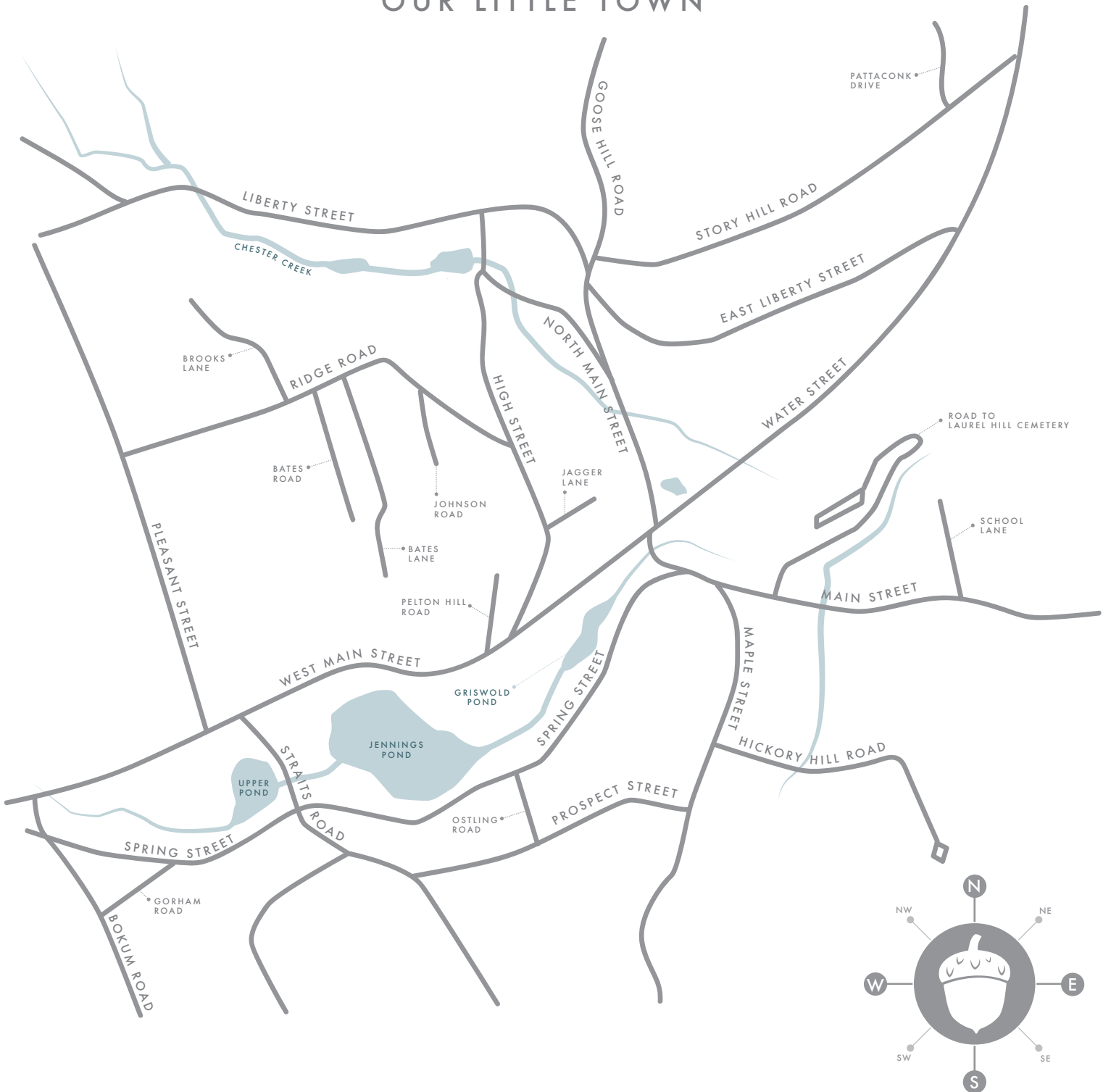




OUR LITTLE TOWN





WHY AM I HERE? (THE NOT-SO-PHILOSOPHICAL ANSWER)

Chasing Squirrels is a COVID-born project built to encourage exploration of our surroundings within a hyper-localized setting. Chester has an exquisite landscape, rich in artistic, culinary, architectural and industrial history. This self-guided walking map of the town involves a variety of different loops, starting with a collaboration between The Chester Imagineers and The Chester Historical Society.

