

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

Manchester Historical Society has reached its 60th year. This land first being colonial Hartford, then East Hartford, and in 1823 Manchester. The town was a farming community to the 1830's, and then transformed into an industrial hub because of the availability of water in the form of several rivers, streams, and brooks. With the signing of the Declaration of Independence in July 1776 and the following 250 years, we now look back and wonder what the signers wanted this country to become.

The Society is planning to study and educate how people of Hartford County played a role in our nation's founding. April 19, 1775, marked the



beginning of the movement to independence at Lexington and Concord. The "Call of Lexington" brought our 19th Militia, which was formed the year before, into the war. We will have programs throughout next year about how our area contributed to the beginning of independence.

On September 28th at 2 p.m. we will hold our Annual Membership meeting with light refreshments. After the business part of the meeting there will be a presentation on our 60 years of history by Susan Barlow and by Carol Cheney about the Society's involvement with the Cheney Cemetery Association in the future.

Reflecting on the past 60 years, it is clear that we have accomplished much with our properties and exhibits in our attempts to preserve

our history and educate the public. Seeing younger members getting involved is gratifying and we wish to see those numbers increase. Our website and regular emails help considerably.

We are most grateful for the work our volunteers do as we cannot operate without them. The participation of the 8th District Volunteer Group has been a blessing. Manpower at our events and during tours of the Homestead and Farmstead has increased. Researchers at our library and those using our website have said how useful they are. Researching families, businesses and houses is time consuming but rewarding and learning more about your family's past makes it worthwhile.

We hope to see you at the History Center and please tell your friends.

**Save The Date – Annual Meeting
Sunday September 28 at 2:00 p.m.**



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A newsletter of the
Manchester Historical Society

Online at:
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E-mail:
info@manchesterhistory.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/ManchesterHistoricalSociety
Tel. 860-647-9983

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Dave Smith

We Will Miss

Ed and Millie Koski were lifelong residents of Manchester and life members of the Society. Ed was a Korean War veteran and worked for many years at Pratt & Whitney in East Hartford. They remained active in their retirement over the past 30 years.

Jim Reuter was a valued member of the Society and often shared his extensive knowledge and expertise of Pioneer Parachute Co., where he worked for 30 years and another 20 years as a consultant. On several occasions he presented talks to our members about parachute history and the parachute used for landing on Mars.

Rudy Zadnik an Air Force veteran and Pratt & Whitney retiree was a long time member of the Society. Along with his wife Jane, he volunteered for many of our activities including the Woodbridge Farm committee.



Celebrating America 250 at the Manchester Historical Society

By Steve Armstrong

Planning is underway for the society's extensive celebration and commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the birth of our nation. We are planning a series of lectures and presentations that will extend from November 2025 all the way through July of 2026. Some of the topics will be about Connecticut's connections to the Revolutionary War and the Declaration of Independence; others will be on topics such as "Interpreting the Declaration of Independence" and "The Impact of the American Revolution on the World". We are still expanding the number of presentations that we will be giving.

We are also looking to partner with other historical societies in the area for some of these presentations and other events. Something else in the planning stages is an event where the Declaration of Independence will be read.

We are continuing to look for folks to be involved in the planning! If you are interested, please contact Dennis Gleeson at dennisgleesonsr@gmail.com.



Woodbridge Farmstead

By Peggy Newton

As we enter the fall season at the Farm certain sights stick in the mind... gorgeous giant Maple tree ablaze with color, Black Walnut tree shells crunching on the grass toward the path to babbling Bigelow Brook, and our own resident woodchuck scuttling around for food. She would be delighted to find peach and apple windfalls.

The Farm has held many successful Open Farm Days this year already, but more events are scheduled for September and October. On Sunday September 14th the Hartford Artisan Weaving Center will present a weaving demonstration and offer visitors a chance to try the art of weaving. They will also have their handiwork for sale. On Sunday October 12th we will host a talk about barns in CT and visitors may visit our newly restored barn facing Woodbridge St. Our last Open Day,

Sunday October 26th will be our annual Halloween Celebration with hayrides and Pumpkin Hunt.

