



Manchester: Past Places, People



THE 80'S AND 90'S

Note: The Manchester Historical Society has been the appreciative recipient of a number of copies of old newspapers, which do a little to fill in the void in news of the past caused by the loss of the files of the Manchester Herald in two fires since the first Saturday Herald was printed on Dec. 17, 1881. Copies of the Herald as a weekly and as a semi-weekly and of the Connecticut Courant (which became the Hartford Courant) for March 16, 1888 provide interesting aspects of the late nineteenth century world.

The Blizzard of '88

The historic blizzard of 1888 buried the country on March 12. Beginning on Sunday night, March 11, it continued through Monday and Tuesday. There were no trains, no mails, "no horse cars." Schools, factories, and business were suspended. The Connecticut Courant for the following Friday reports many cases of children and women getting into drifts up to their shoulders and being rescued; milk delivery wagons stalled and abandoned on North Main St. to delight of neighborhood boys who "enjoyed ice cream with their suppers"; and the account of a hearse which tipped over, but the coffin was placed in an express wagon and "the interment was held in spite of unusual difficulties."

The Courant carried columns from neighboring communities reporting the effects of the storm. Manchester is among them.

"Manchester emerges from the storm in good spirits. Trains are running to and from Hartford and the streets are alive with people. There is plenty of food in the stores, the supply of fuel is fairly good, and the weather is mild. The outcome is much more satisfactory than most people feared it would be."

"The blizzard of Monday caught many people away from home. The Manchester station was crowded all day with weary passengers waiting for the train that did not come. The noon express reached Vernon on time, but there it remained. The local freight, which had been switching in the yard all the morning, finally came to a standstill on the south track of the main line. The train crew swelled the crowd in the depot and passed the night there with a dozen others."

"The South Manchester railroad tied up Monday noon and two hours later the last belated team had disappeared from the streets. The Cowles hotel was crowded. The Mather Electric company's employees were only partly successful in reaching their boarding places. Seven girls and thirty-five men passed the night in the factory; they made beds in the hay used in packing electric lamps."

"The silk mills closed early and most of the employees found shelter at home or among their friends who lived near the mills. About twenty girls spent the night at the mills and were provided with food from the families of the Messrs. Cheney. The schools closed as soon as the storm became severe and the children were safely disposed of. At Oakland the teacher and twelve pupils passed the night at the schoolhouse."

"Business was suspended Tuesday save at the meat markets and grocery stores, which were thronged with customers. Every house holder made his way to the nearest store and laid in supplies for a long siege."

"Wednesday morning the situation was unchanged. The novelty of the storm had worn off and everybody was longing for pleasant weather. By noon their wishes were granted and the work of digging began."

"The South Manchester railroad put a force of 125 men at work shoveling and by night had cleared the line. The smoke of approaching engines on the New England road was eagerly watched from the depot, and when Conductor Bacon's train, headed by two 'mogul' freight engines, appeared through the drifts west of the depot, it was hailed with cheers. He kept on toward Vernon and reached that station at 11:30 p.m. and tied up for the night."

"Work on the streets began Tuesday afternoon and all day Wednesday heavy sleds were dragged over the principal thoroughfares. Many of the side streets are still impassable."

"Trains have been running from Hartford to Vernon and back at intervals during the day. The Courant reached here Thursday morning for the first time since Monday and the newsboys sold out in a hurry. No mail has been received since Monday morning."

The Saturday Herald

The Manchester Saturday Herald for August 28, 1886, is typical of the paper while it was a weekly. Elwood Ela, who had started the paper with Thomas Pratt, publisher of the Rockville Journal, five years earlier had bought out Pratt. Not until the following year did he persuade Thomas Ferguson, a young Irish millhand who had been doing part-time reporting from Talcottville, to join the staff and inaugurate a family dynasty of journalistic service.



The Manchester Saturday Herald, in its fifth year, followed the custom of devoting a large proportion of the front page to advertising.



"Fur-lined cloaks are shown in greater variety than ever," says a story on fashion in the Manchester Half/Weekly for Jan. 22, 1896.

Like most newspapers of the period, Mr. Ela's 1886 Herald gave half its front page to advertising.

That the tabu against medical advertising did not then exist is evident from some of the business cards in the first column. C. N. Griswold, North Manchester dentist, advertises in the top card: "I have recently purchased a Seabury Vulcanizer whereby rubber plates can be made more durable and with half the ordinary thickness." Dr. D. L. Ross, M. D., states: "Diseases of the Stomach and Chest a Specialty."

No doubt Joseph Pohlman used locally grown tobacco for the "Fine Cigars," which he advertised as being "manufactured on the premises by Union hands."

