

# The Courier

MAY 2008

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A quarterly publication of the Manchester Historical Society, Inc. / 106 Hartford Road / Manchester, Connecticut 06040 / (860) 647-9983

## No Pane, No Gain

by Robert Dunne

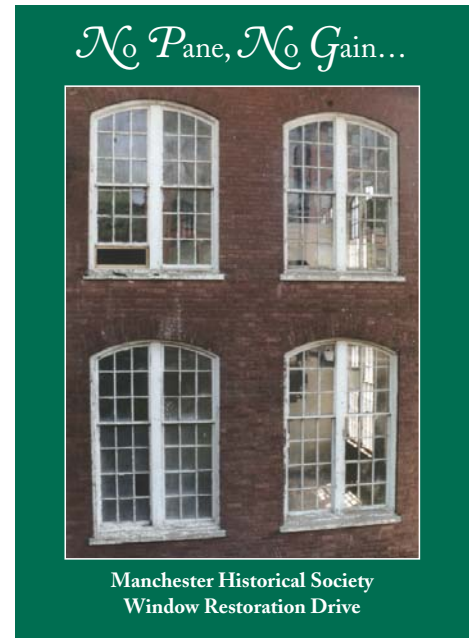
If there is any truth to the proverb that the eyes are the window to the soul, then the windows at the Society's History Center at 175 Pine Street have provided an opaque, dingy vision into all the activities that go on inside it. This problem is about to change, however, as Society members and the public are invited to participate in a new fundraising venture.

The Society is launching its "No Pane, No Gain" Window Restoration Drive, and its goal is ultimately to restore the 168 window openings in the History Center.

We're already off to a good start with the help of a \$140,000 Historic Restoration Fund grant awarded by the State's Commission on Culture and Tourism. This matching grant is a lot of money, but because it will cost about \$6,000 to restore each window, the grant will allow us to restore only about 44 windows.

A brochure describing the drive in more detail will be mailed out soon.

**Games Printing** generously donated their services in designing and printing the brochure.



See **WINDOWS**, page 2

## What's New at the Old Manchester Museum?

After being closed for several months, the Old Manchester Museum, at 126 Cedar Street, will open its doors with a gala event on Friday, May 16, to kick off several new and exciting exhibits. Wine and refreshments will be served.

"Shakers in America—Beyond the Furniture: One Family's Collection" is one of the new exhibits, featuring the collection of Alana and K.C. Parkinson. The exhibit will showcase some of the products produced by Shaker communities other than their famous furniture. The Shakers have been engaged in making herbal medicines, and raising, packaging, and selling seed packets of vegetables and flowers. A variety of examples of these prod-

ucts will be on display. Also on display will be artifacts related to several regional Shaker communities, including those at Enfield, CT; Tyringham, MA; Watervliet, NY; and Enfield, NH. Although their numbers are now few, the Shaker legacy lives on. The exhibit will run through December 2008.

A recently donated antique voting machine is the centerpiece of another new exhibit, "Voting in Manchester," that focuses on how citizens voted in Manchester 100 years ago. Donated by the Town, the machine was first used in the early 20th century and was the first automatic voting machine after ballot boxes were

See **MUSEUM**, page 2

How Sweet It Is!



Society honors Corporate Member Royal Ice Cream (See related story, page 4.)

## **WINDOWS**, *from page 1*

But in brief, we are launching the “No Pane, No Gain” Window Restoration Drive to give individuals and businesses the opportunity to be a part of this much needed work, from restoring one pane at a time to restoring entire window sashes. Contributing to this drive will help the Society get closer to its goal of completing the building’s structural renovation—and in doing so, you will also be permanently recognized.

We have arranged three creatively titled levels of sponsorship:

1. ***Pane in the Sash Level.*** For \$50 you can sponsor the restoration of a single pane of glass (donations for more than one are welcome). Donors in this category will be recognized by having their names, along with those of other like donors, engraved on a plaque that will be on permanent display in the History Center.

