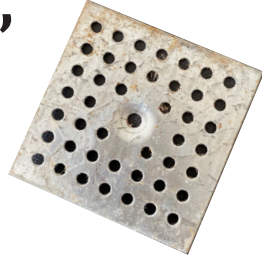




# Chester Historical Society

Fall 2021 Newsletter

## “Farm Finds” Challenge Goes Virtual



Covid has changed our calendar of events – again! We had already postponed our April 2020 Farm Finds Creative Challenge three times. But this time, instead of scrapping our Sept. 25, 2021 live event, we’re going virtual, with a little “live” thrown in.

What does this mean? Sadly, it does mean we’re not having our usual festive reception at the Chester Meetinghouse.

However, we’re excited by the new possibilities. For the first time, the remarkable silent auction creations can be viewed by people all over the country. Bidding will last for 10 days! Also, anyone who wants to see these items up close can stop in at the Chester Museum (see schedule).

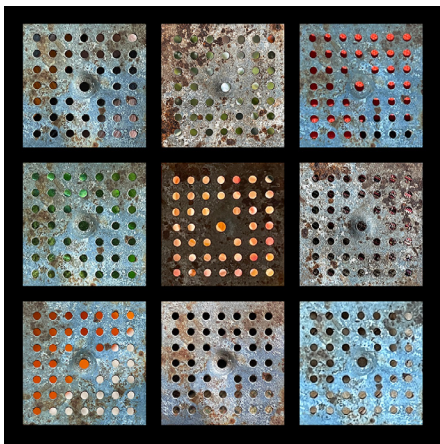
What IS the Farm Finds Challenge, you ask? In 2019, when we rescued vintage farm equipment from a vacant Chester property, we spotted dozens of 2-inch perforated metal squares on the ground. Aha! Farm Finds!

As with the past eight Creative Challenges based on artifacts from Chester’s manufacturing history (hooks from Brooks, knitting gauges from Bates, manicure sticks from Bishop & Watrous, and even scraps from discarded Meetinghouse red velvet stage curtains), local artists, designers, jewelers and more take the “challenge” to create unique and desirable items for a silent auction to raise funds for the Historical Society.

To access the silent auction, enter... [virtuauction.bid/chesterthistoricalsociety](https://virtuauction.bid/chesterthistoricalsociety) or go to our website at [chesterhistoricalsociety.org](https://chesterhistoricalsociety.org).

### Farm Finds Creative Challenge Schedule

- Sun 9/26: 10-4 Museum open for viewing items
- Fri 10/1: 5 pm Online auction opens
- 5-8pm Museum open for viewing & bidding
- Sun 10/3: 10-4 Museum open for viewing & bidding
- Wed 10/6: 5-7 Museum open for viewing & bidding
- Sun 10/10: 10-4 Museum open for viewing & bidding
- 4 pm Online auction ends



A 2-inch perforated metal square was the starting point for artists in this year’s annual Creative Challenge fundraiser. Once more, a simple foundation triggered the imagination of local artists. A sampling (left to right) of their inspired art includes: (1) “I’ve looked at light from both sides now,” an 8-inch Epson archival print by Jan Cummings Good; (2) “Country Habitat,” a 38-inch-tall handmade birdhouse by Maureen Olansen, owner of R.J. Herbery; (3) “A bag with many holes,” a Cowhide leather and thread bag by Drew Archer, owner of Blackkat Leather; (4) “Vanadinite Squared,” a handcrafted necklace with 16” sterling silver chain by Donna Carlson.

# Chester memories are best when shared with others

## Here's a few selections from the Society's Oral Histories Collection

History is not just buildings, artifacts and old maps; history is the people who lived at that time. Whether a native or a newcomer, we all have memories and stories of Chester—its hills, town center, shops and events, schools and neighbors, etc. The Chester Historical Society has taped oral histories for many years. Now, with current technology, we're finding methods to make this history more accessible for all. History is really the present time, or as we like to say, Today is Tomorrow's History. If we do not collect and preserve those memories, those stories, then one day they will disappear forever. In the meantime, we've collected nine excerpts from oral histories of past and present residents. Enjoy!