Hold the phone. Why are we chasing these squirrels, anyway? According to long-time Chesterites, Peter Good and Jan Cummings:

*...Research reveals that gray squirrels (*Sciurus Carolinensis*) were abundant here long before the birth of our nation. They were a source of sustenance for Native Americans, and old-timers share stories of Squirrel Stew having been a life-sustaining dish during The Depression. Though some residents appreciate squirrel intelligence, resourcefulness and resent their cunning ability to take what they like from carefully fashioned and filled bird feeders.*

Squirrels became our quirky, yet loveable town mascot during the early 1970s when Peter Good designed the town seal. Chester has been chasing squirrels ever since.

Through self-guided tours using the Chasing Squirrels pdf, participants will not only observe Chester's history but also be invited to contribute to its future. For the "UP NORTH" route, follow the red squirrels. Each red squirrel indicates a site on the tour.



We know it's nutty but if you'd like to be featured on our social media, feel free to tag us! @ChasingSquirrelsChesterCT

Put on your walking shoes and hop the streets with us! You might even spot a squirrel...

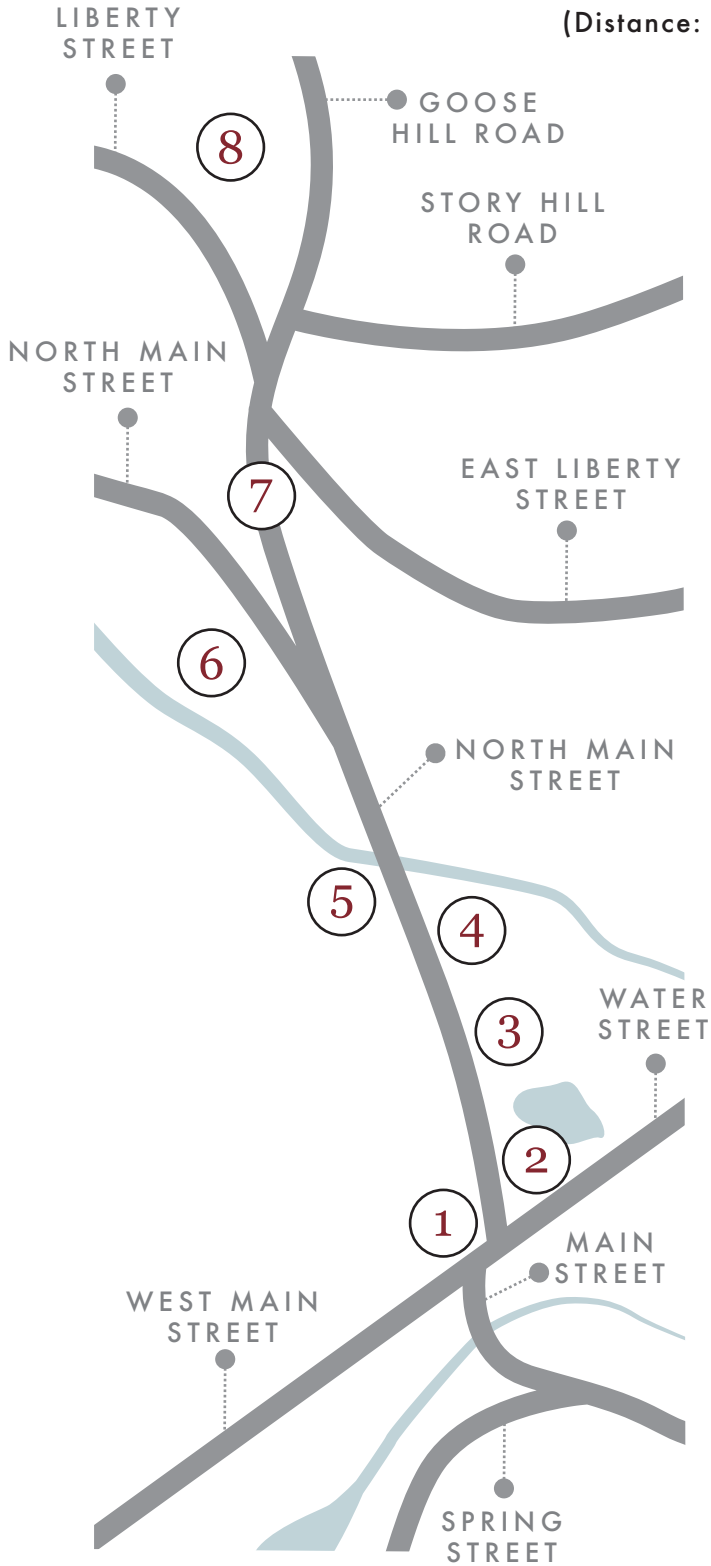
Writing and Editing.....Kailey Costa & Cary Hull for Chester Historical Society

