



# The Courier

SEPTEMBER 2010

VOL. 45, NO. 4

A quarterly publication of the Manchester Historical Society, Inc. / 175 Pine Street / Manchester, Connecticut 06040 / (860) 647-9985

## The Woodbridge Farmstead

A PROPERTY IN TRANSITION

by Martha Davidson

The Woodbridge Farmstead was home to successive generations of the same family whose members witnessed — and contributed to — two centuries of history in Manchester. When the Farmstead's last resident, Thelma Carr Woodbridge, died in October 2009, the property passed into a new era, one in which the Manchester Historical Society plays a significant role as owner and steward.

The Manchester Historical Society is committed to preserving the history and heritage of the Woodbridge family and farm, setting it in context of Manchester Green's evolution, and using the site to educate the public about the town's agricultural past.

Both Thelma and her husband Raymond Woodbridge, who died in 1997, wanted to preserve this tangible piece of town history. Thelma officially donated the two-acre property to the Manchester Historical Society in 1998, and continued to live there until her death last year.

Since Thelma's death, the Woodbridge Farmstead Committee headed by Tim McCann has focused on easing the Farmstead from its status as a private home to its new role within the Historical Society's family of properties. During these early days, the focus has been on critical projects required to protect the buildings and grounds—such as inventorying contents of the house, coping with excessive humidity in the basement, removing a diseased maple tree from the front yard, mowing the lawns and preserving the barn roof.

Plans for an on-site tenant are being modeled after the Cheney Homestead's tenant arrangement. Various public functions at the site, such as house tours and outdoor dining events, have been suggested, but other matters including parking, security, event staffing and potential liability must be resolved before the Farmstead can "go public." Probate of the estate also must be completed.

In August, Manchester Historical Society members voted to establish the Woodbridge Farmstead Endowment Fund, which will provide funds from Thelma's estate to help support the site's operation. Earlier this year, the property attained tax-exempt status from the town. Conservation of the oldest barn has begun and a consultant's report with recommendations has been completed.



Red barns and stone walls behind the Woodbridge House.

The Woodbridge Farmstead is located at 495 Middle Turnpike East. The farmhouse is an outstanding example of 1830s Greek Revival architecture that was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1999. The house is tucked between a furniture store that originated as a textile mill and a pizza restaurant that once was a general store and Manchester Green post office. Behind the house, the view is more pastoral. Two red barns, along with stone foundations of outbuildings and vestigial gardens, offer intriguing reminders of the past. Bigelow Brook runs through the property, past one of the largest black walnut trees in Connecticut.

Over the course of 150 years or so, the Woodbridge family operated Meadow Brook Farm, delivered milk to local residents, and grew crops that included hay, corn, turnips and potatoes. This past spring, in Thelma's memory, Fred Lea, a Manchester farmer and Woodbridge Committee member, donated and planted two Pound Sweet apple trees on the back slope near the barns. The gift is already bearing fruit as it offers a lesson in local agricultural history. The Pound Sweet apple was developed by the Lymans right here in Manchester, only a mile east of the farm.

## Meet Our New Museum Docent Coordinator

EMILY BLOOM IS NOW HELPING US with scheduling docents/hosts for the Old Manchester Museum. Florence Johnson has been doing this for many years and has finally decided that it is time for someone else to take over. Emily has started calling our regular volunteers and scheduling them for duty at the museum on Saturdays and Sundays. She is hoping that everyone who has been on duty at the museum in the past will continue to help out. Emily is also looking for new people who would like to greet museum visitors and show them the exhibits. We will provide orientation for anyone who is interested. Please contact us at 860-647-9742 (you can leave a message) and we will pass on your name to Emily.

### The Courier

A newsletter of the  
Manchester Historical Society

On the web at [www.manchesterhistory.org](http://www.manchesterhistory.org)  
E-mail: [manchesterhistory@juno.com](mailto:manchesterhistory@juno.com)

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## Results of Historical Society Special Membership Meeting

A SPECIAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING WAS HELD SUNDAY, AUGUST 22, 2010 at the Elks Club, 30 Bissell Street in Manchester. The meeting was called to consider a resolution creating a permanent endowment fund for the Historical Society and to consider bylaw amendments recommended by the board of directors.

The resolution to create a **Permanent Endowment Fund** was approved by an overwhelming majority of the voters. This endowment fund will be funded through donations, gifts and bequests and will be held in trust in perpetuity. Only income generated by the fund shall be expended in support and maintenance of the activities and services of the Manchester Historical Society. Income shall be determined in accordance with the Connecticut Principal and Income Act (1999). This resolution shall be and is hereby made a covenant and agreement on the part of the Manchester Historical Society with every person who shall make a donation, gift subscription or bequest to the endowment fund, that the principal of such fund shall be held in trust in perpetuity and the income only thereof be used by the Society for the purposes herein stated; with the only exception to this covenant being a clear and present danger to the very existence of the Society if part or all of this endowment fund principal is not applied to the operation of the Society, said clear and present danger to be determined by the Society membership at a meeting duly convened.