2. ***Half-Sash Level.*** For \$2,000 you can sponsor the restoration of the vertical half of a window sash. Donors will have their names engraved on a plaque by the window, and listed with like donors on another plaque that will be on permanent display in the History Center. In this category, there would be two names recognized for each sash.

3. ***Clinking-Glass Level.*** For \$3,500 you can sponsor the restoration of an entire window sash. Donors will have their names solely engraved on a plaque by the window of their choice,

and listed with like donors on another plaque that will be on permanent display in the History Center.

The Society’s “No Pane, No Gain” Window Restoration Drive gives you the chance to leave your own mark—or as a memorial—on what will be a vital and long-lasting cultural and educational resource. For more information, or to arrange an appointment to visit the History Center, please call 860-647-9983.

You can use the form on the last page of the newsletter to mail in your donation.

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## **MUSEUM**, *from page 1*

done away with. It was in continuous use until more modern machines were introduced later in the century. A special feature of the exhibit is that visitors may actually cast their votes on the machine.

In honor of Manchester’s Korean War veterans, a new evolving exhibit is under way that highlights the contributions of some of our local veterans. As the year progresses, we hope that veterans will visit us and add their personal history to this display, including identifying on a large map where they served in Korea.

Re-opening day ceremonies will take place from 5 to 7 p.m. Tickets for Society members are \$5, \$7 for non-members, and reservations may be made by calling 860-647-9742. The Museum will resume its regular hours of Saturdays 10 a.m.–4 p.m., and Sundays 1–4 p.m.

### ***The Courier***

*A newsletter of the  
Manchester Historical Society*

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## **Portsmouth Honors Artist Russell Cheney**

Several paintings by Russell Cheney that are owned by the Society will be on loan for a special exhibit dedicated to the Manchester native in Plymouth, NH, from June 2 through the fall.

The exhibit, “Russell Cheney, A New England Master: Northern New England Paintings 1910-1945,” will be held at two locations. The Portsmouth Historical Society will display Cheney’s works from Portsmouth and the New Hampshire coast, from June 2 to October 31; and the Portsmouth Athenaeum will showcase works centered on Kittery and Southern Maine, from June 2 to September 6.

On Saturdays from late June through October, guest curator Richard M. Candee and other speakers will provide talks about various aspects of Cheney’s life and works. A one-day symposium will take place at the Athenaeum on August 2.

For more information on times and locations, call the Portsmouth Historical Society at 603-436-8420 or visit their website at [www.portsmouthhistory.org](http://www.portsmouthhistory.org); the Portsmouth Athenaeum can be reached at 603-431-2538 or [www.portsmouthathenaeum.org](http://www.portsmouthathenaeum.org); and go to [www.russellcheney.com](http://www.russellcheney.com) for more information about Cheney.

In 2001, the Manchester Historical Society presented an exhibit on Cheney’s paintings at the Cheney Homestead, featuring works owned by the Society and others owned by local residents and organizations.

## *It Must be Christmas in April*

The Woodbridge Farmstead and the Cheney Homestead benefited from approximately 125 hours of labor during the recent Rebuilding Together weekend (formerly known as Christmas in April). Volunteers from the New River Community Church, in South Windsor (pictured) worked at the Farmstead and volunteers from St. Bridget's Catholic Church worked at the Homestead. About 165 bags of leaves were filled at the Homestead and about 70 were filled at the Farmstead. The Town of Manchester removed the bags and some brush at the completion of the work period. The Society—especially the Farmstead and Homestead committees—thanks all who volunteered!



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## **Heritage Day:**

*It's free, fun, and historic!*

The public is invited to Manchester's big community event celebrating the town's history, Heritage Day, on Saturday, June 14.

Heritage Day is based on "Homeland Day," a day set aside in 1914 by the Cheney Brothers mills to celebrate the many ethnic backgrounds of those who came to Manchester to work in the silk mills. In 1991, Heritage Day was re-established to celebrate Manchester's history, culture, and diverse ethnic groups. Exhibits and entertainment take place at the air-conditioned Cheney Hall (177 Hartford Road), with free parking in the Hall's adjacent lot. Opening ceremonies start at 10:30 a.m. on the stage, followed by curator Dave Smith's slide presentation about the Cheney Mills. From 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., the Historical Society's museums, Cheney Homestead, and Keeney Schoolhouse will be open without charge. The Homestead will again feature Civil War re-enactors.