Graphics and Layout.....Rebecca Joslow MacGregor for Chester Imagineers



ROUTE: UP NORTH

(Distance: .37 miles one way)



Chase squirrels and collect nuts! Follow the list below to locate the various sites on the tour:

-  1 North Main Street
The Stone Store
-  2 North Main Street
-  8 North Main Street
-  16 North Main Street
The Dunk House
-  23 North Main Street
-  33 North Main Street
The Norma Terris Theatre
-  Hearse House Hill
and The Cemeteries
-  4 Liberty Street
The Meeting House

This is a close-up view of the map on Page 1, zooming in on the "UP NORTH" route.



When do you think this photo was taken and why?



Stone Store 1922



Stone Store after 1924

Known as the “Stone Store,” this handsome structure was built by William Buck in 1809, a merchant involved in the West Indies trade. The stone for the building is believed to have come from the Chester quarry behind the present location of the Catholic cemetery (Rte. 154). With its tall white wooden pillars and placement at the head of Main Street, this has always been an outstanding building.

It should be noted that the positioning of this building faced the Cove. This allowed William Buck, who also owned the nearby shipbuilding yard, to have a commanding view of ships leaving Chester destined for the West Indies or those returning laden with their cargo.

Gideon Parker “kept store” here from 1830 to 1847. Next, the Denison store and the post office were located here. It was an old-fashioned “general store,” dealing in both dry goods and groceries, and giving people a great place to gather.

Then, from 1899 to 1930, Louis Tasso, a dealer in fruit and vegetables, owned the building. In 1901 the story of someone trying to rob “a paper of tobacco” from Mr. Tasso made the news.

About 1920, a wooden addition was built onto the west side of the building, and, among other things, housed a barber shop. Albert Carini bought the building in 1933 and opened a tavern/bar as well as a liquor store. The wooden ell was taken off in 1940 and a brick addition was put on the back. Chester Post Office was here from 1941 to 1964, when it moved into its new building, where it still is located.

The upper floor of the Stone Store was often rented. Shortly after 1840 it was a private school. Beginning in 1897, Chester’s kindergarten was in a small room on this upper floor. The long list of children in that first kindergarten class is printed in “Kate Silliman’s Scrapbook.” Later it was an apartment.

Jim Grote, a lifetime Chester resident, was in that first kindergarten in 1897, and he was also postmaster of the post office when it was located here.

When the building was purchased by graphic designers Janet and Peter Good in 1984, they tore down the walls on the ceiling of the second floor to create a two-story office, accessed by a new exterior stairway designed by renowned architect Thomas Norton. Eight years later, Norton advised the Goods again as they doubled the size of the building, while preserving the aesthetics of the original 2-foot-thick granite walls.



Stone Store as Post Office 1941 to 1964



The train was built for the movie, *It Happened to Jane*, filmed in Chester during 1958.



Stone Store 1969



Side view of 2 North Main, probably when owned by The Shailer family.
Note the dirt road!



Harriet Shailer Strickland, probably turn of the century

Prior to 1830 Isaac and John Daniels were partners in a general store at this site. That early building was removed, and a dwelling built here by manufacturer, Joshua L'Hommedieu.

In 1851 the first Roman Catholic mass in Chester was said here by a curate at St. Patrick's in Hartford. Originally a one-and-a-half-story building, the house was jacked up in the late 1800s and enlarged to make a Victorian-style home for the Fisk Shailer family.

