

The Courier

SEPTEMBER 2013

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Great School Fire of October 1913

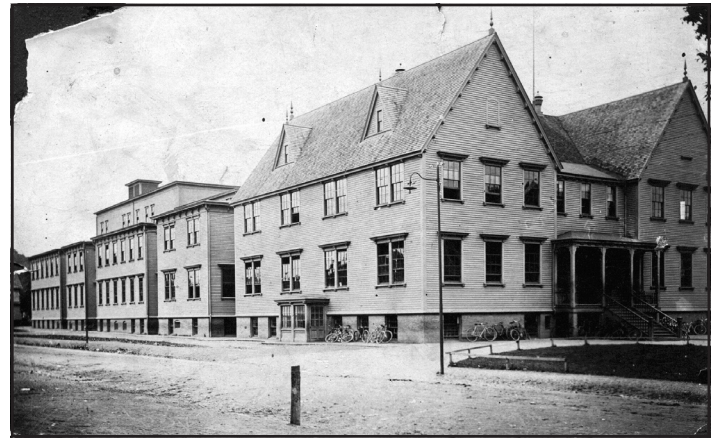
Hundreds of Students Safe—Fire Drills Praised

by Dave Smith

The largest fire in the history of Manchester occurred 100 years ago in 1913. The large complex of wooden school buildings, which occupied the site of what is now Bennet Sixth Grade Academy and the East Side Recreation building, went up in flames on the afternoon of October 23rd.

Because of the insistence of School Superintendent Fred A. Verplanck in conducting routine fire drills, all students and teachers escaped the burning building without loss of life and without serious injury. "When a man rushes into a burning building and saves a human life, he becomes a hero. Nevertheless, even more credit is due to the man who, with far foresight, devises a plan of action which, in the case of an emergency, saves hundreds of lives." Even though there were a 1,000 pupils and teachers in the school, time and again in the fire drills, the entire building had been emptied in less than two minutes. Superintendent Verplanck was on his way to Boston on school business and was to take the 2:20 train. He was at the Manchester station when he heard the fire alarm from Box 43. Knowing that the box was near the school, he learned from a messenger that the school was on fire. William Foulds' automobile was standing at the station and Verplanck pressed it into service and hastened to the scene of the fire with grave apprehension. He was overjoyed when, on arrival, he found that the pupils had all escaped in an orderly fashion. When he was congratulated, he replied in his laconic style "The system worked; and it worked when I was absent."

The escape was wonderfully well-managed and great credit is due to Elisabeth M. Bennet, head teacher of the building. When a 10 year old boy ran into her office shortly after 2 o'clock and told her that a waste basket in the library



A large complex of wooden school buildings stood on the site of present day Bennet Academy.

was on fire, she ran at once to the library, which was at the east end of the second floor, and saw that the fire had spread from the waste basket to a wooden desk over it. Instead of sounding the school alarm for a fire drill she smashed the glass over the general alarm box, cutting her hand in doing so, and pulled the general alarm, which automatically sounded the fire drill signal in the building and also sounded the gongs in the fire department houses throughout the district.

In less time than it takes to tell it, the whole great building, occupying an entire block, was a mass of flames. The building was entirely of wood, sheathed inside with yellow pine, finished in shellac. Gun powder could hardly have been more inflammable. Within an hour and a half, the great building was in ashes, only two chimneys remaining above the foundation. The Rogers business block, the hose house of No. 4 and four dwelling houses on School St. and the library building and a dwelling house on Wells Street had shared its fate.

See FIRE, page 4

Woodbridge House Renovations

Over the past month, the exterior of our Woodbridge house has been repaired and repainted. The new paint scheme is a departure from the all-white the house has been for the past 60 years or so. Referring to old photos of the house, it was determined that during the late 1800's and early 1900's the house has had several different colors and evidence of that was found while doing repairs to the exterior woodwork. In addition, a postcard from our collection shows the house with a yellow and white combination during the early 1900's.

Now the house sports a yellow color for the clapboards and bold white to highlight the Greek-Revival style of the trim. The windows and shutters remain the traditional dark green. The side porch has had several posts replaced, which were custom-turned to match the existing posts.



Postcard showing Manchester Green, the Woodbridge house (left) and the Glastonbury Knitting Mills.

New Faces...

