



# The Courier

60 YEARS OF PRESERVING MANCHESTER'S HISTORY

A quarterly publication of the Manchester Historical Society, Inc. • 175 Pine Street, Manchester, CT 06040 • 860-647-9983

## President's Message

*Steve Armstrong*

Greetings! This is Steve Armstrong. I am the new President of the Manchester Historical Society.



I am incredibly excited to take on this position. I want to first thank and congratulate Dennis Gleeson for his dedication and effort as the previous president of the organization. He has put in long hours leading the organization: please thank and congratulate him when you see him! I am happy to report that Dennis will still be coming into the History Center three days a week to give tours.

I know many of you, but for those that I don't know I want to give a little of my background. I have been a career social studies/history instructor at both the high school and college levels. I have worked as a classroom teacher and administrator in the Manchester public schools

and the West Hartford public schools. I am currently an adjunct professor in the History Department at Central Connecticut State University and have also taught university classes at the University of Connecticut and at Trinity College. I have served as the social consultant at the Connecticut State Department of Education. I am a past president of the National Council for the Social Studies, the major organization of social studies educators in the United States; I am also a past president of ASCH (the Association for the Study of Connecticut History). I am presently serving on the America 250 Connecticut Commission, which is dedicated to the commemoration of the 250th "birthday" of the United States.

I am very much committed in continuing in the path of Dennis Gleeson. I want to plan more events for the

History Center. Simplistically, we need to get more people into the History Center and our other museum properties. We have an exciting schedule of America 250-related events planned. In addition, in May we will be having a Manchester Historical Society history trivia night, with wine and cheese provided. More details to follow on this event. We are also applying for grants that will provide funding for improvements to the History Center.

This is a great time to study history, and I hope that you want to be part of that. If you have any ideas or suggestions on programs we could sponsor at the center, please contact me at [stevearmstrong512@gmail.com](mailto:stevearmstrong512@gmail.com). We also are looking for new volunteers: please consider joining us in our work.

I am looking forward to collaborating with everyone on issues related to enhancing the study of Manchester's history.

*America's 250th*



## The Courier

*A newsletter of the*

Manchester Historical Society

Online at:

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Dave Smith

## The Cheney Homestead Celebrates America's 250<sup>th</sup>

*By Tana Parseliti*

This is an exciting and meaningful year for the Historical Society and especially for the Cheney Homestead as our country celebrates the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and founding of our country.

The Homestead was built by Timothy Cheney in 1785. Timothy's connection to the Revolutionary War was an intimate one. He served as a captain in the militia during the Revolution.

The Homestead is prized as an example of how people lived in the 18th and 19th Centuries and is the birthplace of the founders of the Cheney Silk Mills. Members of the Cheney family lived in the Homestead until 1960. The family donated the Homestead to the Historical Society, and it opened to the public in 1969.

The Historical Society would like to enhance the experience of visiting the Homestead. We are partnering with other individuals, groups and organizations to feature special displays, events, activities, and demonstrations each month the Homestead is open that illustrate how people in the Colonial Era lived, worked and played. Some of the planned activities include:

- Performance of Colonial music and song.
- Colonial tea tasting and poetry reading.
- Carding, spinning and loom demonstrations.
- Informal display and discussion of culinary herbs used in Colonial kitchens.
- Quilting exhibit and demonstration.
- Old World life skills such as candle dipping, butter churning, etc.
- Penmanship Contest for children and adults at the Keeney School House with prizes.
- Family Day featuring Colonial Era children's games and an ice cream social.
- Revolutionary War Encampment by re-enactor group. (Awaiting confirmation.)

The Homestead will be open May through October on the first and third Sundays of the month from 12 to 2. Additional special opening dates include:

- Saturday, June 13 for CT Open House Day from 11 to 3 featuring activities for families and children

*continued on page 3*

## Manchester and the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence

# Manchester and the Revolutionary War

By Dave Smith

The beginning of the American revolution occurred with the Lexington Alarm on April 19, 1775. That incident was made famous by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his poem about the midnight ride of Paul Revere ["Listen my children and you shall hear of the midnight ride of Paul Revere ....."], which every school child used to learn. That day saw British troops marching on Lexington and Concord and on that same day riders were dispatched throughout southern New England to New York and beyond to spread the news that a war against the British had begun.