About 1919 George Emmons bought the house. He owned an insurance agency, which at some point was located in the red "garage" to the left of 8 North Main. George's daughter, Marion, married Claude Watrous, and they raised their family here - Hazel (who later married Harry Archambault), Arnold, Philip, George and Katherine.

Sometime after Claude Watrous's death, the insurance company was moved to this house. It continued under the George C. Emmons Insurance Agency name until the late 1960s when it became the Archambault Insurance Agency, owned by Harry Archambault, who lived next door at 8 North Main. The building is still owned by an Archambault.

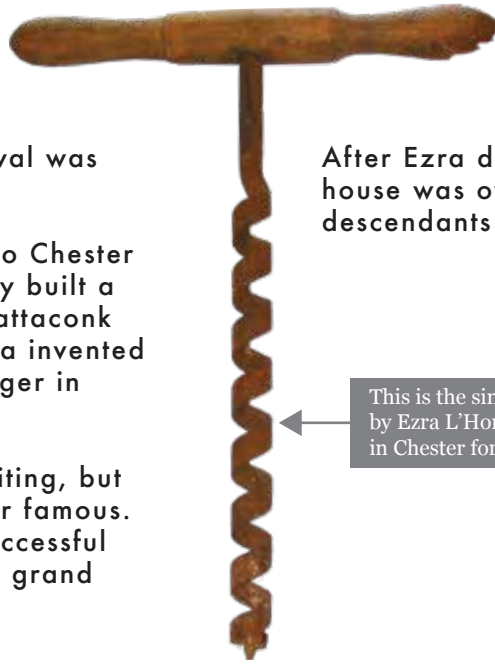
From family legend: Many years ago, an insurance customer was short of money with his premium overdue. Without the company's knowledge, he planted a small tree in front of the building in lieu of payment. The tree grew from 2 feet to well over 30 feet, obscuring much of the office, before it was cut down.



2 North Main, 1930s



Watrous child posing in front of their homestead



This two-story clapboard Greek Revival was built in 1835 by Ezra L'Hommedieu.

Ezra and his brother, Joshua, came to Chester from Norwich, CT, around 1812. They built a factory on the south branch of the Pattaconk Brook for manufacturing gimlets. Ezra invented and patented the single-twist ship auger in 1816.

A ship auger may not seem very exciting, but Ezra's invention helped make Chester famous. It also helped make his factory so successful that he was able to build himself this grand house at 8 North Main.

After Ezra died in 1860 of typhoid fever, the house was owned by Samuel Silliman and his descendants until 1940.

This is the single-twist ship auger invented and patented by Ezra L'Hommedieu in 1816. Innovation has been present in Chester for centuries!

When Chester celebrated its Centennial in 1936, the town used this house as its headquarters. One afternoon during the Centennial, the very oldest residents of Chester gathered here for a tea party.

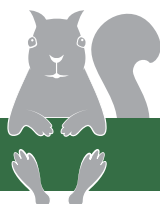
In 1940 the house was owned by Claude Watrous, who lived next door at North Main Street. He later sold the house to his daughter and son-in-law, Hazel and Harry Archambault. They raised their four children here, and one of them, Tom, now owns it with his wife, Kathy.



The very oldest residents of Chester gathered in front of the Samuel Silliman house at 8 North Main Street for a group photo during the 1936 Chester Centennial.



The Archambault family in the early 1960s. Hazel and Harry, with their four children, Tom, Ray, Karen and Mary.





This early colorized postcard of the Dunk House shows the gambrel roof and addition.



Hattie Daniels stands in the doorway of the “neat and comfortable home” of Maria Hough, about 1880s.



The Dunk House taken by Lydia Fargo



Hattie Daniels and Maria Hough in the back yard of the Dunk House, about 1880s.



The Dunk House before its 1976 restoration.

This has been called the oldest house in Chester, named the Dunk House because the original owner of the property was Thomas Dunk in 1672.

It was essentially a one-room house, 20 feet square, with a gambrel roof.

When Thomas Dunk’s son was born, around 1711, an addition was built to the north side.

The house had many owners, one who added a lean-to in the mid 1800s to create more space for his growing family.

A later owner was Miss Maria Hough. In 1893 the local New Era newspaper wrote, “The oldest house in Chester, which is supposed to be 200 years old, is undergoing some repairs to preserve the ancient relic. The outside of the building shows the ravages of time, but the inside is a pattern of neatness and of a comfortable home.”