**Geraldine Carini:** During World War II, I was an airplane spotter. In the field next to the Larson house on Goose Hill, up at the top near where the water company is, there was a little shack. My cousin Alma [Doak] and I would go up, eight to twelve on Saturday mornings. We'd see airplanes, and we had to identify them, and we would have to call in and say the direction they were coming from and where they were going. P-51's, I remember. I can't recall all of them now. But we could identify them all! They didn't have to be too low; we could still identify them. And then we would have to man the phones in the report center, which was in the basement of the old town office building.

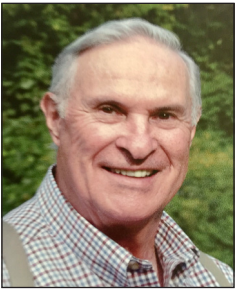
**Harold Jones, Jr.:** As kids, we all swam in the Mill Pond, up at the corner of Deep Hollow, and we played in the brook down through Great Brook, from there down towards the center. It depended on what Bates's shop was doing; sometimes the brook was yellow, sometimes blue, sometimes red. Above the Mill Pond, Deuse's shop, at the end of Deep Hollow—they had a bridge across the brook, and right in the middle of that bridge, there was an outhouse! And that's where the men used to go to the bathroom, down in the brook. And there we were, swimming in the Mill Pond! Never thought anything of it.



**Debra Germini Calamari:** I believe it was when I was in fifth grade when the band used to play in the Memorial Day parade. Jack Brogan, the principal, had us practice every Friday as soon as it got nice. We would practice marching, the whole band, down Ridge Road to High Street, down West Main Street, to Robbie's, to get an ice cream cone. We would practice our formation, playing our music, looking at our music on our lyres, and making sure we were in formation. We would stand nice and straight, and in line. Then we'd have our ice cream, and we'd all march back up to the school. That's what we had to do every week as soon as the weather warmed up. When it was time to play in the Memorial Day parade, we were sharp!

**Peg Lieberman:** My father was a doctor. We moved to 68 Main Street, where I still live, in 1937. You just walked through the house and went into his office. I thought that was really pretty cool, because if it got crowded and there weren't enough chairs, people had to sit on the steps going upstairs. I was probably about five or six. And often when I should have been in bed, I wasn't, I was chitchatting with everybody on the steps! I remember him getting paid not with money, but with eggs and food. It was just so much different. As a child of the doctor in town, I thought it was terrific! I wouldn't have changed anything.





**Nate Jacobson:** I was in school the day of the '38 Hurricane. We had a lot of windows in the study hall facing west. There were beautiful maple trees all the way along High Street and we watched as the hurricane picked up one tree, laid it over, then the next one went over, they looked like soldiers getting shot – one right after the other. I've never forgotten that. We didn't get out of school till 6 or 7 o'clock. The teachers had to walk us home. Julia Castelli walked us up Goose Hill Road. I remember her stopping us and handing us over the wires that were sparking on the pavement, so we didn't touch the wires. She left me off at home and then went right on up Goose Hill. God knows how long it was before she got home.

**Betty Tremalgia:** We did a lot of walking. Walk to school in the morning, go home for lunch, go back from lunch, go home after school, go back downstreet, and we'd go to Robbie's. I always had a chocolate Coke, and we sat in the booths in the back. We used to have such a good time, just having a Coke, and enjoying ourselves. Or an ice cream sundae. And then they had the First National, A&P, and Zanardi's store, so my mother would have me pick up stuff at the store.



