

The Anne Cheney House: A Lost Mansion

Also known as the **Rush Cheney** house. Notes by Susan Barlow, Manchester Historical Society, 2016 www.manchesterhistory.org

A large and elegant mansion once stood at 80 Hartford Road, between the Frank Cheney mansion and the Cheney Homestead. The property belonged to Rush Cheney (1815-1882), a founder with his brothers and a brother-in-law of the Cheney silk mills. Rush and Frank, the youngest of the silk-mill founders, worked closely together throughout their lives, and their houses were next door to each other. Rush was President of Cheney Brothers, 1876 to 1882. Rush married Julia Ann Goodwin in 1847. They had four children: Anne Wells Cheney (1849-1944); Harry Grant Cheney (1852-1918); Louise Cheney (1856-1939); Robert Cheney (1859- 1935).



1903, back of house



1908, front of house



1938, after the hurricane, front of house, seen from Hartford Road.
Photo by: Anton Latawic



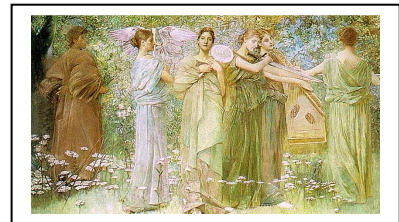
1878 drawing of the Rush Cheney "farmhouse," moved to Wells St. in 1883 & remodeled as the So. Manchester Library.

The original house on the property was built c. 1847, see box above. In 1883 McKim, Mead and White designed a new house, but that grand house was remodeled and expanded to three times its original size in 1900. Rush Cheney had met the architect Stanford White, of McKim, Mead and White, about 1877 when Rush and his brother Frank were having the Cheney Block built in Hartford – the building, known as the Richardson Block, is still in use. In her book "Silk and Guns, the Life of a Connecticut Yankee, Frank Cheney 1817-1904," Alice Farley Williams (1910-2007), great grand-daughter of Frank Cheney, says, "The Rush Cheneys and the Stanford Whites became great friends...it was Stanford White who transformed...the house in South Manchester into a beautiful mansion with marble floors, European furniture, and objets d'art. In the dining room was a bronze fountain with a Saint Gaudens *Diana* made by Tiffany. The Whites and the Rush Cheneys were such good friends that in 1944, when Annie, the last of Rush's children died, Mrs. White, a very old lady, came from New York to the funeral. ...the house was left to Cheney Brothers. For a time it served as a nursing home, but was torn down [Ed. note: in 1951]."

In "Great Oaks, Memoirs of the Cheney Family," Antoinette Cheney Crocker devotes a chapter to the Rush Cheney family, whom she calls "The Royals," because they referred to themselves as "we," in the royal manner, and some of the rest of the family viewed them as "pretentious." They "collected antiques, paintings, furniture, and lace brocades. They visited Mrs. Jack Gardner [Ed. Note: Isabella Stewart Gardner, whose house is now a museum] in Boston...in the central hall was a polished desk, terra-cotta and tile floor, a

Roman sarcophagus, an alabaster bowl that reflected the light from above the marble stairway, and carved Italian chairs. The Vandyke on the stairway, the big living room with the long refectory table, the Italian quattrocento fireplace, the large irons and cast iron firebacks, damasks, endless objets d'art on the table were all of mysterious origin." She describes the house as "large, stuccoed with masses of white varicolored pebbles pressed into the stucco." Antoinette notes that "the art treasures were left to Mrs. Stanford White."

Thomas Dewing's painting *The Days* → hung on the dining room wall – a gift in Anne's will to the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford.

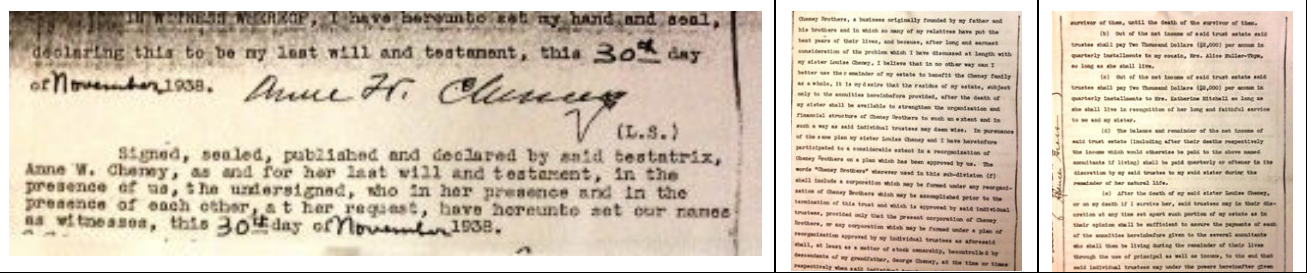


Olmsted Associates, the firm begun by Frederick Law Olmsted, designed the landscaping of the house. Nothing remains of the house itself, but there are some remnants of landscaping and tunnels.

Rush "was a man of refined and sensitive character," says biographer Dorothy Cheney in "The Descent of the Founders of the Cheney Silk Industry," a 1960 privately published booklet available on the Historical Society website at <http://www.manchesterhistory.org/reprints/DorothyCheneyDescentFounders.pdf>. Rush "possessed inventive talent and capability in the application of mechanical principles to manufacturing; and thus contributed a very important element to the building up of the Silk manufacture," quoted in an 1897 Cheney genealogy compiled by Charles Henry Pope.

Anne W. Cheney was the last Cheney to live in the house. In June 1946, Manchester Memorial Hospital opened a "Hospital Annex" in the former mansion. "The home was renovated and leased for two years to take care of persons who need hospitalization but require a minimum of medical care. It has a capacity of 45 beds," –*Hartford Courant*, 3/23/1946. I have spoken with women who, as high school students, worked or volunteered there. They remembered the house as elegant and beautiful. Larry Cassells's *Courant* paper route included "delivering the paper to patients in the nursing home...I recall the grand staircase and other elegant features." Tom Ferguson remembers that in the late 1950s, the garages behind the former house had red crosses painted on them – in the style of the American Red Cross.

Anne Cheney's will and gifts to the community.



In her 1938 will, Anne Cheney made bequests to all her employees and provided for her sister Louise, if she survived her. Most of the estate was to be used to shore up Cheney Brothers as the will's trustees saw fit. There were also gifts of artwork to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Wadsworth Atheneum. The will is a public document available at the Manchester Probate Court.



Portrait of Anne Cheney – see description at right, from the signage at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.

Thomas Wilmer Dewing
American, 1851–1938
Frame designed by Stanford White
American, 1853–1906 and probably crafted by
Newcomb-Macklin Company
Anne Wells Cheney (1849–1944), 1889
Oil on canvas
Gift of Mr. Horace B. Learned, 1981.34

After acquiring Dewing's *The Days*, displayed nearby, sisters Anne and Louise Cheney commissioned the artist to paint their portraits. This portrait of Anne was given to the museum in 1981; while the other remains in a private collection. The Cheney family's production of popular silk fabrics afforded the women a lifestyle with connections to artists, celebrities, and socialites. Dewing's friend, the noted architect Stanford White, remodeled their home and arranged magnificent art and furnishings into a harmonious setting.



Anne Wells Cheney and her sister Louise Cheney, c. 1880s



Settee, c. 1886, wood, gilding, and silk, designed by Stanford White (1853-1906). A gift to the Wadsworth Atheneum from the estate of Anne Wells Cheney through Clifford D. Cheney, 1944.