

DEDICATION

by

David John Preece

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c. 2010

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

HARRIS L. GILSON
GEORGE W. STEVENS

GEORGE ADAMS
REV. GEORGE BENNETT
REV. T.J. CATE
BENJAMIN CHASE
JOHN CARROLL CHASE
REV. R.E.C. DORION
COLONEL HOSLEY
C.A. MARTIN
LEWIS MORIN
SELECTMAN WILLIAM OWEN
THEODORE PARKER
SELECTMAN GEORGE WEST
ARTHUR WILCOMB

General

The Set and Staging: Bare stage with minimal scenery, and period costumes. Furniture and props are minimal. Setting and atmosphere are created through lights, sound and movement. The play has been written to be performed by a company of seven actors. Two actors will play the roles of Harris L. Gilson and George W. Stevens. The five other actors will play a variety of roles, each with a New England accent. The distribution of these roles will be at the discretion of the director.

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TIME: Early 1900s
PLACE: THE AUDITORIUM OF THE STEVENS' MEMORIAL HALL

The audience, arriving sees an empty stage in half light. Two men, STEVENS and GILSON enter and begin placing chairs across the center of the stage. They also move a podium to the center. As the lights go down, they finished setting the stage and standing on opposite ends of the stage watches the late arrivals in the audience.

When the auditorium is in complete darkness, the first man speaks.

GILSON

Chester, New Hampshire is a nice small, farming community, located nine miles east from Manchester.

(An antique-looking photo taken of
Chester is projected)

STEVENS

Just enough distance to keep the riff raft out.

GILSON

In 1719, 125 of proprietors petitioned the Royal Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony that the town be incorporated. The grant was issued in 1720, and the town was incorporated in 1723.

(BENJAMIN CHASE stands up and addresses
Gilson.)

CHASE

Excuse me.

GILSON

Yes.

(Sees Chase.)

You.

CHASE

That wasn't quite right.

GILSON

What wasn't?

CHASE

The year. The town was incorporated in 1722.

GILSON

And how do you know? Were you there?

CHASE

Of course, I wasn't. Wasn't even born until 1799.

STEVENS

(To Gilson)
Who is he?

GILSON

Who are you?

CHASE

Benjamin Chase. Am the historian, who wrote the book about the history of Chester.

GILSON

Oh yes. I think I remember you. Please come on up and join us.

CHASE

Well, if you insist.

GILSON

(As Chase comes to the Stage)
Weren't you active in Presbyterian church?

CHASE

Very. Some say that I was the moral conscience of Chester for many years because of my stands on temperance, abolitionism, pacifism, and women's rights.

STEVENS

A regular busy body, if you ask me.

CHASE

(Turns to Stevens)
Some one has to keep the history records.

STEVENS

I Suppose.

CHASE

It only took the town two years to incorporate.

GILSON

Not bad when you consider it would probably take longer today in Concord, with some of those folks in the state legislature getting involved.

STEVENS

All for good reasons.

GILSON

Or what the folks in Concord say it is.

CHASE

Of the original 125 petitioners, only 13 actually settled in Chester.

(more)

CHASE (cont'd)

(beat)

Early settlers were primarily Scot-Irish, and they either purchased or leased.

GILSON

Some even married into land from the original proprietors.

STEVENS

What some men will do to get ahead in life.

CHASE

The original grant for Chester stated 100 square miles, and if surveyed today it would reflect approximately one hundred and fifty eight square miles of wooded land.

(beat)

Roads were barely cart paths.

GILSON

(To audience.)

Many roads are in that condition still today.

STEVENS

All for good reasons.

CHASE

Travel from what is now Hooksett to Chester Center for a Town Meeting or to Church was a round trip that took all day, or longer.

GILSON

It was no wonder that outlying areas created their own communities, their own parishes, and schoolhouses.

STEVENS

All for good reasons.

CHASE

Eventually these areas broke away and incorporated their own towns, now known as Candia, Raymond, Hooksett, Auburn, and Derryfield.

GILSON

Which is now known as Manchester.

STEVENS

I knew that.

GILSON

Of course, you did.

CHASE

The young men fought the British in the Revolutionary war.

GILSON

And some of them died.

STEVENS

But it was for a good cause.

CHASE

During the period after the Revolutionary war, Chester was an important stop on the first stage route, which was established between Haverhill, Massachusetts and Concord, New Hampshire.

(beat)

In 1793, many of the larger homes along Haverhill Road and Chester Street served as inns and taverns for the travelers.

STEVENS

Chester has always been very neighbor-like and hospitable to its visitors. That's the way we are.

CHASE

In 1803, a company was formed to build the Chester Turnpike, a straight-line toll road, between Chester and Concord.

(beat)

Unfortunately, this venture was not profitable and was later abandoned. It couldn't compete with the development of the Merrimack River for waterpower and transportation.

GILSON

Which left Chester as a small, rural community.

STEVENS

Just as well.

CHASE

During the town's first century, there was no town hall in which to hold public meetings. For such gatherings, the selectmen were forced to hire a function room at a local tavern or use a church hall.

GILSON

The taverns were more popular.

STEVENS

Hands down.

CHASE

For some years, town meetings were held alternately at the east and west meetinghouses of the Congregational and Presbyterian churches.

STEVENS

In Chester, we try not to show favoritism.

CHASE

From 1846 through 1854, the Chester Inn of Abel Quigg was used at a charge of fifteen dollars for each gathering.

STEVENS

Fifteen dollars for each gathering?! That's a little bit high, isn't it.

GILSON

What other options did they have?

CHASE

A petition was circulated in January 1840 asking that Chester erect its own town hall. The petition was signed by a number of the leading citizens.

STEVENS

Whether they are "leading citizens" or not, the question was "who's going to pay for it". That's the bottom line.

CHASE

The town meeting was held and it turned down the request.

GILSON

(To audience.)

It is interesting to note what was happening outside of Chester.

CHASE

(Indignant.)

Such as.....

GILSON

For instance, Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom marries Prince Albert of Saxe Coburg-Gotha in 1840.

