



Chester Historical Society

August 2017 Newsletter

Chester Museum *at* The Mill: It's Just Steps Away

There's an expression, 'It's right under your nose,' that probably applies to many of us. At times we look too far for attractions, seeking something new.

We may see Gillette Castle from a distance, but rarely take the time to cross over the river and simply walk the property and enjoy the stunning river view.

You could include Chester Museum at The Mill in that 'it's right under your nose' list as well. Situated just off the town center, it's easy to drive by and say, 'I have to stop in...someday.'

This is an excellent year to make that 'someday' happen.

Why?... because we have new exhibits on all three levels, each with Chester connections. Even if you visited as recently as last year, you have a whole new experience in store.

Why?... because there is new appeal to youngsters as well as adults.

Why?... because there is no admission fee (although we always welcome donations). Come in and catch a glimpse, then come back as often as you like. Bring a relative; bring a friend.

Why?... because it's air-conditioned and you can also sit on the deck by the waterfall.

Why?... because it's all about Chester and, yes, it's right under your nose.

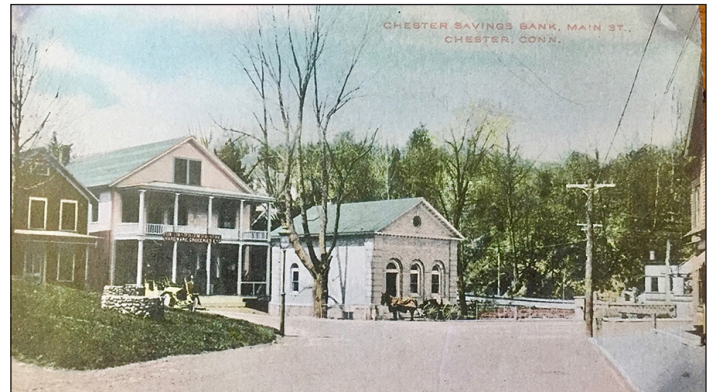
Let's get to some highlights...

Brooks Reception Area: You are greeted by a 3-foot-high representation of the Waterhouse Grist Mill painstakingly crafted by Society Life Member Nate Jacobson (right). The structure complements the two 3,000-pound millstones that flank our entrance door that are from the original Goose Hill Road site.

Waterhouse Room (1st Floor): Two new exhibits have been curated by Exhibit Co-chairs Keith Dauer and Sandy Senior-Dauer.

Chester Postcards: More than 200 historical Chester postcards from our collection and a few from other collectors are on view. Some of the cards are more than 100 years old. Many of the cards were taken by Hugh Spencer (see 3 *Chester Notables*). You will enjoy seeing how the town, especially the center, looks much the same and then again, where it has changed. Some cards are documentary; others might be whimsical.

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Colorized postcard of Chester Bank (circa 1910)



Nate Jacobson in his workshop

(continued from page 1)

3 Chester Notables: Discover three diverse individuals who lived or traversed through our history, each just under the radar. **Hugh Spencer** was a noted and published scientific photographer who shared his talent by documenting our town from 1916 to 1948. **Constance Baker Motley**, educated as a lawyer, worked with Thurgood Marshall to win civil rights cases in the '60s and later became a role model for female black Americans in her career as a judge. She owned a home in Chester for 40 years. In the 1880s **The Leatherman** walked a predictable 365-mile Connecticut loop, stopping in Chester every 34 days, yet little else is known about him. A life-sized statue, carved by member Weymouth Eustis, almost brings The Leatherman to life.

Whelen Room (2nd Floor): How do you enhance an exhibit that won both state and national awards? This past spring a small team refreshed two areas of the *Streams of Change: Life & Industry along the Pattaconk* exhibit with more improvements on the horizon.

We have greatly expanded a focus on the S. Silliman & Co. inkstands and related products. A special emphasis is on the company's invention of a pocket inkwell and the impact it had on history as Civil War soldiers wrote home from the battlefield.

While the barbershop area continues to be a hit with visitors, additional memories will surface with two new panels in our "Heart of the Town" area, one replicating the soda fountain at Chester Pharmacy, the other filled with 'then and now' images of familiar buildings in the center of Town.

See You at the Museum!

Hours: Sat 1-4; Sun 10-4 thru October

Free Admission • Air-Conditioned



Left:
(1) Storyboards of Constance Baker Motley's remarkable career
(2) Silliman inkwells and associated writing tools
(3) Recreating the soda fountain at the former Chester Pharmacy
(4) Then & now images of the center of Chester tied to locations of principal buildings.

Right: Sculptor Weymouth Eustis with his life-sized wooden statue of the mysterious Leatherman.