Meet Mike Forino, Assistant Director



The Society's Board of Directors has chosen Michael Forino as Assistant Director. Mr. Forino comes to the Society with experience in museums, archives, and private historical consulting; with research interests in industrial, business, and labor history. He is a recent graduate of Central Connecticut State University's M.A. in Public History program, where he received the School of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Graduate Scholar Award in 2012. Mr. Forino also holds a B.A. in History from Central Connecticut State University.

Prior to coming to the Historical Society, he worked in the curatorial department at the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury, CT, and as an Archivist and Research Historian at History Associates Inc., in Rockville, MD. He has also interned with the State Archivist.

He was introduced to the Society in August of 2012 as an intern, when he extensively researched the History Center building. For his Master's capstone project, Mr. Forino continued his work to compile a detailed history of the former Cheney Brothers Machine Shop.

Mr. Forino will utilize his knowledge and experience to assist the Executive Director in creating new programs, engaging the community, developing exhibitions, and aiding in the transition of the former Cheney Brothers Machine shop to the Society's museum and research center.

Meet Ann Lucente, Volunteer Coordinator



Ann Lucente is our new Volunteer Coordinator. She has been volunteering at the Society for several years and has worked on the tag sales, the holiday gala, and the school tours. Ann has also volunteered her time at other local organizations. She is helping to organize the volunteer corps. If you are interested in joining with our volunteers, please contact Ann at 860-645-8862 or at 860-916-6047.

The Courier

*A newsletter of the
Manchester Historical Society*

Online at: www.manchesterhistory.org
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Genealogy Group News

The Genealogy Group is a group of Society members with a common interest in doing genealogy research on our own families. All Society members are welcome to join us for free. The general public is welcome, for a fee of \$3.00 per meeting. We meet at 10:00 a.m. on the second Tuesday of every month at the History Center, 175 Pine Street in Manchester, unless otherwise specified. Our upcoming meeting places and agendas are listed on the upcoming events page at www.manchesterhistory.org. If you have questions, call Kris Miller at 860-528-3122.

Our September meeting was held at the Probate Court Building in Manchester. Probate Judge, Mike Darby, gave a talk on genealogical research information that is accessible to genealogists at the Probate Court.

October 8 Our meeting will be at the History Center. Ruth Shapleigh-Brown, founder and executive director of the Connecticut Gravestone Network will be giving a talk on "Gravestones 101 in Hartford County".

November 12 Our meeting will be at the History Center. We will be having a "round table" discussion concerning business topics for the coming year. We will be discussing future meeting agendas and field trips, plans for our own reference library, and nominations for group officers.

December No meeting will be held in December.

January 14 Our meeting will be at the Windsor Historical Society at 96 Palisado Ave. in Windsor, CT. Librarian, Barbara Goodwin, will give us a tour of their extensive historical resources relating to the town of Windsor and its people. Highlights include thousands of historic photographs, 17th-20th century manuscripts (many indexed by date and family name), more than 350 published genealogies of Windsor families, family correspondence files, and subject files. Their library also contains copies of local cemetery records and vital records, regional and state histories, town reports, local newspapers, school yearbooks, city directories and maps. There will be free time to browse their library and to go through their two self-guiding exhibit galleries.

February 11 Our meeting will be at the History Center and we will be taking care of business such as electing new officers.

Farewell for Joe and Joanne Hachey



Mayor Leo Diana speaks about the accomplishments of Joe and Joanne Hachey at the Manchester History Center, June 3, 2013.

The Manchester Historical Society recently honored Joe and Joanne Hachey as they prepared to move to Maine. Both have been active in Society events and in its preservation work. Joanne, an artist and Vernon school art teacher, donated house-portraits to our gala auctions to raise funds for the Society. Joe chaired a committee to save Center Memorial Park. Friends and members gathered on June 3, 2013, to celebrate their contributions. "Joe and Joanne are wonderful, witty, sociable, and energetic members of the community, volunteers at the Historical Society, Unico, Cheney Hall, and Lutz Museum, who are committed to causes of preservation, fairness, and learning," said Susan Barlow, Events Chair. Mayor Leo Diana presented the Hacheys with a plaque recognizing their work, and declaring June 3, 2013 "Joe and Joanne Hachey Day." Joyce Hodgson, Little Theatre Executive Director, presented two Cheney Hall mugs, and warm thanks for the Hacheys' work. The Events Committee provided a festive luncheon, where guests mingled and socialized. These members purchased a life membership for the Hacheys: Malcolm and Susan Barlow, Phyllis Chapman, John and Janet Cooney, Peg DeForge, Leslie Frey, Ed and Ellen Kloehn, Denise L'heureux, Ann Lucente, Pat Matrick, Kris and Marie Miller, Dave Smith, Fred Spaulding, and Robin Starkel. We will miss the Hacheys and their many creative ideas and productive work for the Historical Society.