Visitors to Heritage Day can enjoy the exhibits of cultural and historic interest inside Cheney Hall, ethnic food, local entertainment, a tour of the Fire Museum, free bus tours of Manchester's historic sights, and horse-drawn carriage rides of the Cheney historic district with commentary by local historians. Join us for an exciting and informative day of history and culture. Questions may be directed to the Historical Society's Susan Barlow, who serves on the Pride Week/Heritage Day Committee.

See <http://www.ci.manchester.ct.us/prideandheritage/> for more information about Pride Week activities, including a free concert by the Marvelettes on Saturday, June 7 in Center Park. The Marvelettes' hits include "Please Mr. Postman," and "Don't Mess with Bill."

# *How Sweet It Is!*

## The History of Royal Ice Cream

by James S. Orfitelli

Royal Ice Cream was founded in 1926 by Michael A. Orfitelli, Sr., an Italian immigrant who forged an honorable reputation by producing Italian ice cream desserts.

Michael Sr., my grandfather, came to this country from Telese, Italy, when he was 16. Although he had little further schooling in America, he taught himself the English language and became a well-read man. He worked at different companies around the state when he was young and learned what he could about business in America. During those early years Michael Sr. worked at the Manchester Dairy on Summit Street, which was a Sealtest Dairy at the time.

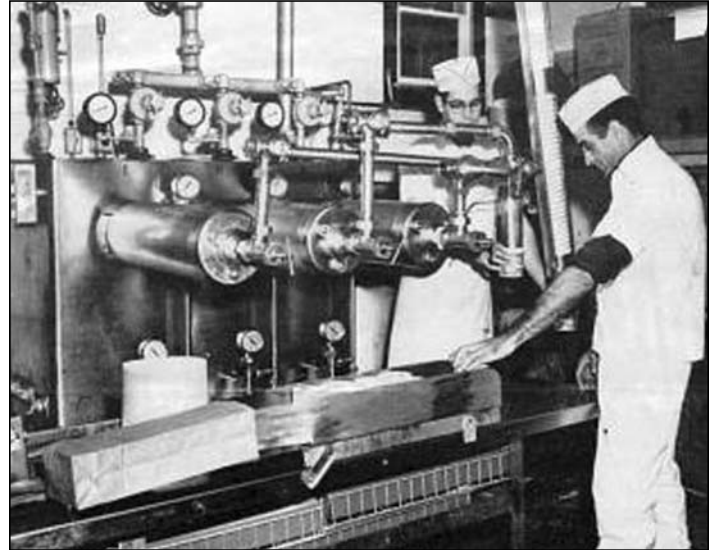
It was at that point that Michael Sr. visualized his own ice cream business and decided to venture out on his own. He almost named the company Sunset Dairy because of its proximity to Sunset Hill, which borders the west end of the facility today where Warren and Village Streets dead end. In the very early days the company was called Royal Ice Cream with a crown over the "R" along with the slogan, "King of Frozen Desserts."

Michael Sr. and his wife Nancy had eight children, two of whom, Harold and Michael Jr., came into the business. At various times the other six would reluctantly help out, but help they did.

As the business grew and succeeded, Michael Sr. bought all the houses on the north side of Warren Street and shortly after that bought two four-family homes on Wells Street. His plan was to have the workers live in the houses at low rent and include this as part of their wages. My grandfather loved family and would hold large pizza parties in the garages used to house the delivery trucks.

I also heard that when my grandfather wanted to show his siblings in Italy how successful he was in America, he took his new Buick over with him when he visited. While he was there the transmission had problems and it would only go in reverse and no one there could fix it. He ended up driving it 40 miles backwards to get to the ship that would bring it back to the states!

