

[Eric Weber](#)

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George Cheney (1844-1918), born in Constable, NY, on the Canadian border; d. in Thompsonville, CT, m. 1864 **Elizabeth Jane Alvord (1847-1922)**, b. Northampton, d. and bur. Thompsonville, CT. She was of Northampton when they married. They came to Williamsburg shortly after the census of 1870, and George was soon hired as gate-keeper of the Williamsburg Reservoir Company dam three miles north of the village. He was at breakfast with his family in a company-owned cabin beside the dam when it collapsed catastrophically on Saturday, May 16, 1874. His three-mile bareback ride on an old plowhorse to his supervisor Onslow Spelman's house in Williamsburg undoubtedly saved hundreds of lives, and he was awarded a gold medal commissioned by the Reservoir Company's owners for his heroism.

After the disaster cost George his dam-tending job, the family lived on in the little cabin overlooking the ruins of the dam until the house caught fire and burned to the ground. Then they moved to a place in Searsville on or near the site of the present-day Pat's Store. That house too burned, and George's gold medal -- the only thing of significant value he had ever owned -- was lost in the fire and never recovered.

In 1895 he bought 30 acres of land at the northeast corner of Nash Hill and O'Neil Roads. He sold it at a loss five years later, but while living there he evidently made the acquaintance of the Graves family living nearby, and he and/or his sons may have worked for the Graveses as farmhands. (A photo of the Graves family taken during the Old Home Days parade of 1915 includes a teenage boy identified as Donald Cheney.) By 1910 the senior Cheneys had moved to Enfield, CT, and in 1916, 22-year-old Charlie Graves (1894-1984) journeyed down for a visit with them and took this photo of the elderly Cheneys in their yard. He may also have written the accompanying notes. Charlie later bought the Nash Hill Road property that had formerly belonged to the Cheneys.



MR. and MRS. George Cheney
Mill River Hero 1874
Taken by Charles E. Graves
1916

J. EDWIN GRAVES
GRAVES FARM WILLIAMSBURG, MASS.
P. O. HAYDENVILLE, MASS.
R. F. D. BOX 13

Mrs. & Mrs. ^{Cheney} moved to Thompsonville Conn.
to stay with their daughter. June 5, 1918.

Mr. George Cheney Died ^{Nov.} 1918.

Mrs. George Cheney Died Feb. 23, 1922, age 77

Philip Donald Cheney was drowned in
Conn. River at Springfield Mass. May 4, 1919.