**George Ott:** Milk was delivered to your house every day. Other days the ice man would come by and the women would put a sign that said "ICE" in the window. Then he'd come in and see how big your ice compartment was, and chip you off a hunk. That was a thrill to the local kids because they'd go catch a couple ice chips. When the butcher came by and sounded his car horn, boy, the whole neighborhood was there! He would take out his carving knife, and he'd whack off pieces of that salami, or bologna or whatever it was. And one man would come by once a week selling fresh fish. When he came into the yard he had a tin horn that he blew out the window. We didn't need a horn for one man who sold horseradish. I can remember him coming up the road, and we always swore we could smell him coming, never mind hear him! You could even order a suit of clothes without going out of your house.

**Peggy Breslin:** Feinsteins [the flatiron building at the corner of Main and West Main] was the place to go for anything. We'd get our Keds over there, we went there for dungarees and boots. Every kid had to have their name in their clothes because when we went to school everybody had the same thing, so if it didn't have your name in it you didn't know whose you got. All the coats were alike, all the boots were alike, mittens were alike. Oh, we used to be in Feinsteins all the time.



**Robert Blair, Sr:** (recalling the Depression) The government set up a little area where the people that needed help could get flour, rice, Dinty Moore's stew, and many of the people had to avail themselves. Some of them didn't have a car so they'd use a wheelbarrow. I can remember this, to get flour. Mostly flour they wanted. And the government did help them to do that. They didn't want welfare, the people didn't, but they had to—there just was not work. But people were pretty self-sufficient in the smaller towns, it wasn't so hard. Because they burned wood, and they had gardens, and they had good neighbors to help them. This was what kept them going. But it was a tough time.

As you can appreciate, oral histories are invaluable. But we can't do it alone. We need your assistance collecting stories, of any length, and sending them to us. We've put how-to ideas on our website, [chesterhistoricalsociety.org](http://chesterhistoricalsociety.org), to start the process. We invite you to take a look, then reflect!

## Honoring Judge Constance Baker Motley at 100 by Marta Daniels

September 14, 2021 marked the 100th birthday anniversary of Constance Baker Motley (1921-2005), a pioneering civil rights attorney and distinguished federal judge whose 60-year legal career dramatically shaped U.S. history in civil rights, women's rights and American jurisprudence. She was also our Chester neighbor for 40 years, beginning in 1965.

Her centennial offers an occasion to celebrate her life and legacy. September is also CT Freedom Trail month and a good time to visit the *Constance Baker Motley Preserve* on her former Chester property, now a CT Freedom Trail heritage site.

Motley's home on Cedar Lake Road, purchased in 1965, was seasonal, used for family weekends, holidays and vacations. She arrived here as Manhattan's Borough Council President, and in 1966 became a federal judge in the Southern District of NY—a historic first for an African American woman. For the next 39 years, Chester residents knew her only as “the Judge from New York.” But Motley's earlier, extraordinary contributions to the American Civil Rights movement had been under-recognized, eclipsed by her judicial achievements, and obscured by historical circumstances and judicial caution.

Between 1954 and 1963, Motley spent nine tumultuous years in the Deep South, helping dismantle a century of brutal Jim Crow segregation and racial inequality. The first female staff attorney for the NY-based NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (LDF), she was recruited in 1946 (just out of Columbia Law School), and mentored by LDF founder and director, Thurgood Marshall.



Coretta Scott King, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Constance Baker Motley at the August 1965 Southern Christian Leadership Conference Convention honoring Rosa Parks in Montgomery, AL. Constance Baker Motley gave the convention's keynote address.

After the Supreme Court's 1954 landmark decision *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawed segregated public schools, Motley cut a 9-year path through 11 Deep South states, enforcing *Brown*, triggering integration in hundreds of schools in each state. Imperiling her own life, she became “the face in the courtroom,” the first Black female attorney to argue inside a southern courthouse.

***“I rejected the notion that my race or sex would bar my success in life.” Constance Baker Motley***

Famous among her school cases were the 1957 Arkansas “Little Rock Nine,” the 1962 James Meredith admission to the University of Mississippi, and the 1963 University of Alabama desegregation battle against segregationist Governor George Wallace who “blocked the schoolhouse door.”

