

## Old Manchester Museum School Tour Guide - 2018

Welcome to the Old Manchester Museum of local history.

This building was built in 1859 by Cheney Brothers for use as a school for Cheney children and the children of factory managers. It was originally located around the corner on Cooper Hill St. When the Dye House was built there in 1914 the school was moved to this location. From the outside you can see that there were two entrances, one for the girls and the other for the boys. You just entered through the girls' entrance. The boys' entrance is behind the shelves of the Museum Store.

We do ask that you not touch any of the items on display. Many are old and fragile, or easily breakable.

### **DOCENTS:**

*[Try to include the items marked with an asterisk\* You have only 10 minutes for the lobby and for each gallery. You can add some of the other items if time allows.]*

**\*The Manchester Sports Hall of Fame** now has over 170 inductees, all with a Manchester connection, including famous people such as Geno Auriemma and Dr. Marcy McDonald who has swum the English Channel many times. Over 30 sports are represented.

*[Perhaps the students can identify some who attended their school.]*

### **\*Show and Tell Session**

*[We have several items that were commonly used 100 years ago but are no longer used and the students probably do not know what they were used for. Explain what normal conditions were like such as no electricity or telephones, no central heat in the house, dirt roads, mud in the spring, etc. The irons did not use electricity but were heated on the kitchen stove, the warming stone was to heat the bed on a cold winter night because there were no furnaces to keep the bedrooms warm, the boot jack could remove muddy shoes without getting hands dirty, early large wood cameras on tripods used glass plates for negatives, etc.]*

Let's enter the **North Gallery**, and begin to the right.

### **School Room**

On the right you can see a representation of a school room. The bench is from the former Center Academy on East Center St., where the Masonic Hall is now located. It was in use from 1847 to 1905. The blackboard is original to this building. The 1849 Map of the USA on the wall to the right of the classroom was what schoolchildren would have seen when this school was first used, showing what our fast growing country looked like. You will notice that there were only 30 states then, and only 5 west of the Mississippi River. By 1859 California, Minnesota and Oregon had been added.

### **\*Cheney Silk Enterprise**

Silk had been produced in Connecticut from the early 1770's. As a home industry, silk worm eggs were hatched and the worms fed on a diet of mulberry leaves until they formed cocoons. The thread spun by these worms to form the cocoons was unwound by hand and several strands were combined into a single fiber, strong enough for sewing. Silk fabric was very costly to produce.

### **\*First Cheney Silk Mill, 1838 - Hop Brook**

Of the original eight Cheney brothers, three, George, John and Seth were not directly involved in the silk business. The others: Charles, Ralph, Ward, Rush and Frank (together with a partner, Edward Arnold) were the founders of the Cheney Bros. silk empire. Between 1835 and 1840, the brothers tried silk culture, raising silk worms and growing the mulberry trees for their leaves, the only food the worms will eat. Eleven pounds of leaves were needed to create one pound of cocoons. Nine pounds of cocoons were required to produce a pound of silk. (It took 100 pounds of leaves to make 1 pound of silk!) In 1844 a general blight affected all the mulberry trees and the rearing of silk worms was abandoned throughout the USA.

*[Pick up and shake one of the cocoons and ask what might be inside. You can shake it too. Explain that after soaking in hot water you can unwind the silk threads onto a pencil. A cocoon that has been cut open is in the display cabinet]*

On display here you can see Cheney silks of many colors and patterns. There is a silk tapestry woven at the mills in 1920 for draperies for the White House during the Wilson administration. There are also cravats and other samples of Cheney made textiles. The hanging on the right demonstrates how up to 8 colors were applied in a printing sequence from bottom to top.

Pioneer Parachute Co., a subsidiary of Cheney Bros., was established shortly before World War 2. It soon began to develop a new material, nylon, in conjunction with Dupont Co. and the U.S. Army.

The Cheney family emblem includes a bull's head and a skein of silk, as seen in the weaving on the upper wall. The story goes that a family ancestor, one John Cheney had his life saved during the Battle of Hastings in 1066 because he was wearing a bull's skull for protection when he was struck on the head with a sword. The Cheney family owes its existence today to that bull's skull.

### **\*Bon Ami**

Perhaps the best-known product made in Manchester was Bon Ami Soap.

