

MANCHESTER'S REVOLUTIONARY WAR FOUNTAIN MARKS ITS 100TH YEAR

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Nov. 2, 1915

D. A. R. Vote to Build Memorial Fountain.

(Special to The Courant.)
MANCHESTER, Tuesday, Nov. 2.

Will Donate Fountain.

Orford Parish, D. A. R., at their meeting Saturday voted to erect a memorial fountain at the Center and appointed a committee to look after the work. The fountain will be erected to the memory of the Manchester soldiers who fought in the Revolutionary War.

In 1915 Orford Parish, Daughters of the American Revolution, announced their plans to erect a memorial fountain at Manchester's center to honor the memory of those of Orford Parish who fought in the Revolutionary War. It would be a marble fountain, located on the western point of the triangular park that sat out in the middle of East Center Street.



An aerial photograph of Manchester's Center from 1934. Note the triangular Isle of Safety located at the joining of East Center and Main Streets where the fountain was originally placed.

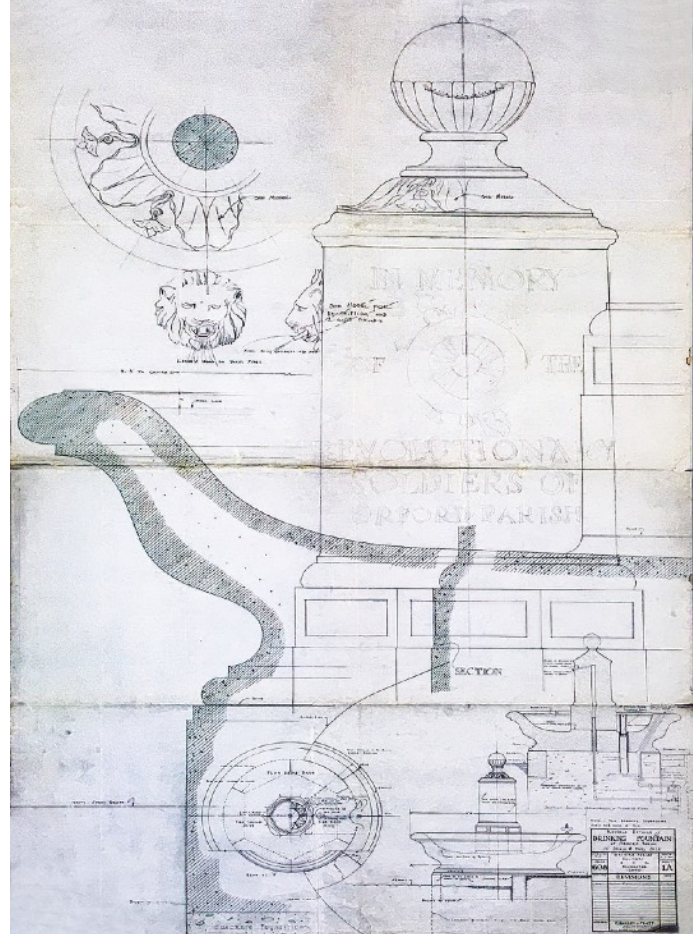


Charles Adams Platt
(1861-1933)

Charles Adams Platt was commissioned to design the fountain. Drawings were finalized and sent to Carrara, Italy, an area known for the fine quality of its marble.

Mr. Platt's mother, Mary Elizabeth Cheney (1829-1908) was the daughter of George Wells Cheney, of the founding generation of the Cheney silk mills. The family lived in New York, but came to visit their Cheney family in Manchester.

Platt trained as a landscape painter, and as an etcher with Stephen Parrish in Gloucester, Massachusetts in 1880. He attended the National Academy of Design and the Art Students League in New York, and later, the Académie Julian in Paris, with Gustave Boulanger and Jules Joseph Lefebvre. At the Paris Salon of 1885, he exhibited his paintings and etchings and gained his first audience. In the decade 1880–1890, he made hundreds of etchings of architecture and landscapes. He received a bronze medal at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900.



Platt drawing of Revolutionary War memorial fountain. Revised details of drinking fountain at Orford Parish, 1974.002.02647, Charles A. Platt architectural records and papers, Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

Numerous examples of Platt's work are found in Manchester and other places such as New York and Washington. Several of the Cheney mansions were examples of his work. The Phillip Cheney home, Frank Cheney jr., Clifford Cheney, John Davenport Cheney and Seth Leslie Cheney homes stand as evidence of his artistry.

July 9, 1921 Fountain Dedication

The day's exercises began in the Center Congregational church at 2 o'clock. By late afternoon dignitaries from the local chapter, state officers and visiting members marched to the fountain for the unveiling. Aaron Johnson, chairman of the board of selectmen, accepted the fountain. It replaced a cast-iron fountain long in use. The erection of the foundation had been long under consideration by the local chapter for several years had it not been for WWI. It would be interesting to note that Miss Mary Cheney acted as treasurer of the fund. Other notables involved in the early planning were Mrs. C.E. House and Mrs. F.A. Verplanck, who submitted reports to the national convention held in Washington.

Midnight Motorist Wrecks D.A.R. Fountain

At 2 o'clock in the morning on September 25, 1922 a large touring car traveling at a high rate of speed, carrying four passengers jumped the triangular curbing where the fountain resided, completely demolishing the memorial just over a year after its dedication. The passengers in the car, Hartford residents, were returning after a late dinner in Willimantic. The driver, as reported, became confused as he did not avoid the triangle.