A little known fact is that Rudy Kissman, the town's previous fire marshal, worked at the dairy when he got out of the Navy. He would tell me the story that my grandfather, Michael Sr., was building a patio at his house. He would tell Rudy to take a break from bagging popsicles and work on the patio: "That was your grandfather's idea of a break!"



*Harold Orfitelli (front), in 1958.*

Michael Sr. and company survived the great Depression and the hurricane of '38. Years prior to the hurricane, Michael had a generator installed. It is my understanding that after the storm Royal was one of the few places in town that had power and they stored blood for the hospital in their coolers.

Harold and Mike Jr. took the business to the next level of growth, adding novelties and further expanding the specialty line with items like Nut Roll, Jimmy Roll, and Cake Ala Mode. For many years the town school system bought its ice cream from Royal. Ice cream sandwiches and Dixie cups were commonplace in the Manchester school system. Mike would take care of the deliveries and Harold ("Babe" as he was known for being the youngest of the eight) would take care of making the ice cream. They worked well together, growing the business throughout the state and developing a good name in the ice cream industry.

By the late '60s Babe and Mike realized that continuing the manufacturing of popsicles, Dixie cups, and sandwiches would not be in their best interest for further growth. They made the decision to discontinue these lines and concentrate on the specialty desserts. Even though there was fierce competition, it just made sense to go this route. In the '50s and '60s there were over 60 manufacturing dairies in the state of Connecticut, but today there are only a handful.

See **ICE CREAM**, page 6

# NewsNotes

## *Tree Planting at Homestead*

The Cheney Homestead Committee will host a memorial tree planting in honor of **Mark Sutcliffe** on Sunday, May 18 at 3 p.m. at the Homestead on 106 Hartford Road. Mark passed away in October of last year. He was a dedicated Society member and chairperson of the Cheney Homestead Committee for many years, and responsible for the impeccable maintenance of the Homestead and grounds. He also authored a comprehensive plan for the next 25 years for the property to guide the current Committee's work. His presence is deeply missed. Friends are invited to join Society members at the tree planting in his honor.

## *Annual Fund Update*

As of April 17, the Society has raised \$19,613 in donations to the Annual Fund. As reported in the last issue, Annual Fund donations are used to offset day-to-day operating costs of the Society. Please help us meet rising costs in fuel, in electricity, in—well, in just about everything these days! There is a cut-out form on the back page. Thanks to all who have already donated!

## *Bring on the Kids!*

The Society is preparing for school tours for Manchester's third-grade students from mid-May through early June, with visits planned for the Cheney Homestead, Keeney Schoolhouse, Old Manchester Museum, and the History Center. The Society will provide a little education and a lot of fun for the little tykes, as it continues a decades-old tradition.

## *Dobkin Memoir Donated to Society*

In 1942, the Dobkin family moved from Ellington to Manchester and purchased a former Cheney mansion on Hartford Road. They were the first non-Cheneys to move into a house on the Great Lawn, but at the time, they didn't even know who the Cheneys were.

**Audrey Dobkin Brett** has written a memoir of her family's life on a 200-acre farm in Ellington, and has donated a copy to the Society. Audrey, now a Rhode Island resident, lived in Manchester from 1942 to 2005. She plans to continue writing, eventually to cover the subject of her family's move to Manchester.

Audrey and her brother, **Adler Dobkin**, participated in a Society television show, which visited their former home—the former John Davenport Cheney mansion, built in 1905, and at 4,000 square feet, one of the smallest mansions. The television show is available at Mary Cheney Library.

## *Fire Watch*

In the next issue of *The Courier*, Doug Welch will untangle the complicated history of the Manchester Fire Department. Stay tuned....

## *Welcome Aboard!*

The Society recently elected Jill Mack to the Board of Directors. As the current chairperson of the Cheney Homestead Committee, Jill is not a newcomer to the Society. Previous to assuming the Chairperson role, Jill was a volunteer at many Society events, including the wreath auction, antique auction, and tag sales.

