



MANSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 45, No. 1

February/March 2009

PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Crocuses and snowdrops, returning robins, little league sign-ups, and daily countdowns to spring. It's that time of year....and, while Mansfield readies for the warmer climate, the Historical Society prepares for its museum opening on May 31.

Our Museum Director Ann Galonska and volunteers are already preparing exhibits for the opening and Fred A. Cazel, Jr., Program Chair, and the Board are developing a calendar to inspire and invigorate appreciation for Mansfield's history.

In 2009, we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of George Gurley's bequest, which created our operating endowment. Gurley's philanthropy has sustained us through good times and lean ones. His vision to support the Historical Society's mission lives on as we write and recognize the histories of our town and its 13 villages.

The economic downturn that challenges budget makers from Mansfield to Hartford to Washington, too, affects us. But, it is in these challenging times that we see an opportunity to increase our important role as an important center for Mansfield's history and a destination for Mansfield residents and families.

We go forward in confidence, in knowing how well the Mansfield community responds to our initiatives. I share with you the highlights of the closing months of 2008 – after the Museum doors had closed for the season:

- Holiday trip to Newport, Rhode Island – sold out
- Holiday Book sale – more books sold in six weeks than past two years combined.
- 1st Annual Fund – Thank you for your support!
- CONCORA musical performance – an evening of period songs, readings and parlor fun

Indeed, our Board is energized and enthusiastic about increasing membership, developing special programs, and making Mansfield's historic treasures more visible and accessible to our community. We hope our work at the Mansfield Historical Society provides a window with which to understand our present and to consider our future through the lens of our past.

We look forward to seeing you in the coming season. Our first program will be on April 3 and the details are below. As always, our door is open and you have a place at the table to share your thoughts and ideas for bringing our history to life at the Mansfield Historical Society. Please feel free to contact me or Ann Galonska at 429-6575 or mansfield.historical@snet.net.

John Meyers, President

APRIL MEETING AND PROGRAM

Date/Time: Friday, April 3, 7:00 p.m.

Location: Buchanan Auditorium at the Mansfield Public Library, 54 Warrentville Road (Route 89)

Speaker: Dr. Jamie H. Eves

Title: A Gneiss Prospect: Shaping an Early Industrial Ecosystem in Connecticut's Lower Willimantic River Valley, 1820-1920 – Technology, Community, and Environment (Details on the following page.)

APRIL 3 PROGRAM: TECHNOLOGY, COMMUNITY, AND ENVIRONMENT ON THE LOWER WILLIMANTIC RIVER, 1820-1920

Most people tend to view industrialization as a form of environmental degradation – the abuse of nature by human activity. Yet the reality is often more subtle. In Connecticut, industrialization replaced one human-centered ecosystem (an agrarian ecosystem) with another (an industrial ecosystem). To what extent was the new ecosystem sustainable? Recent research has thus far uncovered a mixture of good and bad.

On April 3, 7:00 p.m., in the Mansfield Public Library's Buchanan Auditorium, Dr. Jamie Eves will present his research-in-progress on industrial transformation along the lower Willimantic River in the 19th century, including the town of Mansfield. He hopes that there will also be a dialogue in which he can find out from the audience more about Mansfield's role.

Dr. Jamie H. Eves is an Assistant Professor in Residence at the University of Connecticut. He is also the Volunteer Collections Curator at the Windham Textile and History Museum.

NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM



This spring we are blessed with the assistance of four student interns from the University of Connecticut. We are thrilled to welcome back Amanda Sullivan, who interned at the museum a year ago. Joining her are new interns Stacie Minervino, a senior majoring in History and English, and Amelia Trial, a junior majoring in History, with a minor in Anthropology. Amanda, Stacie and Amelia are assisting with cataloging and exhibit preparation.

Our fourth intern is Carolyn Barry, a senior majoring in Urban Studies who plans to pursue a graduate degree in Historic Preservation. Carolyn has undertaken the completion of the Mansfield Barn Survey project. She is photographing and documenting barns that were not surveyed last year. The information that she gathers will be added to our collection and also submitted to the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation's on-line archive at www.connecticutbarns.org. Visit this website to see information on Mansfield barns previously submitted by the many volunteers who worked on this project last spring.

