

# The Courier

SEPTEMBER 2011

VOL. 46, NO. 4

A quarterly publication of the Manchester Historical Society, Inc. / 175 Pine Street / Manchester, Connecticut 06040 / (860) 647-9983

The Winds Blew, The Trees Flew:

## Society Weathers “Irene”

Our recent visitor from the tropics, “Irene,” wreaked havoc at Society properties, although thankfully it was relatively minor damage. At the Cheney Homestead, two trees belonging to the State of Connecticut came down onto our property along the right-of-way fence next to I-384. The fence was heavily damaged and will require replacement by the State.

At the Woodbridge Farmstead, a large black walnut tree situated on the border between our lot and the fire station came down and leaned against the fire station building. The roots were pulled out due to the very wet and soft ground, causing the new fence to sustain damage. There was no damage to the fire station. The town has removed the tree and will repair the fence.

A locust tree next to the entrance ramp of the History Center was uprooted, falling on the ramp, railing, and power lines. The tree was removed from the power line by CL&P crews (it did not cause a power outage). The lower part of the tree was cut up by volunteer Colin MacNamara and carted away by Dave Smith. The handrail was damaged and will require partial replacement.

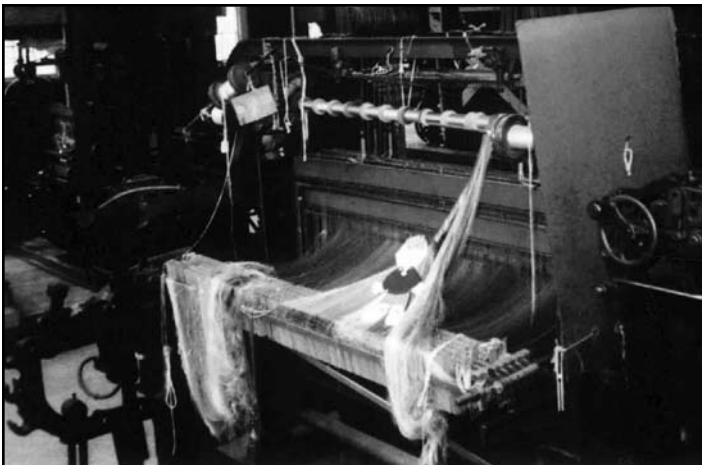
Windows in the collections room and office at the Old Manchester Museum were boarded up in anticipation of wind and water damage. Fortunately, the Museum did not sustain any damage.



*Winds from “Irene” uprooted a tree at the History Center.*

## Flat Stanley Comes to Town

Legendary Storybook Character Spotted Recently in Manchester



*Flat Stanley almost gets lost in a loom while visiting the History Center!*

If you have young children or grandchildren, you may have read the story of Flat Stanley. He was flattened in his schoolroom when the bulletin board fell on him, but being flat didn’t stop Stanley from being adventurous. Students made colored cutouts of Stanley and sent him to their friends and family and asked them to create more adventures for him.

The second-grade son of a friend of Manchester Historical Society’s Secretary, Marsha Gunther mailed her a cutout of Flat Stanley which arrived last spring. Marsha took Flat Stanley to many interesting sites in Manchester.

Flat Stanley went to the Old Manchester Museum where he sat under the sign and looked in the window.

See STANLEY, page 2

STANLEY, from page 1

He carefully looked around the Keeney Schoolhouse, fearing another bulletin board disaster. The sign at Pitkin Glass Works peaked his interest. There was no water in the Dancing Bears fountain at Center Park, but he posed for a picture. The loom exhibit at the History Center was huge—Flat Stanley almost got lost in the machinery. Finally a swing set at Charter Oak Park provided a fun moment.

Many pictures were taken during Flat Stanley's visit. He was sent back with a photo album of his Manchester adventures. Austin Matusik in Ortonville, Michigan was glad Flat Stanley survived; only losing one button on his flat shirt.

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## New Contact Info

We have recently changed our mailing address and email address. Please use these new addresses—it will speed up our communications and make it easier for us to reply to incoming mail.

[info@manchesterhistory.org](mailto:info@manchesterhistory.org)

175 Pine Street, Manchester, CT 06040

## The Courier

A newsletter of the  
Manchester Historical Society  
Online at [www.manchesterhistory.org](http://www.manchesterhistory.org)  
E-mail: [info@manchesterhistory.org](mailto:info@manchesterhistory.org)

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Design & Printing: Grames Printing, Inc.