Attorney Motley also participated in every major civil rights campaign, from the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott (where she helped Rosa Parks), to Dr. King's 1957 Albany, GA Movement (serving as his attorney), to the 1959 Lunch-Counter Sit-Ins, and the 1961 Freedom Riders (where she helped John Lewis).

***“In the heart of the American South, during the early days of the Civil Rights Movement in the late '50s and '60s, there were only two lawyers that made white segregationists tremble and gave civil rights workers hope—Constance Baker Motley and Thurgood Marshall.”***

**Congressman John Lewis,  
after Judge Motley's death**

Her most significant civil rights success was winning reinstatement of 1,100 school children—arrested and expelled for peacefully marching during Dr. King's 1963 Birmingham Desegregation Campaign. According to historians, her legal victory marked a turning point for a flagging Civil Rights movement, leading directly to the massive turnout in the August 1963 March on Washington. When Dr. King gave his “I Have a Dream” speech, Attorney Motley was on stage with him—by special invitation.

While Motley argued 200 civil rights cases, including 10 before the U.S. Supreme Court (the first Black woman to do so), newspapers and history books rarely highlighted her participation or legal achievements.

In contrast, her 39 years on the federal bench (1966-2005) generated frequent headlines. Her decisions

increased access rights of women, humane treatment of prisoners, rights of workers, justice for litigants in unfair trade practices, and women's equality in employment and pay equity. Her 1978 post-World Series ruling that female reporters must be admitted to major league sports locker rooms earned Motley a lasting national moniker—"The Baseball Judge."

Her judicial career coincided with her life in Chester, which was quiet, private and devoted to family. She also enjoyed town events and patronized Chester businesses. Through her longtime friend Barbara Delaney, she became actively involved with the Chester Historical Society as a founding Trustee in 1970, and then Life Member.

During her Chester time, Motley received 33 Honorary Doctorate degrees, the Presidential Citizen's Medal, and inductions into the National and Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame. Upon her death in 2005, her legal work was praised by Supreme Court Justices and three Presidents. Her 2005 *NY Times* obituary noted "In case after case, she earned a reputation as the chief courtroom tactician of the Civil Rights movement."

In her honor, the Chester Land Trust created the *Constance Baker Motley Preserve* on Motley's former land in 2017. In 2018 the State of Connecticut designated both the Preserve and Motley's 1745 home (now privately owned) a CT Freedom Trail "Heritage Site," one of only 144. Adding to the *Preserve* in 2020, the Land Trust built the popular "Little Rock Nine" half-mile hiking trail, memorializing Motley's famous school case.

In 2019 the Chester Historical Society mounted a permanent exhibit about Motley in the Museum at The Mill, and produced *Champion for Justice*, a PowerPoint program for schools and civic groups. In 2020 the Society established the *Constance Baker Motley Archive*, and produced a YouTube video, *Constance Baker Motley in Chester, 1965-2005* in honor of her 100th birthday.



***"Racism has not been eradicated and will follow us and bewilder us into the century."***

***"Equal Justice Under Law"***

**Constance Baker Motley Autobiography, 1998**

During Freedom Trail Month, residents are encouraged to watch the new video, peruse the museum's Motley exhibit, visit the Land Trust's Preserve, and hike the "Little Rock Nine" trail.



Constance Baker Motley offers inspiration in challenging times.

Marta Daniels is Chester Historical Society's curator of the *Constance Baker Motley Archive*.



## New 2021 Exhibits at Museum

There's always something new, a good reason to visit (or revisit) Chester Museum at The Mill. Our 2021 special exhibit, *Before the Vote; Ahead of their Time*, features independent Chester women (1870-1920) who entered the workplace, opened a business, became a missionary, etc. before they became eligible to vote with the passing of the 19th Amendment in 1920. The exhibit also showcases dresses and posters from that era.