We are so grateful for the help of all these student interns!

ANNOUNCING OUR UPCOMING EXHIBITS

The museum will open its season on May 31st with four new exhibits. We are collaborating with the First Baptist Church in preparing a wide-ranging retrospective exhibit on the church and its involvement in the Mansfield community. Located on Spring Hill at the geographic center of the town, the First Baptist Church has played a major role in Mansfield's history, and its members have made prominent contributions to local government, business, industry, culture, and society. The exhibit, designed to complement a series of 200th Anniversary events at the church, will include many artifacts, photographs, documents, and narratives of church members and friends through the years.

Two other exhibits will focus on the village of Gurleyville and its namesake – the Gurley family. In its heyday in the mid-1800s, Gurleyville was a thriving community with two silk mills, a gristmill and saw mill, its own church, a school and three stores. The exhibit will include a wide variety of photographs and artifacts related to the village, its industries and some of its notable residents.



The Ephraim Gurley Tool Manufactory in Gurleyville, later the Mansfield Silk Company mill

A related display will trace the history of the Gurley family in Mansfield. The first Gurleys settled in the early 1700s in northwest Mansfield in the area known as "The Ravine." Gurleyville owes its name to Ephraim Gurley who established a successful tool manufactory on the Fenton River in 1808. This exhibit will also recognize George H. Gurley whose bequest 30 years ago established our Society's endowment fund.

This year our kitchen display area will focus on textiles in two time periods, 1800 and 1900. In the earlier kitchen, domestic textile production will be illustrated, including spinning, weaving and the use

of natural dyes. The 1900 kitchen will examine the 19th century technological changes that relegated the spinning wheel and loom to the attic and led to the development of new textile crafts in the home.

Please contact the museum at 429-6575 if you'd like to help with the exhibits or have any materials that you are willing to loan.

DO YOU KNOW?

- What is Mansfield's connection to Russia?
- Who won the first medal for silk manufacturing in America?
- What happened to the original church building of the First Baptist Church of Mansfield?
- When was the last field of flax planted in Mansfield?

For answers...see you at the museum opening on May 31. We hope to see you there!

ROGER WILLIAMS RE-ENACTMENT, APRIL 19TH AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

As a part of the 200th Anniversary Celebration of the First Baptist Church of Mansfield, actor Bill Hutchinson will portray Roger Williams, the founder of the Baptist movement in America. The re-enactment will be presented at the church on Sunday morning, April 19th, at 10:45 a.m. during the regular worship service. After the service, refreshments will be served and Hutchinson will continue the story of Roger Williams and the early Baptists in a question and answer session. The church invites Mansfield Historical Society members and friends to attend this event.

Hutchinson, Professor Emeritus and former Head of the Theatre Department at Rhode Island College, is well known for his "Legends of Living History" dramatizations of Thomas Jefferson, Edgar Allen Poe, Henry David Thoreau, Clarence



Bill Hutchinson as
Roger Williams

Darrow, Moses Brown, Oscar Wilde, Anglican Bishop George Berkeley, and others. The Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities called on Hutchinson for his Roger Williams portrayal in its Legacy Series which sent actors into the schools to make historical figures come alive in the classroom. Hutchinson added Native American actors from the Narragansett tribe in traditional dress to an expanded version of the Roger Williams story for Rhode Island's 350th Anniversary, and he uses some Narragansett words in his solo performance.

Roger Williams was born in London and educated for the ministry at Cambridge University. He broke away from the Church of England because he could not agree with its policies on faith and church governance. In 1630 he and his wife Mary sailed for the Massachusetts Bay Colony in search of religious liberty. He served briefly as pastor at churches in Plymouth and Salem, but his views soon brought him into conflict with the authorities, and so, with the support of twelve "loving friends and neighbors" he acquired land from the Native Americans and established what is now Providence. Williams showed an early gift for language learning, acquiring facility in Greek, Dutch, and French as a student. He gave Dutch lessons to the poet John Milton in exchange for lessons in Hebrew. Williams' sensitivity to foreign languages probably helped him acquire land for his new settlement.

