



The Courier

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Future of Bennet School Buildings Again in Doubt

by Robert Dunne



Bennet's Cheney Building, on School Street

The future of the Bennet Middle School complex, formerly known as Education Square, is again in jeopardy, due to an 8-1 decision of the Town Directors last month to demolish three significant buildings in the complex.

Destruction of the three buildings—the Cheney building (originally the State Trade School), the School Street Firehouse, and a town boiler plant—would significantly mar the integrity of Main and School Streets, which are a part of Manchester's only National Historic Landmark District.

By ignoring the wishes of a referendum approved by the town last November, the Town Directors intend to demolish a critical mass of buildings that link the Main Street National Historic District with the historic district of the East Side.

The Town Directors voted to tear down the three buildings to possibly make way for a parking lot and half a soccer field (a definitive plan from the Town is not yet in place). A full-length soccer field, located one block away, on Charter Oak Street, calls into question the economic soundness of this decision.

These actions by the Town Directors were regarded as quite a

(see *Future*, page 2)

Old House Fair 2006

How to Preserve Your Historic Home

Anyone interested in the preservation and maintenance of older homes—from chimneys to porches, from windows to interior painting—will enjoy a field day of activities at the Historical Society's Old House Fair 2006.

To carry out its mission to advocate for the preservation of historic structures, the Society will host its second Old House Fair starting at 9 a.m. on Saturday, April 22, at the SBM Charitable Foundation Auditorium at Manchester Community College.

Old House Fair 2006 will be a day-long series of lectures and workshops designed for owners of older homes to preserve the historical integrity of their houses.

John C. Leeke, preservation consultant from Portland, ME, and author of over 100 articles in preservation journals, will lead two workshops, one on windows and another on porch preservation. State Historian Walter Woodward will provide the keynote speech.

Additional workshops will focus on chimney restoration and repair and choosing an interior paint palette for the historic home.

As he states on his comprehensive website, Historic HomeWorks (www.historichomeworks.com), Leeke believes that there "is an economical and practical alternative to trashing your fine old windows and buying replacements made of plastic." In addition, "Effective maintenance is the key to preserving your porch.... The bottom line can be much less costly than major porch rebuilding with all new materials."

Old House Fair 2006 builds upon the success of last year's inaugural fair, which featured nationally renowned preservationist Bob Yapp and drew over 100 participants.

If you want to maintain the historic integrity of your older home and desire to know the *right* way of restoring your home instead of just considering hard-sell fashionable methods, then come to Old House Fair 2006. Advanced admission is \$15 for MHS members and \$20 for non-members, or \$25 at the door for everyone. For more information, call 860-647-9983.

Cheney Homestead News

by Mark Sutcliffe, Chairman

Things have been quiet at the Homestead since the Christmas open house, which attracted 55 visitors including a troop of Cub Scouts. Everyone enjoyed the decorations provided by the Manchester Garden Club. It is amazing what talented people can do with twigs and cones and bits of colored ribbon!

The Homestead relies on several sources of revenue to fund the *basic* maintenance needs of the facility, such as fuel oil, electricity, repairs, insurance, snow plowing, tree and grounds care. We receive interest and dividends from our modest endowment, twenty percent of the Society's annual fund receipts, rent from our tenant, admission fees, fundraising profits, and

donations from Society members and friends. We are always trying to think of ways to cut expenses and increase income. Remembering the annual help we got from many members of the Cheney family years ago, we decided to offer this opportunity to as many descendants as we could locate.

In December we made an appeal to 241 members of the Cheney family, most of whom are not members of the Manchester Historical Society, for help covering the costs of museum operations. Ten percent of the letters came back marked "deceased" or "moved with forwarding address expired," but as of this mid-January writing, we have received positive responses from 19 people. Support from family members is especially gratifying. It tells us that there is a community of people all across the country for whom the Cheney Homestead is important and worthy of support. We have received donations from as far away as California, Oregon, Texas, and Maine, and as close as Manchester, Connecticut.

Our challenge is to live up to everyone's expectations of what our little museum should be: teaching about the lives and legacy of the Cheney family of Manchester, Connecticut, through preservation and interpretation of the historic homestead, its grounds, and collections. We complement the exhibits at the Old Manchester Museum, the Manchester History Center,

and the Keeney Schoolhouse, as well as those of other cultural attractions in town, to tell the complete story of Manchester life in days gone by.

