
CHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Volume 6, Issue 1

A Publication of the Chester Historical Society

October 2007

SNOWFLAKE HOLIDAY CRAFT FAIR

*Saturday, November 3 - Town Hall
9:00am to 3:00pm*

A Great Way to Spend a Fall Day in Chester

Tables include:

- ❖ *Handmade Crafts*
- ❖ *Photographs and Paintings*
- ❖ *Handmade Soaps*
- ❖ *Jewelry*
- ❖ *Jams, Jellies and Maple Syrup*
- ❖ *Baked Goods*
- ❖ *.....and much more!!*

On the same day, visit the following locations in Chester Village:

- ❖ *John Root - "Music of the Gaslight Era" Free concert at 12:30pm at the Cornerstone Christian Church*
- ❖ *Soup and sandwiches from the Church Mice of the Cornerstone Christian Church*
- ❖ *Hamilton Memorial Library - Book Fair*
- ❖ *Chester Railroad Museum - Railroad Memorabilia and Artifacts*
- ❖ *Village Shoppe - Antiques and Gifts*
- ❖ *Pease General Store - Old Fashioned Mercantile Shop*
- ❖ *Carm's Restaurant - Known for breakfast and lunch*
- ❖ *A&L Market and Chester Village Market - Everything and anything you need*

A Trip Through Chester in 1892

By Clifton Johnson

Chester Village

From North Blandford I went on up and over the big hills and presently took a road that went down a long, twisting valley, with a mountain brook for company, tumbling along through the stony depths of the hollow. This brought me to Chester, a good-sized village of little houses in a broken valley gathering about the two churches and several stores.

There are a number of emery mills in the place, and near the depot some granite works. All about are big sweeps of hills, dipping now and then into the narrow, tortuous ravines which wind back among them. The Boston and Albany railroad has its iron path through the valley, making frequent passages over the Westfield river which wanders through the lowlands.

A smaller stream, spanned by a number of shaky wooden bridges, leaps and foams and slides down from the Blandford hills. In the depot neighborhood there is the sound of the continuous hammering of the stone workers, and as you wander about the place you are usually within hearing of the monotonous grinding and crushing at the emery mills.

A short climb up a steep, rough wood-road brings one to the mines. Here stand some rude little sheds, which serve as storage places for tools, and a blacksmith's shop, and beyond is a great dump of broken stone. Into the side of the hill, close by, is built a heavily timbered structure something like a small, unfinished room. In one corner is a door and on opening it one finds a narrow, black passage leading straight into the hillside. However

hot the weather outside, the air in this gloomy passage is cool and damp. But to one unused to this sort of thing, the idea of the mountain's caving in on him, in spite of the big timbers close set along the walls, and the lonesome, dropping silence of the dark corridor leading away to depths unknown and entirely hidden in pitchy blackness, does not make the position one readily chosen for a loitering place. I did not have to go many yards into the hill to satisfy my curiosity. Then I came out, went down the hill and continued up the valley.

After a mile or more along the level, I crossed the stream and took a road leading up the northern hill. It went up, and up, and up – a twisting, ever-climbing roadway through the woods. At its side was a little stream tinkling through the stony hollow it had for ages been wearing. The end of the year was approaching, and there were flashes of color on the maples, and yellow tones were beginning to appear among the still general greens of the forest. On the ground was a rustling of early fallen leaves. In time I came out of the woods, and the steep road was at an end. Here were wide, rolling sweeps of open hill-top, where were many groups of cows, sheep and horses grazing in the fields. Lines of stone fence zigzagged across the brown pastures and shut in the grass-grown highway.

It seemed to me that I had seen no piece of real country in all Hampden County that was more delightful. Both east and west the land dipped into the wooded valleys, and beyond, ranges of blue hills towered along the horizon. Nature everywhere here has moulded the landscape on a grand scale. The lines of the near sweeps of pasture land were peculiarly pleasing and the changing views one gets of the purple mountains across the valleys are very charming. In many ways it seemed an ideal place for summer residences. It was a quiet, warm afternoon; a light wind swayed the long grasses and made the leaves on the trees nod sleepily; a soft hazing of clouds was drifting up into the sky out of the west, and the color effects were quite enchanting.