Bates Company Safe Now Safe and at a New Home

Last winter when the safe that formerly housed the records of C.J. Bates & Son was moved to the Town Office Building, a more than century-old booby trap was discovered.

Former trustee Art Christianson and Society Curator Diane Lindsay were responsible for setting up the Chester Historical Society exhibit that focuses on some of the products and individuals that were part of the business that began in Chester in 1873.

After Diane placed artifacts in the safe's shelves, Art installed a protective Plexiglas shield, only to find out that a metal-plated housing on an inside door prevented closing the safe doors. He removed the plate and discovered two 6-inch glass tubes containing a clear liquid.

Thankfully, Art immediately did some research and discovered that the glass tubes were tear gas canisters, an original booby trap if the safe's lock were to be drilled from the outside. The State Police were contacted and recommended a firm to safely dispose of the canisters. "Thank goodness I was suspicious," said Art. "The whole Town Office would have been evacuated."

The safe, manufactured by August Ockert (New Haven, 1853 - 1910), was part of the Bates business, both at its original North Main Street location and later when it moved to Middlesex Avenue in late 1970.

Skip Hubbard remembers the safe at North Main. "When I first began work at Bates in 1970, one of my first jobs was to do a portion of the weekly factory payroll. Workers, many on piecework, were paid in cash then, so we calculated the bills and coins we would need for each employee, ordered the funds from the Chester Bank, filled envelopes and stored them in the company safe for distribution on payday. All the hand ledgers were secured each night as well."

The family-owned company was sold in 1976 to Coats & Clark, Inc., but continued business in Chester until operations were moved to various locations in the South in 1992.

Appropriately, the safe then moved back to its original North Main Street site, which had become Goodspeed at Chester, and was displayed in the lobby of the Norma Terris Theater. Recently, when the Historical Society was offered the safe, but didn't have the appropriate

space, the Town offered space in its lobby.

"It's a great addition; people are simply fascinated by the safe," said Town Clerk Debra Calamari.

(Note: The safe now joins another historical piece in the lobby, a 7-foot Seth Thomas clock 'given to the Chester Trust Co. on November 17, 1917 by Mary Wright Brooks in memory of her husband, Simeon Spencer Brooks'.)



NEW! Membership Opens Our Doors

We are pleased to announce a new benefit of Chester Historical Society membership. In addition to Museum Shop discounts and advance notice of special events, members may now schedule museum mini-group visits with a docent at times other than our normal weekend hours. This becomes a great option when family or friends are in the area. Or simply invite some neighbors to join you. Mornings, afternoons or early evenings are available.

Contact Diane Lindsay (860-526-2443, dianedavelindsay@att.net) or Skip Hubbard (860-526-5765; skiphubbard@yahoo.com) and we'll do our best to arrange a time for your visit.

Batter Up: Vintage Baseball Games Return on Sunday, September 17th

Players from the Tri-town area will again take the field when the historical society teams of Chester, Deep River and Essex stage their 4th Vintage Baseball Day at Devitt Field in Deep River. Games, played by 1857 rules (no gloves, balls caught on one bounce are outs), will begin at 2 p.m. with a round-robin schedule of three games. The Chester Squirrels squeaked out two narrow wins last year and will be defending its crown against the ICE (Ivoryton, Centerbrook, Essex) Elephants and the Deep River Haz Beenz. Refreshments available, free admission, just a family fun day for all.



Chester Museum at The Mill

Chester Historical Society

Membership Form Through June 2018

Chester Historical Society memberships (except Life Memberships) are paid annually.

PLEASE INCLUDE ON THE MEMBERSHIP ROLL FOR THE YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2018

Name(s) _____

Mailing Address _____

E-mail _____ Phone _____

Please Note: Your e-mail address is important to us. It's become a primary way to inform our members of Society activities and includes the Robbie Collamore Music Series. We do not share your email addresses with others.

**MEMBERSHIP
LEVEL**

I would like to be
a Society member
for the next year
as indicated

- Student (\$15)
- Individual (\$20)
- Family (\$30)
- Benefactor (\$100)
- Sponsor / Corporate (\$250)
- Life (\$500) One-time payment to enroll one or two individuals in the same household as lifetime members.
- Please accept my additional donation for \$ _____

Make checks payable to Chester Historical Society. Mail to: CHS, PO Box 204, Chester, CT 06412.
All dues and donations are fully tax-deductible. Please consider your check your receipt. Thank you.

Your Membership helps tell Chester's Story

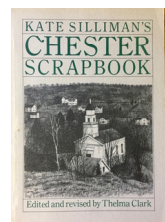
As an all-volunteer organization with no income from the town or state, we rely on the support of members, plus fundraisers and grants to fund the free exhibits and public programs we create. Annual membership is at the core of that support.

