



Historical Society of Cheshire County

*Collecting, Preserving, and Communicating the
History of Cheshire County*

VOL. 35, NO. 4

NOVEMBER 2019

Toy Story: Toy Manufacturing in the Central Connecticut River Valley



*Kingsbury Toy Company, Keene,
NH, fire engine, early 20th century*



*Whitney Brothers high chair,
Marlborough, NH, mid-20th
century*



*S. A. Smith Company toy wagon,
Brattleboro, VT, 19th century*

In 1952 the Kenwood Blankets Company of Peterborough developed a display for an Easter trade show in New York City. The company decided to prepare a toy-land themed booth, complementing its line of bedding by using scraps of blankets to produce small stuffed sheep for the display. The toy props stole the show. The sheep were priced at \$50 to deter sales, but they sold anyway. As a result, the company soon formed KenToys Company to make and sell stuffed toys to a national market.

The KenToys Company was only one of many toy manufacturing companies that were established in the Central Connecticut River Valley over the last 170 years. The Historical Society's new feature exhibit *Toys: The Story of Toy Manufacturing in the Central Connecticut River Valley* examines the development of the toy industry to reveal the technological innovations of its residents, the history of childhood play theory in America, popular culture's impact on industry, and how both national and international forces impacted the toy industry.

The exhibit opens at the Society, 246 Main Street in Keene, with a reception on Wednesday, November 6 from 4:00 to 6:00 pm. The exhibit is free and open to the public. A special hands-on play area will be provided for children. The exhibit will continue through April 18, 2020, and then move to Brattleboro, Vermont, and Peterborough, New Hampshire.

The *Toys* exhibit features examples of many of the classic playthings that have been manufactured in the region. For example, metal toys were made in the late 1800s by the Wilkins Toy Company which became the Kingsbury Toy Company and continued in the business until 1942. It is said that children all over America would eagerly await the arrival of the new catalogue of Kingsbury Toys.

Two other companies featured in the exhibit include Whitney Brothers and Douglas Toy Company. The Whitney Brothers – Charles, Fred, and Mark – started a wooden toy manufacturing company in Marlborough, New Hampshire in 1904 in a building which was originally a water-powered grist mill. Today, the (Continued on page 2)

Historical Society of Cheshire County



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Toy Story(Continued from page 1):

educational furniture at a facility on Railroad Street in Keene. Douglas Toy Company has been a family-owned and operated company since 1953, and has become one of the oldest and most respected plush-toy companies in the world. Dozens of other toy companies from the tristate area will be included in the exhibit, which will trace the history of toy use, manufacture and the place of toys in popular culture.

The *Toys* exhibit is a collaboration between the Historical Society of Cheshire County, the Brattleboro Historical Society, Marlborough Historical Society and many individuals with personal links to toy manufacturing history. Sponsors of the exhibit include Douglas Toy Company, Whitney Brothers, and Toadstool Bookshops.

The Historical Society will host several toy related events and presentations in conjunction with the exhibit. Please visit the exhibit and take a trip back into your childhood.



*Estey Organ Company child's
reed organ, Brattleboro, VT,
early 20th century*



*Red Shed Rubber Toys puppet
family, Peterborough, NH, 1950s*



*Douglas Toy Company plush
horse, Keene, NH, c.1970s*

Toys Exhibit Programs

Wilkins and Kingsbury Toy Identification Day & Show-n-Tell: Saturday, November 9, 1:00 to 2:30 pm, Exhibit Hall, Historical Society. Kingsbury Toys experts Greg Bixby and David Frechette will be on hand to identify toys. Participants are encouraged to bring up to 3 of their favorite Wilkins-Kingsbury toys. Be prepared to share a story with other participants. Advanced registration required. Call 603-352-1895 to receive your time slot to meet the experts.

Toys I Have Loved Pop Up Exhibit: Wednesday, December 11, 5:00 to 6:30 pm, Exhibit Hall. Bring a favorite toy from your childhood to this temporary exhibit. Participants will write their own exhibit label and share why their toy is important to them. At the end of the event, each participant brings his/her toy home again.