Chester Center

A few miles drive over these broadly rolling hills brought me to Chester Center. It is a quiet little hamlet scattered along the roads which converge at the church. The houses are pleasantly shadowed by elms and maples and have many orchards close about. From here I went down the hill into the eastern valley.

The way is long and hummocky and steep, much of it through the woods, but with frequent breaks that give delightful outlooks deep into the valley and of the great slopes opposite veiled with the blue haze of distance. One of the inhabitants commented on the region in this wise:

“If people saw these same hills in Switzerland, they'd go into ecstasies over them, but here in New England they're of not account at all. People will travel the world over hunting for sights worth seeing, but I think they could find within driving distance of home a good many pieces of nature just as handsome and of the same sort as those they describe as so wonderful in countries three or four thousand miles away.”

Hiram Smith Tomb

I had been told there was an interesting tomb in a pasture close by the road on the way down the hill, and I stopped at a sagging gateway which I had been directed to watch for, and, after hitching the horse, made search for this curiosity. I was something of an amateur in the tomb hunting line, never having been on such a quest before, and my success was nothing to boast of. The pasture was hilly and brushy, broken with thickly scattered boulders, and with here and there a boggy hollow.

I understood that this tomb was a great rock as large as a house. A certain farmer of the region, Hiram Smith by name, did not take kindly to the idea of being buried in the ground, and accordingly hunted up this great boulder, had a cavity hewn in it and arranged that he and his sister should there be buried. He left directions that a road should be kept open between the highway and his last resting place, that the public might make pilgrimages thereto. In willing away his property he affixed the condition that this road should always be kept open. I don't know whether it is or not, for it soon merged into the grass and I lost it altogether. I went up hill and down hill, over bogs and through tangles of brush, examined every sizeable rock and began to conclude that this tomb must be mythical. But I persevered, and just as the sun sent its last faint rays glancing along the close-cropped stubble of the pasture, I entered a little grove of hemlocks and there was the stone.

It has a height of about ten feet and a breadth of thirty. Its face has been smoothed on one side and a double aperture cut in it which is now sealed up with slabs of the original stone on which are the inscriptions: Hiram Smith, died 1873: Sarah Toogood, died 1869.

There was something strangely lonesome in the situation. Here was one of Nature's great, rough boulders, hidden in a gloomy thicket, far from habitations, in a half-wild pasture, made the last resting place of these two people; and though their spirits have flown and it is only the bodies which rest here, there comes to one an involuntary sympathy with their imagined loneliness.

North Chester

I made my way back to the main road in a vastly straighter course than that by which I came. Then I hastened down into the valley and there hunted up a place to spend the night. There was a grandmother in the family where I found lodging, who, at seventy-eight years of age, could still read the newspaper without "specs." She said that people spoiled their eyes by using kerosene lamps. If they would only stick to their tallow candles as she did, their eyes would be all right. They made tallow candles every spring, and she said she thought them the very best lights that could possibly be had.