Many dedicated volunteers pitch in to help with all these events, as well as maintaining the property. But we always need more helpers who enjoy meeting and greeting guests and doing light maintenance work and having fun. If you are interested, call the History Center (860-647-9983) or email me at (peggynewton47@att.net).



Amy and Taj Hoch served ice cream August 24th at "Shady Glen Sunday at the Farm"

You are invited to
Manchester Historical Society's
Annual Meeting
and
60th Anniversary
celebration

Sunday, September 28
at 2:00 p.m. at the
Manchester History Cen-
ter, 175 Pine Street.

• Membership meeting • History
presentations • Refreshments

Hosted by the Cheney Family in
tribute to Historical Society
members and friends



Knoll's store on School Street. The sign hanging over the store is now on display at the History Center.

See article on the back page.

Coming North End Exhibit

By Bernie Niedzielski

There has been a flurry of activity at the History Center as we get ready for the public grand opening of the North End Exhibit on Sunday, October 19, 2025 from 12 Noon to 5 PM.

The 1500 square foot walk-through exhibit took 2 years of design, construction, historical research, and presentation preparation to reach this milestone.

The exhibit has 12 walk-through sections that will allow visitors to travel back in time through the history of the North End of Manchester. On display are a variety of artifacts, photographs, and audio-visual presentations that show aspects of life in the North End. Topics include Industries, Schools, Churches, Mills, Depot Square, Businesses, and the 8th School and Utilities District along with 135 years of history of the Manchester Fire Department, 8th District.

Come and visit us on October 19th and enjoy the memories of the North End.



John Knoll taking a selfie with his parents.

See article on the back page.

Calendar of Events

History Center Exhibits, Library, 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, business signs** and the **loom room**. The new **Eighth District Fire Department and North End** exhibit will open mid-October. 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 clock making exhibit, and an art gallery. The Homestead was donated to the Manchester Historical Society by the Cheney family in 1968 for a museum to exhibit and explain the impact of the Cheney family on Manchester. Guided tours include the one-room 1751 Keeney schoolhouse, a partial restoration of one of Manchester's earliest one-room schools.

Woodbridge Farmstead and former Meadowbrook Dairy, 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. 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. The house interior includes a Victorian era parlor and later sitting and dining rooms. 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, September 6, Old Manchester Museum open from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Sunday, September 7 and 21, Cheney Homestead open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, September 14, Woodbridge Farm open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. [closed Sept. 28]

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

Saturday, October 4, Old Manchester Museum open from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Sunday, October 5 and 19, Cheney Homestead open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, October 12 and 26, Woodbridge Farm open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 1, Old Manchester Museum open from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Saturday, December 6, from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Holiday Open Houses at the Cheney Homestead and the Old Manchester Museum

2025 Marks the Manchester Historical Society's 60th Year

September 30, 2025 was the date of the birth of our Society and we are still here and thriving, thanks to the efforts of many, many people over the past 60 years.

1960's

The Society was formally organized on September 30, 1965. The Society's fiscal year was established as October 1, 1965 – September 30, 1966, and October 1 – September 30 every year thereafter. General meetings of the society were held throughout the year and the public was invited to attend. Meetings were held at Illing Junior High School.

The first officers were: president William Buckley, vice-president Horace Learned, recording secretary Vivian Ferguson, corresponding secretary Hazel Lutz, and treasurer Arthur Illing. Other members of the first Executive Council (later called Board of Directors) were Robert Boyce, Dr. Charles Jacobsen, Jr., Miss Frances Hoxie and C. Elmore Watkins. Mis Helen Estes and Robert Smith chaired standing committees. A more impressive group of individuals could not exist to run the Society in its early days. By mid-1966 the membership total was over 500!

Society activities included: selling house markers as a fund raiser, taking photos of Manchester landmarks and ordinary buildings to preserve their history (including slides by Arthur Illing of the North End before removal of the buildings began in 1967), creation of a Public Information Committee to research and publish in the Manchester Herald a series of articles about Manchester's early days, people, places and buildings, and publishing booklets such as "This is Manchester" (a brief history of the town).

At the end of the first full year the Society's treasury balance was \$3,300 (equivalent to about \$33,000 today!) The most significant development of the 1960's was the acquisition of the Cheney Homestead in 1968, including the contents of the house and an endowment which covered only a part of the operating costs.