For just \$30 per family (\$20 for an individual) annual membership, you can help as we share the Chester story through our programs, publications and award-winning museum.

Renewals were recently sent out to our current members. Please consider adding your support with the membership form contained in this newsletter.

BONUS! Free Kate Silliman book for all new members

A valued resource, Kate Silliman's Chester Scrapbook (264 pages, 134 photos) is the 'go-to' place for much of Chester history. All new members can pick up a free copy (\$15 value) of this Society publication during museum hours.



Museum Group Visits - Always a Hit

With the opening of Chester Museum at The Mill for its 8th season on June 2, we began welcoming visitors on the weekend as well as inviting weekday groups to enjoy our new exhibits.

With only a few days of school remaining, on June 16 Leeann McKenna's 2nd grade class at Chester Elementary walked down the hill to see the museum. Greeted by docents Nancy Watkins, Keith Dauer and Sandy Senior-Dauer, the children got a full tour and asked some surprisingly mature questions. Nancy handled the long-run exhibit on the second floor, which now features a soda fountain from the Chester Pharmacy owned by her mother, Shirley Miceli.

Keith and Sandy guided the class through the first floor, a new seasonal exhibit that, as Exhibit Co-Chairs, they curated. The children were especially enthralled with stories of The Leatherman, and also enjoyed the historical postcards and the career of Constance Baker Motley.

The individual thank-you cards we received express their experience best: (1) "That was so much fun. I learned a lot today. I liked the Leatherman"; (2) "I really liked seeing all the old postcards"; (3) "The best part was that

I saw the big waterfall"; (4) "I really liked all of the little models of things. I liked seeing the pictures from a long time ago compared to the pictures that were taken not a long time ago."

We will be inviting other school groups to visit beginning in September.

Another special day occurred on Saturday, June 24. Following the dedication of the Constance Baker Motley Preserve on Cedar Lake Road, we co-hosted with the Chester Land Trust a luncheon for the Motley family at the museum. It was especially notable for Joel Motley III as he was able to view the fine new exhibit we have that focuses on the remarkable career and accomplishments of his mother. The Motley family owned a home opposite the new preserve for 40 years.

On July 5, we hosted a Chester Merchants morning meeting with optional time to see the new exhibits.



Elementary School 2nd graders thoroughly enjoyed Nancy Watkins' stories of the Chester Pharmacy, a business owned by her mother, Shirley Miceli.



Constance Baker Motley's son, Joel Motley III, reviewing some highlights of his mother's career with Marta Daniels, who curated this portion of the Chester Notables exhibit

An Invitation to Community Groups

We love to open our museum to community groups and organizations for meetings or just for a group visit. With a little advance notice, let's find a date and time that works best for you. Plus, we'll have a docent on hand.

Contact Diane Lindsay (860-526-2443; dianedavelindsay@att.net) or Skip Hubbard (860-526-5765; skiphubbard@yahoo.com) to get on our calendar.



Chester Historical Society
P.O. Box 204
Chester, CT 06412-0204

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 203
Deep River, CT

Postal Patron
Chester, CT 06412

Mark Your Calendar

Sunday, Sept. 17

Tri-town Vintage Baseball Game

Devitt Field, Deep River, 2 p.m.

Sunday, Sept. 24

Robbie Collomore Music Series Opens

Chester Meetinghouse, 5 p.m.

Friday/Saturday, Nov. 24/25

Family Thanksgiving Hours

Chester Museum at The Mill, 10 a.m - 4 p.m.

Stay Informed:

www.chesterhistoricalsociety.org

www.collomoreconcerts.org

Museum Hosting

"I still find I'm learning every time I visit the museum," said Sosse Baker. "And I find it's even more fun when as a host I get to welcome visitors." Other volunteer hosts often express the same thoughts. Each Saturday and Sunday we open the museum to residents and visitors alike. The main role of the host is to orient the visitor to the museum; a background in Chester history, while at times helpful, is by no means a requirement. "Our museum experience is self-guided. We ask volunteers to be hosts, not docents and often partner with another during a shift," said Diane Lindsay, who will be scheduling hosts this summer and fall. We encourage others, including those new to Chester, to inquire about hosting by contacting Diane (860-526-2443 or dianedavelindsay@att.net).

Robbie Collomore Music Series Celebrates 44th Season

With a four-concert lineup that begins on September 24th with a String Trio and follows with programs featuring guitar & bandoneon, Latin Jazz and Gospel Music, there is little reason to leave town for a fill of excellent music.

Individual or Season Tickets
Available

Visit www.collomoreconcerts.org
for a full schedule, artist bios and to
purchase your tickets.

Funding for the mailing of newsletter provided by Essex Savings Bank as part of its Community Investment Program