CHASE

Trivial.

GILSON

(To Chase.)

Not for the people of the British Empire and world.

(To audience.)

William Henry Harrison was elected President in 1841 but dies of pneumonia after one month in office.

STEVENS

In Chester, you cannot decide when or where you will die, but you can decide how you will live.

GILSON

(To Stevens.)

Yes.

(beat)

Harrison was succeeded by Vice President John Tyler. The world's first commercial Christmas cards are printed by Sir Henry Cole in London in 1842 and Charles Goodyear receives a patent for vulcanization in 1844.

STEVENS

What's "vulcanization"?

GILSON

It's a process to strengthen rubber...you know for tires.

STEVENS

Oh, I see.

CHASE

(Sarcastic.)

Christmas cards and rubber tires. What will they think of next?

GILSON

(Ignores Chase. To the audience.)

President John Tyler signs a bill authorizing the United States to annex the Republic of Texas in 1845, which resulted in the Mexican-American War.

CHASE

Several of our men fought in that war.

STEVENS

Chester has never had a boundary dispute with its neighboring towns and we like it that way.

CHASE

(To Gilson.)

This is all very interesting but what does all of this have to do with Chester? Can we get back to issue of the town hall at hand?

(beat)

Thank you.

(beat)

As I was saying, the idea of having a new town hall lay dormant for another decade, until 1850, then a town meeting voted seventeen hundred dollars to build a town hall.

GILSON

However, this vote was rescinded the next year.

STEVENS

Chester is known for not making hasty decisions.

CHASE

On August 9, 1853, a special town meeting discussed an offer by Mr. Rogers to sell to the town for two hundred dollars his corner lot at Chester Center. Elias True could be contracted for thirteen hundred dollars to erect a two-story building measuring thirty-two-by fifty-feet.

GILSON

Progress was finally being made.

CHASE

The next month, the citizens voted seventy five to fifty one on a motion by Francis V. Dow to spend up to one thousand dollars to build the hall. It was anticipated that another five hundred dollars could be raised by donations. The land would be bought by the trustees of Chester Academy, who would in exchange be given use of the new hall's second floor.

STEVENS

In Chester, we may not have all come over in the same ship, we're all in the same boat...together.

CHASE

Town meeting also placed a requirement that hall could not be erected farther than 825 yards from the Congregational church.

GILSON

That was because, Chester believes in a separation between church and state.

CHASE

A group citizens at the March 1854 town meeting tried unsuccessfully to rescind the previous vote on building a town hall. Before work on this building could finally be started, a group of businessmen came up with a new scheme. The trustees of Chester Academy agreed to spend twenty-five hundred dollars immediately to erect an academy building complete with furniture and equipment. One-half of the cost was borne by Derry Bank president John Noyes.

STEVENS

When you buy and develop real estate in Chester, you soon learn nothing is dirt cheap.

CHASE

The next year this group sold the building to the town for twelve hundred and fifty dollars, with the proviso that the top floor would be permanently under the control of the academy's trustees. An alternative proposal to purchase the whole building was rejected by the voters.

STEVENS

In Chester, there's limits to everything.

GILSON

This new town hall became the center of much of Chester's political, educational, and social life.

CHASE

In 1859, the town voted to allow all religious societies and agricultural society the use of the building without cost.

(beat)

For other groups and individuals the fee would be one dollar per evening up until 10 PM and twenty-five cent per hour thereafter.

STEVENS

In Chester, there is no such thing as a free hand out.

GILSON

They call them "user fees."

(beat)

But things were happening outside Chester. California is admitted as the thirty-first U.S. State.

CHASE

Why would anybody want to go a place called California when you could live in Chester?

GILSON

There was gold and opportunities in California.

CHASE

Oh.

GILSON

Also, New Hampshire's own Franklin Pierce was voted in as United States President.

CHASE

Yes, the people voted him out four years later.

STEVENS

Either too much butter or not enough.

GILSON

United States President James Buchanan was elected United States President and he inaugurated the new trans-Atlantic telegraph cable by exchanging greetings with Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom.

STEVENS

(Pretending to be funny)
Hello...hello...and any one home?

GILSON

The industrial diligence of developing devices, such as telephone and typewriter, has become unstoppable and consequently the industrial revolution began.

CHASE

There might have been an industrial revolution going on but you wouldn't have known it in Chester. Shoes were made in small shops in the community. Fine fabrics were imported but mostly all fabric for clothing and household use was manufactured in the home.

(beat)

There were lots of opportunities in Chester if you wanted them.

STEVENS

Sometimes, you've got to go out on a limb sometimes because that's where the fruit is.

GILSON

(Looks at Stevens)

Fruit? Oh yes.

(beat)

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln beats John C. Breckinridge, Stephen A. Douglas, and John Bell and is elected as the sixteenth President of the United States, the first Republican to hold that office.

STEVENS

It's about time.

GILSON

The American Civil War begins at Fort Sumter, South Carolina on April 12, 1861.

CHASE

And many young men of Chester volunteered and fought to keep the Union together.

(beat)

And some of them died.

STEVENS

But it was for a good cause..

GILSON

During the same time, President Lincoln signs the Homestead Act into law in 1862 and the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863.

CHASE

Slavery was finally abolished.

STEVENS

We will never have true civilization until we have learned to recognize the rights of others.

GILSON

President Lincoln was later shot at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. by John Wilkes Booth and dies the following day April 14, 1865.

CHASE

In Chester, it was dark day that day.

GILSON

But the nation moved on.

(beat)

In a New York City theater, British author Charles Dickens gives his first public reading in the United States in 1867. Plans for the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City are completed in 1870.

CHASE

In Chester, it would not be long before the town hall proved too small.

STEVENS

Even this small town.

GILSON

Later that year of 1870, the fifteenth amendment is entered into the United States Constitution, giving blacks the right to vote.

CHASE

All men are equal.

GILSON

In August of that year, Charles Dickens dies after suffering a stroke.

STEVENS

Dickens once said, "No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another"...and I believe he's right.