The "service station" of the day took care of the independent means of transportation, and Charles Martensen and Co.'s ad is for: "Blacksmithing! Wagon Repairing and Horseshoeing." A companion ad, in large, two-column size, for Hale, Day and Co. is for "Carriages! Side Spring, Side Bar, and End Spring Buggies and Village Cart with Top."

The still familiar name of Watkins Bros. appears with an ad for "Furniture, Carpets, and Wall Paper." Very much a sign of those times is Watkins' offer of a seven-piece parlor set for \$45.00 and a complete chamber set for \$27.00.

The Editorial Notes on the front page announce that "the tobacco crop in the Connecticut Valley is of unusual excellence"; twits an editorially expressed hope in the Hartford paper that there will be no further loss of factories to outlying communities with the fact that the Mather Electric Company is moving to Manchester; and notes that, at the annual town meeting in six weeks, "the completion of the election will depend upon the action of the Prohibitionists, who are expected to support a full town ticket from their party."

Among the "Affairs About Town" on the first page are: "Mr. Popples, near the Green, is building a spacious barn," "The scheme for starting a watering cart in Northern Manchester, mentioned in the HERALD several weeks since has met with approval in many cases," and, not to ridicule but to include the humor of a proof-reading slip, "James Harrison is recruiting at Niantic. He has a lung trouble and hopes to recover full health."

The baseball news was on the front page. The Actives of North Manchester defeated the Glastonburys. The Stars had a game scheduled at Rockville, and the Monitors, one at Thompsonville.

Neighbors' News

Some Glastonbury news is located on the front page and more is given on page 2, where are items collected, in addition, from East Hartford, Wapping, East Windsor, and Talcottville.

Page 3 has three columns of local news, three columns of ads, and two columns of features not of local authorship, such as "A Georgia Ozier Willow Farm" and a long anecdote about "John Q. Adams and His Coachman."

Local items, again titled "Affairs About Town," on page 3 include: "The excitement over croquet is so great that on some lawns kerosene lamps are used to help out an interesting game"; "Work in some departments of the Union mills has been suspended several days during the week because of the scarcity of water"; and "Mrs. Bidwell's private school on Chestnut Street will begin its second term on Monday... This school offers special advantages to children too small or otherwise unqualified to enter the public school. We can heartily recommend it."

The fourth and last page is divided between advertising and four columns of syndicated features.

The Half/Weekly

By 1896, the paper had become the Manchester Half/Weekly. It sold for two cents, compared to five cents for the earlier weekly. It had survived a fire in its Rose Building location in North Manchester without losing an issue, because one-time co-owner Pratt had made his Rockville press available. Activities were carried on in Apel's Opera House and Furniture Store until the Rose Building was repaired.

There is no great change in make-up from the Saturday Herald, but the paper no longer carries columns of news from nearby communities and fills in with more of the syndicated feature stories, including one in which the famous actress Sarah Bernhardt ascribes her good health to bicycling, a sport for which she says she wore "bloomers as the costume that is most fitting."

The leading front page story on Jan. 22, 1896 was the death of Addison L. Clark, who lived at the Green and who owned a stockinet factory at the Green and other knitting mills in Glastonbury. He left "a fortune estimated at from 200 to 250 thousand dollars."

Among the front page news briefs are: The ice house is being filled; a masquerade ball is planned at Apel's Opera House, where there is later to be "a combination expose" of spirit phenomena and variety show"; and the Cheney dye house is running twelve hours a day.

The front page is still half given over to advertising. Watkins Bros. had oak chamber suits reduced from \$33 to \$24.50 and parlor rugs from \$65 to \$45. C. E. House advertised men's fleecy-lined underwear for 75 cents. Cheney's store was selling out its dry goods, with "black Henriettas" reduced from \$1 a yard to 75 cents.

The inside pages are largely devoted to syndicated features

and ads. A fashion story shows the latest thing in short fur-lined capes, "fitted close to the shoulder, giving a sloping effect." There are a number of "jokes," of which the following is representative:

"What makes you chew gum all the time?" inquired the office boy.

"Haven't got anybody to talk to," answered the girl at the typewriting machine.

Quaint as the modern reader finds some of the wording and the situations before the beginning of the twentieth century, the Herald as a weekly and a half-weekly supported the community interests as its daily suc-

cessors have done in the twentieth century, as well as providing a living history.

Note: The Public Information Committee of the Manchester Historical Society will be grateful for any details illustrating the past or suggestions for future columns: Mrs. Frank Atwood, 110 Westland St.; Edson M. Bailey, 99 Tanner St.; William Coe, 463 E. Center St.; Miss Helen Estes, 36 Porter St.; Mrs. Horace Learned, 30 Forest St.; Mrs. Harry Maiment, 99 Robert Rd.; Miss Anna McGuire, 23J St. James St.; and Herbert Swanson, 233 S. Main St.