

NEW CITY BY THE FALLS

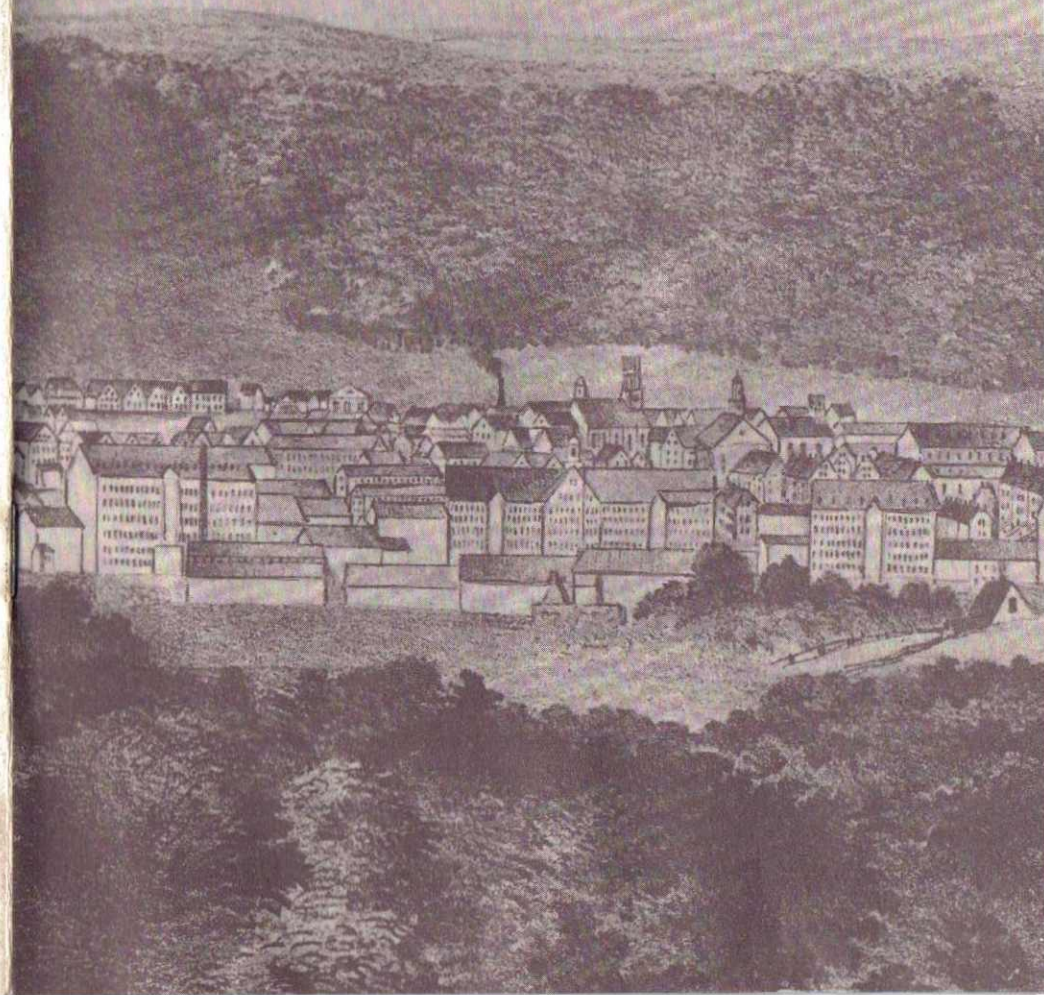
THE FIRST TEN YEARS OF

MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

1838 - 1848

by Virginia Plisko

Director, The Manchester Historic Association





URING the early years of the nineteenth century all New Hampshire was astir with the momentous events that were taking place in the little village of Manchester nearly a mile to the southeast of the great Amoskeag Falls of the Merrimack River. The little farming community had always been known for the contentious and independent spirit of its people and the fearless valor of its most famous son General John Stark, who had led the New Hampshire men to victory after victory in the Revolutionary War. Manchester was proud of its heritage and content to live as it always had by farming the land and harvesting the river's bounty annually during the great spring fish runs at the falls but now her whole way of life was being changed by forces beyond the control of any New England town. Manchester was undergoing an invasion.

It had all begun in 1807 when Judge Samuel Blodget had finally succeeded in completing his barge canal around the Amoskeag falls and predicted that a city would rise there by the river which would become known as the Manchester of America. Three years later in 1810 the town had adopted the name of Manchester in his honor. Barges plying up and down the river had brought new prosperity to the area and manufacturing had actually begun on the Goffstown rather than the Manchester side of the falls. There the thriving little village of Amoskeag had grown up and by the early 1830's three small mills were in operation there producing cotton cloth. These events had affected Manchester only slightly. A few of her citizens profited by catering to the canal boat men and tending the lock and it was easier to receive goods from Boston, but otherwise life in Manchester continued on as it always had.