FIRE, from page 1

It was impossible to do anything to save the school building itself. The great structure was a roaring cauldron, so hot that no one could approach within two or three hundred feet of it. The large three-story wooden Watkins building [at the corner of School and Main Streets and now Pinewood Furniture] was on fire again and again but was kept wet down and was finally saved.

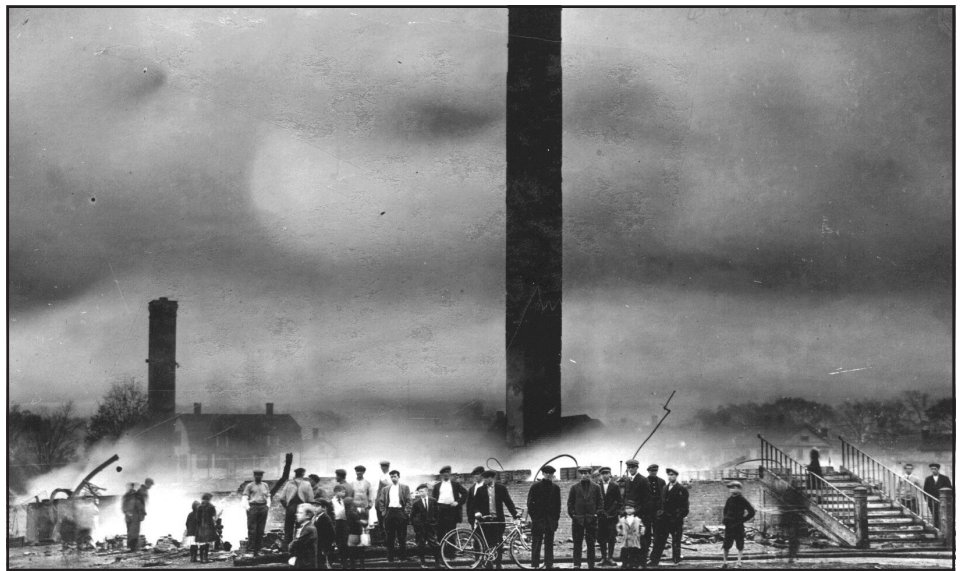
At 3:05 the great crowd, which was massed on the lawn of the high school opposite the burning building, heard the siren of a rapidly moving fire automobile and a moment later the hose truck of Hartford No. 1 drew up at the corner of Main and Eldridge Streets. Ten minutes later it was followed by the motordrawn steam fire engine of the same company which at once coupled to the hydrant at the corner and began pumping. Cheney Brothers, according to Frank Cheney, Jr., carried \$100,000 insurance on the school house and contents. The library building [on Wells Street] was insured for \$12,000.

The scene of the fire after nightfall was a mecca for thousands of curious ones and many came from Hartford and other places, both by trolley and in automobiles. For hours the people promenaded about the square in which the burned school building stood.

The homeless ones had little trouble finding places of refuge last night. In fact, it was difficult for them to decide where to stay, as hundreds of people tendered their services and offered to share their homes until other arrangements could be made.

By 1915 a new school complex had been constructed and still stands today. It consists of the Franklin, Barnard and East Side Rec buildings which now comprise the Bennet Sixth Grade Academy.

Sources include the Manchester Herald of October 24, 1913.



*Top: The wooden buildings engulfed in flames
Bottom: The scene after the fire.*

Historic Barn Lecture and Tour

On Sunday, September 15th, at 1:00 p.m. the Society will present a program describing the project recently undertaken by the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, which photographed the historic barns throughout Connecticut. Many of these old barns are threatened because of their age, weather and demolition. The project was carried out to document the remaining barns before they are gone.