GILSON

The phonograph is patented by Thomas Edison in 1878 and the next year, using a filament of carbonized thread, Edison tests the first practical electric light bulb. It lasted thirteen and half hours before burning out.

STEVENS

Thirteen and half hours?! Can you imagine?

CHASE

With the introduction of all of this advanced mechanization and technology, the shoe and fabric industries moved to large factories in the cities like Manchester and Nashua.

STEVENS

Good. They can have all the worries and riff raft that goes along with it.

GILSON

Like Manchester where waterpower, rail facilities and more labor were available and production could keep up with the demands of larger markets.

STEVENS

I always say if you can't find it in Chester, you don't need it.

CHASE

In the 1870s, there was a proposal for a railroad to run from Nashua through Chester and to Rochester to service these factories.

STEVENS

Sounds expensive to me. And besides, who would pay it?

GILSON

But the railroad went through Hampstead and Sandown, again leaving Chester off the beaten path of commerce.

STEVENS

For all good reasons.

CHASE

Although Chester never became a manufacturing center, its residents have played a major role in both New Hampshire and the nation.

GILSON

Oh really?

CHASE

Really. Chester has given the State of New Hampshire three governors, three senators, a chief justice of the State Supreme Court, a President of Dartmouth College, and numerous judges, lawyers, doctors, engineers, and financiers.

STEVENS

Not bad for a small town off the beaten path.

CHASE

In 1877, the New Hampshire Legislature granted a charter to the Chester and Derry Telegraph Company. The telegraph line was operated successfully until 1884, when it was converted to a small private telephone company, The Chester Telephone Company.

GILSON

Telephones?! In Chester?

STEVENS

What will they think of next?

CHASE

In 1879, Chester increased its town hall's seating capacity by purchasing twenty-two right-long spindle-backed settees for eighty eight dollars.

STEVENS

(To audience.)

Chester is known for thinking ahead.

GILSON

In 1880s, the United States has about five thousand telephones and Helen Keller was born in Alabama. Buffalo Bill Cody opens his Wild West show and Mark Twain completes Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. The Statue of Liberty was dedicated in New York Harbor and the Kodak box camera was offered for sale for twenty-five, taking one hundred pictures on a roll.

CHASE

(To Gilson.)

Had our share of entertainment, too. Oh yes.

(beat)

In 1882, a stage was built across the west end of town hall for "public entertainments and public meetings." Traveling vaudeville players, medicine shows, and local theater groups all used this stage. Almost every week a church service was conducted in the hall by itinerant preachers. Public lectures were presented on topics such as abolition temperance, woman's rights, and political philosophies of all types. Dances and dinners, plays and preaching filled the hall with local residents several times per week.

STEVENS

Now that's entertainment.

CHASE

In response to heavy demand and usage, the annual town meeting of 1885 voted nine hundred dollars further to improve and enlarge the hall. It was proposed to add a twenty-four-by-thirty-foot wing to hold a larger stage and two anterooms.

GILSON

The start of construction was delayed for years. The Exeter News-Letter claimed, "The drones who were chosen as a committee to see that the job was done have not got life enough to put it through."

STEVENS

Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there...and that's what happen to this committee.

CHASE

After four years of planning, the town decided not to build the wing.

(beat)

Well, I have to be going.

GILSON

So soon?

CHASE

It's my time. I lived for ninety years. That was enough.

GILSON

(Shakes Chase's hand.)

Thank you so much for contribution and for setting the record straight.

CHASE

It's my pleasure. That's what I'm here for.

(To Stevens.)

Remember, don't let yesterday use up too much of today.

STEVENS

Try not to.

CHASE

And if you need another historian to help you, my grandson is here to help.

(Calls out to audience.)

Johnny, are you out there?

(JOHN CHASE stands up in the audience.)

JOHN CHASE

Yes, grandpa. Over here.

CHASE

There you are. Come on up quickly and meet these two gentlemen. Need your historical perspective.

(As John Chase hurries to the stage.)

GILSON

We were grew up in Chester.

CHASE

You did?

STEVENS

Oh yes. We both moved away for school and jobs.

CHASE

That's why I don't recognize you. This is John Carroll Chase, my grandson. He will also be historian.

(To Gilson)

And you?

GILSON

(Shakes John Chase's hand.)

Harris Gilson.

CHASE

Don't remember.

(To Stevens)

And you?

STEVENS

George W. Stevens.

CHASE

(Recognizes the name.)

Oh yes. So you're the one. Thought you looked familiar.

JOHN CHASE

(To Stevens.)

Happy to meet you.

CHASE

Better to be going. Guests, like fish, begin to smell after awhile.

(Chase leaves.)

GILSON

(To John Chase.)

What happen's next to the town hall saga?

JOHN CHASE

Well, I remember that the Exeter News-Letter predicted, "We probably shall never get a new town hall till some philanthropist contrives to immortalize his memory for a good substantial one."

STEVENS

(To Gilson.)

I have an idea. What if...?

GILSON

(To Stevens.)

You're not serious, are you?

STEVENS

It's my money and I'll do what I want to do with it.

GILSON

Stubborn as always.

(To John Chase.)

Go on with your story.

JOHN CHASE

Chester became a popular summer resort. The estates of the wealthy, the inns and the summer boarding houses provided summer jobs for many of the year-round residents.

STEVENS

We were known as the "Newport" of New Hampshire.

JOHN CHASE

However, the summer resort activities began a decline and this continued to decline well into the 1900's, the inns, taverns, and the smaller stores in the outlying areas struggled and could not afford to remain open and were gradually converted to private homes.

STEVENS

As they say, "Cut your sail according to your cloth."

GILSON

Things were happening in other places in the United States in 1890s. The United States Census Bureau begins using Herman Hollerith's tabulating machine to count census returns and the Daughters of the American Revolution is founded in Washington DC.

STEVENS

Some of the daughters were from Chester.

GILSON

(To Stevens.)

That's right.

(beat)

Ellis Island opens as immigrant receiving station in New York Harbor.

