

Cheney Homestead Children's Tour Script

By David Beal – Chairman, Cheney Homestead Committee (portions of text by Clair Leighton, Mark Sutcliffe, et al.)

Abridged for third grade tours by the planning committee.

Outside Porch by Keeping Room Door (Time: 30 seconds)

Script:

"Welcome to the Cheney Homestead. My name is _____ and I'll be your guide as we tour the Homestead. This house was built over 200 years ago. Everything in the house is very old and fragile so please don't touch anything as you go through the rooms. Please leave your backpacks and other belongings on the bench."

KEEPING ROOM (Time 7 minutes)

Script:

"This house was built in 1785 by Timothy Cheney. Timothy was a farmer, a clockmaker and a soldier in the Revolutionary War. Timothy's grandchildren, the famous Cheney brothers, who built all the Cheney Mills factory buildings, grew up in this house. For almost 200 years, members of the Cheney family lived here.

"The first young family to live at the Homestead were Timothy's son, George Cheney, his Wife, Electa Woodbridge Cheney and their nine children. There were eight boys - George, John, Charles, Ralph, Seth, Ward, Rush and Frank. Lastly a little sister was born, Electa – who was named after her mother. Since she was the only girl, all of her brothers adored her and when they had money, bought and made her fancy gifts. She was called "the pet" of the family because she was loved so much by everyone."

"This room is the Keeping Room— it was like a family room or living room but they also originally cooked their meals in here before they had a separate kitchen. This was the room where they spent time with close family and friends who would come to visit.."

Talking Points

- Family Pictures

"Above the display cabinet is a picture of Electa Cheney, the mother of the Cheneys. Six of her boys became inventors and businessmen. On either side of Electa's picture are her two other boys, John and Seth, who both became famous, successful artists. They became very rich and traveled the world while selling and studying art. They both created a lot of the paintings and drawings you'll see in the Homestead as we walk around."

Optional question: *"Why do you think artists were very, very important back in the early 1800's, more important than most artists are now?"*

(Elicit answer that there was no photography, no phones with cameras, so if you wanted a picture of someone you had to draw it or have someone draw it.)

- Pass around the Seth Cheney sketch at this point.

- Display case

(Have the kids stand in rows in front of (but not touching) the glass case.)

"In the case are items found buried outside under the ground or found inside the walls of the house. The shoes that you see were found in the upstairs walls near the roof and were probably put there because people believed that shoes in the wall would protect the house from lightning."

Optional question: *“Why do you think they were especially afraid of lightning back then?”*

(Try to elicit answers about no fire department or fire extinguishers, no 911, only a brook in back of the house for water.)

- **Clock in the Wall**

(Show them where the clock in the wall used to be, now just a painted clock structure.)

“On the wall, there is something that looks like a clock – in fact there once was a clock built into this wall. When Timothy Cheney built the house, he probably put the clock into the wall to save space. When his grandson Seth decided to make his mother’s bedroom larger, he had to make room for a little door behind this wall. So, Seth took out the insides of the clock, but left the shape of it in the wall and boarded it up from behind. Then Seth put one of his paintings where the hands of the clock once were.”

DORMITORY (Time: 7 minutes)

Script:

“In the beginning this house was very small. When their family started getting bigger, George and Electa Cheney had to add a room for their many children to sleep in. The family called the new room “The Dormitory” and that’s where we are now. This room is setup like a dining room right now, but this was actually originally the bedroom for all 8 of George and Electa’s boys. Their daughter, Electa, had her own bedroom upstairs.”

Talking Points

- **Grandfather clock:**

“Can a person with good eyes read the name on the grandfather clock? (Reads: “Timothy Cheney, 1775”) He was the grandfather of the boys that grew up here in this house. Timothy was very good at building things. You may remember that he built this house, but he also built clocks like this one and became VERY famous in the United States for his well-made clocks. All of the gears inside are made of wood. It still runs perfectly, but it isn’t running right now.”

Optional question #1: *“Why do you think the clock says “East Hartford” on it, if it was made here in Manchester?”*

(Answer: Manchester was a part of East Hartford when this clock was built.)