In addition, we will tell about our plans for the Woodbridge barn and describe the steps being taken to preserve it for future generations. The lecture will be held at our own historic barn on the Woodbridge property, which was built in the late 1700s and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. (See Calendar, page 7, for additional information.)




SAVE THE DATE FOR THE 10th ANNUAL

Historical Society Holiday Gala

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2013

Plans are underway for the Historical Society's 10th Holiday Gala fundraiser. We are looking for some special item to help make the evening a financial success as well as a fun-filled evening. Do you have a special antique, collectible, service, or artistic item that you can donate to the auction? Cottage rentals, timeshares, dinners, concert tickets, and gardening consultation are all popular auction items. We're also looking for sponsors, such as local businesses, and advertisers for our Gala program, and we would appreciate your help in soliciting them. We want the 10th annual gala to be our best ever, and it will be one of our biggest fundraisers. Please contact us at 860-647-9983 to let us know what you can donate or if you can solicit a business sponsor.

Mark your calendar for the festive evening! Wine, hors d'oeuvres, coffee and dessert will be served. You'll enjoy music, auctions, and a few surprises. The museum store will be open to purchase local history gifts. Look for details such as donations of decorated wreaths and baskets in our November Courier (or call 860-647-9983).



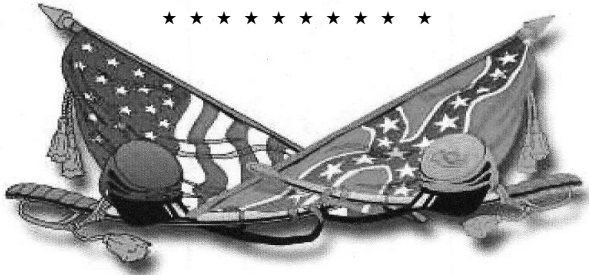
Art Exhibit at the History Center

Harvest: The Industrial Art of Brian Walters
October 1 – December 1



The Manchester Historical Society will be hosting an exhibition of metal sculptures created by Connecticut artist Brian C. Walters II from October 1st to December 1st. Walters is a professional welder turned self-taught artist, who utilizes scrap and found materials to create unique pieces of art—waving between what is natural and man-made. The exhibit will be at the History Center at 175 Pine Street and will be open Monday to Friday during the regular hours of the History Center and also by appointment.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ *The* ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
CIVIL WAR
 150th ANNIVERSARY
 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Civil War Notes

by Ron Schack

MANCHESTER'S BATTLES AND CASUALTIES

August through October, 1863

AUGUST, 1863: PRESIDENT LINCOLN TESTS SPENCER RIFLE

On August 18, 1863, Christopher Spencer, from Manchester, inventor of the Spencer Repeating Rifle, was invited to demonstrate his new rifle to the President. He walked into the White House carrying one of his rifles and a supply of cartridges. He walked past the sentries, and into Abraham Lincoln's office. The next day President Lincoln fired a few test rounds. The Federal government soon ordered Spencer rifles, and the Union soldiers had an important advantage over the South's muzzle-loaders.

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER, 1863: SIEGE OF FORT SUMTER

Union forces began organizing troop action in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, as part of their effort to recapture Fort Sumter. After a devastating bombardment by the Union, Major General Quincy A. Gillmore and Rear Admiral John A. Dahlgren, commanders of the South Atlantic Blockade Squadron, were prepared to launch a boat assault on Fort Sumter. Cooperation between the Army and Navy was poor. The army flotilla was detained off Morris Island by the low tide. By the time they could proceed, the navy assault had already been defeated.

Connecticut regiments engaged in the siege were the **1st Connecticut Volunteer Light Battery**; and the **7th, 10th, and 17th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry Regiments**.

Manchester men involved from the 1st were: William McNary and John Monarch; from the 7th were: John H. Couch, Almon N. Keeney, Darwin P. Thompson, and John W. Wilson; from the 10th were: George G. Barrett, Henry W. Barrows, Dolos S. Bidwell, James H. Bronson, John Burton, William H. Chadwick, Henry T. Gray, Charles I. Green, Amandor C. Keeney, Valette C. Keeney, Albert W. Keeney, James R. Keeney, William J. Lyman, Dennis Mahoney, John L. Otis, George Schildge, Arthur F. Slate, Andrew M. Spencer, and William L. Worton.

