

The Courier

NOVEMBER 2008

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A quarterly publication of the Manchester Historical Society, Inc. / 106 Hartford Road / Manchester, Connecticut 06040 / (860) 647-9983

The 5th Annual Holiday Gift Festival is Coming!

JOIN YOUR FRIENDS AT THE HISTORY CENTER FOR AN EVENING OF FUN, SOCIALIZING, SHOPPING, AND SURPRISES

On Friday, December 5, from 6:30 to 9 p.m., the Historical Society will hold its fifth annual holiday gift festival, featuring live and teacup auctions, wine, hors d'oeuvres, coffee, and dessert. Decorated wreaths, gift baskets, and other boutique items will be for sale. Live-auction items include some of the decorated wreaths, baskets and gift certificates from Downtown restaurants.

Tickets must be pre-purchased (\$8 members/\$10 non-members) at the History Center from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thursdays and Fridays, and 10 to noon on Saturdays, or by appointment (860-643-2413) through November 21; last-minute tickets will be available December 4 from 10 to noon. Or you can mail a check with "Holiday and Gift Festival" in the memo line to 106 Hartford Road, Manchester, CT 06040. All donations help raise funds for our community-oriented organization.



Guests enjoy refreshments and conversation during the 2007 holiday gala at the History Center.

Can't come to the event? Starting November 20, you can visit our Museum Store with items of historical interest. (*See separate story about the Store.*)

The History Center is located at 175 Pine Street, with parking available along Pleasant Street. Handicapped parking is available in the small lot north of the building.

Volunteers and the Historical Society

John Dormer presented the Volunteer of the Year Award to Joe Lawler, a long-time Society volunteer who never asks what needs to be done—he sees what needs to be done, and then he does it. Joe has coordinated the historic house marker program, working with volunteers at the Senior Center. He is also a fixture with the Thursday night crew, which builds exhibits, cares for the building and grounds, and works on a large variety of other projects. Joe and his wife, Mary Ann, who is also a volunteer, are long time residents of Manchester.

"Volunteers make our organization work," said President John Dormer at our annual meeting in October, "we are grateful for the hours and commitment of these dedicated people, but, of course, we can always benefit from more volunteers!" There are many opportunities—tour guides, exhibit designers, cataloguers, indoor and outdoor work crews and convivial people to staff events, assist with parking, decorate tables and booths, etc. There really is something for everyone.

To learn how you can become a volunteer, call Brenda Paullo, volunteer coordinator, at 860-643-2413.



President John Dormer (left) shakes hands with Joe Lawler, recipient of the Volunteer of the Year Award for 2007-2008.

Curator's Corner

by Dave Smith

Three flags from the Ward Cheney Camp of Spanish-American War Veterans have been returned from the Textile Conservation Lab at the University of Rhode Island. They were sent out earlier this year for cleaning and conservation and will be part of a new display at the museum. The flags, donated to the Society last year by Kellie Dietz, were originally in the possession of her grandmother Gladys Ridolfi, who was a member of the Mary Bushnell Cheney Auxiliary of the Ward Cheney Camp.

Four pieces of Seth W. Cheney artwork are still out for conservation and are expected back by the end of the year. All of this conservation work was made possible by a grant from the Cheney Family Fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

During 2007 we also received many other donations of items including: a horse-drawn buggy, two 1950s era bicycles, Cheney Brothers textile samples, scrapbooks from the Manchester Grange, archives of the Manchester Square Dance Club, pictures of the Batson Aero Yacht, memorabilia of Charley Robbins, and of

course a large collection pertaining to Joe McCluskey which was described in the Courier last November. We also received a number of photos, tools, textiles and farm equipment. Some of these artifacts will be on display as soon as we can create exhibits to showcase them. We thank all those who remembered the Historical Society with their donations.

SHARING YOUR OWN COLLECTION

During this year we have on display at the Old Manchester Museum a collection of Shaker items that are from a private collection. The owners, Alana and K. C. Parkinson were anxious to share their collection with others and at the same time provide a unique display at the museum.

We are now looking for other collections to share next year and have on display. Many people collect interesting items, some of them unusual. We are looking for that kind of collection to share with others.

If you have a collection that you would be willing to share, please contact Dave Smith at 647-9742.



History on Your Television

by Susan Barlow, Producer

Have you tuned in to the Manchester Historical Society's television show lately? If so, you may have seen Dick and Rita Borden, who opened their lovely home to our television show. We heard many positive comments about the visual tour of their Victorian gem. The house has an interesting past, having moved from Spring Street to Porter Street back in the 1960s.

The Pitkin Glass Works were featured in the June broadcast, and we are pleased to have captured on film the talks by Richard Ciralli, Tom Duff, Noel Tomas, and John Spaulding.