For more information, contact Bill McMunn at 423-1581 or wcmunn@charter.net.

A YOUNG TEACHER'S INITIATION IN 1860s MANSFIELD

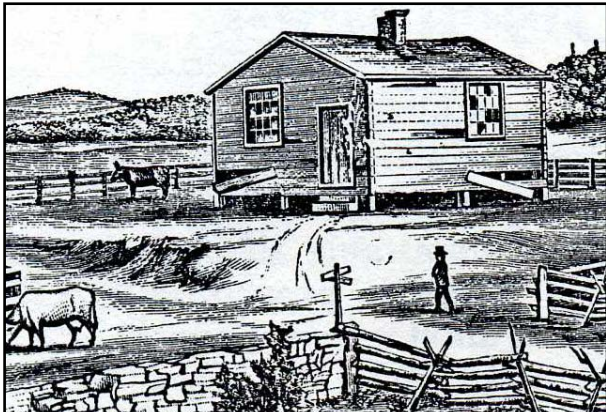
In the September 2008 newsletter we included an excerpt of an unpublished manuscript written by Almira Hibbard of Eagleville that described her examination for a teaching position in Mansfield in 1860. She was not hired at that time because of her young age (16).

Below is another excerpt from this manuscript that describes her first teaching experiences two years later. On May 5, 1862 Almira began her first teaching job at Horn Hill School in Mansfield. The school, now gone, was located on Baxter Road.

Almira Hibbard Parker probably wrote this manuscript in later life, referring back to her diaries. Thanks to a generous gift from the family of E. Elizabeth Parker Avery, the Society owns 70 Parker family diaries, including Almira's 1862 diary. The diary confirms the events described in the following excerpt from her manuscript.

It is about eight o'clock as we reach a dilapidated brown building on a hill. I am certain a mistake has been made for no barn in our village is so poor in appearance as this low building... The door is not unlocked and Sylvester [Almira's brother] peering in at a window says "It's a school house any how, for there are benches round the room." No one comes in the few minutes he waits and at last he speaks "I guess you had better get out take your things and wait on the doorstep." So I wait with my books and bell there alone, for Sylvester said "He must go back to help Father"...

After a time, when I have almost made up my mind to start for home, three children come and one says "Guess I had better get in the window and drive back the bolt to open the door" and I ask "Are you sure you can get it open that way?" and he replies "Yes with the fire shovel," and as he opens the door I go in to the most desolate looking school-room I ever saw.



There are no known photographs of the Horn Hill school but it was probably no better than this dilapidated rural schoolhouse.

There are six dirty windows which have the appearance of never having been washed, more than a bushel of wood ashes are on the floor; the benches are over turned and some of them are broken. As I am looking astonished at the scene before me Mr. Fairweather enters bringing the key. Though he is a stranger I remark to him, "Not a very pleasing prospect for a new teacher" and he replies "It can be made all right" and he goes to work to clean up the ashes and I go out of doors. At length he comes and tells me the room is ready. We go in. The room is very untidy for on desks and benches is thickly settled ash dust. Mr. Fairweather tells me to make the best of it as he leaves and I call the scholars to order. It does not take long to count them. Six tells them all. We read a chapter in the Bible, then I talk to the children of what I purpose to have them

accomplish but they do not appear to care though they sit very still. I assign them lessons and before ten o'clock four more scholars come straggling in. I hear the smaller ones read and the first class in Arithmetic, then comes recess first for the girls, then for the boys. There is no laughter and playing as in our village, but the children stand round and look but say little. The forenoon wears slowly away. There is no sound save my voice and that of the children during recitation... I can hear my brother Sylvester's watch as it ticks on my belt. I look at the watch every five minutes for the time passes very slowly.