# President's Report

by John Dormer

Each fall for the last several years, the Society has requested financial support from the membership through their participation in the Annual Fund Drive. The Fund Drive time-frame matches our fiscal year which is October 1st through September 30th. The Society uses the money from this drive to help cover operating expenses such as electric power, natural gas, telephone and internet service, water/sewer costs, and insurance. All of the officers, Board members and other dedicated members volunteer their time for Society activities. Our part-time Development Director, who handles much of the daily office operation in addition to Development Director duties, is the only person that receives a salary in the Society.

In the past, donations have been received from approximately 100 to 180 of our 600 members. The Society's new Five Year Strategic Plan includes the moving of the Old Manchester Museum from its present location at 126 Cedar Street to the History Center building at 175 Pine Street. As preparation for this move occurs, there will no longer be space in the building to hold one of our major fund raisers, the Book and Tag Sale. I am hopeful that the Annual Fund Drive can replace some of the loss of income caused by phasing out the Book and Tag Sale.

I would like to ask past contributors to continue (and, consider an increase) their dedicated financial support to the Society.

Additionally, I am asking that members who have not contributed in the past strongly consider donating to the Annual Fund Drive this year when they receive the Fund Drive letter. I am well aware that the present economic climate makes it difficult for many people to contribute to charitable, nonprofit organizations. Several donations over the course of the fiscal year may allow members to provide greater financial support than a "one time" donation. Donation of your time on a regular basis at Society events or at the Old Manchester Museum as a docent/greeter or other volunteer opportunities is a significant way of contributing to the growth and success of the Society. Also, encouraging associates, family, and friends to join and become active Society members is yet another way to support the Society.

Thank you in advance for your continued support of the Manchester Historical Society during fiscal year 2012.

**ANNUAL MEETING**  
**Sunday, October 23**  
**at 1:00 PM**  
**History Center**  
**175 Pine Street**

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## Preservation, Is It Worth It?

by Dave Smith

As time marches on, more and more Manchester residents think that the slogan "A City of Village Charm" less and less represents what our town is like. In recent years the pace of change has not relented and many of our older structures and historical assets have been lost, either through development or demolition in the name of progress. Unfortunately, many times these are the parts of Manchester that make our town interesting and give it a unique character, differentiating it from other towns in Connecticut. They represent our roots and connections to where we came from and why the town is like it is.

The businesses that have flourished and waned and eventually disappeared, and the landscapes that have been a part of the town and which influenced the development of farming, manufacturing, and recreation, are forgotten and not given their due respect.

As these anchors to our past disappear, it is like losing older members of the family. When our grandparents and parents leave us, their collective memories are gone forever, along with their histories and life experiences. This is also true of our built-up.

See PRESERVATION, page 3

## Civil War Events:

# The Spencer Repeating Rifle

Christopher Miner Spencer was an American inventor from Manchester, Connecticut, who invented the Spencer repeating rifle (one of the earliest models of lever-action rifle). The Spencer repeating rifle was a manually operated lever-action, repeating rifle fed from a tube magazine with cartridges.

\*Christopher was the son of Ogden Spencer, a wool dealer. In 1849, at the age of sixteen, he went to work in Cheney Brothers' mill. He had completed an apprenticeship as a machinist in the shop of Samuel Loomis and had also studied at Wilbraham Academy. Between 1849 and 1856 he worked in a number of shops in New England and New York. In 1856 he became Superintendent of Cheney Brothers machine shop. About this time his repeating rifle was invented. A patent was secured in March of 1860. Soon after the outbreak of the war, the Spencer Repeating Rifle Company was formed, and financed mostly by Cheney Brothers.

Although the Spencer rifle had been developed as early as 1859, it was not initially used by the Union. On August 18, 1863, Christopher Spencer walked into the White House carrying one of his rifles and a supply of cartridges. He walked past the sentries, and into Abraham Lincoln's office. After some discussion, he returned the following afternoon. Spencer and Lincoln were joined by Edwin Stanton, Secretary of War, and other officials,



Christopher Miner Spencer  
June 20, 1833–January 14, 1922

and the group proceeded to walk out to the Mall. Near the site of the Washington Monument, they engaged in target shooting.

Subsequent to that meeting, the U.S. ordered some 13,171

rifles and carbines, along with some 58 million rounds of ammunition. General Ulysses S. Grant declared Spencer rifles "the best breech-loading arms available." The Spencer repeating rifle was first adopted by the United States Navy, and subsequently adopted by the United States Army and used during the American Civil War where it was a popular weapon. Total wartime production approached 100,000 rifles.