*[Ask if any student speaks French, and explain that bon ami means "Good Friend" because mother could use this soap to clean many things such as clothes, windows, etc.]*

The factory was located on Hilliard St. in the building now called the Time Machine.

Bon Ami became famous because it developed one of the earliest advertising gimmicks, the

motto “It Hasn’t Scratched Yet,” and used a newly hatched chick to convey the message visually. The soap was made with the soft mineral feldspar instead of abrasive quartz. The company began in Glastonbury, but moved to Manchester in 1895.

They sold soap around the world and some foreign language labels are on display.

Another reason for its success was the practice of distributing small samples to housewives. A few days later a salesman would pay a call on the housewife and take orders. In 1959 the company was sold to new owners and subsequently moved out of Manchester. It is still being made in Kansas City, Missouri.

### **Lydall & Foulds Paper Co.**

Lydall & Foulds was established in the northeast section of town, which became known as Lydallville. The mill was situated on Lydall Brook, which also provided power for several other mills. It continued to manufacture paper products until 2001.

### **Mather Electric Co.**

Mather Electric Co. was established in 1883 to make electric generators, then referred to as dynamos. The company acquired the expertise to manufacture electric lamps, known as Perkins Lamps. However, Thomas Edison took action against the company because he claimed they were infringing on his patents for the electric lamp.

### **\*Pitkin Glass Works**

During the American Revolution the Pitkin family enterprises of East Hartford and Orford Parish had supplied the state with gunpowder from their mills. After the Revolution was over and we became a state, there was no money to repay the Pitkins for their gunpowder, so the State of Conn. granted to William and Elisha Pitkin and Samuel Bishop a monopoly on the making of glass in the state for 25 years. *[Explain what monopoly means by comparing the goal of playing the game Monopoly by controlling as many of the properties as possible with the Pitkins’ sole manufacture of glass]*

Glass production in Connecticut was very expensive as there was very little sand in the state suitable for making glass. The Pitkins used sand brought in from New Jersey by barge to East Hartford and then by ox cart to Orford Parish. Inkwells and bottles of many sizes were manufactured here. The bottles were in great demand for shipping cider and other liquids to the West Indies. The Pitkin monopoly expired in 1808, and the company soon faced increasing competition. Finally, about 1830 the factory ceased operation, probably due to the new competition and the increasing difficulty of getting firewood to keep the furnaces going 24 hours a day.

Two especially notable examples on display are the “JPF” inkwell and the tiny, chestnut-shaped bottle. The inkwell is one of only about 6 known examples. The letters “JPF” are the initials of the glass factory manager, John Foster. The tiny bottle was found during an

archaeological excavation in 2003. It was probably made for smelling salts or perfume, or maybe it was made as a “whimsy,” for no particular purpose.

*[By the time you finish talking about Cheney, Pitkin and Bon Ami there will be very little time for anything else in this room. Allow the students to walk around the rest of the center display and proceed to the South Gallery. If they ask questions about these other displays, you can answer briefly]*

### **Manchester Green Post Office**

On display here is the old post office from the Manchester Green Post Office. It was stored in a barn for over 50 years before recently being donated to the Society. Manchester Green was the original center of town and is where the first post office was located in the Woodbridge Tavern (where a gas station now sits) until moving across the street. This particular post office was used until 1944.

### **Ethel Donaghue**

Ethel Donaghue (1896-1989) was one of the very first women lawyers in Conn. Her mother was the daughter of Thomas Weldon and the sister of Dr. Thomas H. Weldon, a revered physician in Manchester.

### **Victorian Parlor**

The “Victorian Period” covered the years between 1840 and 1901. In our display is a corner cabinet from one of the Cheney mansions. Portraits to the right of the cabinet include a silhouette of George Cheney. Two Cheney brothers, Timothy (1731-1795) (who built the Homestead) and his older brother, Benjamin (1725-1815), were among the earliest makers of tall case clocks in America, using wooden gears and works. They set up their clock shop about 1745 near what is now the pond in Center Springs Park. This clock was made by Benjamin about 1760, when we were still called Hartford.

The reed organ was made by Mervin Landfear of Vernon St. in the 1850’s.

### **Made in Manchester**

The exhibit highlights some things made in Manchester during the last 150 years.