I have often heard teachers regret the lack of time for recitations and to day I wish they could have my surplus. Noon comes at last. I am very particular to ring the bell exactly at twelve and for the previous half hour have been very busy hearing the spelling lessons. In the regular order, backwards, "skipping" round, every word has been pronounced by me many times. "A spelling lesson long drawn out." This morning my breakfast was almost untasted, when noon comes my appetite is keen and I eat every morsel which Anna put in my dinner pail, a mistake as I afterwards find, but one of ignorance. The scholars show no disposition to play and I ask Charlotte why they do not. She answers "I am too big and we never do play here." Sarah, a plump English girl remarks, "We used to play when I went to school in New Britain and I like it first rate." I describe the sports of the village children but can get up no enthusiasm and the nooning is spent in little else than "looking." The afternoon seems as interminable as the morning but four o'clock comes at last and I leave the school room to go with Annie and Benjie to their home. They point to a large brick house about half mile away and I imagine a house of comfort, a place of rest. On nearer approach every thing shows wealth. There are neatly laid walls, the fields are smooth and show by a thick turf that fertilizers have been used without stint; a dooryard which is of emerald greenness although so early in the season. Everything promises well and I promise myself a home.

The door is opened by the children and the illusion is dispelled. I feel as one does on opening an outer door on a wintry morning and receives in his face the full force of the raw north east wind. A gasp, a shiver, and a withdrawal but from this place I cannot flee.

The room is large and cheerless. Here sits a fleshy woman with hands folded across her lap who salutes me "I suppose you're the teacher, well you're welcome, it will not take but little more flour to

make bread for you” and she points to a chair and says “sit down.” I sit there and Annie takes my hat and satchel and carries them to my room. Mrs. Fairweather still sits in her chair and as I answer her questions she lets down her teeth and draws them up so that I know they are false. After a time supper is ready, the girls have set a long table just across the room. The hired men have come in, and we are invited to “shove up.” As I sit waiting to be waited on Mr. Fairweather tells me to “pitch in” if I want any thing and the three hired men, the five children, the man and his wife are illustrating “pitching in.” Annie noticing my embarrassment passes me the bread. It is very black, full of coarse holes and on tasting it I find it is sour. The table cloth is but unbleached cotton, very much soiled; ... and no one notices any of the little courtesies at the table to which I have always been accustomed. I feel sick and cannot eat. Mrs. Fairweather tells me that I can go to my room any time I wish, so now Annie shows me the way. A surprise awaits me for I have a neat, airy chamber and every thing is clean. No carpet on the floor except pieces in front of the bed and table but the bare floor is in such contrast with the one below.

In the morning we have warmed up fresh meat, there is decided taint about it (Mr. Fairweather is also a butcher as well as a farmer). I do not feel hungry in the least, but I make a show of eating. Half past seven finds me in my school room. I write a letter home and make this entry in my diary “Feel as though I was not wanted any where.”

Today school is more interesting and were it not for boarding round, teaching would be pleasant. Tuesday night passes like Monday only an increase of home sickness... I hear the coarse jests of the men as they pass under my window and I am afraid. Annie sleeps with me and I am fearful she will tell but I lock and barricade my door.

After sweeping my school room in the morning I write in my diary “*Would that something might happen as that I could go home.*” [Apparently something does] for the P.M. is recorded “*Walked home alone in one hour and twelve minutes. Distance four miles.*”

The way was lonely; there were but seven houses immediately by the side of the road and some were unoccupied but it was to me but little risk to go thus alone for I felt that I should certainly die if I did not go. What a pleasant social group around our tea

table. I contrast it with the one where I board and burst into tears. Mother urges me to eat and never food was more relished.

After tea I tell my story and they all laugh. Father tells me that I have drawn on my imagination but I tell him it is every word truth...

Thursday, Sylvester carries me back and Friday I write [in my diary] “This boarding round is not what it is cracked up to be,” also “My school appears better than it did two days ago...”