Look for the upcoming program about the 150th anniversary of St. Bridget church, the first Catholic congregation in Manchester.

Our Society's TV shows air on channel 15 at 8 p.m.; running time varies from less than an hour up to two hours. Each show runs for a month, so if you miss it on the first Saturday of the month, you can catch it on subsequent Saturdays. Cox public access, Channel 15, broadcasts in Manchester, South Windsor, Glastonbury, Wethersfield, Rocky Hill, and Newington.

Some of our programs are available at Mary Cheney Library and some are for sale at the museum gift shops.

Your comments on the shows are welcome. Call the Society at 860-647-9983, or call me directly at 860-643-9776.

The Courier

A newsletter of the
Manchester Historical Society

Web page: manchesterhistory.org

E-mail: manchesterhistory@juno.com

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Welcome New Members!

The Society welcomes the following new members who have joined from August 26, 2008 through October 13, 2008.

From Manchester:

Nicholas Carlo
Vivian Carlson
Raymond Davis
James M. Kidd, Jr.
Florence Parker
Joseph Prignano
Sheree Robotto
June Roncarti

From Elsewhere:

Christine Hupalo Alameda, CA
Kristine R. Miller South Windsor, CT
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The Beginning of the 'Town of Manchester Fire Department'

by Doug Welch

This is the second part of a two-part article that began in the last issue of the Courier.

The ultimate consolidation of Manchester's two district fire departments into one municipal fire department was an issue that was brought to the forefront by the League of Women Voters of Manchester. The National Board of Fire Underwriters issued a report in 1951 grading the South Manchester Fire District as "4th class for specifically rated property, and Grade B for minimum rates on dwelling house property." Following the release of this report, the League of Women Voters asked for the formation of a Fire Protection and Utilities Study Committee. The Committee was quickly formed and issued their report in 1951 with one of their recommendations being consolidation of the South Manchester Fire District and the Eighth School and Utilities District Fire Department.

An ordinance was introduced in 1953 which would permit the town to consolidate the two fire districts. However, even after enactment by the town Board of Directors, the ordinance could not go into effect until it was approved by the voters of both districts. The League of Women Voters of Manchester had requested the ordinance and strongly supported it. Their contention was that consolidation "would provide a fire department with a single administration and would permit the most efficient distribution and effective utilization of personnel and equipment." They argued consolidation "would enable the Board of Directors and the General Manager to make a unified approach to the problem of fire protection."

Some items of concern with the consolidation issue included the fate of pension benefits and years of service to fire fighters who were on the payroll of the South Manchester Fire Department, and whether or not the Eighth Utilities District would be compensated for their sewer assets. The Eighth Utilities

District ultimately chose to be excluded from the consolidation plan, based mainly on the sewer issue. The South Manchester Fire District officers were also not in favor of the consolidation plan and, although they had the power to stop it, they stated they would not stand in the way of consolidation if it was approved by the voters.

The final vote on consolidation was taken in April, 1957. There were contingency plans in place anticipating that the Eighth Utilities District would vote not to consolidate. SMFD Fire Chief Clifford Mason was asked by Town Manager Richard Martin to come up with a plan for fire protection in areas of town outside the Eighth Utilities District boundaries to the north. The plan included an agreement with the Eighth Utilities District whereby they would be compensated for providing fire service in certain areas on the north side of town, so that the town fire department would not have to respond through the District to reach emergencies. When the Eighth Utilities District ultimately did opt out of the consolidation effort, the agreement was put into effect. The agreement was to continue until the Town Fire Department could build a fire station in closer proximity to these areas.

On June 30, 1957, the South Manchester Fire District and its Fire Department ended its 60 year existence. Its equipment and buildings were taken over by the Town of Manchester for the sum of one dollar. Although the actual name change was not implemented for almost 20 years, this was the beginning of the Town of Manchester Fire Department

Information for this article was derived from:

1. "The History of Manchester Connecticut" (Mathias Spiess and Percy W. Bidwell, 1924).
2. "A New England Pattern; The History of Manchester Connecticut" (William E. Buckley, 1973).
3. Various articles from the "Manchester Evening Herald" newspaper.

Annual Holiday Open House Is Traditional and **NEW!**

Come one, come all to the traditional and festive Open House at the Society properties—it's free and fun—and it all takes place on Sunday, December 7, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. We have new activities for children and adults this year. Plan to visit all the properties, and you can even consider walking from place to place. We have free maps for a self-guided walking tour with commentary about the Historic District and buildings.