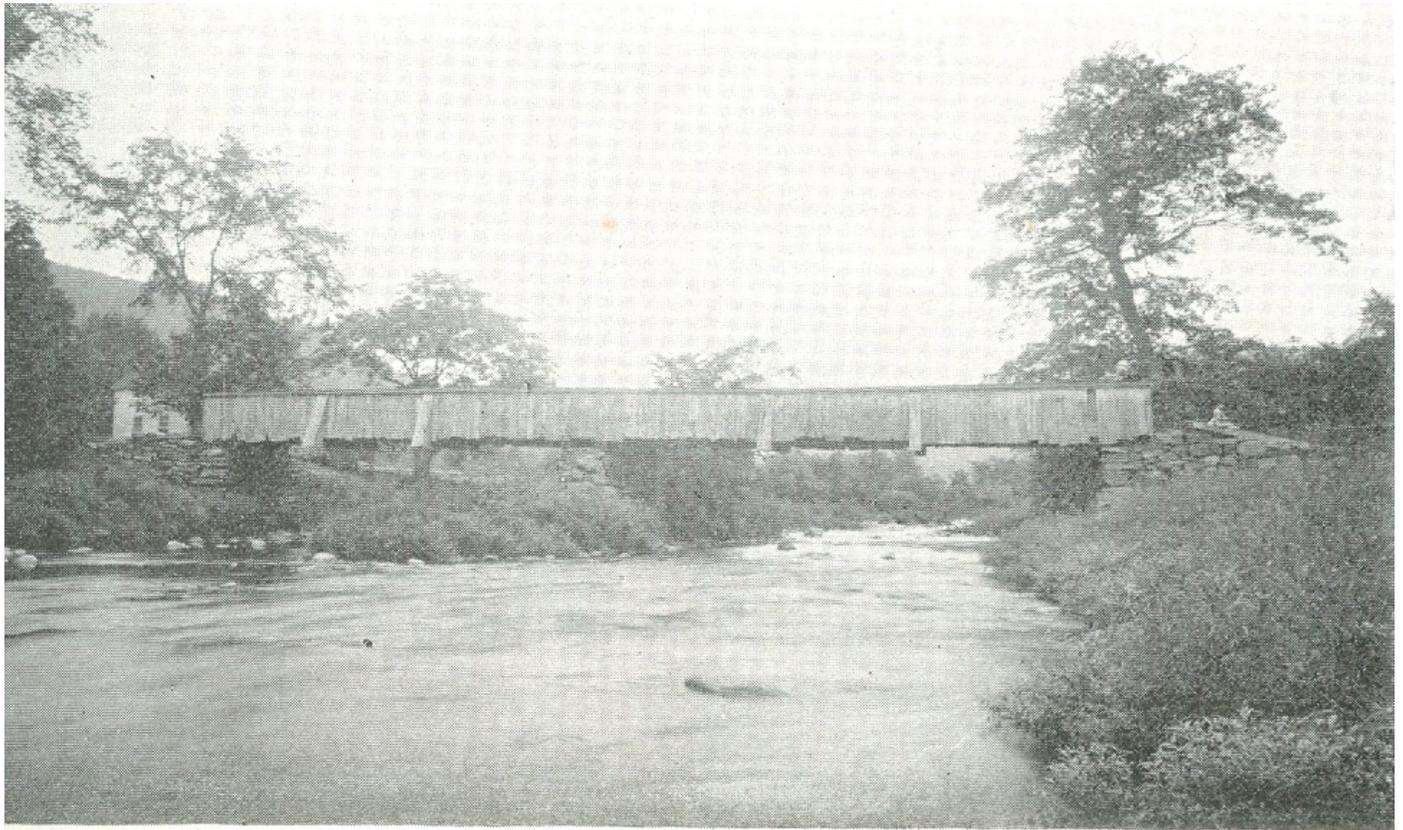
Dayville and Littleville

The next morning opened pleasant, a bright sun looked over the eastern ridges and soon dispelled the light mists which lurked in the valley and veiled the hills. Here in the valley was once a quite populous village, and it had manufacturing enterprise in the way of some small cotton mills. But the mills are a thing of the past and many of the inhabitants have moved away, and the school of the district can at present muster no more than eight scholars.

Presently I took the winding road by the stream and kept in its company down through Littleville (which is like its name), and Huntington to Russell where I turned northward and climbed the mountain by an irregular road through the woods to Montgomery.

Editor's Note: This trip through Chester in 1892 is included in the book, Picturesque Hampden Part II - West, published in 1892 by the Picturesque Publishing Company of Northampton.