Coming in 2020:

History of the Whitney Brothers; February, Time and Date TBA

History of Kingsbury Toys, Film and Discussion; March, Time and Date TBA

Visit the Historical Society of Cheshire County website for more information about upcoming programs: www.hscnh.org.

Giving Tuesday: December 3, 2019

Theme: Celebrating Empowered Women in Cheshire County History



Jennie B. Powers



Participants in the Women's Track Meet in Keene, New Hampshire, May 11, 1916

As you probably know, Giving Tuesday is a movement for people to give something back to the causes that they believe in. It comes right after the big shopping days of Black Friday and Cyber Monday – which will be December 3rd this year.

Our theme for Giving Tuesday will be **Celebrating Empowered Women in Cheshire County History**, in honor of the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote. In 2020, the Historical Society of Cheshire County will invite the public to celebrate *herstory* with a series of programs and special events. Here are a just a few of the things we hope to do:

- **Jennie Powers: The Woman Who Dares** – a presentation on Jennie's life story, humane societies at the turn of the 20th century, and the Progressive Era from a local perspective (see page 6 for more information)
- **International Women's Day Celebration** – stories of women from around the world who have inspired change
- **Votes for Women: A History of Women's Suffrage** – featuring Liz Tentarelli, president of the League of Women Voters NH
- **Badass Women of Keene Walking Tour** – with stories of real women in Keene's past who took a stance to right a wrong or make their voices heard
- **The Not-So-Good Life of the Colonial Goodwife** – Velya Jancz-Urban honors our foremothers' journeys while teaching about the little-known issues faced by colonial women
- **Suffragettes in Corsettes** – the history of underwear reveals a lot about changing roles in society
- **Reading of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's 1848 Speech and Discussion**– in collaboration with the Women & Gender Studies Department at Keene State College.
- **A website on Empowered Women of Cheshire County**

There are several ways you can help us meet our ambitious goals for Giving Tuesday. We will need a social media squad to help us get our message out. We are looking for people to share stories about ways in which their involvement with the Historical Society of Cheshire County has enriched their lives. And we hope to receive commitments for matching gifts in advance of Giving Tuesday. If you are interested in helping in any of these ways, please contact: devdir@hscn.org.



Executive Committee of the New Hampshire Women's Christian Temperance Union in Keene, NH, September 1888. Photo by J.A. French

The Story of Toy Manufacturing in the
Central Connecticut River Valley

TOYS

ON VIEW AT THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF
CHESHIRE COUNTY
246 MAIN STREET, KEENE, NH

NOVEMBER 6, 2019-
APRIL 18, 2020



Exhibit made possible through a partnership with:
Marlborough, NH Historical Society, Brattleboro Historical Society,
Historical Society of Cheshire County and David Frechette
Exhibit sponsored by:
Douglas Toy Company, Toadstool Bookshops and Whitney Brothers Inc



BECOME A FINN FOR THE DAY!

VISIT THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CHESHIRE COUNTY'S



FINNISH TORI-MARKET

INSPIRED BY THE MARKETS IN HELSINKI
HAND-CRAFTED ITEMS, FOOD, MUSIC, DANCE,
DEMONSTRATIONS AND MORE...

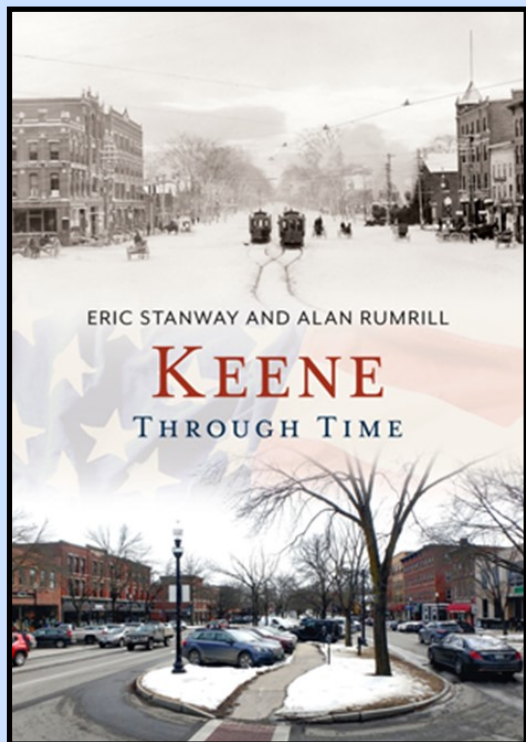
SAT., NOV. 16, 2019 9AM-2PM

TROY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. 44 SCHOOL ST., TROY, NH