The 1785 Cheney Homestead at 106 Hartford Road features holiday decor by the Manchester Garden Club. The Fireside Patriots, a living history group in authentic nineteenth-century garb, will portray prominent members of the Cheney family. Come meet and talk with the Patriots. Visit the Old Manchester Museum at 126 Cedar Street with its Shaker exhibit, which will be closing soon, and shop at the delicious bake sale. The first 20 children will receive a holiday surprise. (*Hint: the first initials of the surprise are B.B.*) When you visit the History Center at 175 Pine Street, you can shop at the new Museum Store, and enjoy some old-fashioned games, suitable for children of all ages.

Invite your friends and neighbors to this wonderful and free activity.



Cheney Mansion Walk

by Susan Barlow

It was a beautiful day to visit the Great Lawn. Our Historical Society sponsored a walk on October 11, starting at the Cheney Homestead, built in 1785. In the upstairs parlor near the portrait of Kate Fox, there was a presentation about the mid-nineteenth century Spiritualism movement, a belief that the living can talk with the spirits of the deceased. Kate Fox, a famous medium of the time, helped people interpret messages from their loved ones who had passed away.

Then the group tramped across Hartford Road to walk on the town-owned nine-acre portion of the Great Lawn, noting the long sidewalk leading from the mansions to the Cheney mills and offices. Unlike mill owners in some industrial cities, the Cheneyes lived near the mills and thus also near the mill workers.

With permission of several mansion-owners, the tour group viewed the fascinating interiors of two grand old homes, and the exteriors of several others. It was interesting to see the studio where Russell Cheney painted. This former barn was converted to a studio in the early nineteenth century and has a huge north-facing window.

Proceeds from the walk will help fund the new heating and cooling system at the Homestead.

Check the web site www.manchesterhistory.org for upcoming walks and other events.

Help Wanted

The Society is looking for volunteers who are operationally knowledgeable of either/both the QuickBooks and/or the PastPerfect computer programs. These programs are used by the Society for our financial and membership record keeping. Data needs to be entered into these systems one or two times per week, total time per week of about eight to ten hours. If you can help us out, please call John Dormer at (860) 647-9983.



*Photo of Great Lawn, c. 1900,
from the Historical Society's collection.*



John Olds House Receives Historic Designation

The John Olds house at 669 Tolland Turnpike has been designated as a State Register of Historic Places property. Built c.1776, it was the home of Revolutionary War veteran John Olds Esq. Often referred to as “the Father of Manchester,” Olds was prominent in the attempt to create the Town of Manchester by removing Orford Parish from the Town of East Hartford. The effort was successful and the town was incorporated in 1823.

New Museum Store Opening November 20

by Susan Barlow

Time to shop! Time to support your Historical Society! And you can do both at once by visiting our new museum store, starting November 20.

We continue to feature our traditional Society tee-shirts, note cards with local scenes, and our popular Manchester history books. In addition, we now have an intriguing décor with antique display cabinets, boutique-quality scarves, jewelry, handbags, and specialty books for children and adults, including books on silk—how appropriate for a town whose nickname is the Silk City.

Look for our newest publications, *The Miracle Workers*, a facsimile edition of a Cheney mills recruiting booklet, and the *Bidwell Reminiscences*. There are also posters of Cheney fashion models, framed pictures of local scenes, and videotapes on local history—topics include sections of town such as Lakeview, Hilliardville, and Hollywood; tours of historic homes, such as several Cheney mansions and interviews about the Great Depression.

We accept credit cards and, during the holidays, your purchases will be wrapped in free gift bags designed in a Historical Society motif. Store hours are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thursday and Friday, 10 to noon on Saturdays, and during special events such as the Gala evening on December 5. The museum store is located inside the History Center, 175 Pine Street. Your purchases help pay our operating expenses.

Thanks to many volunteers who made the store come together!



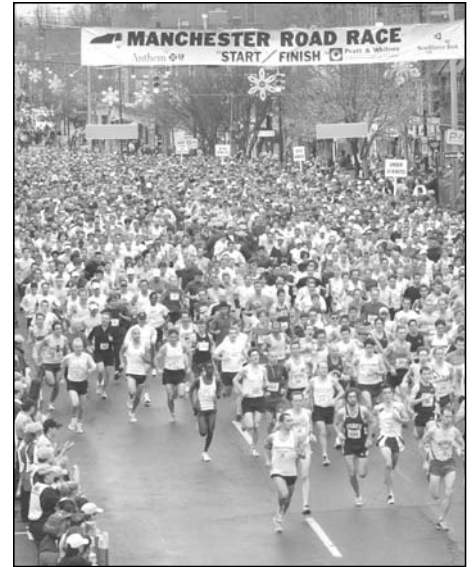
Running and History: Sunday, November 16 at 1 p.m.