Spotlight on Collections

We were honored to be included in a newly published book, *Connecticut Valley Furniture: Eliphalet Chapin and His Contemporaries, 1750-1800*, by Thomas P. and Alice K. Kugelman, and Robert Lionetti. The Connecticut Historical Society published the richly illustrated 551-page tome, edited by CHS's Director of Collections Susan P. Schoelwer. This long-awaited book is the definitive work on the subject and its release coincided with a major exhibit at CHS by the same name. Three of the Homestead's pieces—the scalloped top dressing table, the built-in tall case clock, and a bureau—are illustrated and described in detail. We also received acclaim for having the "largest known intact set of Chapin school diamond-splat claw-and-ball-foot chairs."

New Mission Statement

In January, the Homestead Committee adopted a new mission statement: "The Cheney Homestead Museum teaches about the lives and accomplishments of the Cheney family of Manchester, Connecticut. This is achieved through the preservation and interpretation of the historic homestead, its backgrounds, and collections."

The Courier

**A newsletter of the
Manchester Historical Society**

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FUTURE OF BUILDINGS IN DOUBT

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surprise to many, because the Directors did not allow for public hearings on the subject. Neither did they solicit the input of either the Town's own Cheney Brothers Historic District Advisory Commission, the Town Historian, Vivian Ferguson, or the Historical Society. Instead, as reported in the *Journal Inquirer* on January 18, several Directors simply took their own private tours of the complex and then reached their conclusions without any input from expert historians.

Society Executive Director Mary Dunne said, "It's deplorable that the Directors changed the parameters of the public referendum without the opportunity for public comment. And it's absolutely inexcusable that they did not consult with or even notify the Cheney Brothers Historic District Commission before making their decision."

Controversy surrounding the old Education Square is not new. As reported in *The Courier* in May 2004 ("Preservation Alert: Bennet Middle School"), the Town

(see **Future**, page 3)

History on Your Television

by Susan Barlow

Did you know that you can watch history every Saturday on public access television in the Manchester area? With house tours, interviews, and nature hikes, our Society's TV show airs on channel 15 at 8 p.m. Each show runs for a month, so if you miss it on the first Saturday of the month, you can catch it on subsequent Saturdays. Some of our tapes are available at Mary Cheney Library and some are for sale at the museum gift shop.

In February, *The Hispanic Experience* tells many stories of coming to Manchester from Puerto Rico, Central and South America. We asked participants, "Why Manchester?" We heard many reasons and fascinating experiences. Dan and Dawn Tomacos, of Kids Quest, filmed and edited this show.

We are trying out digital editing on a show about *Ephemera*, with Francine McKinney of South Windsor, former owner of a bookshop. Francine is great, but the editors (me and my video partner Kathryn Wilson) are struggling to improve the quality of sound and video while learning new techniques. Formerly we used linear editing, which was also quite complicated when we got started. So it has taken a while to get this ready for viewers. Francine's family grew up in the Buckland-Hilliardville area, and she displays some interesting photos of relatives and the Manchester landscape of long ago.

Future shows also include a tour of a modest home chock full of historic artifacts; footage of our Hudson Street walking tour on January 1, 2006, attended by about 50 people; and an interview with Phil Susag about Cheney mansions owned by South United Methodist Church.

Cox public access, Channel 15, broadcasts in Manchester, South Windsor, Glastonbury, Wethersfield, Rocky Hill, and Newington. Your comments on the shows are welcome. Call the Society at 860-647-9983, or call me directly at 860-643-9776.

Hidden Gems Walking Tour



Contemporary view of St. James School with its side doors, formerly separate entrances for boys and girls. Photo by Dick Jenkins, Historical Society member and webmaster of MHS1955.com, which has many photos and stories of Manchester history.

Board Director Susan Barlow of the Society will lead a 1-3/4 hour walking tour on Saturday, March 11 (snow date, March 12) at 1 p.m. Participants will meet at St. James School, 85 Park Street. The walk will showcase little-known streets and interesting buildings, some hidden from view to the average driver. By walking, we will have time to see up close the c.1910 Peter Gorman mansion and a mansard-roofed house tucked behind Downtown businesses, as well as many Cheney Mill worker houses. For participants with some extra time, we'll visit the History Center after the walk.