JOHN CHASE

And now we're flooded with immigrants. Irish, Italian, and not to mention, the Eastern European Jews.

(beat)

But everyone is welcome.

GILSON

(Ignores the last comment.)

To mark 400 anniversary Columbus Day holiday, the "Pledge of Allegiance" was first recited in unison by students in public schools. The first professional football game is played, in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, between the Latrobe YMCA and the Jeannette Athletic Club.

STEVENS

Latrobe won the contest twelve to zero.

GILSON

Utah is admitted as the forty-fifth United States' state after the President who is also the prophet of the Mormon Church receives a revelation that polygamy should be prohibited.

STEVENS

God works in mysterious ways.

GILSON

The United States Supreme Court rules in Plessy v. Ferguson, introducing the "separate but equal" doctrine and upholding segregation.

STEVENS

The Constitution says that all men are created equal. Period.

GILSON

William McKinley succeeds Grover Cleveland as President of the United States and Mark Twain, responding to rumors that he was dead, is quoted by the New York Journal as saying,

STEVENS

(Reads from the newspaper)

"The report of my death was an exaggeration."

(Laughs at the quote)

We're all here for a spell; we might as well get all the good laughs you can.

GILSON

But in Chester, the failed attempt to enlarge the old town hall now evolved into schemes to construct a completely new building.

JOHN CHASE

In 1892, the Derry news reminded its Chester readers how the old hall was jammed past its reasonable capacity at the last town meeting and no one thought it proper to open the door or windows for ventilation.

GILSON

Finally, a local pastor stood up and asked.

(REV. CATE stands up in the audience.)

CATE

If a man was shut up in a hogshead and the bung hole was closed, how long would he live?

(beat)

For the love of God, how long do you expect us to endure these conditions?

GILSON

The town fathers, now properly chastened, opened the windows. To many, a new town hall would be a lot more comfortable than the stuffy old academy building.

JOHN CHASE

The Derry News was one of the leading agents promoting the construction of a new hall. In January 1896, it reported that the old hall is "unfit for little else" beyond a town meeting, or a country dance.

GILSON

(Takes a news paper)

The next month the Derry News characterized those opposed to a new hall as..

(Reads)

"never in a parade. If they move at all, it is only by force or by mistake. I suppose the Lord has a purpose in allowing such person to exit, the same as he has for toadstools."

STEVENS

In Chester, a remark like that generally hurts in proportion to its truth...and that was a stinger.

JOHN CHASE

The 1897 town meeting appointed a special committee to build a new town hall at a cost of six thousand dollars.

GILSON

A special meeting at the end of the month turned down the whole project.

JOHN CHASE

In December 1897, the Derry Newspaper reported that recently an old-fashioned singing school on Thanksgiving eve was so crowded that many in the crowd had to stand the whole time. The newspaper predicted that many of those who attended would never come back again until a new hall was built. Despite such chiding, the voters turned down a new hall again in 1898, 1905, and 1907.

GILSON

Time wasn't waiting around for the other parts of the country. The first Electric bus becomes operational in New York City and in 1903, the first World Series was won by the Boston Red Sox.

(John Chase, Stevens, and the actors in the audience stand up and cheer.)

GILSON

(continuing)

And they were the champions for many years after.

(beat)

In 1906, San Francisco earthquake, with an estimate magnitude of 7.8, destroys much of city, killing at least three thousand people and leaving close to three hundred thousand homeless with three hundred and fifty million dollars in damages.

JOHN CHASE

Three thousand people?! That's more than three and half times the people living in Chester at that time.

GILSON

What a tragedy.

STEVENS

The tragedy is that we get old too soon and wise too late.

(beat)

Why are they letting people build in areas where they have no business building...you know in geological hazards?

GILSON

If you take away the geological hazards, there are no places for people to live.

JOHN CHASE

Except for Chester. We have small floods but nothing serious.

STEVENS

Maybe we shouldn't advertise that information. We wouldn't want all those people moving up here.

JOHN CHASE

Good point.

GILSON

Finally, newly elected President Theodore Roosevelt proclaims Devils Tower as the nation's first National Monument.

JOHN CHASE

Maybe Chester should be a National Monument?

STEVENS

Word would get out and we would be plagued by visitors and tourists.

JOHN CHASE

Oh yes. You're right.

GILSON

(To John Chase.)

Thank you but we can take it from here.

JOHN CHASE

You're most welcome.

STEVENS

Your insights were most informative.

JOHN CHASE

Glad I could help.

(Leaves the stage to take his seat in the audience.)

GILSON

The long-awaited local philanthropist finally emerged in 1907 with the reading of the will of George Washington Stevens.

STEVENS

(Suddenly realizes. To Gilson.)

That's me.

(beat)

I'm dead?!

GILSON

(To Stevens.)

Yes. It happens to everyone, George.

STEVENS

But what about my life?

GILSON

(To Stevens.)

Relax. I was just getting to that part of the story.

(To the audience.)

You see my friend over there, George Washington Stevens, was born on June 8, 1816, in a house on the spot where Howard West now lives. He was the son of James and Sarah Stevens.

(A photo of George W. Stevens is projected.)

STEVENS

Actually, was born in 1817. But who's counting?

GILSON

Okay, 1817. In his early childhood, his parents moved to the house which they occupied till their death.

STEVENS

In fact, it was on that very same site where I built my summer cottage.

GILSON

(To Stevens)

Now you're jumping ahead of the story.

STEVENS

Was only trying to help.

GILSON

Don't be so helpful.

STEVENS

So go on. Go on with your story and pretend that I'm not here.

GILSON

Will try.

(beat)

In his boyhood, he experienced "religion" in the good old fashioned way.

STEVENS

Yes, was moved by the spirit...or thought I was.

(beat)

Looking back, maybe it was probably just my hormones kicking in.

(Sheepishly smiles)

You know frightening that can be at times.

GILSON

Oh yes, it was something else and he became a member of the Baptist church. He was baptized in Dale's mill pond.

STEVENS

Everybody gets baptized. It's the thing to do in Chester.

GILSON

Although in later years, under his guidance of Theodore Parker...