Then in 1831 the company operating the mills in Amoskeag Village was reorganized as the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company and by 1834 had purchased a vast tract of land on the east bank of the river formerly the farms of a number of Manchester residents. On this property they had constructed two power canals over a mile in length. By 1839 this company had laid out a city by the river and had a large new mill under construction for the Stark Manufacturing Company, a new corporation which had leased the land and water power. In the fall of that year the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company held its first land sale in the new city. Eighty-four lots were sold and people swarmed into the new village. The community was laid out along Elm, Chestnut and Pine

Streets running north and south; and Merrimack, Manchester, Hanover, Amherst and Concord Streets running east and west. Included were both Concord (now Victory Park) and Merrimack Commons. West of Elm Street short streets were laid out running down to the mill canals along the river. Here the first blocks of brick tenements were under construction for the workers of the Stark Corporation.

By 1839 the area of Elm, Amherst and Hanover Streets had assumed the appearance of a thrifty village and the sounds of building were heard on all sides. During this year of bursting growth the Amoskeag Company built the Manchester House to serve the city as a hostelry and began the policy of giving each religious denomination a church lot if the chosen property was east of Elm Street, the lots on the west side being available at reduced prices. The Hanover Street Church (Congregational), said to be one of the most beautiful public buildings in the state, was the first of five churches constructed in that year. Several business blocks had been constructed on Elm Street, The Manchester Mills organized, a second mill built for the Stark Mfg. Co. and the town's first newspaper *The Amoskeag Representative* founded by the time that the company held its second land sale at the end of the year. The town had now grown to include the areas between Hanover and Merrimack Streets and Elm and Union Streets. Indeed its growth had been so unexpectedly rapid that the budget set at the town meeting in the old village proved inadequate to meet the needs of the new one and a special town meeting was called to consider the problem. Other necessary business transacted at this meeting included the establishment of both Police and Fire Departments and the authorization to purchase a fire engine for the burgeoning new village.

The next year brought the construction of the first Amoskeag mill and the completion of the Granite Street Bridge at a cost of \$10,000. Joseph Emerson founded the town's second newspaper, *The Memorial* and the Stark Guards were organized for the preservation of the peace and social pursuits. This was the year that saw the organization of the Amoskeag Insurance Company and the moving of the Post Office from the old village to Elm Street in the new community. The newcomers now made plain their intention to control town affairs. It had become apparent that the inhabitants of the "New Village" would soon outnumber those of the town and they did not talk or act with much moderation to the resentment of the old established families. A disruptive town meeting held that spring proved conclusively that newcomers did indeed predominate and henceforth Manchester was to be controlled by the people of the "New Village". The new selectmen

proceeded to organize the various boards of municipal officers and build the first fire station. The town was divided into school districts and the decision to purchase a pauper farm was approved. The population had now mushroomed to 3,325 an increase of 2,338 inhabitants in the last 20 years, the majority of whom had arrived during the previous two years.

Building progress continued at an ever accelerating rate aided by the Amoskeag Company's land sales which were held annually and sometimes biannually for the next few years. The first town meeting in the "New Village" was called in 1841 and a fine new Town House built of brick with a central cupola surmounted by a fine eagle, constructed at a cost of approximately \$17,000. The first school house was also built in the village at the corner of Lowell and Chestnut Streets. The Amoskeag Company conveyed deeds for the Valley Cemetery and the right to use all company streets south of Bridge Street and west of Elm Street. The street plan was again extended, Union Street being laid out between Merrimack and Bridge Streets and Orange Street between Chestnut and Elm. The Union building became the first private building built west of Elm Street above the growing rows of red brick mills and joined rows of tenements which separated the city from the river. An unidentified local newspaper described the growing community in the following glowing terms, "Manchester is a city in miniature — the population already numbers nearly four thousand inhabitants. The amount of business done here for a new place is almost incredible; and there is every prospect that it will rapidly increase for years to come. There are now in operation only two factories and the sum of one hundred and twenty thousand dollars is annually paid for help. Two more are nearly finished. A Town House worth \$20,000 is now going up and likewise many stores and dwelling houses. These afford employment for many hands. Manchester is destined to be a great place."

Indeed it was. During the remainder of the decade the community continued to grow at an ever accelerating pace. The Concord Railroad was opened to Manchester in 1842, the same year that the Amoskeag Falls bridge was constructed at a cost of \$12,069. Interested citizens organized the Manchester Lyceum where one could subscribe to a series of twenty lectures for the fee of 50 cents for ladies and 75 cents for gentlemen. It was soon followed by the Manchester Atheneum, a private circulating library, and The Manchester Museum and Gallery of Fine Arts. Churches continued to be built at a steady rate and by 1850 there were no less than eleven clustered in the city's center. A third

newspaper, the *Manchester Democrat* appeared in 1842 followed by three others in 1845. Manchester was a community of readers interested in the affairs of the town, state and nation. The 1840's were years of great agitation for temperance and no less than five different temperance organizations were founded in Manchester to fight the evils of strong drink. The sale of intoxicating beverages in Manchester was actually restricted as a result of their efforts causing much unrest in the town.