The walk is free to members and \$2 to non-members. Questions may be directed to the Society at 860-647-9983, or through the contact button at www.manchesterhistory.org.

FUTURE OF BUILDINGS IN DOUBT

from page 2

Directors two years ago were seeking alternative uses of the property, even if that involved demolition of the entire complex. Through the active participation of the Historical Society, the Advisory Commission, and concerned citizens, the Directors decided to renovate the complex and keep it an active school.

The referendum last November, overwhelmingly approved by the town's citizens, never included demolition of buildings in the Bennet complex.

Of the three buildings now slated for the wrecking ball, the Cheney Building especially would be an irreplaceable loss to the town. Besides its architectural significance (see the May 2004

Courier), the building is a key historic structure in the town's history because of the many residents who learned the textile industry there and went on to work in the Cheney Brothers Mills. The superior materials used to construct the building lend the structure to a viable adaptive reuse.

Since the Directors did not bother to solicit the opinions of the town's citizens or historians—a decision that runs contrary to last fall's referendum, we invite our readers to contact them directly. Public hearings on the fate of the complex should be a given. It is not too late to engage the Directors in constructive dialogue that may yet preserve the Bennet complex. Their address is 41 Center Street, Manchester, 06045, and their telephone number is 860-647-3130.

Welcome Aboard, New Members!

We welcome the following new individual or family members of the Society who joined between November 5, 2005 and February 1, 2006:

From Manchester:

Sandra Bailey and Family
Sarah Clancey
Matthew and Kimberly Dietrichsen
Bert Gay
Eileen Griffin
Rosemarie Henry
William McGugan (Life Member)
William and Norma Mullen
Michael Pohl
Mary Tierney
Jerry Williams

From other towns:

Christopher Ambrose (Hebron)
John and Barbara Borini (Ellington)
Lois Daly (East Windsor)
Helena Marrin (Brookline, MA)
Cecilia Muth-Herman (Bel Air, MD)
Janice Peacock and family (Tolland)

The Hispanic Experience in Manchester



The Society opened the multi-media exhibit "The Hispanic Experience in Manchester" on January 9 at the History Center with music, dancing, and food of various regions. The exhibit is a collaboration with the Association of Puerto Ricans and Latinos United of Manchester (APLUM), and over ten countries and locales are represented. The exhibit includes personal artifacts, beautiful textiles, rare photographs, and a video loop of interviews conducted with members of Manchester's Hispanic community. The exhibit will be on display until February 28.

Society Volunteers Help Out with Katrina Relief

[Ed. Note: Sue and John Hovey are long-time volunteers with the Society (John has served as a Director on the Board). For over four months, the Hoveys have been in Mississippi helping out with relief efforts there. Last month they reported to us on their work. Here are excerpts of their report.]

The day is done here, even though the day never stops. We usually get up between 4 or 5 in the morning and drop about 9 or 10 at night. Waveland, Mississippi, has been cut off from the rest of the world. You need to go 30 miles outside this town to find reasonable life. We're into the fifth month after the hurricane and although there has been some progress it will take many years to see a point of basic recovery.

"Camp Katrina" started out at the Kmart plaza when the Christian Life Church of Orange Beach, Alabama, sent over a small group in a pick-up truck hauling a small utility trailer. They arrived the third night after the storm. Not knowing what to expect, they brought some basics to get started and evaluate what would be needed. By the second night they had 400 people stay for dinner. Eighty percent of Waveland was destroyed. Upon the church's arrival people had been without food or water for three days. No cars, stores, banks, churches, or schools. It looked like a nuclear bomb had been dropped.

Our first trip brought us here at the end of September, and we stayed until mid October. At that time the church was feeding anywhere from 500 to 5000 a day. A store was created for donations that were sent in, and a clothing area was established. FEMA set

up a site. The government sent in a \$6 million prototype hospital, and a helipad was set up for the use of two helicopters. We had brought many donations down in our camper. It took us three days to get here and we camped at Walmart's parking lot at night. Tractor-trailer trucks came 24/7 bringing donations from all over the world. Volunteers came from over 35 states. These people used their vacations and took unpaid time off from work; even entire families came. No one left without saying that they were coming back. We came down to volunteer our time and help out a little.