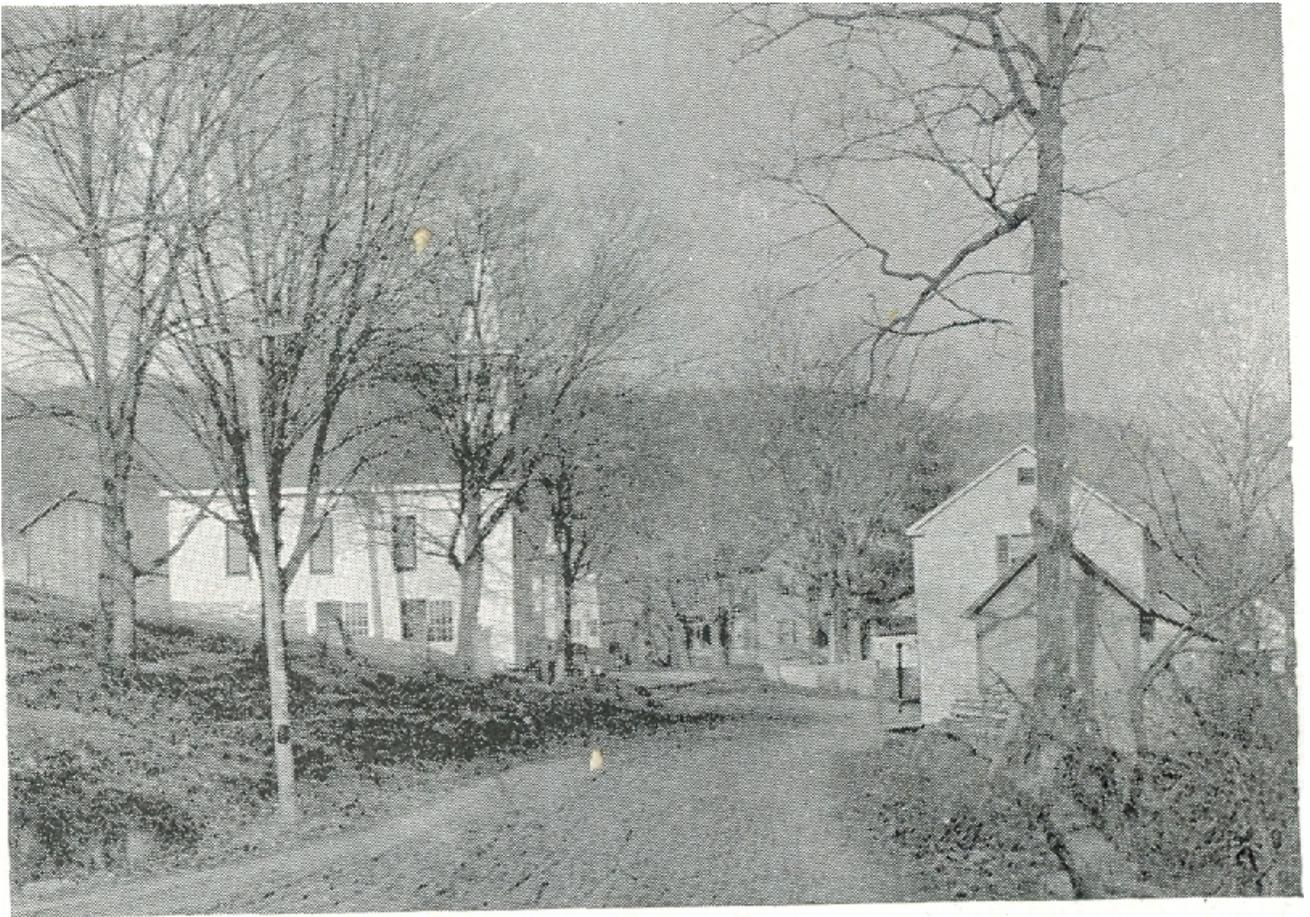
The text and photographs are by Clifton Johnson who with his brother Henry started Johnson's Bookstore in Springfield.