FOUR RACE FANS TO PRESENT PROGRAM AT HISTORY CENTER

Join four Road Race fans for a program about different aspects of the Thanksgiving Day race that has brought fame to Manchester, and become a part of the holiday tradition here. In stories and pictures, we'll find out some behind-the-scenes lore:

- Susan Barlow will summarize the early history of the race and the McCluskey family's wins;
- Mike Saimond, principal of Verplanck School, will talk about his 41 years of running in the Turkey Day race;
- Mike Nimirowski will describe the revival of the race after World War II, and;
- Phil Susag will explain the changes in the race route and mileage over the years.

The program takes place at the History Center, 175 Pine Street, where there will also be a Road Race exhibit, including McCluskey family donations of memorabilia from the early days of the race. The cost is \$1 for members/\$3 for non-members. Light refreshments will be served.



The 2004 Road Race

PHOTO BY JOHN LONG

We Will Miss...

Volunteer **Roberta Lusa** (1943-2008), who helped produce our booklet: *Customs and Incidents of Early Days in Manchester; Reminiscences about a South Manchester Boyhood in the Post-Civil War Era*, by Edward Lincoln Bidwell. Roberta single-handedly typed Mr. Bidwell's columns from old Manchester Herald newspapers. She enjoyed the project because she thought the columns, written in 1921, would "pique the interest of the modern reader." We who are interested in the little details of life that occurred over a century ago, are fortunate that Mr. Bidwell left us this unique account of everyday life in the post-Civil War period." (*Booklet still available in the museum store.*)

Society member **Francis J. O'Leary** passed away in October 2008. He had a great love of Manchester and requested that he be remembered by gifts to the Society. The Society thanks his family for their help in carrying out his request. "Bud" will be greatly missed by all who knew him, especially his friends at the Manchester Historical Society.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!!

As you are aware, we collect dues from members and also request donations for our Annual Fund drive. These monies are used to maintain the day-to-day operations of our Historical Society.

BUT, these monies are not sufficient to employ a full-time Executive Director. (We have been fortunate that John Dormer has been serving as interim Executive Director. We applaud his efforts in this endeavor and thank him for volunteering.) However, additional monies are needed to fund this position which had previously been handled through a Grant that was not renewable.

Therefore, we are seeking donations in significant amounts to speed up the process of hiring an Executive Director. While donations may be made in any amount, if 20 persons each contributed \$5,000 we would have sufficient funds to employ an Executive Director for well over a year.

These donations may be made in cash from current assets, in securities of publicly traded stock or mutual funds, or through an IRA distribution. Again this year and next, persons who are at least 70 1/2 years of age may make a distribution from their IRA directly to a charitable organization (Manchester Historical Society) without incurring tax consequences. This must be done before December 31st.

Donations should be sent to the Manchester Historical Society and designated for the Executive Director Fund. If you have any questions, please call Anne Beechler, Treasurer, at 643 6969.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Unless otherwise noted, admission to all lectures and walking tours is \$1 for members and \$3 for non-members. All lectures and events will take place at the Manchester History Center, 175 Pine Street, or as noted.

Sunday, November 16, 1 p.m.
**"Manchester Road Race—
Looking Back"**

A panel will talk about the famous race over the years.

Friday, December 5, 6:30 to 9 p.m.
**Annual Wreath and Gift Festival
and Social Evening**

Sunday, December 7, 1 to 4 p.m.
Annual Open House, FREE
Holiday Open House of the Society's properties: Cheney Homestead, Keeney Schoolhouse, Manchester History Center, and the Old Manchester Museum.

Museum To Close for Winter

The Old Manchester Museum will be closed for the winter. The last open day will be Sunday December 21. The museum will reopen in early April. During this period, our research facilities will continue to be available by appointment. Please call 647-9742 to schedule a research visit.



The Manchester Historical Society
 106 Hartford Road
 Manchester, Connecticut 06040

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One by One...
 WINDOW RESTORATION CONTINUES



One by one, the windows at the History Center are being restored. Thanks to all the volunteers who have worked on this project, and all the donors who have given a total of \$27,645.00 to preserve the windows of this historic building through the “No Pane, No Gain” fund drive. We are grateful to all those who have given. Additional contributions are welcome!

YES! I want to help the Historical Society in its “No Pane, No Gain” window restoration drive. Enclosed is my check for \$_____.

- Pane in the Sash Donor _____ @ \$50 ea.
- Half-Sash Donor _____ @ \$2,000 ea.
- Clinking-Glass Donor _____ @ \$3,500 ea.
- Memorial Donation in Honor of:

Name _____

Address _____

Donations may be made payable to the Manchester
 Historical Society
 and mailed to:
 No Pane, No Gain Drive
 Manchester Historical Society
 175 Pine Street
 Manchester, CT 06040