The destruction of the fine new Town House by fire in 1844 led to great improvements in the supply of water available for fire fighting and the development of a fire department described as "second to none". 1844 also saw the chartering of the Manchester Bank and the founding of the Manchester Brass Band. The population had again increased and now stood at 6,036.

1845 was a year of even more unexpected growth marked by the construction of two mills each 440 feet in length and five business blocks. Over two hundred buildings were under construction in that year and it was said that nearly one hundred more were to be begun by the 4th of July. The population of the "New Village" school district had reached 10,000 and a second Town House was completed costing \$35,000. Radically different from the first, this building was designed by Edward Shaw of Boston in the then new Gothic style and still serves Manchester as her city hall today. Fraternal feeling among the inhabitants was marked by the founding of the Wanolancet. Mechanics and Masonic Lodges during this and the preceding year.

The town was granted a city charter in 1846 and became the City of Manchester, a proud accomplishment for a community only eight years old. Her limits were now extended south to Park Street, east to join Union Street and north to the Old Falls Road. With a population of 10,125 the city at this time was in reality a series of loosely joined villages clustered around the planned center community. Janesville, Bakersville, Goffs Falls, Youngsville, Hallsville and Towlesville had all grown up around the homes of prominent residents or families and were all eventually absorbed into the street plan of the city proper.

The new city continued to amaze all who visited the community and contrasted its prosperity with the farmlands of less than ten years before. The writer of an article printed in *The Messenger* of May 22, 1847 expressed his feelings as follows: "In the year 1838, I think, I passed through this place when the first factory and block of boarding houses were being erected. Since that time I have passed through the place once

or twice in the cars, but saw little of the change, till now; and what a change! A city has sprung up as by magic; for it seems but last year that I saw the place as above described. But now those sandy plains are covered with long, broad streets, magnificent stores and hotels, princely mansions, beautiful carriages, spacious school houses and elegant churches; and then between the main street and the river are the boarding houses, the railroad with its extensive and very convenient depot, the canal and the factories with all their appurtenances, all of which are so arranged as to render Manchester one of the most delightful manufacturing cities in the world. It is superior in point of elevation, surface and extensive area, to almost any other place of the kind in New England. The building lots were laid out on a generous plan, so that to many of the houses are attached large gardens, which render the place more beautiful and healthy. Thus, in the course of nine years has this mighty work been accomplished, changing the once barren and desolate waste into the busy hum of industry and thrift, with its beautiful gardens and fruitful fields. As a proof of the generosity and good taste of the projectors of this young and growing city, the visitor will see several, four I think, public squares, which when they shall have been properly cultivated and adorned, will add very much to the beauty of the place."

It is difficult today to visualize the Manchester of those years. It was a very different city from the Manchester of today or even the Manchester of the latter half of the nineteenth century and now has been almost entirely obliterated by its own bursting growth and prosperity. The early city was a New England community of brick business blocks built in the restrained Federal style, and brick mills with gabled rooves small in comparison to those of later years. Churches of brick and wood were built in styles cherished today as typically New England and were attended by a populace living in Federal and Greek Revival homes grouped around tree studded parks. Elm trees lined both sides of Elm Street and some sources describe a third row down the middle also. Elms and maples were planted along the other streets and the city was known for its beautiful shade trees.

Although the standard histories give no indication of it, early Manchester was also a city of mill girls. Drawn to the community by the mills which offered them independence and a chance to make a living for themselves in a respectable manner and among congenial company the girls came in droves from the farms of New England and the mill towns of Massachusetts. For many it was their first experience in living among other young people of their age and for all their first opportunity

to be truly independent of their male dominated families. With their neatly dressed hair and trim gowns fashioned in the styles of the day, the mill girls were indistinguishable from the daughters of the city residents. Religious and hungry for learning, it was they who undoubtedly provided the impetus for the founding of the Lyceum and Atheneum, became involved in the temperance societies and were the mainstay of the many churches. By 1850 the girls formed almost one-third of the city's population of 14,000 and were the largest single class of mill employees. They continued to be so until the influx of families from Canada after the Civil War changed the patterns of employment from that of single operatives to one of settled families of mill workers.

The first ten years of the new city's growth prophesized the years to come. The remaining decades of the nineteenth century were ones of ever increasing growth, progress and pride in the city as Manchester, with her broad tree lined streets, imposing business blocks and handsome houses grew into New Hampshire's largest city and her parent, the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company became known as the largest textile mill in the world.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Blood, Grace Holbrook. MANCHESTER ON THE MERRIMACK. Somersworth, New England History Press. 1975.
- Browne, George Waldo. THE AMOSKEAG MANUFACTURING COMPANY OF MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE. Manchester, The Amoskeag Manufacturing Company. 1915.
- Lamb, Fred W. FROM OLD HARRYTOWN TO QUEEN CITY. Scrapbook of newspaper clippings. Manchester Historic Association.
- McCauley, Elfrieda B. THE NEW ENGLAND MILL GIRLS. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1971. Copy at Manchester Historic Association.
- Potter, C.E. THE HISTORY OF MANCHESTER FORMERLY DERRYFIELD IN NEW HAMPSHIRE. Manchester, C.E. Potter. 1856.