This is not a school sponsored event

The Tori is held in conjunction with Finn-Funn Weekend at the Inn at East Hill Farm, hosted by Finnish American Heritage Society, Finnish Heritage Society Sovittaja, and The Finnish Center at Saima Park in Fitchburg, MA.

For more info about Finn-Funn Events visit:
<https://www.saima-park.org/ff2019/index.html>



From Arcadia Publishing and the History Press:

Keene Through Time

by Eric Stanway and Alan Rumrill

A new volume in the Arcadia Publishing series "America Through Time" focuses on the city of Keene. "America through Time" is a local and regional interest series that showcases the history and heritage of communities around the country. Using modern color photographs juxtaposed with old images, *Keene Through Time* captures a strong sense of the past while demonstrating the forces of change through the passage of years. The book is co-authored by well-known local author Eric Stanway and Historical Society of Cheshire County director Alan Rumrill.

The new book contains almost 200 images and the stories behind them. The book will be available at the Historical Society of Cheshire County, the Toadstool Bookshop and other local retail outlets. The book sells for \$23.99. The Historical Society is offering a **special publication release price of \$18.00 per volume through November 15, 2019**. Please visit the Historical Society office or website to order a copy of the book. Shipping can be arranged.

Libraries on the Big Screen

2019 FILM SERIES AT THE
KEENE PUBLIC LIBRARY, 30 WINTER ST, KEENE, NH

The Historical Society of Cheshire County, the Keene Public Library, and film historian Larry Benaquist have teamed up to celebrate the rededication of the Library with five very different interpretations of what the concept of a library is.

THURS. NOV. 7. 6:30PM.

STORM CENTER (1956)

A small-town librarian refuses to take a book on Communism out of circulation, with disastrous results. The first film to directly attack McCarthyism.



THURS. NOV. 14. 6:30PM.

DESK SET (1957)

The library/research staff at a large television network have their jobs threatened when the network hires someone to install his invention, EMERAC ("Electromagnetic Memory and Research Arithmetical Calculator") to automate the research operation.



THURS. NOV. 21. 6:30PM.

THE MUSIC MAN (1962)

Marian, the Librarian, is the only person in River City who sees through the fraudulent Harold Hill. She has access to printed proof of "Professor Hill's" deception, but she loathes to reveal it as she is beginning to develop feelings for him.



THURS. DEC. 5. 6:30PM.

PARTY GIRL (1995)

Airhead Mary gets a job in her local branch of the city library. Slowly, the routines at the library turn her into a near-obsessive, in love with the life-saving organizational principles of the Dewey Decimal System.



THURS. DEC. 12. 6:30PM.

THE PUBLIC (2018)

About to be ejected into the cold, a group of homeless men refuse to leave the Cincinnati Public Library and barricade themselves inside. While fictional, The Public is a sensitive and interesting examination of the functions of public spaces.



Five Reasons to Become a Member of the Historical Society of Cheshire County

1. The Historical Society of Cheshire County puts on over 150 programs per year, which reach about 9,000 people. About 22% are youth and teens.
2. The Wyman Tavern preserves one of Cheshire County's most historic buildings and provides a window into 18th century life. In June 2019, the Bruder House opened next door to the Wyman Tavern as a welcome center and venue for programs.
3. Programs such as the Finnish Bread Bake-off, the Hindu Holi Festival of Color and the International Festival celebrate our diverse cultures.
4. Events such as the 18th Century Village Day (formerly the Wyman Tavern Festival) make Cheshire County a better destination for residents and guests.
5. Your support helps people of all ages "find their place in history."