More restoration was done in the 1970s when new owner Jeanne Simmons took the house back to its original beams and then hid “modern conveniences” with rustic barnboard.

An addition was built by the next owner, and then French chef Claude Martin and his wife Catrin created the Thomas Dunk House Gallery in that new addition. They also redesigned the kitchen French-chef style.



Before the wing was added by Tony Zanardi.

This Greek Revival house was built about 1830 for John Gilbert. John's sister (Abby Gilbert Daniels) lived in a Greek Revival house on Liberty Street that had been built a few years earlier. Her house was designed by Ithiel Town, a renowned Connecticut architect. John must have wanted to mimic his sister's house, and it is believed that he hired Ithiel Town as his designer.

A later owner was Antonio Zanardi. "Tony" came to the US in the 1890s and bought this house in the early 1900s. He and his wife, Claudina, had a large family (including relatives who immigrated to Chester) and he added the north wing.

Peter Zanardi says that the hillside behind the house was filled with terraced grape arbors. "There is a story of one of the town's leading ladies questioning Tony about the grapes during Prohibition. 'They are for the jam,' he supposedly answered. 'I have a large family and we need the jam.' They were, of course, for vino and I remember my father talking about the winemaking parties.

"Winemaking is part of the town's Italian folklore. The house played a major role in the early days of the Italian community here. The Italians could party and Prohibition made no sense to them."



Winter 1980s

Tony's daughter, Molly Malchiodi, was the last one of the family to live in the house. During the mid 1900s, Molly ran Zanardi's meat market on Main Street with her brother and husband. She died in 1979.



© 2020 Chester Historical Society

Bates factory date unknown



© 2020 Chester Historical Society

Bates manufacturing line



© 2020 Chester Historical Society

Bates 1971

This complex of buildings is now owned by the Goodspeed Opera House, with the big brick building being used as their seasonal theater.

Before that, however, this was home to C.J. Bates Company, the oldest operating crochet hook manufacturer in the United States and by 1971 the largest needlework tool manufacturer in the US.



© 2020 Chester Historical Society

Bates office staff 1913



© 2020 Chester Historical Society

Bates workers 1915



© 2020 Chester Historical Society

Bates manufacturing display

The company was named for Carlton Joseph Bates. At age 14, Carlton Bates began working for the firm of Tyler and Post (in the "Yellow Factory" just up the stream from here) by stoking the stove and sweeping the floors before going to school each day. Tyler and Post made small items from ivory discarded by a piano key manufacturer, and then took over another business that made crochet hooks from whale bone and cow shin bone. Carlton bought the business from Mr. Post in 1873 and continued to make bone items.

Around the turn of the century, Carlton's son, Hamilton, joined the company after he finished school and in 1907 the company name changed to C.J. Bates & Son. The business took over the nearby wooden buildings of the Silliman Company and gradually replaced them with brick and stucco buildings.

Meanwhile the Bates company kept expanding: Hamilton's sons joined the family business; more space was needed; and the product line grew to include bone, wood and steel manicure implements; bone and celluloid crochet hooks; wooden crochet hooks and knitting needles.



33 North Main Street | The Norma Terris Theatre continued...



C.J. Bates & Son began the manufacture of bone collar buttons in 1873 and the business changed and expanded to meet the changing American market for knitting and crocheting supplies. Their transition from bone and wood to steel knitting needles led to the production of steel manicure sets to meet the changing needs and interests of women.



Bates factory crew 1944

In 1970 the Bates company moved to a new factory on Middlesex Avenue. In 1982 the company gave these buildings to the Goodspeed Opera House of East Haddam, and the brick portion was converted into the Goodspeed-at-Chester theater (now known as the Terris Theatre), to be used as "the birthplace for new American musicals." The space was fully renovated as an intimate 200-seat theater, and opened on July 1984 with the new musical *Harrigan 'n' Hart*, starring Mark Hamill (who had become famous in 1977 as Luke Skywalker in the original "Star Wars" movie). The music for the musical was written by Max Showalter who had visited Chester in 1958 while filming "It Happened to Jane," with Doris Day and Jack Lemmon. Max ultimately made Chester his home.