Bylaw amendments were also voted on at the meeting. All the recommended amendments were approved, most by show of hands and one amendment by paper ballot. Among the significant changes:

1. The **size of the Board of Directors** has been changed from 20 to 16 directors, including the four officers.
2. The **Woodbridge Farmstead Endowment Fund** was approved and will be funded with a major gift from the estate of Thelma Woodbridge. This will be administered much the same as the new Permanent Endowment Fund described above, and will be focused on the operation and maintenance of the Woodbridge Farmstead.
3. **Nominations from the floor** will no longer be allowed at the annual meeting. All nominations for officer or Board of Director positions must now be made in writing at least 45 days before the annual meeting. This will provide time to ensure that those nominated are qualified and are interested in serving and understand the responsibilities and expectations of being a Director.

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## New Endowment Fund

DONATIONS ARE NOW BEING ACCEPTED for the new permanent endowment fund, officially established at the August special membership meeting (see above). Only the income of this fund will be used for the support and maintenance of the Society's operation and for the upkeep of its properties. The principal of the fund will be held in trust for the benefit of the Society. Gifts and bequests of cash, securities, real estate, etc. are welcome, and can be addressed to the Historical Society, 175 Pine Street, Manchester, CT 06040, clearly noting that they are earmarked for the Permanent Endowment Fund.

The hope of the Board of Directors in recommending such a fund is that it will ensure the long-term health and strength of the Society. The Board thanks the Finance Committee and attorney Malcolm Barlow for their work in creating this fund.

# Cheney Dye House Project Underway

by Dave Smith

THE RENOVATION OF THE CHENEY DYE HOUSE at the corner of Pine and Cooper Hill Streets began in earnest in January of this year. The work has been underway for over seven months and is expected to be completed in May of next year, according to Joel DeSimone of Sikon Construction Services, representing the building's owner. This project will save and reuse one of the major buildings in the Cheney Brothers National Historic Landmark District, creating 57 residential apartments.

The Dye House was built in 1914 and required the moving of the Cheney School building (our Old Manchester Museum) to its present location on Cedar Street. In the last years of the Cheney's textile business, the west end of the building was used as the office. That was finally closed in the mid 1980's and the building was purchased by The Simon Konover Co. The company also acquired several other mill buildings which have since been renovated into apartments. They are the Velvet Mill Apartments and the Clocktower Mill Apartments.



D'Amato Builders and Advisors of Norwich, CT is the general contractor for this project, which is expected to cost about \$15,000,000. Of interest is the fact that not only is the exterior brick shell of the building being restored to its former glory with the architectural details retained, but many of the interior structural columns and some beams are being reused. Because the roof had been leaking for many years, the original second floor and some beams were not salvageable.

Without federal and state assistance, this project would not have been financially possible. The Connecticut Housing Finance Authority, the Department of Economic and Community Development, Historic Tax Credits and federal funds from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development are all contributing to the economic viability of the project. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is also a major contributor.

# Third Grade School Tours

by Dave Smith

THIS YEAR THE THIRD GRADE SCHOOL TOURS were coordinated by Kris Miller and assisted by the many volunteers who staffed each of the sites. Kris, in her first time organizing the tours, did an outstanding job in what is often a thankless task. Twelve schools and some 550 students and 100 adults came through our three museums and the History Center. They also visited the Fire Museum. Juggling this many groups of students and the vagaries of the weather is not a job for the faint hearted.

The students enjoyed a more hands-on experience this year. They learned about and played old time games at the Keeney Schoolhouse, lifted a Civil War rifle and tried Morse Code with the Boy Scout display at the Old Manchester Museum, tried weaving on a small loom and a braiding machine at the History Center, and pumped water and formed a bucket brigade at the Fire Museum.



Bowers School students weaving cord on a braiding machine.



Volunteer Ruth Herbele demonstrates how a rope bed works for Martin School students visiting the Cheney Homestead.

We are indebted to all the volunteers who made this year's tours successful and enjoyable. We also thank the adults who chaperoned the students and learned something new about our town's history.

We are looking for a coordinator for the 2011 school tours to maintain this decades-old tradition of teaching another generation about Manchester's unique history. Kris will help the new coordinator with the resources she developed for this year. Please call the office if you are interested.