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1863: CONSCRIPTION

Manchester did have a dark side during the war. Conscription was enacted in July, 1863. A number of Manchester men were draftees or substitutes during September/October, 1863, and reported as deserted in this same time period. They were: from the **5th Connecticut Infantry Regiment**: August Braun, John S. Cook, James Leary and Gustave Schmidt; from the **8th Connecticut Infantry Regiment**: John Clark; and from the **20th Connecticut Infantry Regiment**: Michael Halvey and John Schmitt.

OCTOBER, 1863: THE BRISTOE CAMPAIGN

The Bristoe Campaign was a series of minor battles fought in Virginia during October and November, 1863. Major General George G. Meade maneuvered the Union Army in an attempt to defeat General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Lee countered which caused Meade to withdraw. Lee struck at Bristoe Station but suffered losses in two brigades and withdrew. The Union Army smashed a Confederate defensive bridgehead at Rappahannock Station driving Lee back across the Rapidan River, resulting in a Union victory.

Manchester men involved in this campaign from the **1st Connecticut Volunteer Heavy Artillery Regiment** were: James C. Battersby, Loan A. Chapin, John Fagan, Samuel W. Gray, Evander Hodge, Henry Hollister, John Kennedy, James Keough, Woodford Martin, John L. Morgan, Alvin Perkins, George O. Roe, William H. Tufts, Thomas White, William Whitney, William A. Williams, and John Winchester, Jr. Manchester soldiers from the **14th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry Regiment** involved in this campaign were: Hiram Blish, Thomas Hannah, John Morris, Charles C. Sullivan, and Lucius Talcott.

Sources include: Manchester Historical Society Civil War data and Wikipedia website.

We Will Miss...

KENNETH HERBELE Ken was a long-time member and volunteer at the Society, together with his wife Ruth. He served in the U. S. Air Force and was active in other organizations. Ken also enjoyed fishing. He and Ruth have often served as docents at our Old Manchester Museum and at other events. Ken will be remembered for his smile and infectious personality.

JAMES TIERNEY Jim was a life-long Manchester resident and a member of the Society for many years. He was very active in the early years of the organization, and continued his interest until his death. Jim worked for the U.S. Postal Service after serving in the U. S. Coast Guard during World War II.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Lectures usually take place at the Manchester History Center at 175 Pine Street. Parking is available along Pleasant Street and along Forest Street next to the building; parking for people with disabilities is available in the small lot next to the History Center. The building is handicap accessible. The cost for most lectures and walking tours is \$2 for members and \$4 for non-members; free for children under 16.

OLD MANCHESTER MUSEUM, 126 Cedar Street
Saturdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sundays 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.
(except holidays, May through December)

CHENEY HOMESTEAD, 106 Hartford Road
Open second Sunday of every month year-round 1–4 p.m.
View the 1785 house and hear commentary about this interesting residence where the Cheney brothers were born and grew up.

September 10, Tuesday, 10:00 a.m., Manchester Probate Court
GENEALOGY GROUP MEETING

A special meeting at the Probate Court in Manchester, with Judge Michael Darby, who will describe the genealogical information accessible to genealogists at the Court. Historical Society members are invited to join this group of both amateurs and experts with an interest in genealogical research. Non-members are welcome, \$3.00 fee. Meets the second Tuesday of the month, usually at the Manchester History Center, 175 Pine Street.

September 15, Sunday, 1:00 p.m.

HISTORIC BARNs AND TOUR

Woodbridge Farmstead, 495 East Middle Turnpike at Manchester Green, east of the intersection of the Turnpike and Woodbridge Street. Parking at Senior Center. Find out more about the barns of Manchester and the photo project undertaken by the CT Trust for Historic Preservation to save images of these disappearing structures. After the tour, talk and some light refreshments, we will drive to a most unusual barn full of ancient wood and modern craftsmanship.

September 21, Saturday, 1:00 p.m.

CHENEY DISTRICT HISTORIC WALK (see story, pg. 4)

Come explore the Cheney Brothers National Historic Landmark District with commentary on the people who lived and worked here—mill owners and employees—and the historic buildings, landscapes, and silk mill operations. This popular event, now in its 35th year, features Chris Paulin, Director of Manchester Community College's Institute of Local History, and a wonderful speaker. We'll tour for about two hours, walking about one mile over bumpy terrain. Free, but donations to the Manchester Historical Society are welcome. Meet at Fuss & O'Neill, 146 Hartford Road, with plenty of parking to the west and behind the building. Open to all. Extreme weather cancels, but if it's just mild sprinkles, please plan to come with your umbrella. No dogs, please.