The news reached Manchester (then that part of East Hartford known as Orford Parish) and at least 25 men are known to have answered the call. Within a few days these men marched to the Boston area, joining men from throughout Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and beyond. The following local men are known to have participated in that first response to the British aggression as part of the Lexington Alarm Company:

Timothy Cheney, Richard Pitkin, Ozias Bissell, Elisha Buckland, Simon Gaines, and Joseph McKee, all officers of the local Company. The rest

of the Company was made up of James Bellows, Ozias Bissell, Samuel Bryant, Timothy Bryant, David Buckland, Matthew Cadwell, Jedediah Darling, Jr., Nathaniel Dewey, Abiathar Evans, Samuel Evans, Jr., Solomon Gilman, Jr., David Goodrich, Alexander Keeney, Jr., Theodore Keeney, Josiah Loomis, Robert McKee, Josiah Olcott, Jr., Joseph Stedman and Ephraim Webster.

Others may well have joined them, and further research is required to find them. The above list has been reported by both Mathias Spiess and William Buckley in their histories of Manchester.

We have some knowledge about Timothy Cheney and Richard Pitkin, but very little about the others. If you know about any of the others mentioned (or perhaps are even descended from one of them) please let us know. Alternatively, maybe you would be interested in doing some research into one or more of them. We would be very grateful for any information you share with us for our records. Our contact email is [info@manchesterhistory.org](mailto:info@manchesterhistory.org).



## The Cheney Homestead Celebrates America's 250<sup>th</sup>

*continued from page 2*

- Sunday, July 12 for an America 250 Celebration featuring re-enactors. Time and activities to be announced.
- Saturday, Dec. 5 and Sunday, Dec. 6 from 12 to 2 for a Holiday Open House with decorations by the Manchester Garden Club

We hope you will visit the Homestead during the 2026 season and perhaps, consider volunteering at the Homestead. To learn more about volunteer opportunities please email me at [tanamp@aol.com](mailto:tanamp@aol.com) What better way to celebrate America's 250<sup>th</sup> then to be a part of telling her story.

*Tana Parseliti is a new member of the Manchester Historical Society Board of Directors, a member of the Manchester Historical Society America 250 Planning Committee and incoming Chair of the Cheney Homestead Committee. Her professional career spanned 30 years in economic and community development with an emphasis on small business and Downtown development. She serves on the Manchester Arts Commission and is a member of The Sculpture Project. Tana resides in Manchester with her husband, Frank.*

## Cheney Homestead: A Manchester Treasure

*By David Beal*

The Cheney Homestead, cared for since 1968 by the Manchester Historical Society, is one of those special places where Manchester's past still feels close at hand. The house, its grounds, and the family collections have been lovingly preserved so visitors can step inside and get a real sense of how the Cheney family lived. It's not just about dates and facts. It's about seeing where daily life unfolded and understanding how one family helped shape Manchester from the late 1700s into the early 1900s. When you walk through the rooms, history feels personal.



The house itself has quite a story. It was built around 1785 by Timothy Cheney who was a clockmaker, farmer, and militia captain. It's what is referred to as a "bank house", due to the way it is constructed. Since it's partially built into the earth, you can enter at ground level on both the first and second floors, which makes it architecturally unusual. The home wasn't meant to be flashy, but it still features beautiful, raised wood paneling that you can admire today. Back in its early years, the house overlooked Hop Brook, whose waters powered the family's early mills. From these beginnings, a silk business would eventually grow and put Manchester on the map.

The Homestead was the starting point for the Cheney brothers, who went on to build what became the largest silk business in the world. Their success reshaped the south end of Manchester into a thriving industrial community. The Cheneys didn't just build factories. They built housing for workers, schools, libraries, and even a golf course. The family's influence extended beyond industry as well, producing artists, writers, and reformers. Today, visitors can see that legacy in the museum's collection, which includes furniture that has been in the house for more than 160 years, along with original artwork created by family members such as John and Seth Wells Cheney.

Caring for a 230-year-old home and the fragile items inside it, is no small task. It takes steady effort and a lot of heart. Recent improvements like a new roof and updated exhibits have helped preserve the house and its history, but maintaining the 5.5 acres and keeping the museum running depends heavily on dedicated volunteers. We're always glad to welcome anyone who would enjoy helping care for the grounds or sharing the Cheney story with visitors of all ages.