# NewsBriefs



by Susan Barlow

## Heritage Day

In June, the Manchester Historical Society opened its museums free to the public during the Town's Heritage Day. Volunteers gave tours at the Cheney Homestead, where the Fireside Patriots demonstrated nineteenth-century clothing and crafts; the Keeney Schoolhouse, with games for children; the Loom Room at the History Center; and the Old Manchester Museum. In addition, we had a popular booth at Cheney Hall, a slide show about the Cheneys and the silk mills, and at the History Center, a giant tag sale, which brought in thousands of dollars as well as many visitors. Thanks to all the volunteers who made this big day a reality.

## Popular Walks and Programs

In May, a large group of walkers visited Pitkin Glassworks, Manchester Green, and the charming home of Brian Foley on Middle Turnpike. In June and August, we had tours of the historic Buckland Cemetery, site of gravestones of the Bucklands, Hilliards, and many other families. In July, David Howard, son of member and volunteer Gordon Howard, read from his book "Lost Rights," about a stolen copy of the Bill of Rights.

## Meet Me at the Vault

On Sunday, October 10 at 1 p.m., Joe Camposeo, Town Clerk and Historical Society member, will open the vault at the Town Hall, 41 Center Street, and talk about the resources available for historians and genealogists. Plenty of parking on the side and behind the Town Hall.

## Center Memorial Park

The park continues to be threatened by building and paving. (For details, see your February 2010 issue of *The Courier*, also available online at <http://www.manchesterhistory.org/news.html> and then click on the February issue.) The park welcomed thousands of visitors during May, when ceremonies were held at the pavilion steps after the Memorial Day parade, in June during Pride in Manchester Week at the free concert in the park, art show, and fiddle contest, and again in August for the solemn memorial for victims of the workplace shooting of eight people at a Manchester business. We are fortunate this beautiful space is available for these events. The Manchester Historical Society continues to oppose encroachment on the parks.

## Board of Directors

Through the Peer Advisor Network, the Society's Board of Directors met with peer counselor Beth Pite to work on our long and short-term goals, and on ways to improve communications within the organization. Our board meetings start at 6:30 on the fourth Monday of each month (unless it's a holiday), and members are invited to attend.

## Historical Society Web Site

Our web site continues to grow, with reprints of articles on local history, including two recent articles with pictures about the Buckland section of Manchester and the Buckland Cemetery. Do check it out at [www.manchesterhistory.org](http://www.manchesterhistory.org).

## We Will Miss...

**Elizabeth Blevins** Betty was a long time Society member. She worked at Cheney Brothers for several years and volunteered at Manchester Memorial Hospital. Her father worked in the Cheney Brothers Machine Shop (now our History Center building) and owned Gibbie's Soda Shop on East Center Street in the 1930's.

**Dr. Charles E. Jacobson, Jr.** Charlie, as he was affectionately known, was a long time resident of Manchester and served his town in many capacities. He was president of the Lutz Junior Museum, the United Fund and the Manchester Memorial Hospital medical staff. In addition he was instrumental in founding the Pitkin Glass Works Council to administer this historic site. He also was one of the prime motivators in establishing our own Manchester Historical Society.

**Edward T. Pavelack** A native and lifelong Manchester resident, Ed was a World War II veteran having served in the Marine Corps, and received a Purple Heart. He was active in the Polish community here in town and enjoyed travel with his late wife Anna, and history.

**John J. Spaulding, Sr.** A long time member and volunteer at the Society, John was active in many history-related organizations. John was a veteran of the U. S. Army. In addition to the Manchester Historical Society, John volunteered with the Pitkin Glass Works, the Conn. Gravestone Network, the Friends of Center Cemetery and the Friends of the Office of State Archaeologist. His avid interest in photography was of immense help to all of these groups.

**Virginia Thornton** Virginia was an honorary Century Club Member of the Society, having attained the age of 100 last year. With her husband Clarence, she moved into her house in 1928 and remained there until her death in July.

**Edward R. Wait III** Ed was a long time Manchester resident and active volunteer at the Society. He enjoyed working at hands-on projects and was actively involved with the Hockanum River Linear Park Comm., and the Second Congregational Church. Ed was a veteran of the U. S. Army.

## 2010 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

*Unless noted, admission to lectures and walking tours is \$1 for members and \$3 for nonmembers. Most lectures and events take place at the History center at 175 Pine St. Admission to Old Manchester Museum and Cheney Homestead is by donation. Additional information is available online at [www.Manchesterhistory.org](http://www.Manchesterhistory.org).*

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### September through December 14

(Saturdays 10-4 and Sundays 1-4)

#### **Boy Scout Exhibit at Old Manchester Museum,** 126 Cedar Street

Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Boy Scouts of America and 99 years in Manchester, the exhibit showcases Boy Scout memorabilia. Coordinated with Troops 25, 27, 47, 123 and 364 as well as with former members of troops that no longer exist.

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### September 25 Saturday 1:00 p.m.