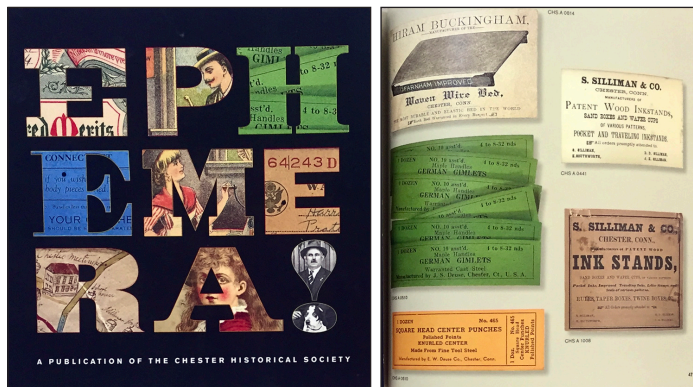
The second floor now has an expanded exhibit of the Russell Jennings Manufacturing Co. that shipped its unique augers worldwide. Admission is free. The museum is open Sundays 10 am to 4 pm through October.

# Civil War Letters Discovered; Book and Play to Follow

In 1863, at age 28, Willis Ayers of Chester volunteered to join the 20th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry. "My family wasn't happy, but it was the right thing to do, and besides, we didn't want the war to end before we had a chance to do anything."

The letters Willis wrote from the battlefield to his younger sister Nancie (pictured) back in Chester, along with the letters Nancie wrote Willis, were saved in a trunk and recently discovered by their Chester great-great-grandnephews Rob and Tom Miceli.

Rob and Tom's book of their letters will be published by the Historical Society this fall. In addition, Tom and Lol Fearon developed a two-person dramatization of the letters to be produced on the Chester Meetinghouse stage in November. A grant from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County will help fund this project. Details and dates will be available through the Society's website this fall.



## Our Newest Book

### "Ephemera"

designed by Jan Cummings & Peter Good

**Filled with images of Chester ephemera from our archives**

What is "ephemera"? All the delightful calling cards, letters, broadsides, trade cards, tickets, invitations and other printed material and photos from the past centuries that help tell the history of our town. This book is fascinating and beautiful! See for yourself – copies are now available in Chester Museum at The Mill or at Lark. Price is \$20, \$18 for members.

## Society adds members; elects new Trustees

We are very pleased to report that our membership (next page) has increased for the 9th consecutive year and included 272 memberships at the end of our June-to-May membership year. Most people have already renewed, with only a few outstanding.

Since June, we have welcomed the following new members: **Cindy & Gary Stevens, Patrick McGannon, Rosemary Blair, David Kelsey and William Brainerd.**

Like to join? We've included a membership form to clip or copy on the last page.

At our June Annual Membership Meeting, we recognized the contributions of **Bruce Watrous** as he completed two terms as a Trustee. Two new Trustees, **Al Cuneo and Julie Blundon Nash**, were elected to serve 3-year terms.

Funding for the mailing of this newsletter provided by Essex Savings Bank and Essex Financial Services as part of their Community Investment Program.



# Chester Historical Society

Membership Year Ending May 30, 2021

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**Membership Form – Join with us in preserving and sharing Chester’s unique history**

Now 51 years old, Chester Historical Society is an independent, all-volunteer organization that is apart from the Chester Town Budget. We depend upon membership dues, an Annual Appeal, and grants to collect and preserve Chester rich history and find creative ways to share its story and its people with the community. To encourage participation, our museum and our public programs are all admission free.

In addition to supporting our mission, your membership includes: advance notice of events / activities; periodic e-newsletters; 10% museum store discount to purchase books, videos, postcards and historic maps.

- Special...** I am a new member – please extend my initial annual membership through June 2023.
- I wish to renew my annual membership through June 2022

Membership Level: Individual \$20 Household \$30 Benefactor \$100

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

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Note: Your email address is important as our primary source of informing our members of Society activities and events.  
 We do not share your info, including email address, with others.

Mail this form and a check to: Chester Historical Society, P.O. Box 204, Chester, CT 06412