(Looks over the audience)

Is Mr. Parker here?

(PARKER stands up in the audience.)

PARKER

Yes. Over here.

GILSON

(Sees him)

There you are. Do you have anything that you would like to add?

PARKER

Well must say, as his chosen religious teacher, young Stevens came into what seemed to him a broader faith. His membership with the church helped safeguard him when he was a young man from the many temptation of city life.

GILSON

Or tried to.

(To Stevens)

Isn't that right, George?

STEVENS

Well...God loves sinners, too, you know.

GILSON

So have been told.

(Back to Mr. Parker)

Thank you very much, Mr. Parker.

PARKER

Anytime.

GILSON

At the age of seventeen, he went to Boston to learn the upholsterer's trade and there later he established himself in the furniture business.

(beat)

His family didn't have the money to send him to school, let alone help set up him in business.

STEVENS

They were dirt farmers in New Hampshire.

GILSON

(To Stevens)

What were the major crops they grew?

STEVENS

Rocks, mostly.

GILSON

Well it's the Granite state.

(beat)

With courage, industry, persistence, and the conscience that "goes to the hammering in the nails" as his capital, Stevens succeed.

STEVENS

Have noticed in my life that there are three kinds of men: the one that learns by reading, the few who learn by observation, and the rest of them have to pee on the electric fence for themselves.

GILSON

Trial by error.

(To Stevens)

Be careful and don't sell too much of yourself.

(To audience)

Yes, he worked very hard. His word was as good as his furniture and any customer buying them felt himself safe in relying upon his honor.

STEVENS

I always told my customers that when you bought a piece of my furniture, you bought a piece of me.

GILSON

(To Stevens.)

Yes.

(To audience.)

Throughout all of his life, Stevens partook of the best that literary and artistic Boston had to offer.

STEVENS

The world is your oyster. But you first got to shuck it.

GILSON

The artist feeling was always strong in Stevens.

STEVENS

Wishing isn't doing.

GILSON

He even got married.

STEVENS

It was the thing to do.

GILSON

His work gave him pleasure in designing unique and beautiful pieces of furniture for his customers.

(beat)

After he retired from his business, he enjoyed using his leisure modeling in clay, painting in oils and writing articles of highly literary finish.

(beat)

Kept his hands busy.

STEVENS

Was the thing to do.

GILSON

Every summer he would come home to Chester to renew his spirit.

(beat)

And then finally at the age of ninety, he died.

STEVENS

Well...all have to go sometime. It's expected in Chester.

GILSON

By his will, the town of Chester has received a gift of nearly twelve thousand dollars towards a new town hall.

STEVENS

Wanted to give back to the Chester, my birthplace and summer home for many years of my life.

GILSON

And to his home on the morning on January 18, 1908, his friends brought him and laid him to rest by the side of father and mother and brothers.

(beat)

With the fine reserve so characteristic of him in matters personal, he had made no mention to any of his townspeople...or his friends of his intended bequest to the town.

STEVENS

None of their business.

GILSON

I suspected.

STEVENS

Didn't want any of that gushing attention. It maybe okay for politicians, but it's not right for me. In Chester, you just do it.

GILSON

When the gift of nearly twelve thousand dollars was announced and that this money was to be used for the purpose of building a new town hall.

(Several townspeople come from the audience and take their seats on the stage. SELECTMAN GEORGE WEST addresses the audience.)

GILSON

(continuing)
The town meeting was held.

WEST

To the inhabitant of the Town of Chester in the County of Rockingham, in the State of New Hampshire, qualified to vote in Town Affairs, you are hereby notified to meet at the Town Hall in said Town on Tuesday, the tenth day March next, at nine of the clock in the forenoon, to act upon the following subjects.

GILSON

One of the subjects was to see if the Town will vote to accept the legacies of the late George W. Stevens.

WILCOMB

Move that town provide the lot and pay for the building's foundation so that the bequest would only be used for the actual building.

WEST

And the motion was passed.

GILSON

The people of Chester has always been concern about where their money is being spent.

STEVENS

Money is flat and meant to be piled.

WEST

The citizens also voted that the following groups have equal use of the new hall - all religious groups, the Grange, the Grand Army of the Republic, the Women's Relief Corps, Junior Order of American Mechanics, and the New England Order of Protection.

STEVENS

If you are willing to volunteer your time, there are many organizations for you to participate.

WEST

The building committee was organized, consisting of Albert M. Hardy, George D. Rand, Edwin P. Jones, John M. Webster, and George E. Gillingham. Later, prominent military leader, Colonel George Hosley, joined the committee to give it more momentum.

(COLONEL HOSLEY stands.)

HOSLEY

(To West.)
And discipline.

WEST

At the special town meeting in July, General Hosely displayed the plans for the town halls of Enfield and New Durham, New Hampshire, to show what could be built for the price.

HOSLEY

The Town paid two hundred dollars for those plans from A.T. Durham.

OWEN

Two hundred dollars! Did you hear that?

WILCOMB

Didn't like of either one of them.

HOSLEY

Wanted to show what could be built for the price.

WEST

What a waste of money...good tax payers' money.

OWEN

What were the Committee thinking? We're not Enfield or New Durham; we're Chester.

HOSLEY

(Ignores West and Owen and addresses the audience.)

In Chester, it's difficult to please everyone.

(beat)

The choice of the site was also under consideration. Mrs. Kent, Mrs. Lane, Miss Melvin, and Mrs. Emerson would not sell their land at any price.

STEVENS

In Chester, you simply can't put a dollar amount on land. There are other considerations.

HOSLEY

The best available site was the current occupied by the academy building. The committee submitted various floor plans for the voters' consideration.

GILSON

There's an old saying that "a camel is a horse designed by a committee" and this committee was no exception.

STEVENS

In Chester, we do things a little differently here. There's a community participation.

HOSLEY

It was also necessary to find a new spot on which to locate the old academy building. Some voters proposed moving it to the old evaporator lot and selling it the Grange or G.A.R. And finally, it was voted to call the new building, Stevens Memorial Hall.