The motor car struck the massive fountain squarely toppling it and breaking free the sphere atop the center column sending it flying across the eastbound lane of East Center Street where it came to rest against the Odd Fellows' building.

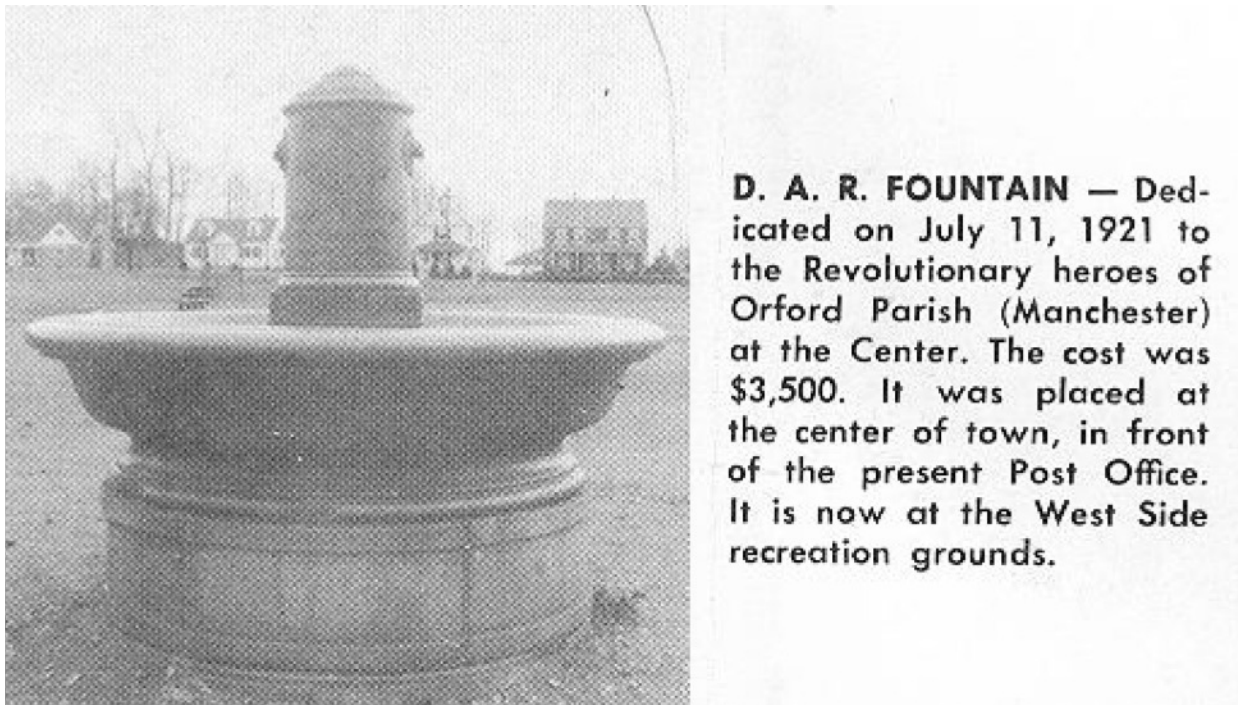


This was the scene on the morning of September 25, 1922 with the Revolutionary War Memorial fountain knocked from its base.

Photo by John Knoll

The Widening of East Center Street to the “Green”

Over time, interest was being shown to widen East Center Street from the Center to Manchester Green. These interests eventually called for the elimination of the water fountain and the isle of safety. By 1937 the D.A.R. was faced with finding a suitable home for the fountain. Suggestions were made to relocate it to the corner of Hartford Road and Main Street to replace the existing horse watering fountain. Other possibilities were to place the fountain in Educational Square, but that was rejected by the Board of Education. On April 6, 1938 the fountain was moved to the Fouracres, behind and between Washington School and the West Side Recreation facility. As evidence of its existence on the Fouracres we have this photograph appearing in the 1955 Manchester High School yearbook, the Somanhis.



Notice the sphere is absent from this photo. Some accounts say the original sphere lies on the bottom of Union pond, possibly taken as a prank from the Public Works Garage facilities near Union Pond.

Somanhis Yearbook Photo - 1955

What you see today of the D.A.R. Fountain

Over the years I've had conversations with Bob Harrison, former Superintendent of Parks, regarding the fountain. Harrison recalled that the damaged fountain was taken at some point to the Town Highway Garage off Tolland Turnpike. Union Pond neighbors the garage. The 16-inch marble sphere that originally topped the fountain's center column could very well have been thrown in the pond by vandals, Harrison suggests. When thoughts of giving the fountain a proper place to be displayed after its removal from the Center, one of his workmen used a larger cement sphere that originally graced the three foot tall brick wall running across the front of the Franklin Building, now part of the Bennet Academy. That wall ran along the edge of the parking lot dividing the lot from the grass, extending to Main Street.



The entrance to the former Franklin Building, now part of the Bennet Academy shows a portion of the wall and decorative concrete sphere that once separated the parking lot from the front lawn.

Somanhis Yearbook Photo - 1952

Fountain Finally Gets a Permanent Home

In October of 1987 the D.A.R. Revolutionary War fountain was moved from the Town Highway Garage on Olcott Street to Center Memorial Park, where it stands today. Close examination of the fountain will show the damages from the September 25th, 1922 accident with the touring car that toppled it from its base and the mended cracks in the bowl.