\*Spencer's fame as a mechanical genius does not depend on only the repeating rifle. During the early years of his service with Cheney Brothers, he invented a silk spooling machine which later proved of great importance to the manufacture of cotton and linen thread. During the war he built a steam automobile in which he drove to and from his work. The automatic screw machine, Spencer's greatest invention, was manufactured in Hartford by Billings and Spencer and other firms. Spencer was actively interested in many developments in the field of machinery and mechanics until the very end of his life.

*[\*Information obtained from "History of Manchester, Connecticut" by Spiess - 1924]*

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### PRESERVATION, from page 2

environment. The man-made parts of our neighborhoods and town represent those who have been here before us. We have been left with the legacy of their lives and toils.

Believe it or not, one can still find evidence of the Native Americans who lived here. Unfortunately, these natural and stone artifacts are not protected from development. Likewise, there are still a few houses built before 1750 surviving in town. These are not protected either. In fact, very few of our historic assets have any kind of protection to ensure their survival for future generations.

Over the past ten years, more than 90 buildings over 50 years old have been demolished. 36 have either been razed or a demolition permit sought just since January 2008. These lost structures included houses, barns, a carriage house, and mill buildings. This process of demolition piece-by-piece is often not noticeable until it is too late.

Currently, there are some very significant assets that are threatened. The first to come to mind is the John Olds house on Tolland Turnpike. It was built in the late 1700s and has special significance because Olds was one of the prime movers in creating the town of Manchester. Center Memorial Park is under threat by the construction of an addition to the Mary Cheney Library, which will decrease the park area and at the same time obstruct views of the park from the street.

A new addition to the list of threatened places is part of the Cheney Railroad line. From behind the former Shaw's Supermarket north to the Hemlock Street area, there is a 40 ft. high embankment constructed in the 1860s to carry the South Manchester Railroad past Center Springs Park. Several hundred feet of the embankment (which would be most of it) is now being considered for removal to accommodate a new street between Broad Street and Edgerton Street. To some it may be just a pile of dirt, but to others it represents the entrepreneurial spirit of an earlier generation of Manchester citizens who connected the southern part of town to North Manchester and the main railroad line from Hartford to Providence and beyond in order to get locally made products to the world.

Museums and historical organizations preserve great works of art because they are attractive. They preserve photographs and documents because they show or tell how our ancestors lived and what they thought. Should we not also preserve these other things that man has built and for the same reasons? As we better understand the past, we get a clearer picture of where we are now and why things are as they are.

If you have thoughts on whether preservation is important, please let us know. Contact us at [info@manchesterhistory.org](mailto:info@manchesterhistory.org) or phone us at 860-647-9742.

## Newest Century Club Member

By virtue of having attained the age of 100 years, and being a long-time resident of Manchester, **Carl Matson** was recently elected Century Club Honorary Member by The Manchester Historical Society. Congratulations Carl!

## Welcome, New Members!

*We would like to welcome the following new members to the Society:*

### FROM MANCHESTER

David Beal  
Michael Darby  
Corinne & John DeLucco  
Frances Gagnon  
Marilyn Lassow  
Amelia Mariotti  
Carole Quish  
Joyce Wilkenson  
Joseph Young

*The following members recently upgraded their membership to Life Member:*

Beverly Fuss  
Phyllis Plocharczyk  
David E. Plocharczyk

## Manchester School History on the Web

The Society is pleased to announce an enhancement to our web site: the stories of our town's school names, as well as the history of school buildings no longer serving as schools and school buildings that no longer exist. To access these features, go to [www.manchesterhistory.org](http://www.manchesterhistory.org) and click on Kids' Corner in the upper left menu. You will also find a children's history of the town from the 1950s, a downloadable coloring book featuring historic sites around Manchester, and a map of the Cheney Brothers historic district.

## We Will Miss...

**CHRISTINE WALLEN** Chris was an active Society member, often acting as docent for the third grade school tours at the Keeney Schoolhouse. She was a retired elementary school teacher and loved animals as well as local history.

## 80 Years Ago...

### LORD MAYOR OF MANCHESTER, ENGLAND VISITS MANCHESTER, CT

On October 13, 1931 the Lord Mayor of Manchester, England, George Frank Titt and his wife and other officials visited Manchester, Conn. Their visit included events involving over 1,600 school children at Education Square, an afternoon tea at the Manchester Country Club for the women and a large banquet at the Masonic Temple. During the ceremonies, the Lord Mayor presented to the Town of Manchester an ornate wooden plaque carved with the coat of arms of Manchester, England, made from a 400 year old oak tree. The plaque was accepted as a remembrance of his trip and a permanent memorial to the friendship between the two cities.