STEVENS

Makes sense to me.

WEST

The next town meeting was held on November 3, 1908, voted to accept the plans drawn up by architect George P. Adams of Lawrence, Massachusetts.

(ADAMS stands to be acknowledged.)

HOSLEY

His fee was two hundred and eighty dollars.

STEVENS

That's a lot of money, if you ask me.

GILSON

No one asking you, George.

WEST

Was also voted to purchase for seven hundred and fifty dollars an acre of land next to the cemetery from Mrs. Annie Morse Sprague as a site for the old building.

OWEN

Was also decided to build a cellar under the of building to allow for storage of the now roller and road machine.

WEST

George L. Thebold of Concord, New Hampshire, was hired to move the hall a few hundred yards to its new site with a team of draft horses.

HOSLEY

The town chose to accept the bid of C.A. Martin of Derry as contractor to build the new hall at a cost of eight thousand one hundred dollars.

(MARTIN stands to be acknowledged.)

GILSON

Martin was the lowest of the bid submitted.

HOSLEY

Additional costs were voted for a steel ceiling in the ladies' parlor down stairs, twenty dollars for a fireplace mantel crafted by George H. Carter and thirty-three dollars for a memorial tablet honoring Stevens. Professor Edmund R. Angell of Derry was to be paid three hundred dollars to set up an acetylene gas generator for illuminating the hall. A small building would be erected behind the hall as a gashouse and as the men's toilet. Lewis Morin of Derry was hired to dig the foundation.

(MORIN stands to address the audience.)

MORIN

During excavation, an unnamed resident offered a bribe of ten dollars to my workers to move the foundation six feet farther north.

(beat)

Ten dollars!

HOSLEY

The problem was that the Baptist church owned only three feet of land in front of its chapel.

CATE

The new town hall was going to sit practically right on our front doorsteps.

GILSON

Immediately, a firestorm arose between the members of the Baptist church and the Town of Chester.

GILSON

(continuing)

Claiming that their property would be injured to a great extent if the town hall was placed on this site, they protested vigorously against such action.

STEVENS

Can you image? The same people that baptized me, were now crucifying me in their prayer circles and saying...

CATE

(holding up a bible)

"Not in my backyard."

GILSON

In this case, it was their front yard. The idea was not at all pleasing to the church members.

WEST

On April 6, 1909, a special town meeting debated the problem.

HOSLEY

Cyrus A. Marston estimated that he could move the new foundation ten feet forward for three hundred dollars and twenty-five feet for three hundred and fifty dollars..

OWEN

After debate, a motion was made by Frank M. Morse not to move the new building even one inch.

WEST

The vote was 117 to 41 against the Baptist.

CATE

If you ask me, it was religious persecution, if you asked me.

(beat)

There was no explanation as to why the voters were so determined not to move the town hall north on its large lot to accommodate the reasonable wishes of their Baptist neighbors.

GILSON

It may be "reasonable" for the Baptist but it wasn't for the rest of the town.

STEVENS

What I've learned is that you can't keep trouble from coming, but you don't have to give it a chair to sit on.

HOSLEY

The committee's decision prevailed and work was begun on the building.

MARTIN

The construction had not proceeded far when the members of the church became sufficiently aroused to petition the courts for an injunction, restraining the town from building on that property.

STEVENS

So much for loving your neighbors and turning the other cheek.

GILSON

Several months passed as the law suit made its way through the courts.

MARTIN

It seemed like years. The legal system works slowly in New Hampshire.

STEVENS

Like a maple syrup.

GILSON

It's probably because it's understaffed.

STEVENS

That's the New Hampshire advantage.

GILSON

It was finally decided that no such injunction should be sustained and the town was given permission to proceed with the construction.

MARTIN

The design that Adams submitted to the town is in sharp contrast to the rest of Chester's architecture. It seems to be a combination of a number of different late Victorian-Edwardian styles.

(A antiqued photo of the Stevens Memorial building is projected.)

ADAMS

That's what happens when you get a committee involved in designing a building. You end up with a camel.

MARTIN

Parts of the hall are in the Queen Anne style and other elements look Tuscan, neoclassic, and Georgian, with a little Moorish thrown in for good measure.

STEVENS

There's something for everyone.

MARTIN

It was quite at odds with Chester's typical New England style...whatever that's is.

ADAMS

It was what the people of Chester wanted.

CATE

Some people.

STEVENS

See what I mean.

GILSON

In fact, an unsigned poem about the new hall was published in the newspaper.

(West and Owen stand as if they are reciting a poem.)

WEST
Neighbors who have been friend for years.

OWEN
In sunshine and in shade.

WEST
Perchance went to school together.

OWEN
And toy and marbles played.

WEST
Now do not speak as they pass by.

OWEN
With angry eye and clouded brow.

WEST
And really seems a pity.

OWEN
The new town hall should part them now.

WEST
Some say "It's too high and narrow."

OWEN
Others too low and wide.

WEST
And the wind will blow it over.

OWEN
Or the color they can't abide.

WEST
Its much too near the highway.

OWEN
Or it isn't near enough.

WEST
I tell you a building committee--

OWEN
Has it pretty tough.

(Owen and West turn and acknowledge each other, and then they take their seats.)

GILSON
(To West and Owen.)
Thank you for your rendition.

OWEN AND WEST

(Together)
Anytime.

GILSON

(To Adams)
Mr. Adams?

ADAMS

Yes.

GILSON

Since you are the architect of this fine building, would you mind giving the audience a tour through the building?

ADAMS

It would be my pleasure.

(Unravels some architectural plans as he addresses the audience.)

On entering the front hall, at the right of ticket office, the stairway to the upper hallway is next the selectmen's room, which is sixteen by seventeen feet. On the left, a large room divided by the fireplace and lovely mantle is to be used as the formal ladies lounge.

GILSON

All of these rooms have suitable closets.

STEVENS

A necessity in government buildings.

ADAMS

Next comes the banquet hall, twenty-nine by twenty-four feet, leading from which is a kitchen, twenty by twelve feet furnished with all the conveniences of cupboards, drawers, lockers, and sink.