The agreement required that the house be maintained as a historical museum. The Cheney Homestead committee, under the direction of Herbert Swanson, was created to administer the property. The Homestead was first opened to the public May 24, 1969.

1970's

One of the first renovations at the Homestead was the woodshed attached to the house. It was converted to an office for the Society. Donations continued to come in for display. As the rooms in the house were restored, they were opened to the public. Resident caretakers, Mr and Mrs Royal Isham, were engaged to

look after the Homestead.

New officers were elected in 1970: president Albert Harris, vice-president Christie McCormack, recording secretary Mrs. Myrtle Williams, corresponding secretary Miss Hazel Lutz, and treasurer Mrs. Parmys Pratt.

The Society continued to hold regular meetings of the members featuring speakers on a wide variety of topics. The Homestead was open to the public every Christmas season and was appropriately decorated.

During 1972 an Oral History Project was initiated under the direction of Mrs. George Walker. Town residents shared their memories for posterity.

In 1973 the Society participated in the town's 150th anniversary celebrations by erecting about 20 aluminum plaques throughout town. These Sesquicentennial markers provided a brief description of the historic sites. (Unfortunately, many of these plaques have since disappeared.) In addition, the Society created a series of exhibits at Whiton Memorial Hall, from the time of Indian settlements to 1945. Over 3,000 visitors viewed the exhibits.

Also, in 1973 Dr. William Buckley published his book "A New England Pattern." A Charter Oak seedling was planted on the Homestead grounds in 1976.

The Keeney Street schoolhouse rebuild/restoration was begun in late 1976 and continued into 1977. It was finalized and dedicated in June 1977. New Homestead caretakers, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Gaal, moved in late 1977. In 1977 the Society's newsletter was officially named "Courier" which name we still use today.

1980's

New officers elected in 1980: president Jon Harrison, vice-president Eleanor Coltman, recording secretary Lillian Grant, corresponding secretary Addi Laughlin, and treasurer Richard Carter.

An Annual Antique Show was inaugurated late 1983. It was held at Waddell School. Herb Bengtson was named chair of the Acquisitions Committee, which position he served for many years.

In 1984 the Society began preparatory work on the former Lutz Children's Museum on Cedar St. prior to making it our new Manchester History Museum. Much work and many hands were needed to make the building usable as a museum and safe for visitors. The museum was officially opened Saturday, June 21, 1986 to many visitors. One of the first exhibits was about Manchester's North End.

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2025 Marks the Manchester Historical Society's 60th Year | *continued from page 6*

In early 1986 the Society hired its first Executive Director, Jon Harrison, who had previously been society president for 3 years. Mr and Mrs Philip Meek became the new resident hosts at Cheney Homestead in 1987.

In 1988 the Manchester Sports Hall of Fame found a home in our new Cedar St. museum.

1990's

1990 marked the Society's 25th anniversary.

In 1990 the officers were: president Richard Egan, vice-president Fred Crosby, recording secretary Dorothy Herman, corresponding secretary Diane Lenti, and treasurer Geri Lemelin.

The Donaghue estate on Tolland Turnpike was officially given to the Society. It was left to us by Miss Ethel Donaghue, a well-known lawyer in West Hartford. She was the last of the Weldon family, which owned the farm for many years.

In 1994 we published our first history book titled "Old Manchester..a Picture Book" by Milt Adams. It was a great success and was followed by the publication of two more books ("Old Manchester II..The Storytellers" and "Old Manchester III Manchester Green..a Picture Book").

1998 saw the donation of the Woodbridge property at Manchester Green to the Society by Thelma and Raymond Woodbridge. Thelma retained life use of the house until she died in 2009.

Manchester's third grade students got a taste of history in-person in 1998 as they walked through the Cheney Historic District and visited three museums and Cheney Hall. This program continued until 2020 when covid halted the tours.

The Town celebrated its 175th anniversary in 1998 with a parade and other festivities. Our Society had its own float in the parade.

In June 1999 the Society acquired the former Cheney Brothers Machine Shop building. It was made possible by using funds from the sale of the Donaghue property on Tolland Tpke. Since then, many volunteer hours have been spent in fixing windows, cleaning and painting the interior, removing temporary walls and sanding the maple floors.