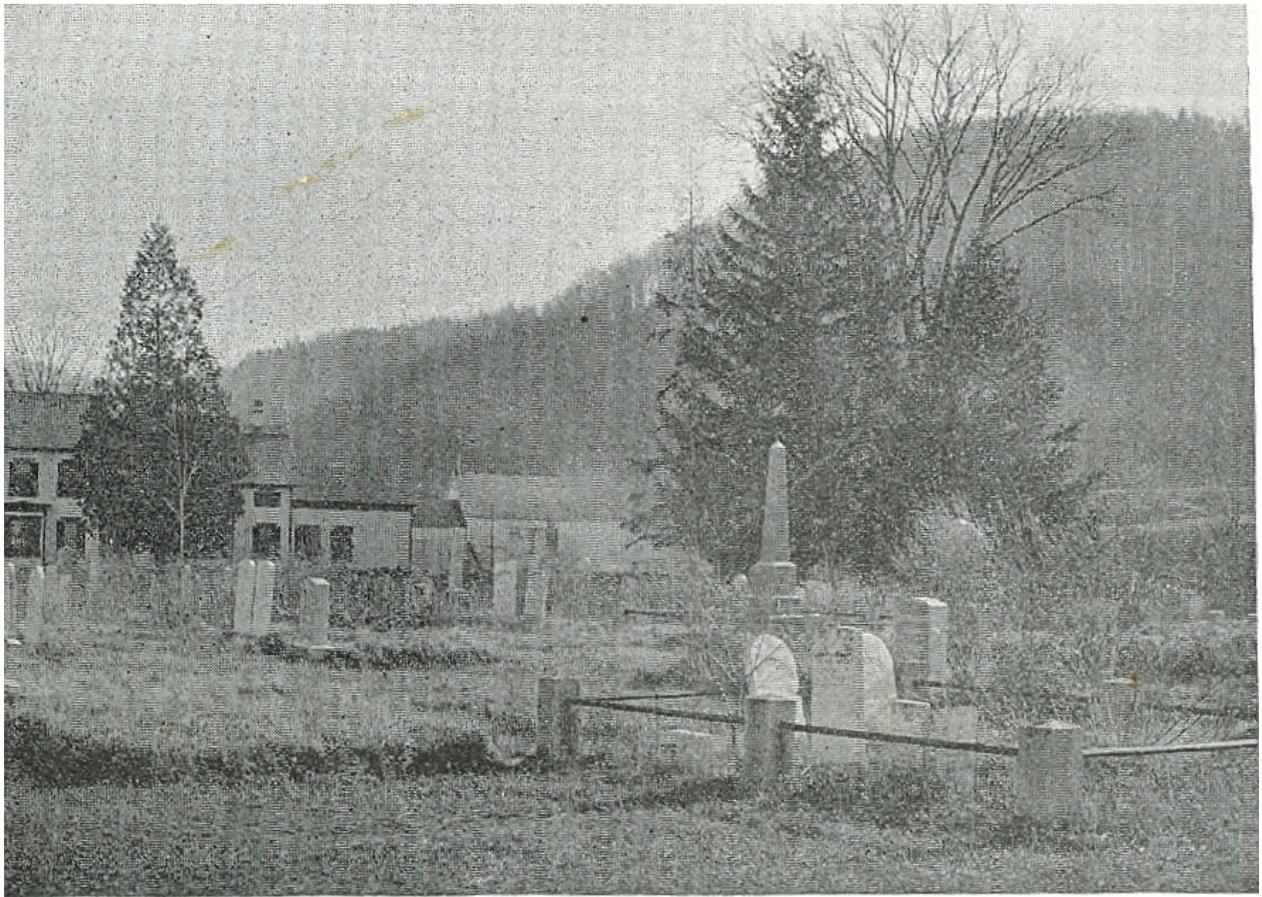
AN OLD BRIDGE—CHESTER.



CHESTER CENTER.



CHESTER—METHODIST CHURCH.



