

The Manchester Historical Society, notes by Susan Barlow, May 2015

“Traveler from a Small Kingdom”

Autobiographical young-adult novel By Emily Cheney Neville (1919-1997)

For our Great Lawn walking tours – this book describes life in Manchester in the late 1920s

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Emily Cheney was born in Manchester, CT on December 28, 1919, ninth and youngest child of Howell Cheney and Anne Kimberly Bunce Cheney. Emily grew up on “The Place,” as the Cheneys called it, with freedom to come and go among the mansions where the Cheney relatives lived. She graduated with an A.B. from Bryn Mawr College in 1940, then worked for *The New York Daily News* and *The New York Daily Mirror* newspapers. She had five children with her husband, Glenn Neville, and lived in New York City, and, after Glenn’s death, lived in Keene Valley, NY, which is described in her book as a large and rustic Cheney summer home.

“Howell Cheney” mansion on the Great Lawn, where Emily and her siblings grew up.

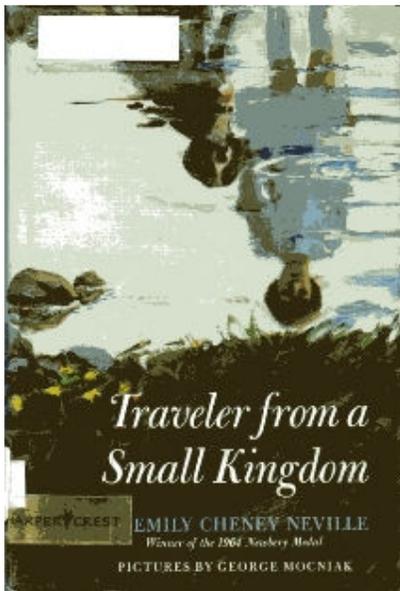


Besides *Traveler from a Small Kingdom* (1968), she wrote *It's Like This, Cat* (1963), which won the Newbery Medal in 1964, *Berries Goodman* (1965), *The Seventeenth-Street Gang* (1966), *Fogarty* (1969), *The China Year* (1991).

Excerpts from *Traveler from a Small Kingdom*

Page 2-3: “Mary [Emily’s sister] walked along, dragging first one toe and then the other to make patterns in the gravel driveway. Emily skipped across the road in zigzags.... The road looped through the Place, connecting one big Cheney house and another, lying beneath big trees and cutting like a reddish ribbon through the green lawns. The Place resembled a small golf course. A dozen different families of cousins, all Cheneys, had their homes in it, a small green kingdom in the middle of South Manchester, Connecticut. The year was 1927 and Emily was seven years old. She and Mary attended the family school, a little brown-shingled, two-room building at one corner of the Place. Almost all the pupils were Cheneys, aged about six to twelve. They walked past the familiar cousins’ houses: Aunt Maisie’s, with two fierce chow dogs; Uncle Charles’, with a big fountain in which they were not supposed to swim; then Uncle Austie’s, and the Aunts’ garden. These were their landmarks, as the post office and grocery store are for most schoolchildren.”

Page 146-147: “Two unusual events happened that year. One was the great Cheney Thanksgiving party held in Cheney Hall. The Hall was the big building that had once been used as an auditorium and now housed the silk salesroom. The bolts of silk and racks of neckties were removed, and the great trestle tables arranged for serving Thanksgiving dinner to more than a hundred Cheneys. In other years, each Cheney family had had Thanksgiving at home, or at most had doubled up with one other family of cousins. Now all the aunts and uncles and the more distant cousins stood about the Hall, talking before dinner. The older children, now married and with little children of their own, had returned. Emily and Teddy led the others in racing around and even under the long tables.”



Far left: Cover of Emily’s book, available online at used book sites, and in Manchester’s public library.

Center: May 26, 1973 news article about a book signing in Manchester.

Above: Emily (right), and Mary, one of her older sisters; photo on inside back cover of book.