We have received so much from this experience. We are humbled by what we have and continue to receive. They have served over 25,000 meals to date. They have now gone into the second phase of their mission and are now working on going into the field and helping gut and rebuild houses. I could write for days and tell you stories, but you need to be here to appreciate it. In October people were still living in tents. A FEMA trailer is like being locked in a closet. The sewage lines are constantly broken from trucks running over them. Every one gets at least one flat tire as there are nails everywhere. The donations from all over the world bring you to tears. Christmas here was a moving experience.

(see **Katrina Relief**, page 6)

Remember the North End with Your Next Cup of Coffee!



To commemorate reunions taking place this spring involving current and former residents of Manchester's North End, the Society now has available at the History Center and Old Manchester Museum special-edition coffee mugs featuring a colorful mural of Depot Square. Artist Nancy Paine beautifully captured this important part of town that was demolished in the 1960s.

Lesson Learned: During Hailstorms, Take in Your Chickens!

[Ed. Note: Volunteer Coordinator Brenda Paullo discovered this news story from an 1829 issue of the New England Weekly Review; it details a rather dangerous hailstorm that hit Manchester that spring. The article is reproduced nearly precisely as it was first printed.]

Manchester, (Conn.) May 30, 1829 Hail Storm—A shower of Hail about two miles wide passed through this town yesterday, between four and five in the afternoon, which, for severity was almost unparalleled in our Country. Many of the hail-stones were one and a fourth inch in diameter, and their form was unusually regular, being almost that of a perfect globe. Their solidity and specific gravity were equal to ice formed in the coldest months in the winter, and their fall, being attended by a strong wind, rendered the damage very considerable. The grain in the fields and the plants

and vegetables in the gardens, are literally cut down and destroyed, and the fruit trees stripped of the promise of a productive season. The windows on the north and west, which were most exposed, are entirely broken. In the Union Village, about 3100 panes of glass were broken, more than 950 of which were in the stone Cotton Mill. Fowls, that could not find a shelter from the fury of the storm, were beaten down and killed. How soon the frowning elements when permitted to burst upon us, will destroy the labor of many a toilsome day.

J. T. H.

NewsNotes

“On My Honor,” You’ll Love This Exhibit

New Volunteer Coordinator **Brenda Paullo** is culling together materials for the exhibit “On My Honor: Manchester Girl Scouts, 1919-2006,” which will open at the History Center on March 14. Featuring decades of artifacts and old uniforms, the exhibit will also benefit from the participation of local Girl Scouts troops with assistance from Carol Sutcliffe and Kate Sinnamon.

Get Out Your Walking Shoes...

Throughout the spring the Society will lead a number of walking tours, ranging from such familiar historical locations as Manchester Green (Feb. 25) and the Downtown Main Street area (June 3), to rustic locales like Union Pond (May 6), to the unusual, such as “Hidden Gems” (Mar. 11—see related story). The Society’s walking tours are a great way of getting exercise while learning about Manchester’s rich and diverse history.

Stay Tuned for a New Curator’s Column

Although **David Smith** stepped down as Society president last fall, he remains a Board Director and has recently assumed the title of Curator for the Society. Starting with next issue’s newsletter, Dave will write a column dedicated to reporting on some of the fascinating artifacts that are donated to the Society.

We Will Miss...

The Society regrets the recent passing of **Robert H. Smith**. A long-time member of the Society and a frequent donor of rare artifacts, Robert was an active member of the Manchester community, having served in various capacities, including the town Board of Education and the Manchester Memorial Hospital. His father, Robert J. Smith, developed some of the town’s finest neighborhoods, and Robert himself lovingly restored the Charles Cheney house on Hartford Road, where his family resided for 30 years. The Society will miss him.

KATRINA RELIEF

from page 5

The world needs to know what happened here and what miracles have occurred to help these people. The destruction was shocking at first. Now we have become used to it and have learned to accept it. The townspeople are committed to staying. They just get up every day and put one foot in front of the other.