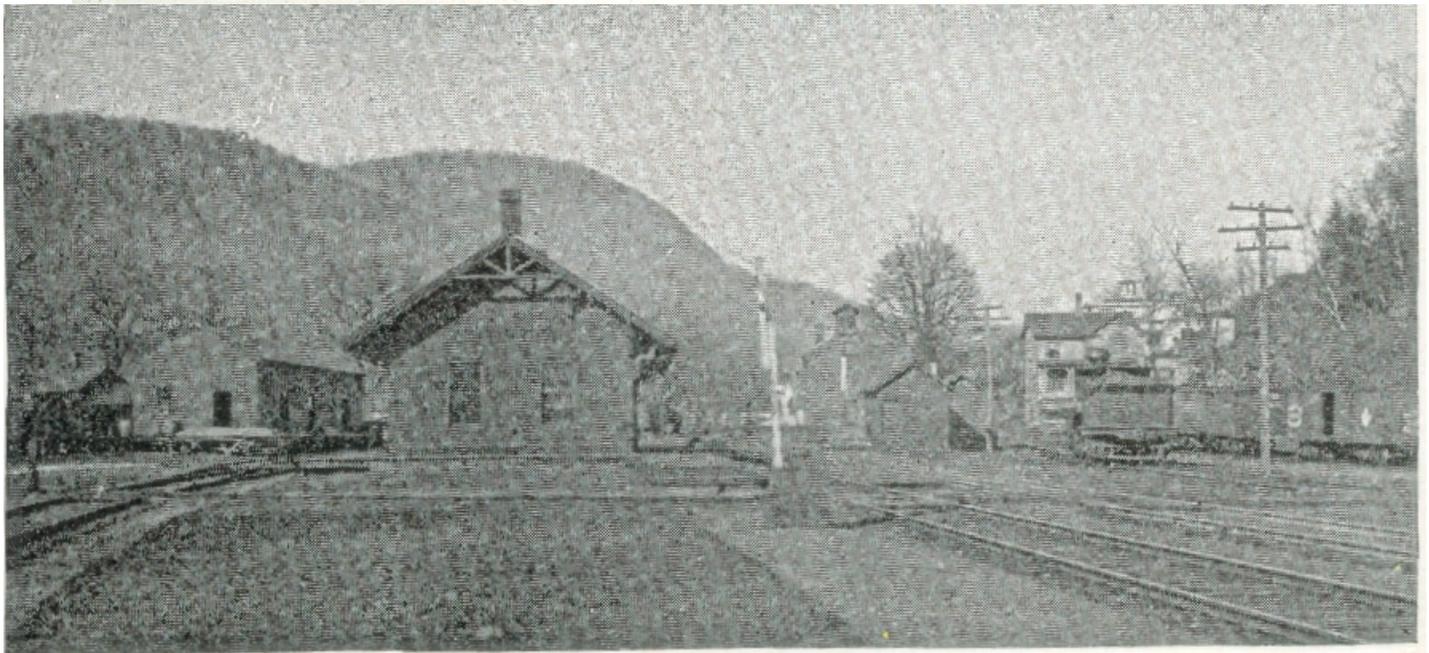
IN THE OLD CEMETERY.