GILSON

What more could anyone ask for?

CATE

That the building be located as far away as possible.

GILSON

Besides that.

STEVENS

So much for forgiveness.

ADAMS

At the right is a store room, eight by twelve feet, at the left entry with a staircase to the basement and an exit from the southeast corner of the building.

(beat)

On the second floor is an auditorium, with a seating capacity of several hundred.

GILSON

(To the audience)

The very place you're sitting at today.

ADAMS

There is a hallway thirty by seven feet, leading from which is an ante-room, eleven by fifteen feet on the left. The stage is twenty by fifteen feet, sufficient to serve many purposes. There is an ante-room twelve by ten feet on the right with an entrance at each end. A stairway leads from the second story hallway to the balcony. The basement has a concrete bottom in which are two furnaces, one for each of the two floors, toilet rooms--

GILSON

One for men and one for women.

STEVENS

Necessary for government buildings.

ADAMS

There are fuel bins with room for the installation later of cistern for fire suppression and a vault, if the town so desires and has the financial resources to make the improvements.

OWEN

"If" is big word.

GILSON

The building, painted in attractive shades and stranding as a guard in the spacious square, is a fitting monument to the memory of that generous hearted, noble minded and philanthropic representative of true manhood.

STEVENS

Can't always tell by the looks of a toad how far he can jump.

GILSON

(Acknowledges Stevens.)

Yes, George.

(Addresses the audience.)

The dedication took place on March 29, 1910.

(An antiqued photo of the dedication of the Stevens Memorial Hall is projected as the members of town help to hang the large flag banners on both sides of the stage.)

ADAMS

By two o'clock, the hour for the opening of the dedicatory exercises, every seat and available standing space was occupied. Upon the platform were seated the selectmen of Chester, William T. Owen, John E. McCannon, Walter P. Tenney, the Rev. James G. Robertson, pastor of the Congregational Church, Rev. T. J. Cate, pastor of the Baptist church, and Rev. George W. Bennett of Fremont.

(beat)

The chairman of the Board of Selectman welcomed everyone and gave the opening remarks.

(As Adams takes his seat, OWEN stands.)

OWEN

Harris L. Gilson grew up and lived in Chester for many years, but is now a citizen of Wakefield, Mass. He is the executor of Mr. George Stevens' will. He was also a long time friend of Mr. Stevens.

GILSON

Many years we were friends.

STEVENS

(Remembering)

In the summer, after our chores, we used ride our horses together over to Dale's mill pond and go swimming.

(To Gilson)

GILSON

Ah yes...so many memories.

OWEN

Mr. Gilson has manifested much interest in the work of constructing the hall as it has progressed. I regret to say that Harris Gilson is sick and is unable to be present to assume the honor of presenting to the Selectmen of the town the keys of the building and thereby the building itself in a formal manner.

STEVENS

(To Gilson)

Coward.

GILSON

(To Stevens.)

Couldn't do it alone.

OWEN

Therefore, I have selected Arthur H. Wilcomb, the town treasurer, to read Mr. Gilson's address. Mr. Wilcomb.

(WILCOMB stands up and reads his speech to the audience.)

WILCOMB

"Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. It gives me great pleasure that representing the estate of the late George W. Stevens, I make a formal presentation of this beautiful to the town of Chester as a memorial of Mr. Stevens. He, as you know, was a native of this town, and for many years before his death made it his summer home., he was always greatly interested in the town and his will has made it possible for this building to be dedicated today."

(beat)

"I am peculiarly grateful that I have this honor today, as I was intimately acquainted with Mr. Stevens for many years, and I knew his love for the town, and how glad he was to be able to make the provision as expressed in his will. Such nobleness of heart and character as that possessed by Mr. Stevens, I have seldom known among men. Please let me join with you in appreciation of generosity, and may his memory be perpetuated in the hearts of us all."

(looks up from this written speech)

And now, Mr. Chairman, in behalf Mr. Gilson and in behalf of our honored friend and generous donor, who, being dead, yet his presence is felt in this fine building, a fit memorial of his generous thought, I present you, the key to the Stevens memorial hall.

(As Owens stands to accept the key from Wilcomb, Gilson remarks to the audience)

GILSON

Chairman Owen accepted the keys and made interesting remarks, referring pleasantly to the donor, the town and its citizens and interests.

STEVENS

For all good reasons.

GILSON

There other speeches give that day. Long speeches that went on for ever.

STEVENS

As I always say, talk less and say more.

GILSON

Yes, George.

(West and Owens stand and address the audience.)

WEST

A grand musical and literary entertainment was performed.

OWEN

Although some became very tired before the program was completed. Too many numbers on the evening's program, if you as me.

WEST

(Ignores the comment.)

The program was presented by the Crescent orchestra of Nashua, the MacWatters quartet of Boston. Miss Bertha Hook of Nashua, rendered readings and piano solos, and Mr. William Thomas gave a number of readings all which were much enjoyed. The orchestra rendered fine music and their efforts were appreciated. The quartet has appeared in Chester before but was liked even better than ever this time.

OWEN

Thought it would never end.

STEVENS

That's how they do things in Chester.

WEST

It was nearly 11:00 o'clock when the program was brought to a close and all felt that day and evening would long be remembered by those who were permitted to enjoy the unusual and most satisfactory exercise.

OWEN

Except for all of those music numbers and readings.

(Lights dim, as the town people take chairs off the stage and the banners down. One by one, they leave the stage.)

GILSON

There have been very few changes made in Stevens Memorial Hall since its dedication.

STEVENS

What's wrong with the original?

GILSON

Things change. People change and their needs change.

STEVENS

For instance?

GILSON

For instance, the police department in 1978 redesigned the basement for its unique purposed. A handicapped entrance was added to the hall in 1984. In 1981, town meeting discussed moving the rest rooms into what used to be the selectmen's office.

STEVENS

The selectmen's office?! Where do they meet?