Jill was raised in Manchester and attended local public schools through high school, leaving to attend college in Vermont and begin a teaching career. She received a BS in Elementary Education and an MA in Educational Leadership from Castleton State College, Vermont. After several years of teaching-related experience in Vermont, Jill returned to her Manchester family and roots, in 2000. Her interest in the Society was prompted by learning that her great-grandfather, Alfred Leidholdt, was a weaver for 40 years at Cheney Brothers and finding many educational artifacts from South School in the family home. Welcome aboard, Jill!



## LEAVE A LEGACY™

June is Leave A Legacy month. Leave A Legacy Connecticut assists organizations such as the Manchester Historical Society by encouraging individuals to include in their wills contributions to their favorite charities.

You can make an impact on future generations in Manchester and ensure that the Society's important work will continue by leaving a legacy to the Manchester Historical Society. For more information, please contact Dave Smith at the Society at 860-647-9983, or the Leave A Legacy Foundation at 860-525-6052.

## *We Will Miss...*

The Society regrets the passing of several valuable members. **Norman Grimason**, a Manchester native and Korean War veteran, passed away in March. Life-long Manchester resident **Dorothy (Aspinwall) Ewing** also passed on in March. Manchester native **John C. Narkon** passed away in April.

## **ICE CREAM**, *from page 4*

In the late '70s, I came into the business. Harold and his wife Jeannette had three other sons and, like their aunts and uncles before them, they helped out in the business as needed before moving on to their own careers. For the next 15 or so years I worked the business under the direction and guidance of my father and Uncle Mike. Uncle Mike retired in the early '80s and Harold eventually phased out his presence to allow me to take charge. Harold retired in the late '80s. During this time the company was developing new and more interesting dessert items to meet the ever-growing demand for new products.

Around 1995, and after years of trucks always present on the state roads, Jim made the decision to stop all wholesale deliveries and sell everything through distributors. By this time, Royal had extensive business throughout the state of Connecticut and in the neighboring states of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York.

As they say in life, "timing is everything." It worked out perfectly as we found distributors for our entire customer base, and some of the employees that were no longer needed went to work for the new distributors.

Today, Royal Ice Cream has its fourth generation working in the business off and on while they attend college and make the decision as to what career path they will take. Royal is going strong. We have gone from local, to regional, to national and soon, to international. Royal ships its products as far west as Michigan, as far south as Florida, and within a few weeks will be shipping a new high-protein ice cream to Singapore and ice cream pies and cakes to Ireland. We have taken on the manufacturing responsibility for the Specialty Desserts Company located in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, which involves high-speed cookie and stick novelty production. Unlike sixty years ago, it's now all automated.

Two years ago we completed the first of a two-part expansion plan, upgrading all our refrigeration operations to being computer controlled. New ice cream making equipment took us from 3.5 gallons a minute to 17.5 gallons. A high-speed packaging machine wraps 150 pieces of ice cream a minute, and our cookie sandwich machine assembles a cookie sandwich untouched by human hands at 120 a minute. Our customer base/distributors are companies like H P Hood, Hersey's, Kemps, Guida's Dairy and Garelick.

Our ice cream is served and enjoyed by some very prominent people and places. Kathryn Hepburn was a big fan of our maple walnut and once sent her brother to the dairy to pick up some because the local ice cream parlor in Old Saybrook was out. Donald Trump enjoys a special Cherry Vanilla made with burgundy cherries at all his hotels and restaurants. (Rumor has it that it's the only flavor he eats.) The Waldorf Astoria in New

York City serves our vanilla ice cream exclusively, and the Royal Wich has won awards in Connecticut Restaurant Culinary Fair and the Los Angeles County Fair. The Historical Society serves the Royal Wich as the sole dessert at Cruisin' On Main. (By the way, look for our new wrapper this summer at the event.)

Shortly we will be approaching the town of Manchester for permission to build a large freezer off the back of the building and complete the second part of our expansion. Manchester has been good to Royal Ice Cream and I like to think that Royal Ice Cream has been good for Manchester. It is our goal to stay in Manchester and continue to grow and support our community. The public is always welcome to visit our retail outlet at the plant on Warren Street, Monday – Friday from 7:30 AM to 5:30 PM and Saturday from 7:30 AM to 12:30 PM. Please visit our web-site at [www.royalicecream.com](http://www.royalicecream.com).