The Norma Terris Theatre exterior before a summer show (photo provided by The Goodspeed Opera House)



The Norma Terris Theatre interior stage (photo provided by The Goodspeed Opera House)



Hearse House Hill on the way to cemeteries c 1880. Walking up Hearse House Hill, on the way to the cemeteries. See the tall white building in the background? This was the Chester Hotel (now Leif Nilsson's Spring Street Studio). You can also see the Greek Revival house at the bottom of the hill (29 North Main Street). The carriage tracks in the foreground, on the right, are likely leading to the Hearse House. This is the oldest photo of Chester in the Historical Society archives (excluding individual portrait photos).

At one time the town had a somber black hearse that was kept in a small building, known as the Hearse House, on the south side of the Old Burying Grounds.

So of course the hill leading up to the cemetery became known as Hearse House Hill.

The cemetery on the left as you climb up the hill is the "Old Burying Grounds," which is the older of the two. The first burial here was in 1736. The grave of Chester W. Brooks, the last full blooded Native American in Chester, is here, dated 1885. Abraham Waterhouse, one of the earliest settlers in Chester, is also buried in this cemetery.

On the right, up the sloping hillside, is the "Old Cemetery" [sic]. This cemetery was the site of Chester's First Congregational Meeting House. The steps leading up into the cemetery are said to be the original steps to that first meeting house.

The Second Meeting House still stands at the north end of the Chester Green, opposite the Gazebo, which was built here in 1981. The Gazebo was designed by architect Thomas Norton (who also did the designs for the Stone Store additions by Peter and Janet Good) and built by the Chester Rotary Club in 1981.



The headstone of Abraham Waterhouse in the Old Burying Grounds, dated 1817.



The Old Burying Grounds, about 1960.

This handsome building was the second Congregational Meeting House of Chester. The first Meeting House was located closer to the top of the hill (where the "Old Cemetery" is). That building became known as "The Lord's Barn." Legend has it that sheep used to gather in the open space under the floor; often their bleating would drown out the minister's voice, so the service had to be suspended while the sheep were driven away.

This second Meeting House was built in 1793, using parts from the first Meeting House. It was used as a church until 1846 when the third Congregational Meeting House was built on the hill beside where the United Church of Chester is located. The next year, 1847, the Town of Chester bought the second Meeting House, along with its stoves and furniture, for \$300. It became known as the Town Hall. For the next 30 years, it was used for town meetings.

The building took on a new life after 1876, when two wealthy residents paid for its remodeling. An addition was built across what had been the front of the building, which now became the back. The entrance doorway now faced the town center. The addition contained a stage with dressing rooms below it. The balcony was extended to its present horseshoe shape. The stage walls and ceiling were paneled with the remnants of the old box pews.



Meeting House c. 1905



Tom and Mrs. Thumb 1880s in
The Chester Meeting House

At some later date, the Dramatic Club contributed toward an entry hall for the front of the building, providing a ticket office, cloakrooms and an entrance.

The Chester Town Hall witnessed many events under its roof. P.T. Barnum's midget star, Tom Thumb, appeared here as did barber shop quartets, local drama productions, recitals, pageants, high school proms and square dances, fairs and school graduations.

The Town Hall was also featured in the Doris Day and Jack Lemmon movie, "It Happened to Jane," in 1958. Many Chesterites who were "extras" in the film participated in the movie's "town meeting" held inside the Chester Town Hall.

4 Liberty Street | The Meeting House continued...



Meeting House 1909 first graduating class



Meeting House Class of 1933 graduation

Over the next decade, the building was used less and less and needed repairs and restoration. The Chester Historical Society, which was established in 1970, undertook the preservation of the building as its first goal. During the winter of 1972-73, the building was completely refurbished and renovated. The building was then listed on the National Register for Historic Sites.

As the usage of the building grew, the Historical Society undertook another fund drive to add an addition to increase the size of the stage and add better dressing rooms, storage, and the Historical Society's archive room. This was completed in 1985.



Meeting House 1950s -1960s with The Fife and Drum Corps.

The Chester Meeting House and Chester Green are both utilized to this day for a variety of purposes, including the beloved tradition of the Chester Memorial Day Parade each May.