Join or Renew Today! Thank You!

A membership brochure and return envelope are included in this edition of the newsletter.



Great Gift Idea!
Engrave your loved one's name in history.
Buy an engraved brick for the walkway at the Wyman Tavern.
4 x 8 bricks for \$100
8 x 8 bricks for \$200
Call 603-352-1895 to reserve your brick.



Jennie Powers: The Woman Who Dares

Wednesday, January 22
6:30 pm
Historical Society of Cheshire County
Exhibit Hall.

Jennie Powers was a Progressive Era woman who stood up against social vices in New Hampshire and Vermont in the early 20th century. She was a

humane society agent in Keene, NH, from 1903-1936, and one of the first humane society agents to become a deputy sheriff in New Hampshire. Jennie was known across the country as *The Woman Who Dares*, cited by the Boston Post newspaper as having arrested more men than any other woman in America in 1906. As a photographic activist, she used her camera to document animal cruelty, family violence, and wide-spread poverty in New Hampshire's Monadnock region and beyond. This one-hour slide presentation introduces attendees to Jennie's life story, the work of humane societies at the turn of the 20th century, and the Progressive Era (1890s-1920s) from a local perspective.

This program is the first of the *Celebrating Empowered Women in Cheshire County* series of programs. Check the Historical Society's website for more information.

***In Grateful Recognition of our 2019 Sponsors and Business Members
Thank you!***

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***Reopening in time for
the holiday season.
Sale November 6th through
December 24th.
20% off for members; 10% off
General Public***




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AT THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CHESHIRE COUNTY

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 OPEN TUESDAY, THURSDAY AND FRIDAY 9-4, WEDNESDAY 9-9PM
 THE FIRST AND THIRD SATURDAY OF MONTH 9-12



Historical Society of Cheshire County
P.O. Box 803 – 246 Main Street
Keene, New Hampshire 03431
603-352-1895 – www.hscnh.org
Hours: Tues., Thurs., & Fri.: 9 am - 4 pm
Wed.: 9 am - 9 pm
First and Third Sat., 9 am– 12 pm

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Collecting, Preserving, and Communicating the History of Cheshire County

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Calendar: Complete List of Events at Historical Society Website: www.hscnh.org

November 2019

Wednesday, November 6, 4:00-6:00 pm, Exhibit Hall, *Toys: The History of Toy Manufacturing in the Central Connecticut River Valley* Exhibit Opening

Thursday, November 7, 6:30 pm, Keene Public Library, Film and Discussion: *Storm Center*

Saturday, November 9, 1:00 to 2:30 pm, Exhibit Hall, Wilkins and Kingsbury Toy Identification Day

Thursday, November 14, 6:30 pm, Keene Public Library, Film and Discussion: *Desk Set*

Saturday, November 16, 9:00 am to 2:00 pm, Troy Elementary School, Finnish Tori-Market

Thursday, November 21, 6:30 pm, Keene Public Library, Film and Discussion: *The Music Man*

Thursday and Friday, November 28 and 29, Historical Society closed for Thanksgiving Holiday

December 2019

Thursday, December 5, 6:30 pm, Keene Public Library, Film and Discussion: *Party Girl*

Friday, December 6, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, and Saturday, December 7, 9:00 am to 1:00 pm, Exhibit Hall, Old Homestead Garden Club Greens Sale

Wednesday, December 11, Exhibit Hall, Pop Up Exhibit: *Toys I Have Loved*

Thursday, December 12, 6:30 pm, Keene Public Library, Film and Discussion: *The Public*

January 2020

Wednesday, January 22, 7:00 pm, Exhibit Hall, *Jennie Powers: The Woman Who Dares* presentation.

February 2020

Presentation, *History of Whitney Brothers*. **Date and Time TBA**

March 2020

Film and Discussion, *History of Kingsbury Toys*. **Date and Time TBA**

Sunday, March 8. *International Women's Day Celebration*. **Place and Time TBA**