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PHOTOGRAPHS AVAILABLE

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Resilience, Rebirth, and Redemption: Stories of Manchester

CONCORD, NH—The recently released special issue of *Historical New Hampshire* focuses on the Granite State’s largest city, Manchester. Containing articles ranging in time from 1780s Derryfield to 1980s Manchester, an introduction by Manchester Historic Association’s executive director John Clayton, and the Manchester mills artistry of Marian Cannon Schlesinger, the issue spans Manchester history from its founding to the present day by focusing on three episodes in Manchester’s past.

No one knows Manchester better than Clayton, who sets the stage for the issue in his introduction by reminding readers of the city’s unique history and its ability to reinvent itself. Author Matthew Labbe, a Manchester native-son, focuses on early Manchester in his piece, “The Center before the City: Early Manchester through the Lens of the Huse House,” harkening back to a time when the community was located further east of the river and called itself Derryfield. At that point, no one could foresee the development of the textile mills and the resulting transformation from farm community to industrial city. Labbe uses the Huse House—a library, tavern, post office, store, and private residence—to explore the changing dynamics of Derryfield and tensions that rose with community’s shift closer to the river.

By the 1850s, Manchester and its mill complex was well on its way to becoming a symbol of 19th-century industrialization, complete with the urbanization that accompanied it. With the traditional social fabric undermined by the massive movement of people to the cities, it is perhaps not surprising that young women without the protection of fathers or brothers would prove vulnerable to exploitation. The second article, “‘A True Tale of Disappointed Love’: A Manchester Double Suicide and the Literature It Produced,” by University of North Alabama assistant professor Carolyn M. Barske, relates the sad tale of two young mill women who jumped into the Millyard’s upper canal in a sensational double suicide in 1853. Touching off a firestorm of print, the tragic event received press coverage as far away as Australia and inspired at least two novels that dramatized the women’s short and desperate lives. By focusing on this dark episode in Manchester’s past, Barske highlights the pressures many young women faced when adapting to life in the mills.

The last article, “Perseverance on the Merrimack: The Challenges and Transformation of the Amoskeag Millyard, 1935–1980,” by University of New Hampshire associate professor Kelly M. Kilcrease, tells the remarkable story of the mills in the years since the closing of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company in 1936. Confronted with a major economic and social crisis, business and city leaders adopted an proactive approach to repurposing the Millyard, thus staving off the economic collapse that plagued so many other New England mill towns. Instead, Manchester remained economically viable throughout the 20th century with an appreciation for innovation that positioned it well for the technological revolution of the 21st century.

Historical New Hampshire continues its tradition of publishing fully illustrated issues, with many historic images and more color renderings from the collections of the New Hampshire Historical Society, the Manchester Historic Association, and private collections. The issue includes a special section devoted to the art of Marian Cannon Schlesinger and eight of her color images of Manchester mill buildings. The images were selected from the eighty-three works depicting mill towns the artist given to the New Hampshire Historical Society in 2006, all of which are available for online viewing at the Society’s website, nhhistory.org.

Historical New Hampshire is a benefit of membership in the New Hampshire Historical Society, and members receive a copy of the most recent issue in the mail. To purchase a copy, visit the Society's online store at nhhistory.org or call 603-228-6688.

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