2000's

In 2000 the officers were: president Dave Smith, vice-president Doug Edwards, recording secretary Jean Loto, corresponding secretary Marianne Hamstra, and treasurer Gert Sweeney.

In January 2005 we received delivery of four silk looms from the Scalandre textile mill in Long Island City, New York. The donation was made possible by the generosity of Paula and Anthony Viscogliosi.

Thelma Woodbridge passed away in 2009 and the Woodbridge house now entered a new life, as it became a museum open to the public, joining the late 1700's barn as part of tours available to the public at the Woodbridge Farmstead.

2010's

In 2010 society officers were: president John Dormer, vice president George Beauregard, secretary Marsha Gunther, and treasurer Joe Lawler.

Beginning in 2011 a series of improvements and upgrades were made to the History Center building. Several Boy Scout Eagle projects improved access to the ground floor areas, provided the artifact storage room with shelving, painted the loom room and constructed walls on the ground floor for storage of textile equipment. Students from Howell Cheney Technical School installed lighting and connections to the recently acquired looms.

In 2012 a Timken Foundation grant was received to restore the wood floors on the second floor of the History Center.

2016 saw the restoration of the 1700's barn at the Woodbridge Farmstead. It had weathered over 200 years of winter weather and it was feared that a heavy snowfall would cause a collapse.

This year also saw the donation from the Learned Preston Trust of \$500,000 over the next 20 years to support the Cheney Homestead and Cheney family history. It was the largest monetary donation in Society history.

December 2017 the Society acquired the Cheney Silk Vault building on Elm St. Built in 1920 beside the railroad tracks it has had a fascinating history.

2020's

In 2020 society officers were: president Jack Prior, vice president Peter Millett, secretary Carol Cafazzo, and treasurer Dick Borden.

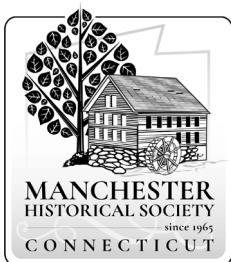
2022 saw the opening of a major exhibit in the History Center, called "Manchester Then and Now".

Also, the new Visitor Center was opened at the Woodbridge Farmstead, focusing on the history of the Manchester Green area. Mayor Jay Moran cut the ribbon.

The Cheney Homestead underwent several upgrades and new exhibits were created. A clock maker's room was opened, ground floor exhibits were reinterpreted and new Cheney art gallery and "Women of the Cheney Family" were installed.

In 2024 a new metal roof was installed on the Cheney Homestead.

2025 will see the opening of our major new exhibit "Manchester's North End and the Eighth District Fire Department."



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Your Membership Expires on:

Interesting Manchester People

John Knoll - Businessman and Photographer

John was born in 1888 and lived his entire life in Manchester except for the first months of his life. His family came to Manchester from Germany when John was still a baby. At first the family lived on Center St. and later moved to School St. where John lived until he died in 1955 at the age of 67.

His mother said they moved from Germany because their daughter was already here in Manchester and told her parents how prosperous life was in the U. S. and Manchester. When they arrived, they found hard times, soup kitchens, and no work for her husband for almost a year. They had no knowledge of English and learned it by reading newspapers.

John left school when he was 14 and worked for the next 10 years at Cheney Brothers. In 1914 he went into business for himself, building a small store at 165 School St. At that time School Street was a wilderness and John helped his father to clear land to build a house. He said all they missed were Indians and wild animals. The store opened December 1, 1914, and continued in business until 1935. He later worked for Henry Anderson's Green House & Flower Shop on Eldridge St.

John's store was noted for its window displays, which were changed often reflecting the seasons. Neighbors said his displays were things of beauty.

But his real passion was for photography and it gave him his greatest pleasure.

He took photos of almost everything he came into contact with, including neighboring children and dogs at play. John also photographed places and events in town and the surrounding area. He entered his photos in the regular Hartford Courant photo contest and won more than once. The Society is fortunate in having in its collections many of Knoll's photographic prints and negatives, as well as one of the cameras he used regularly. Also on display at Cedar St. are items from his store.