Manchester Herald and his cartoons were timely when they were drawn. Many of his cartoons are just as timely today.



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, 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.

Saturday, March 8, North End History Walk, from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Meet at the Whiton Library at 100 North Main St. Enjoy the charm of the old North End, viewing what remains from before the Urban Renewal of the 1960's. Visit the Whiton Library, The "Y," Apel's Opera House, and Woodbridge and Hudson Streets. Rain or shine.

Saturday, April 5 Family History Day, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the History Center. This is a chance to learn how to research your family's history with the help of genealogy experts. There will be experts from the Latino and Black communities able to answer questions. There will also be representatives from the Manchester Town Clerk's office, from our neighboring towns including Glastonbury, East Hartford, and South Windsor and from the Connecticut State Library. This will provide a chance to learn what records are available in our own Town Hall.

Sunday, May 4, Woodbridge Farm open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Note that during May open days will be the first and third Sundays.

Sunday, May 4 Cheney Homestead open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Saturday, May 10, Arts and Culture History Walk, from noon to 2 p.m. Meet at the Town Hall at 41 Center St. Walk through parts of Manchester's Cultural District, designated in 2024. This walking tour through historic

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Pitkin Glass Works History

By Dave Smith

Not much detailed information is available about the history of the Pitkin Glass Works. No business records are known to exist. A large number of Pitkin bottles of many styles, shapes and sizes are known and have become quite collectible. A few are even worth many dollars on the collector market. Most all bottles made by Pitkin were not marked in any way to positively identify their place of manufacture. On the other hand, many bottles that look like known Pitkins are quite possibly not from our local glass works.

Those bottles or inkwells that were made with the initials "J P F" or the name "Spencer" are definitely attributed to the East Hartford Glass Works, later and more commonly known as the Pitkin Glass Works. Another method of assuring manufacture by Pitkin, is being able to prove that the bottle in question has come down through the years in the Pitkin family. There are bottles in collections today that have this "Pitkin provenance."

There is also one other way of "proving" that a bottle was made at the local glass works. That is by finding it at the factory site. There is only one bottle, so far, that has this provenance. It is now on display at our Old Manchester Museum. This

bottle was found by yours truly during an official archaeological dig in 2005, under the supervision of Conn. State Archaeologist Dr. Nick Bellantoni. It was nestled among several rocks and brick fragments, and it was a miracle that it survived intact. Sometimes you can get lucky.

The Executive Council (Board of Directors) of the Pitkin Glass Works actively manages the upkeep of the site and the remaining parts of the stone building. In addition, the Council encourages further research at the site, and is currently planning to conduct a ground penetrating radar survey of the whole property. A similar survey was carried out about 20 years ago which covered much of the site, but with more modern equipment and greater coverage of the grounds, it is hoped that new information will be forthcoming, including the locations of reported buildings such as a pottery.

Please note that the factory site will once again be open to the public during the annual Open House Day in early June. This year's open house will be held Saturday, June 14 from 11:00 to 3:00. Children are welcome (with their parents) and will be able to dig for artifacts.



Calendar of Upcoming Events | *continued from page 5*

districts will emphasize the work of artists and architects, noting their contributions to the culture and economy of Manchester.

Sunday, May 18, Woodbridge Farm open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, May 18, Cheney Homestead open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

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

Sunday, June 8, Cheney Homestead 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 our museums will be open to the public. Also, the Pitkin Glass Works site will be open.

Donors Give Us Life

Our donors keep us alive and enable us to carry out the many functions of the Society. Without your financial support we would not be able to keep the lights and heat on, the insurance and utilities paid, the artifacts cataloged and cared for, and visitors and school tours welcomed to our museums, History Center, Cheney Homestead and Woodbridge Farmstead. These donations during the year 2024 were made through the Annual Fund drive, membership renewals, memorial gifts, and individual interests. Thank you for your generosity.

Although we strive to compile an accurate list, it may happen that a donor was inadvertently not included in this list. If we left someone out, please let us know so that we can recognize the donor in our next issue.

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