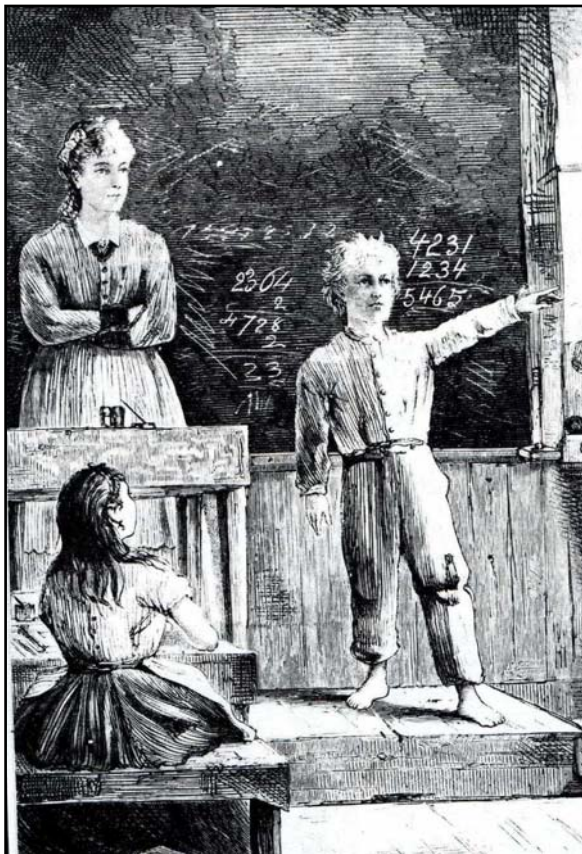
Monday comes and again Sylvester carries me to my school and again he hurries back to “help Father.” ... The children are early here this morning for I requested them to be punctual. They are very shy but appear glad to see me. My school numbers thirteen. The day passes pleasantly for I am learning to teach and the day is hardly long enough, for my work. I am but one month older than my eldest scholar, which fact I take care to keep to myself; seven are over ten; the youngest is five and the classes numerous. Annie Fairweather is the best scholar in books and all are perfect in deportment. I think once in a while that it is rather monotonous and almost wish that some one of them would “cut up” ... At noon I ask Mary if the scholars are always good and she laughs as if I had said something funny and answers “Why no, the scholars used to act awfully last winter and the teacher used to lick’em like sixty but someway we can’t act bad when you’re here” and I treasure this saying and when I go home I tell Father and tears come in his eyes as he says “You are in the right place Almira” and he kisses me.

At Fathers suggestion I go to a different boarding place for he thinks it will not seem so bad to me at Mr. Fairweathers when I get accustomed to being away from home, so I go home with Sarah, the English girl, for she is very neat in her person and I judge her home will be like mine.

We go up the cross road to the turnpike follow the broad turnpike one mile and her home is reached. ... In the front yard I see neatly made flower beds. We do not enter here but go around to a back door. I notice an appearance of thrift every where from the high piled wood, the neatly swept pathway, to the shining milkpans which are arranged on a bench. ... I am ushered into a neat sitting room where I am left alone. I look around, there is a clean rag carpet on the floor; wood bottomed chairs are ranged around the room, a lounge, wide and comfortable looking covered with dark print, a table on which are books and a work basket, a shining stove, curtains of white cotton looped back from the windows and every thing so neat! The air in the room is fresh and there

is not a speck of dust visible. Sarah comes in with a black haired, rosy cheeked little woman whom she introduces as "My sister, Ann" and Ann shows me my room, a large square apartment all clean like the sitting room and whose front windows look out on the neat front yard and the turnpike. I promise myself comfort here and am not mistaken for when supper is announced I go out into a kitchen which compares with the rooms I have seen, and sit down to a table covered with a spotless cloth and on which are neatly set inviting looking plates of food.

Sarah helps Ann in the morning about the kitchen and at eight we start together for school. The stage rattles past us but with this exception we see no sign of man. ...But we are not lonely there is so much beauty about us. Trees are budding, the birds sing merrily as we go along the road under the forest trees and the air is clear and warm. As I come near the school house Caroline meets me bringing a bunch of flowers. I am pleased with the offering and the day goes by like yesterday.



Memorization and recitation were major components of 19th century education.