During his remarks, the Lord Mayor said "*Your town, as I have seen it, is one large and beautiful park. The town should not sacrifice beauty in future population growth,*" he warned. (Remarks that are still timely, 80 years later!)

## "Butterfly Garden" Quilt Auction

### One-of-a-Kind Manchester Themed Item Can Be Yours!

A beautiful hand made quilt crafted by the Manchester Senior Center Quilters in recognition of the 2010 PRIDE IN MANCHESTER WEEK is being auctioned by the Society. It includes the colors of Manchester, interpreting the tree logo and also butterflies from the Butterfly Garden at Northwest Park.

The quilt was designed by Ginny Dodd and was made by: Gemma Biske, Camilla Bosse, Mabel Cole, Marcella Coniam, Ginny Dodd, Nancy Ferrera, Mary Griffin, Lillian Krukus, Gina Morrison, Mae Roser, and Dixie Williams.

You may bid on the quilt by visiting the History Center at 175 Pine Street where the quilt is on display. The auction will close on Friday evening, Dec. 2, 2011 at the Society's annual Holiday Gala, when the winner will be announced.

## Recent Grants Received by the Society

**CHENEY HOMESTEAD** The Society gratefully acknowledges the significant, ongoing financial support of the Cheney Family Fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Two recent Hartford Foundation grant awards in 2010 and 2011 increase the funds available for exterior painting and wood repair at the Cheney Homestead. These contributions reflect the grantors' recognition of the vital role the authentically-preserved home of the silk mill founders plays in the story of Manchester's industrial past.

**WOODBIDGE BARN** The Society received an important grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, Barn Program, in the amount of \$5,000 to be used for the emergency stabilization of the older of the two Woodbridge barns. The barn was built in the late 1700s and has suffered deterioration over the past 100 years to the point where it requires that action be taken now to prevent it from collapsing under a heavy snow load, such as was experienced this past winter. The work is scheduled to be done this fall.

**HISTORY CENTER** The Manchester Road Race Committee has granted the Society a donation of \$15,000 over the next three years to be used for the abatement of asbestos in the future second floor exhibit area of the History Center. The work will be carried out this fall as part of the preparation of this area for the main exhibit.

## Old House Plaques Available

The Historical Society House Marker Plaque program can provide you with a house marker plaque to identify your 50+ year old house. The markers measure approximately 16"x7"x1" and show the following: original owner (if known) and date built (c. if exact date is not known). The owner is responsible to research the property and provide the most accurate dates possible and the Society will verify the accuracy. The fee for a plaque is \$60 for members and \$75 for non-members. Contact the Society for more information.

## 2011 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

All lectures are at the History Center at 175 Pine St. at 1:00 p.m. unless otherwise noted. Parking is available along the Forest Street side of the building and in the small lot on Pine Street. Handicap parking is also in the small lot. Admission \$3 for nonmembers, \$1 for Society members and free for children under age 16. For the latest information on events please check online at [www.manchesterhistory.org](http://www.manchesterhistory.org).

**Saturdays 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.; Sundays 1:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m.**

### **OLD MANCHESTER MUSEUM OPEN TO VISITORS**

The museum is located in the former Cheney School built in 1859 at 126 Cedar Street. Exhibits include Christopher Spencer and his repeating rifle, the history of each of the town elementary schools, the Bon Ami Soap Co., Pitkin Glass, John Knoll "Storekeeper and Photographer," and the Manchester Sports Hall of Fame. Admission by donation.

**September 11, Sunday, 1:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m., 106 Htfd. Rd.**

### **CHENEY HOMESTEAD OPEN TO VISITORS**

#### **Second Sunday of Each Month Year-Round**

View this 1785 house and hear commentary about this interesting residence where the Cheney brothers grew up. Admission and guided tour by donation.

**September 17, Saturday, 1:00 p.m. Downtown Manchester**  
**HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR**

Stroll through our historic downtown, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. View the vintage buildings with their parapets, cornices, and unusual brickwork. The walk will take up to 1-1/2 hours, depending on the weather, and starts in front of the "old High School," now the Bennet Apartments at 1146 Main Street. Please do not park in the apartment parking lot; parking is available at the Bennet Academy parking lot off School Street. Cost: \$1 for members; \$3 for non-members; free to children under 16. Extreme weather cancels.

**September 18, Sunday, 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**

### **"CRUISIN' ON MAIN," DOWNTOWN MANCHESTER**

A large cruise and show of antique and classic cars, trucks, sports cars and street rods. 100 years of automotive history, engineering, and artistry displayed along the one-mile stretch of Main Street between Center Street and Hartford Road. Carnival atmosphere with food and music. Check out our booth and buy a Royal Ice Cream treat—we'll be located in front of Anne Miller real estate office in the historic Cheney Building.