Ka-Klar Cloth Toy Co. made stuffed toys.

Kage Co. made the plastic Glitter Plaques using popcorn-size pieces of colored plastic and heating them until they melted together.

Glastenbury Knitting Co. made the long woolen underwear. You can bet it was scratchy!

“**Getting Around Town**” shows how folks used to travel. Horses and carriages were for the well-off families. Bicycles became very popular in the late 1800’s and motorcycles in the early 1900’s. They were much more affordable than automobiles. Trolleys were very



convenient and not expensive. One could travel all over Conn. by connecting trolley lines.

### **John Knoll**

Knoll had his very small tobacco, candy, and household staples store on School St., but his favorite activity was photography.

He took thousands of photos and we have shown here a small selection of his work.

### **Gorman Brothers Quarrymen and Builders**

The Buckland quarry provided redstone for house foundations and steps.

The Case Mtn. quarry provided granite stone for foundations and walls such as at the Pitkin Glass Works

*[Proceed to the South Gallery]*

**East Wall** (on your left)

#### **\*Elementary Schools**

There are pictures of many of the early school buildings which no longer exist.

Find your own school and see if you can find who it is named for.

At first (about 1751) there were 4 one-room schools in town and now only one of them remains, the Keeney Schoolhouse, restored during the Bicentennial and located on the grounds of the Cheney Homestead which you will (or have already) visit today.

#### **Voting Machine**

The antique voting machine is a working machine and you can actually place your vote on it for your choice of the next president of the United States. It was used in Manchester for many years, but is no longer allowed to be used in elections because it is too old.

#### **\*Spencer Repeating Rifle**

This rifle was invented by Manchester native Christopher Spencer and helped to shorten the Civil War because it gave the army of the North much better firepower.

Christopher began to work at Cheney brothers when he was only 14 years old as an apprentice machinist. He also worked for a time at the Colt Gun Factory in Hartford. He then came back to work for the Cheney's and Frank Cheney recognized Spencer's talent and allowed him to use the company machine shop for his own personal work, but only "after hours." After 11 hours working for Cheney he could work on his own inventions, including the repeating rifle.

Look at the rifles and carbine on the left of the display. Use your imagination to see inside the wooden stock, which is bored out to accept **seven bullets**, with a spring pushing a single bullet into the chamber after each spent bullet is levered out of the gun.

Now look to the right. These Springfield rifles shot once. Then the shooter had to pour gunpowder down the barrel, ram it with the ramrod, insert a bullet down the barrel and ram

that too. Then he had to rise up to a kneeling or standing position and fire! Remember that the Confederates had single shot rifles, but the North was using Seven Shot Repeating Rifles. No wonder the Confederates said “you loaded it once and it could fire all week!”

The Cheneys bought the rights to the rifle and paid Spencer a royalty for each one sold. The rifles were not made in Manchester during the Civil War, but in Boston in a rented piano factory.

Spencer was indeed an inventive genius.

He also invented one of the very first self-propelled vehicles in America, a steam powered wagon, which tended to scare the horses! This was more than 30 years before Henry Ford built his first car!

### **West Wall**

World War I - 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary “In the Trenches and on the Homefront”

### **\*North Wall**

The two wide-angle views show North Manchester’s Depot Square and South Manchester’s Main St./Center St. intersection. Both photos were taken in October 1923 while the town was celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. You can see in the pictures the flags and bunting that were used for decoration all over town at the time.

The view of North Manchester and Depot Square shows how much different that part of town was compared to today. The only thing which remains today from the period shown in the picture are the railroad tracks.

The view of South Manchester shows the Odd Fellows building with the rounded corner, which was demolished in 1982. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park is located there now.

Other photos of North Manchester include the train wreck of the “Bullet” in 1933. This freight train came off the tracks in the middle of the night. It was carrying shoes and lobsters from Maine for New York City. When morning came lobsters were reportedly crawling on neighbors’ yards.

Compare the 1880 and 1914 aero-views of South Manchester and see how much this part of town grew between 1880 and 1914. Most of this growth was because of the success and growth of Cheney Brothers Silk Mills.

If you have any questions, we will try to answer them.

Thank you for visiting and come back again with your parents when you can have more time to see all of the displays and even vote on the voting machine.

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