Wednesday comes and with it Rev. E. O. Rivers. My heart flutters as I see him drive up to the bars for he is Acting School Visitor. It takes him a great

while to hitch his horse and before he comes in I say to the children, "Now do your best to day for my sake as well as your own."

I place the only chair for him by the farther side of the room where he can see every scholar. Little Tommy rolls up his beautiful brown eyes and looks so scared I am afraid he will fail to do his best and Tommy is one of my strong points, he learns readily, remembers everything and has so pretty a voice that when he speak everyone is charmed.

Mr. Rivers is a middle aged man, small with iron grey hair and he is somewhat lofty in his manners. He is a Congregational clergyman, has charge of the parish in which my Father was born and preaches in the very church where Father used to go every Sabbath when he was a boy.

Mr. Rivers tips back in his chair, partially closes his eyes and says "Go on with the lessons." I have been careful to review every lesson each day so that after eight days study most of the scholars have every word they have learned at their "tongues end" and as they recite I feel that Mr. Rivers is looking at me. When noon comes, I, according to the established custom ask him to make some remarks. He rises slowly, speaks very deliberately "I have been interested from the moment I entered the house. All has been done well. I have visited every school in town and in my mind had pronounced the Spring-hill school the best, but I retract, this school is Number one. An old proverb is 'A bad beginning makes a good ending,' this is wrong. It should be what is shown here," and he utters the words with great emphasis "A good beginning precedes a good ending" and then he stands and prays. At a motion of my hand the children rise. It is a far away prayer but we stand reverentially till it is finished and ere he goes he takes my hand gives me some excellent advice. Then he goes away and in every part of the town is heard the praises of my school, for Mr. Rivers, whenever he meets those who are interested in schools, holds mine up as a model...

Almira completed her term successfully on July 25, earning a grand total of \$18. However, when offered a raise to \$2 a week to teach a second term, she turned it down. The following spring she taught again at the Horn Hill School and this time found it a more agreeable experience. She went on to become a successful educator, teaching in schools in Mansfield, Andover, South Coventry, and South Manchester until shortly before her death in 1907.

**NEW TECHNOLOGY IN 1882:
THE TELEPHONE ARRIVES IN MANSFIELD**

The monotony of the avenue has been somewhat relieved the past few days by the workmen erecting poles, and putting up the new telephone line from Willimantic northward through Conantville, Mansfield Centre, Chaffeeville, Gurleyville, Daleville and onward farther north, possibly taking in Tolland, Stafford, and Rockville. A branch to connect Mansfield Centre with the Red Spring has been proposed, but has not yet been decided upon.

Some of the ancient tattlers and gossips, seem to have vague and indistinct ideas relative to the acoustic properties of this new instrument for the transmission of news, and after the completion of the line it would not be strange to see some of them patiently waiting, and listening by the wayside in order to catch the passing messages.

-- The Willimantic Chronicle, June 14, 1882

IN MEMORIAM: JANE PELLETIER

We are saddened to report the passing of Jane Pelletier, a longstanding Historical Society member. Jane served on the Museum Committee and the Acquisitions Committee for many years. She prepared the Museum's informative exhibit on local scouting in 1995 and contributed to numerous other exhibits. We will certainly miss Jane and her ever-cheerful personality. We extend our sincere condolences to her family and friends.

Remember to renew...and tell a friend, too! We'll have a program of interest for you!

MANSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FOR 2009

(Please check your address label. A RED DOT indicates that you have not paid your dues.)

Name(s) _____

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MEMBERSHIP LEVEL

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PLEASE CONSIDER VOLUNTEERING! Check the volunteer opportunities that interest you.

_____ Host/Hostess	_____ Exhibit Preparation	_____ Collections
_____ Educational Programs	_____ Genealogy Research	_____ Historical Research
_____ Office Work	_____ Special Events	_____ Handyman

Please make checks payable to The Mansfield Historical Society. Mail membership form and check to: Mansfield Historical Society / P.O. Box 145 / Storrs, CT 06268.

2009 MANSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

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Vacant, Vice President

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