GILSON

The sanitary facilities had reminded the voters how hard it was to trudge "down to the basement in your best bid and tucker - or better yet, on a cold day in winter."

STEVENS

Some years in Chester, we have two seasons: winter and the Fourth of July.

GILSON

The voters bought his augment and voted 92-52 to spend seven thousand and five hundred dollars to make the change.

STEVENS

Seven thousand and five hundred dollars?! You could have almost built a new town hall for that.

GILSON

Things change...and so does the cost of things change.

(beat)

There are changes all of time. The development of the automobile brought improved roads but it also saw the demise of the "Trolley."

STEVENS

You don't say.

GILSON

Some of our young men went our to Europe to fight the Germans in the Great War. More than 15 million people were killed, making it one of the deadliest conflicts in history.

STEVENS

And some of them were from Chester.

GILSON

During the War, leather, shoe and textile industries in New Hampshire were the leading industries.

STEVENS

But Chester stayed the same.

GILSON

August 26, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution became law, and women could vote in the fall elections, including in the Presidential election.

STEVENS

It was about time they were given the right to vote. If you feel the benefits, you should also feel the burden.

GILSON

In 1924, electric streetlights were installed one mile on each road emanating from Chester Center, thus beginning the electrification of the Town.

STEVENS

Electric streetlights in Chester. Finally.

GILSON

Within a few years, the main streets were all paved, with only a few of the lesser traveled roads still gravel.

(beat)

Then the Great Depression of the 1930's reared its ugly head, proving financially disastrous across New Hampshire, and all of America. The textile industry was hit hard by the depression and growing competition from southern mills. The closing of the Amoskeag Mills in 1935 was a major blow to Manchester.

(beat)

Long bread lines appeared in all of our cities.

STEVENS

Thank God Chester still had its farms to feed us.

GILSON

World War II that helped to revive and motivate the state's economy. New Hampshire's shipyards built destroyers and submarines for the Navy and its factories supplied boots and uniforms for the war effort.

STEVENS

But of course, in our communities, some young men lost their lives. And Chester was no exception.

GILSON

A couple bombs were dropped on two Japanese cities, killing an estimated 246,000 civilians.

(more)

GILSON (cont'd)

(beat)

That was half of the population back then in New Hampshire.

STEVENS

Can't say civilization don't advance. In every war they kill you in a new way.

GILSON

But it ended the war and started the arms race.

STEVENS

Every tomorrow has two handles: We can take hold of the handle of anxiety or the handle of faith.

(beat)

Choose faith.

GILSON

After the war, our young men came home and they wanted to have their own house and yard. In early 1950's, Chester residents had become concerned about the future development of the town, and a Planning Board was appointed and the first zoning ordinance was passed in 1960.

(beat)

Between 1940 and 1980 as better automobiles and roads, such as Route I-93, made it easier to commute to the centers of industry in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, population growth was again evident.

STEVENS

Why would you want to leave Chester and work in Massachusetts?

GILSON

(Turns to Stevens)

You did.

STEVENS

(Remembers)

That's right, had to live there because my job.

GILSON

During that period, three hundred and thirty new homes were built, mainly along existing roads in the community, thus adding to the approximately three hundred and fifty homes remaining from earlier periods of Chester's history.

STEVENS

You don't say. Where were all those people coming from?

GILSON

Massachusetts mostly. The completion of I-93 in 1963 triggered an era of rapid growth in southern New Hampshire. Initially, Chester was relatively unaffected, since there were easily developed areas in the neighboring towns such as Derry, Hampstead and Raymond located nearer the main transportation routes. However, as the farm lands in these towns was turned into house lots and homes, development in Chester increased.

STEVENS

If they build on all the farm lands, where are they going to grow the crops and livestock to feed the people?

GILSON

They didn't think about it, George. It was all about develop now and think about the consequences later.

(beat)

In the late 1990's, the number of home building permits jumped from twenty-five per year to ninety-one in 2000, causing an extremely rapid build up of population.

STEVENS

How can you support that large of population?

GILSON

The cost of housing changed from the one hundred and fifty thousand to two hundred and fifty thousand level to mainly three hundred and fifty thousands and up.

STEVENS

What?! That's outrageous. The Town Hall didn't cost that much.

GILSON

Everything cost more.

(beat)

But there's hope, George. The people finally woke up and the Town started to preserve and maintain it's rural character by encouraging the conservation of open space. To date, a number of properties, totaling hundreds of acres, have been placed under conservation easements with permission from their owners.

STEVENS

Knew they would. That's the way they are in Chester.

GILSON

The Town had property bequeathed; Spring Hill Farm, is maintained by a trust, and is one area that is not only of historic significance, but is also land that will be conserved for the future.

STEVENS

That's the way things are done in Chester.

GILSON

The Town has also been proactive in it's purchase of 105 acres of land now known as the Wason Pond Conservation and Recreation area, land that will be enjoyed by residents for many years to come.

STEVENS

Wason Pond?! Don't you remember the times we had there?

GILSON

All too well.

(beat)

The people of Chester has taken good care of Stevens Memorial Hall.

(To Stevens)

Look at what they done to your building. The painting, repairing, plastering, and restoration.

STEVENS

(Looks around)

The tin ceilings and hardwood floors look as if they brand new. They have even replace the light fixtures to the original.

(beat)

Dedicated people.

GILSON

Even though, it is no longer the seat of government, it's still an important national resource and is center of the cultural community. Scores of organizations still use the Hall in the past and will continue to use in the future.

STEVENS

The world is your cow. But you have to do the milking.

GILSON

(Looks at Stevens in disbelief)

Milking?

STEVENS

Opportunities. There're all many out there in Chester if you want to participate.'

GILSON

Yes, there is.

(beat)

Even today, Chester is still a small, rural bedroom community with almost no manufacturing activity.

STEVENS

Hope that they have more than bedrooms there.

GILSON

The majority of its residents still commute to jobs in other larger cities in New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

STEVENS

Why can't they work in Chester.

GILSON

They would, if they could.

STEVENS

There's hope for all of us yet.

(The lights slowly dim.)

The End