#### **Cheney Railroad History Walk**

Learn about the history of the South Manchester Railroad, the shortest private freight and passenger railroad in the U. S. Meet behind Farr's Sporting Goods at 2 Main Street. Park at nearby shopping plaza or at Eighth District office parking lot. This one mile hike will take about 1½ hours round trip. No dogs please.

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### October 2 Saturday through October 9 Saturday 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., History Center, 175 Pine St.

#### **Huge Week-long Book & Tag Sale**

Special preview on Friday, October 1 from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. (\$5 entry fee) Other days free entry. Over 6,000 square feet of books, toys and games, furniture, sports items, artwork, linens, household items. "If we don't have it you don't need it."

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### October 2 Saturday 1:00 p.m.

#### **Cheney Historic District History Walk (Free)**

Annual tour through the heart of the Cheney Brothers Historic Landmark District visits Cheney Hall, the silk mills, the South Manchester Railroad, the loom exhibit at the former Cheney Machine shop, the neighborhoods of the mill workers and the Old Manchester Museum. Up to two hours. Meet at 146 Hartford Road (former Cheney office building, now occupied by Fuss & O'Neill). No rain date.

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### October 10 Sunday 1:00–4:00 p.m.

#### **Cheney Homestead open**

Admission by donation. Members and children under 16 free.

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### October 24 Sunday 1:00 p.m.

#### **Annual Meeting of the Society**

History Center, 175 Pine Street (Free)

Members are invited to the annual meeting of the Society. Following the business meeting there will be a short program about local history.

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### November 14 Sunday 1:00–4:00 p.m.

#### **Cheney Homestead open**

Admission by donation. Members and children under 16 free.

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### November 14 Sunday 2:00 p.m.

#### **Hilliard Mill Tour and Lecture**, 642 Hilliard St.

The tour of this historic woolen mill will be both inside and outside. The owners will describe the work they have done and the history they have uncovered at the mill buildings..

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### December 3 Friday 6:30–9:00 p.m.

#### **Holiday Gala**, History Center, 175 Pine St.

Featuring hors d'oeuvres, desserts, wine with holiday music and live and teacup auctions. Wreaths, baskets, trees, art objects, jewelry, and gift and restaurant certificates will be auctioned.

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### December 4 Saturday 11:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m. (Free)

#### **Holiday Open House**, at all society properties

**Cheney Homestead 11:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.** Fireside Patriots will demonstrate life in the nineteenth century.

#### **Old Manchester Museum 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.**

The annual Bake Sale and seasonal exhibits will be presented.

#### **History Center 11:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.**

A harp concert by the students of the Music-Makers Academy will be presented at 1:00 p.m.



The Manchester Historical Society  
175 Pine Street  
Manchester, Connecticut 06040

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## Annual Holiday Gala

Come to the Annual Evening  
of Bidding, Shopping, and Fun

Join your friends at the History Center for a fun evening of socializing, shopping, and surprises. On Friday, December 3, from 6:30 to 9 p.m., the Historical Society hosts its seventh annual holiday gala, featuring a live auction, wine, hors d'oeuvres, coffee, and dessert. Gift baskets, decorated wreaths, and other boutique items will be for sale. Live-auction items include gift certificates from local businesses.

Tickets to this event must be pre-purchased, \$15 for members, \$20 non-members. Buy tickets at the History Center, 175 Pine St., from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, starting in November. Or you can mail a check with "Holiday Gala" in the memo line to 175 Pine St., Manchester, CT 06040. All donations help raise funds for the Historical Society's operation.

Unique items needed—we are seeking some special items for the live auction, and we're asking newsletter readers to donate an art object, antique, or other intriguing item that may be taking up space at your home. Call us at 860-647-9983 or bring the item to the History Center at the hours shown above.

We are also seeking corporate sponsors for the event and the printed program.

## Building Maintenance Wishes

As you can imagine, owning and operating four properties with old buildings on them requires equipment and labor (as well as money). We are looking for tools and supplies that can be used to help us with this maintenance and that you may no longer have a use for. For instance, the History Center building is on two levels and we now carry ladders and tools up and down the stairs as needed. Granted, it may be good exercise, but we would like to be able to concentrate on the work and less on moving equipment around. We also have a lot of grass and shrubbery to cut and keep neat. Painting and repairs are ongoing.

If you have ladders (in good condition, but not wood) and cordless or other small tools for indoor or outdoor use which you no longer need, we could put them to good use.

If you have some time (an hour or two on a weekly basis) that you can spare, we can definitely use your help to maintain our buildings, grounds and equipment. The help you provide allows us to stretch our funds.

Please contact the office at 860-647-9983 or Joe Lawler at 860-649-8845 or at [josephlawler@msn.com](mailto:josephlawler@msn.com).