## **History on Your Television**

*by Susan Barlow, Producer*

Throughout April, the Society will present a television show about the famous Pitkin Glass Works, a factory that operated circa 1783 to 1830. The massive stone ruins are located at the corner of Parker and Putnam Streets, and have been the site of several archeological digs. The program was filmed at the History Center in February, when Connecticut historians described the history and operation of the glass works. The program includes a photographic exhibit of remaining Pitkin glass, which is popular with collectors. For more information see [www.manchesterhistory.org/pitkinglass](http://www.manchesterhistory.org/pitkinglass).

The 94-minute program airs at 8 p.m. on Saturdays in April, on Cox Cable's channel 15 in Manchester, Glastonbury, South Windsor, Wethersfield, Rocky Hill, and Newington.

Many of the local-history shows can be borrowed at Mary Cheney Library, or purchased at the Historical Society gift shop or through the web site [www.manchesterhistory.org](http://www.manchesterhistory.org). To check for gift shop hours, call 860-647-9983.

# SPRING CALENDAR OF EVENTS

*Unless otherwise noted, admission to all lectures and walking tours is \$1 for Manchester Historical Society members and \$3 for non-members. All lectures and events will take place at the Manchester History Center, 175 Pine Street, unless otherwise noted.*

- |                            |                 |                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>May 16</b><br>Friday    | 5–7 p.m.        | <b>Reception and Re-opening of the Old Manchester Museum</b><br>\$5 for members, \$7 for non-members. For reservations, call 860-647-9742<br><i>(See related story)</i> |
| <b>May 18</b><br>Sunday    | 1 p.m.          | <b>Shakers in America</b><br>Lecture by historian K. C. Parkinson                                                                                                       |
| <b>May 18</b><br>Sunday    | 3 p.m.          | <b>Memorial Tree Dedication</b><br>In memory of Mark Sutcliffe, at Cheney Homestead<br><i>(immediately following lecture by K.C. Parkinson (See related story.)</i>     |
| <b>June 7</b><br>Saturday  | 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. | <b>Book and Tag Sale</b><br>Fundraiser. <i>Free! (See related story.)</i>                                                                                               |
| <b>June 14</b><br>Saturday | 10:30 a.m.      | <b>Manchester Heritage Day</b><br>Free admission to Society properties, featuring Civil War re-enactment at Cheney Homestead <i>(See related story.)</i>                |



## GIGANTIC BOOK & TAG SALE: The Sequel Saturday, June 7th 9 a.m.- 1 p.m.

Another fabulous book and tag sale for your shopping pleasure will take place at the History Center. Join us on Saturday, June 7, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., and be prepared to go home with armloads of great buys. Expect bargains galore, with prices of \$1 for most hardcovers, and 50 cents for regular paperbacks. There will also be some specially priced books for possible gift-giving. Besides books, there will be great buys on china, frames, decorative items, collectibles, small furniture, and much more! All proceeds will benefit the Society in its daily operations. Questions may be directed to 860-647-9983. The History Center is located at 175 Pine Street.



***Calm before the storm...*** Early-bird tag-salers hunt for bargains at the paid preview event the evening before the Society's April tag sale.



The Manchester Historical Society  
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Manchester, Connecticut 06040

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Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift of:*

- \$50    \$75    \$100    \$250  
 \$500    \$1000    Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I/we prefer to pledge \$ \_\_\_\_\_ over \_\_\_\_\_ months.

Please make check payable to Manchester Historical Society  
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(To be paid in full by September 30th 2008)

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*Thank you for your support!*

**YES!** I want to help the Historical Society in it's  
"No Pane, No Gain" window restoration  
drive. Enclosed is my check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

- Pane in the Sash Donor   \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$50 ea.  
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 Clinking-Glass Donor   \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$3,500 ea.

Memorial Donation in Honor of:

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