**September 24, Saturday, 1:00 p.m.**

### **CHENEY DISTRICT HISTORY WALK**

Annual stroll through the center of the Cheney Bros. Landmark Historic District. This popular walking tour visits Cheney Hall, the silk mills, the South Manchester Railroad, the Loom exhibit at the former Cheney machine shop, neighborhoods of worker housing, and the Old Manchester Museum. The walk takes up to two hours and covers about a mile and a quarter. Chris Paulin, Director of Manchester Community College's Institute of Local History, will speak on Cheney silk mill history, labor relations, and the social network of Manchester in its early days. Meet at 146 Hartford Road, the former Cheney Office Building. No rain date, so we will bring umbrellas if weather is iffy. Extreme weather cancels. Co-sponsored by the Manchester Historical Society, MCC's Institute of Local History, and the Cheney Brothers Landmark Historic District Commission. Donations accepted.

**September 25, Sunday, 1:00 p.m., History Center**

### **FIFTY YEARS ON THE GREAT LAWN**

#### **Lecture by Tom and Vivian Ferguson**

Through stories and pictures, Tom and Vivian will describe life in a mansion on the Great Lawn beginning in 1958, when the Fergusons moved in and when members of the Cheney family still lived in neighboring mansions. Today, this mansion is in the Cheney Brothers National Historic Landmark District as well as in the mansion zoning district. The Ferguson family owned the Manchester Evening Herald, a former daily newspaper in town. \$3 for non-members, \$1 for Society members, and free for children under age 16.

**Saturday, October 8 thru Sunday, October 16,**

**EVERY DAY, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., History Center**

### **GIGANTIC WEEK-LONG TAG SALE—Free Admission**

Shop our 10,000-sq.ft. sale for thousands of books, holiday decor, children's toys and games, furniture, antiques household goods, china, sports items, gardening equipment, framed artwork, linens, wedding gowns, collectible coin sets, and items both useful and decorative. Questions may be directed to our tag sale manager, Terry Parla at 860-643-1823. Terry says, "If we don't have it, you don't need it." Parking available along Pleasant St. and along the Forest St. side of the building (no on-street parking on Pine and Forest Streets).

**October 23, Sunday, 1:00 p.m., History Center**

### **SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING**

Members are called to the annual meeting, including an overview of the past year, business matters, and election of officers and board members. Following the meeting, there will be a short illustrated lecture about local history. There is no admission fee.

**November 13, Sunday, 1:00 p.m., History Center**

### **CLARA BARTON & MARY WALKER IN THE CIVIL WAR**

#### **Lecture by former State Senator Mary Ann Handley**

Former Manchester Community College professor Mary Ann Handley will describe efforts of Clara Barton and Mary Walker in the abolitionist movement, as well as their political activity in the century before women's suffrage. \$3 for non-members, \$1 for Society members, and free for children under age 16.

**December 2, Friday, 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m., History Center**

### **HOLIDAY GIFT GALA**

COME ONE, COME ALL! Our eighth annual holiday gala, a popular event for members and non-members alike. The History Center will glow in its festive decor, and guests can bid on auction items that include services, art work, antiques, and restaurant gift certificates.

**December 3, Saturday**

### **ANNUAL HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE**

The Cheney Homestead, Manchester History Center, and Old Manchester Museum will be open. Details to be announced.



The Manchester Historical Society  
175 Pine Street  
Manchester, Connecticut 06040

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## GIGANTIC TAG SALE Oct. 8-16

The Society's fall tag  
sale will be held

Saturday, October 8 through Sunday,  
October 16 at the History Center,  
175 Pine Street. Hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
every day and admission is FREE.

Shop our huge sale area for thousands  
of items including antiques, collectibles,  
household goods, sports equipment, toys  
and games, furniture, holiday décor,  
and thousands of BOOKS!

Come help us by buying items at the sale.  
Proceeds help the Historical Society to grow.

## Two New T-Shirts Available For Sale at the Museum Store

We have recently added two new styles of T-shirts to our offerings at the Museum Store. The first has an image of the famous Center Memorial Park Dancing Bear fountain. It comes in either a tan or gray shirt with the image in color.

The second T-shirt has an image of the old mill and mulberry leaf in gold on a dark green shirt.

Both shirts come in adult and youth sizes, cost just \$15 and all sales benefit the Historical Society.



*Images on the two new t-shirts at the Musuem Store*