In October there were no cars on the road. Now, in January, there is traffic. Some restaurants have opened up. Walmart is open. It is just a warehouse and very basic generic needs are there. The Laundromat consists of three construction trailers put together and small washer and dryers. Many abandoned cars are still on the road.

The storm was 400 miles wide, with 175-mile-per-hour winds.

Welcome Our New Volunteer Coordinator



Brenda Paullo has stepped in to perform the huge task of organizing the work of the Society’s 100+ volunteers. She is enthusiastic and organized—two essential requirements for the task. The Society operated on volunteer efforts for almost 40 years, and the need for talented and active volunteers did not disappear with the hiring of the Executive Director and staff. Among Brenda’s immediate tasks will be to acquaint herself with the volunteer corps and the interests of all our volunteers and begin staffing the myriad events and activities of the organization. Pictured, left to right, are Carol Sutcliffe, outgoing Volunteer Coordinator Florence Johnson, and Brenda Paullo. Florence, who will still be active in the organization, said of her long service, “I like being part of the Society. It is interesting and fun. I love the people!”

A wave surge of about 25 feet came five miles inland from the gulf. We are going to continue to stay until we feel it is time to go. We have the freedom of the trailer. Camp Katrina is now set up in a demo out by a NAPA store. The volunteers sleep in the back in what were the car stalls. They have cots, makeshift showers, and portable potties. We are fed three meals a day. No one wants to leave; we are loving every minute we are here, because so much work is being accomplished. Gratitude is sincere and goes deep. These are proud people and they feel ashamed to ask for help and cannot believe how the world is coming to their response. I will send back some pictures. Keep in touch and let us know what is happening in Manchester. The way it looks now we will not be back until March.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Winter and Spring 2006

Unless otherwise noted, admission to lectures and walking tours is free to Manchester Historical Society members and \$2 for non-members. All lectures will take place at the Manchester History Center.

<p>February 18 Saturday 12-2 p.m.</p>	<p><i>Special Open House for "The Hispanic Experience"</i> Exhibitors present to discuss the artifacts on display Refreshments will be served; FREE to the public</p>
<p>February 25 Saturday 1 p.m.</p>	<p><i>Manchester Green Walking Tour</i> Led by Mary Dunne with Susan Barlow Meet at Senior Center, 549 E. Middle Turnpike (Rain date: Sunday, February 26)</p>
<p>March 11 Saturday 2 p.m.</p>	<p><i>Hidden Gems of Manchester Walking Tour</i> Led by Susan Barlow Meet at St. James School, 85 Park Street (Rain date: Sunday, March 12) (See related story)</p>
<p>March 19 Sunday 2 p.m.</p>	<p><i>Slavery in Connecticut: Diversity in the Revolutionary War</i> Lecture by Joel Lang of the <i>Hartford Courant</i> Refreshments will be served Free to members; \$5 for non-members</p>
<p>April 15 Saturday 1 p.m.</p>	<p><i>Watching the World Go By: Walking Tour of Manchester's Front Porches</i> Meeting place to be announced (Rain date: Sunday, April 16)</p>
<p>April 22 Saturday 9 a.m. -3:30 p.m.</p>	<p><i>Old House Fair 2006</i> Manchester Community College SBM Charitable Foundation Auditorium In advance: Members \$15, non-members \$20; At the door: \$25 Continental breakfast and lunch included (See related story)</p>
<p>May 6 Saturday 1 p.m.</p>	<p><i>Union Pond Historic Hike</i> Led by Susan Barlow Meet at Robertson School, 65 North School Street (Rain date: Sunday, May 7)</p>
<p>June 3 Saturday 1 p.m.</p>	<p><i>Downtown Walking Tour</i> Led by Susan Barlow Meet at Bennet School, 1151 Main Street (Rain date: Sunday, June 4)</p>
<p>EXHIBITS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Mr. Olcott's Grass Farm"</i> at the Old Manchester Museum throughout spring • <i>"The History of the Manchester Road Race"</i> at the History Center throughout spring • <i>"The Hispanic Experience in Manchester"</i> at the History Center until February 28 • <i>"On My Honor": Manchester Girl Scouts, 1919-2006'</i> at the History Center opening March 14

The Manchester History Center, at 175 Pine Street, is open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays



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