Optional question #2: *“How did you think the clock works, since there was no electricity back then?”*

(Answer: They used weights to pull ropes that power the gears inside the clock. Or, like the small clock over the mantel, they wound it up with a key.)

- **Photo of John Cheney as an Old Man (Sitting on Pianoforte)**

(Hold up the picture of white-haired John Cheney for the children to see)

“John lived in the Homestead, taking care of Electa until she was very old. Then he lived in the house until he was a very old man himself. He tried to keep the house just like it was when he was growing up. He loved to read, and it is said that he would sometimes spend hours in a corner, reading and studying. Like his mother, John also loved to knit. He often knitted mittens for his nieces and nephews.”

- **High Chair**

“This was originally a high chair, but the Cheney children had another use for it. They would tie a rope to it and use it as a sled in the winter. It was used so much as a sled that the back of the chair is flat and smooth now and the chair has an unusual shape to it.”

- **Posters for “Poor Pillicoddy:**

“Long ago, back before television, Internet, or even radio, people liked being entertained just like we do. To have some fun and entertain each other, the Cheneys liked to dress up and put on plays for their families. They would put a curtain between the Keeping Room and the Dormitory right here (Point to the ceiling post where the two rooms meet) Then, they would have guests sit out in the Keeping room (point toward Keeping Room) to be their audience while they used this room, the Dormitory, as their stage. These posters are their advertisements for the plays the Cheneys put on for visitors. (Point to “Poor Pillicoddy” poster.)

- **Pass around toys (cup and ball, kaleidoscope, yo-yo and marbles) used by children during the 1800’s.**

“Children during the 1800’s had very few toys. There was not much time for playing since they had so many chores to do. These are a few examples of what they may have had to play with if they had the time, such as on a rainy day.”

- **Absent minded professor painting**

“This funny picture of the absent minded professor probably made lots of children laugh when they saw what he is doing. He’s boiling his watch and checking the egg to see what time it is.”

BUTTERY (Time: 3 minutes)

Due to the large group, do not go into the Buttery. Bring a couple items out for “show and tell”.

Script:

“The buttery was the room used to store and prepare food. Food was a very big part of the Cheney family’s life and the Homestead was a farm at that time. They all helped with the work on the farm including harvesting the crops to eat. Their father always raised a field of watermelons and often would bring in a wagonload and invite all the neighbors for a watermelon feast.”

Talking points:

- **Butter Churn**

“What do you think this device was used for?” (Answer: For making butter.)

- **Candle Maker**

“What do you think this device was used for?” (Answer: For making candles.)

ELECTA'S ROOM (Time: 5 minutes)

Script:

"This was the parents, George and Electa's room. It was a small room when they both slept in here, but when Electa was an old woman, her son Seth made the room larger so that his mother could have a nice big room to stay in." (Show that the post in the middle of the room was where the corner of the room originally was).

Talking points:

- **Servant's Door:**

(Show the servant's door.)

"Electa had a woman that took care of her in her old age and this was a special "secret" Servant's door for her to go upstairs without going out into the main room so that she wouldn't disturb any guests that might be visiting."

(Tell them you'll go through the servant's "secret door" on the way out.)

- **Chamber Pot:** *"What do you see under the bed?"* (Answer: chamber pot)

- **Bedwarmer** (Show them the bedwarmer and have them guess what it is)

- **Child's Hat** (Point out the hat on the dresser)

"The child's hat on the dresser has fur on it. Can you guess what kind of animal the fur is from?"

(Answer: It is mouse fur.)

Optional questions:

"What things in here are different from what we'd have in a bedroom today?" (candles, old pedal sewing machine, stove for heat, small bed, etc.)

(Have the children go through the secret door and up the stairs and remind them to look at the bedroom on the right and the parlor on the left as they exit the door on the 2nd floor.)

EXIT SCRIPT (Time: 30 seconds)

"That you for visiting the Cheney Homestead and for being such a good group. Make sure to come back and visit us again with your family. Have a great day!"