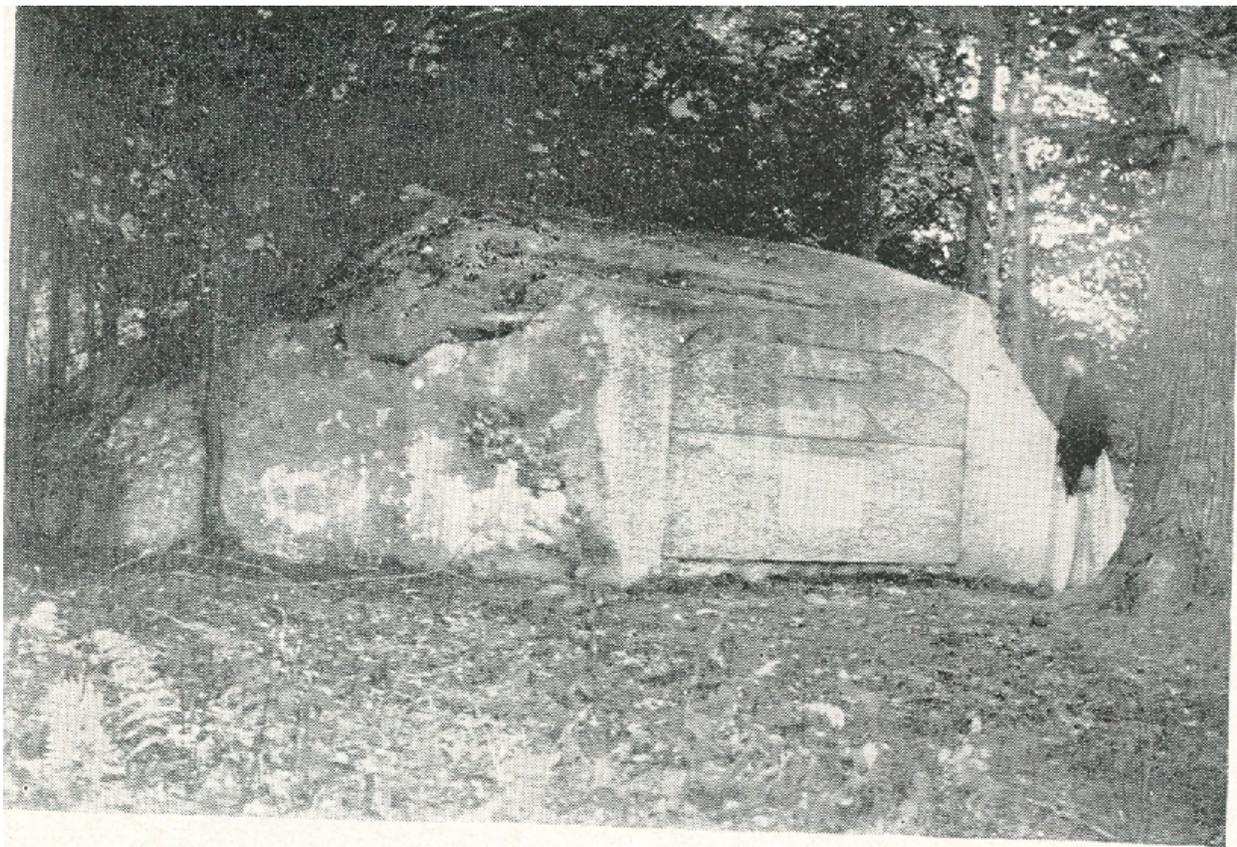
CHESTER—OLD TAVERN AND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.



AT THE MINES.



CHESTER STATION.



A TOMB IN THE WOODS.

erhead WELSH ON



THE LINE OF THE BOSTON AND ALBANY.

Item	Price	Size	Qty	Total
"Chester Folks - The Founders of the Town, Their Ancestors and Descendants" by William Mills	\$18.00			
"Memories of the Boston and Albany Railroad" by Norvel Parker	\$15.00			
"Gravestone Inscriptions for Chester" by Francis O'Leary	\$18.00			
"Gravestone Inscriptions for Huntington" by Francis O'Leary	\$20.00			
"Gateway District Towns - A Pictorial History"	\$16.99			
"Chester Cookbook" - A reproduction of a 1960's-era Chester PTA cookbook	\$8.50			
"Entering Chester" magnets - A miniature version of the state highway signs	\$1.00			
"The Mystery of the Old Mine" a mystery for children by Gertrude Whitcher	\$10.00			
Chester Historical Society pens	\$1.00			
Chester T-Shirts - Over 40 illustrations of Chester scenes (S - XXL)	\$10.00			
Chester Sweatshirts - Over 40 illustrations of Chester scenes (S - XXL)	\$20.00			
	Shipping + handling			\$3.00
	SUBTOTAL			
Annual Membership in the Chester Historical Society (fully tax deductible)	\$5.00			
Lifetime Membership in the Chester Historical Society (fully tax deductible)	\$25.00			
Additional tax deductible contribution				
	TOTAL			

Make check payable to the "Chester Historical Society" and send to:
Chester Historical Society
15 Middlefield Street
Chester, MA 01011

Chester Historical Society
Chester Town Hall
15 Middlefield Street
Chester, MA 01011