October 1 through December 1, Weekdays, 10 a.m.–2 p.m.

HARVEST: THE INDUSTRIAL ART OF BRIAN WALTERS
History Center, 175 Pine Street

An exhibition of metal sculptures created by Connecticut artist, Brian C. Walters II, a professional welder turned self-taught artist. Walters utilizes scrap and found materials to create unique pieces of art, wavering between what is natural and man-made

October 8, Tuesday, 10:00 a.m., History Center, 175 Pine Street
GENEALOGY GROUP MEETING

Topic: "Gravestones 101 in Hartford County" with guest speaker Ruth Shapleigh-Brown, founder and executive director of the Connecticut Gravestone Network. Members of the Historical Society are invited to join this group of both amateurs and experts with an interest in genealogical research. Non-members are welcome, \$3.00 fee.

October 20, Sunday, 1:00 p.m., History Center, 175 Pine Street
ANNUAL MEETING

Election of officers, review of annual activities and finances, and a history tour of the old Cheney Machine Shop with Assistant Director Michael Forino, who calls the building "the heart of the company." All are welcome, but only members can vote. There is no charge. Questions may be directed to 860-647-9983.

October 26, Saturday, 1:00 p.m., 106 Hartford Road
FOOD IN THE TIME OF THE CHENEYS

Led by professor Betty Lou Sandy. Start at the Keeney Schoolhouse at 106 Hartford Road, and hear about sources of foods, their vegetable, fruit and herb gardens, stocking up for the winter and seasonal foods available at that time, with information on the average person in Manchester, as well as the more well to do. Betty Lou will discuss the history of gardening in Connecticut, including the "Native Americans before Colonial Contact, what the Europeans brought over, and through the generations to today's food system." The program includes some walking around the grounds of the Homestead. Betty Lou teaches at Manchester Community College and is the owner of the Manchester business Bettylou's Gardening. Please park at Fuss & O'Neill, 146 Hartford Road. Rain or shine. \$2 for members and Garden Club members, \$4 for non-members, free for children under 16.

October 29, Tuesday, 11:00 a.m., History Center, 175 Pine St.
NEW! CHAT WITH THE PAST

Come in for an informal gathering of neighbors and friends who remember Manchester in an older time. Bring your old photos of Manchester—we will copy and return to you. This social event is free, but donations for light refreshments accepted.

November 12, Tuesday, 10:00 a.m., History Center, 175 Pine St.
GENEALOGY GROUP MEETING

December 6, Friday
ANNUAL GALA (see story, pg. 5)

December 7, Saturday, 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
ANNUAL HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

Holiday Opening at the Historical Society properties: Cheney Homestead, 106 Hartford Road; History Center, 175 Pine Street, and Old Manchester Museum, 126 Cedar Street. Trolley will shuttle visitors throughout the South Manchester Historic District. Various activities at our locations. More info in November.



The Manchester Historical Society
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 Manchester, Connecticut 06040

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The Manchester Historical Society, 175 Pine St., Manchester, CT 06040

Name: (Mr.) (Mrs.) (Miss) _____ Date _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Home Phone () _____ Email _____

Type of Membership:	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$15	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$25	<input type="checkbox"/> Contributing Individual	\$45
	<input type="checkbox"/> Student (under age 18)	\$5	<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate	\$250	<input type="checkbox"/> Contributing Family	\$75
	<input type="checkbox"/> Life Individual	\$250	<input type="checkbox"/> Life Couple	\$400		

I would like to make an additional contribution for

<input type="checkbox"/> Manchester Historical Society Building Fund	\$ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Woodbridge Farmstead Fund	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Manchester Historical Society Endowment Fund	\$ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Woodbridge Endowment Fund	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Cheney Homestead Endowment	\$ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Keeney Schoolhouse Endowment Fund	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted	\$ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Annual Fund	\$ _____

I have enclosed a matching gift form

Make checks payable to: Manchester Historical Society

Membership Dues and Donations to the Society are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.