If you'd like to stop by, the Cheney Homestead is open from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m. on the first and third Sunday of each month, May through October (except holidays). Visits can also be arranged by appointment or for special events. Admission is by donation, and we're truly grateful for the support. For more information, you can call the Society office at 860-647-9983, email [info@manchesterhistory.org](mailto:info@manchesterhistory.org), or visit [www.manchesterhistory.org](http://www.manchesterhistory.org).

## Society Properties Open to the Public

**History Center Exhibits, Library, Office, and Museum Store** at 175 Pine St., open Wednesday to Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. located in the former Cheney Machine Shop building. Exhibits include **Manchester Then and Now, business signs** and the **loom room**. The new **Eighth District Fire Department and North End Exhibit** has been a popular addition. There is a research library and museum store. Our phone is 860-647-9983 and our email is [info@manchesterhistory.org](mailto:info@manchesterhistory.org).

**Old Manchester Museum** at 126 Cedar Street is open the first Saturday of the month, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. May through December. It is also open by appointment. Please call our office at 860-647-9983 for further information. Exhibits include Manchester manufacturers Cheney Brothers, Bon Ami, Iona, and Norton Electric, our elementary schools both past and present, Pitkin Glass Works bottles, and the story of the Spencer Rifle and its inventor Christopher Spencer. There is also a museum store in the lobby.

**Cheney Homestead and Keeney Schoolhouse** at 106 Hartford Rd. are open the first and third Sundays of the month, May through October, from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m. The house is an early American home with period art and furniture, a clock making exhibit, and an art gallery. The Homestead was donated to the Manchester Historical Society by the Cheney family in 1968 for a museum to exhibit and explain the impact of the Cheney family on Manchester and beyond. Guided tours include the one-room 1751 Keeney schoolhouse, a partial restoration of one of Manchester's earliest one-room schools.

**Woodbridge Farmstead and former Meadowbrook Dairy**, at 495 Middle Turnpike East, are open the second and fourth Sundays of the month May through October, from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m. The Farmstead includes a ca. 1830 farmhouse, a Visitor Center in a barn salvaged from North Manchester, and a late 1700's English barn, as well as foundations of several barns from the days of farming. Early farm equipment is on display along with a one-horse open sleigh and a pony wagon. The Visitor Center shows the history of the Manchester Green area in photos. The house interior includes a Victorian era parlor and later period sitting and dining rooms. Visitors can park at the municipal lot behind the Senior Center or along the side street to the east of the Farmstead.

**Genealogy Group** meets the second Wednesday of the month at the History Center 10 to noon. The public is welcome to come and ask questions about genealogy research.

**See also our website at [www.manchesterhistory.org](http://www.manchesterhistory.org) for more information and possible changes.**

## Upcoming Events

The following lecture series will be held on Sundays at the History Center at 1:00 p.m. Each topic will cover a different aspect of the Revolution, how it was affected by other nations, how it has been perceived throughout our own history, how George Washington and Thomas Jefferson are judged today, what the founding fathers would offer Americans today, and the wars of the colonists before the Revolutionary War.

**March 22 - The American Revolution as an International Event** by Steve Armstrong

**April 19 - The American Revolution as Seen in American History** by Steve Armstrong

**May 3 - Judging Washington and Jefferson Today** by Malcolm Barlow

**May 24 - What the Founding Fathers Would Say to Americans Today** by Steve Armstrong

**June 14 - Making war Before the War** by Steve Penny

In addition to the lecture series the following events will also be held:

**June 20 - Saturday Pitkin Glass Works site, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.** The Pitkin Glass Works site is located at the intersection of Parker and Putnam Streets. The event will feature reenactments of Revolutionary War soldiers and their weapons, and music of the period. Parking is available on nearby streets.

## New Members Who Joined in 2025

We extend a welcome to the following new members who joined during last year. We hope that you will visit our properties and join us for our upcoming events.

### From Manchester

Olivia Aiken  
Arionah Alexander-Williams  
Ken Boucher  
Steven Cambria  
Deborah Fafard  
Keith Flint  
Emmet D. Gemme  
Cathy Green  
Shirley M. Hall  
Paula Mayo  
Georgie Melrose  
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Suzanne Reed  
Peggy L. Ryan  
Ralph Taft  
The Turek-Hernandes Family  
Deborah A. Willis  
Craig B. Zinn

### From Connecticut

Isabel Grzegorek  
Ziyon Irving  
Paula Moriarty  
LeAnne Mullen  
Maxine Snyder Parrott  
John L. Presutti  
Cynthia Russell-Williams  
James H. Sarles  
Arlene M. Snyder  
Brooke Wilcox  
Kathy Woznica

Portland  
Bloomfield  
Moodus  
Vernon  
South Windsor  
East Hartford  
Bolton  
Coventry  
Colchester  
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East Hartford

### From Elsewhere

Anne Harris Bacher  
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Joseph Gleeson  
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Dana O'Neill  
William P. Ryan  
Kristin Perry Schwarz  
Kathy Shirer

Ambridge, PA  
Hardwick, MA  
Hyde Park, NY  
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Barrington, RI  
East Thetford, VT  
New York, NY  
Ottsville, PA  
Hyannis, MA

## A Message From Our Former President

*By Dennis Gleeson*

Stepping down feels like an age thing. I found this Society while visiting my mother who lived on School St. On that Sunday Society president John Dormer opened up and gave me a tour of the History Center building. I saw a place where when I retired, I could help.

This person who didn't read books started reading Manchester history books. Then developed a love of researching history, especially local history. Ron Schack and I researched Manchester men who fought in the Civil War. One in five of them died in that war. I also learned to give tours of our developing history center.

Then there are the friendships I made. Finding events added to my life after retiring from

working a regular job. There followed Society management. Fund raising was so important to our growth. During this time, we acquired the Cheney Silk Vault building and the Society continued to move forward.

On the advice of my doctor, I have resigned effective February 1. Consequently, the Board of Directors has elected Steve Armstrong to be my replacement. I want to thank the membership and all the friends I made. I am also asking others to give their time and donations to support the Society.

I will continue to help out and carry out research into Manchester individuals and families.

# Donors Give Us Life

Our donors keep us alive and able to carry out the many functions of the Society. Without your financial support we would not be able to keep the lights and heat on, the insurance and utilities paid, the artifacts cataloged and cared for, and visitors and school tours welcomed to our museums, history center, Cheney Homestead and Woodbridge Farmstead. These donations during the year 2025 were made through the Annual Fund drive, memorial gifts, and individual interests. Thank you for your generosity.

Although we strive to compile an accurate list, it may happen that a donor was inadvertently not included in this list. If we left someone out, please let us know so that we can recognize the donor in our next issue.

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| |

## Woodbridge Farmstead

*By Peggy Newton*

As I was driving by the Farmstead recently, the huge snow piles and old Christmas wreaths made me long for Spring!

Spring at the Farmstead is one of the loveliest seasons with the early appearance of tiny Crocus and Iris in the front garden (and lawn). Along with an errant Tulip from long ago, possibly planted by Thelma Woodbridge herself!

Our first Open Farm Day will be Sunday May 10 (from 12 to 2 p.m.). Please make note of our new hours which have changed for the convenience of Visitors and Volunteers. Come visit the Woodbridge Farmstead in all seasons. So many new activities will be happening this year.

One attraction will be the Grand Opening of our newly restored Upper barn, which had previously not been accessible to visitors. This is the younger 19th century barn which has been cleaned out, windows replicated, and the exterior and lower interior space repainted. Some

cow stanchions have been saved in the lower level, which at one time held over 20 milking cows.

Of course, there is our oldest barn, which may well predate the American Revolution and our Visitor Center, both newly repainted. The Visitor Center contains displays of old Farmhouse memorabilia as well as images of Manchester Green as it was many years ago. The Farmhouse itself is once again available for tours.

Events will be held on Special Sundays to coincide with the 250th anniversary year of our country's founding. And we will have again our unique visits from Aussakita farm animals, Shady Glen ice cream and antique car show.

With so much happening this special 250th year we can use many new volunteers! If you have an interest in Manchester history, enjoy meeting new people and having fun please call the History center office at 860-647-9983 or email [peggynewton47@att.net](mailto:peggynewton47@att.net)