Walking Tour of Historic Litchfield

Litchfield was founded in 1719, and during the next 100 years it became a prosperous commercial and legal center. Major stagecoach routes passed through Litchfield, and the courthouse housed many people to the area. The town boasted the first law school in the United States, constructed in 1749, and an early school for young ladies, founded in 1792. Each year dozens of young people traveled from all over the country to study in Litchfield, and their presence added a progressive and energetic element to the town. By 1830 Litchfield was the fourth largest settlement in Connecticut and had earned a national reputation as an educated and cultured community.

Both the Litchfield Law School and the Litchfield Female Academy closed in 1853, contributing to a period of economic decline in Litchfield's history. The population of the town decreased, and business in the formerly bustling commuter town slowed. Because Litchfield's water supply was not sufficient to support large mills or factories, and the railroad routes bypassed the town's hilltop location, it was difficult for the area to recover from its economic hardships.

Litchfield's economy improved when the town gained popularity as a seasonal resort in the 1870s and attracted wealthy summer residents. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, and the country celebrated its centennial in 1876, many Americans became nostalgic for the colonial era. This renewed interest in the architecture and lifestyle of early America was known as the Colonial Revival, and the movement was particularly influential in Litchfield in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Colonnade, a magnificent new and expanded existing building and constructed two new townhouses that evoked the grandeur of the past.

After the Civil War, many towns formed Village Improvement Societies as part of an effort to beautify their green and village centers, and to pay tribute to their New England character. In 1913 Litchfield's Village Improvement Society launched a campaign to alter the appearance of the business district to glorify the colonial heritage of the town. Instead of a neat village, a new and expanded existing building and constructed two new townhouses that evoked the grandeur of the past.

Intent upon showcasing the community's traditional New England roots, local homeowners modified and expanded existing buildings and constructed two new townhouses that evoked the grandeur of the past.

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- **Moses & Mahal (Strode) Seymour Jr., 1837** – This 19th century Greek Revival townhouse was designed by E. K. Root. The house is an example of the newly rising popular style and was the residence of the Seymour and Root family.

- **George M. & Elizabeth (Parsons) Woodruff, 1855** – South Street

- **Elijah Wadsworth** – Built next to his house to accommodate his growing family. The yellow color scheme is characteristic of the Victorian era.

- **Seymour & Stephanie (Whitney) Cunningham, 1904** – This 19th century Colonial Revival home was designed by E. K. Root. The house is an example of the newly rising popular style and was the residence of the Seymour and Root family.

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**The Litchfield History Museum** uses seven galleries of furniture, fine arts, costumes, and household objects to investigate the evolution of a small New England town. Period rooms and hands-on areas invite visitors to discover its town while learning about national, social, cultural, and political history. (Open mid–April through November: Tuesday–Saturday 11 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday 1–5 p.m.)

**The Tapping Reeve House & Law School** takes visitors on a journey through the life of a real student from the early twentieth century. Through role-playing, hands-on areas, and interpretive exhibits, visitors explore time in the Tapping Reeve years. (Open mid–April through November: Tuesday–Saturday 11 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday 1–5 p.m.)

**The Helga J. Ingraham Memorial Library** is open free of charge to the public and contains extensive historical and genealogical resources, including papers, diaries, account books, photos, and newspapers. (Open your-round Tuesday–Friday 10 a.m.–12 p.m. and 1–4 p.m., as well as by appointment.)

**On the Green**

**Congregational Church, 1829**

The Congregational Church was built in 1823 on the village green. A second church structure replaced the 1802 building that was present. Congregational church was not built until 1829. This structure served as the first Congregational church in Litchfield. Deconsecrated in 1878 as a result of changing architectural taste, the church was moved around the corner and became, successively, an armory, public hall, and theater. It was re-reconsecrated in 1929 after it was restored to its original Congregational Church Revival style. The steeple and interior date from a 1929–30 remodeling.

**Dr. South’s Apothecary Shop, 1781**

(99) – Dr. Reuben Smith of North Street erected this little building next door to his house on North Street to serve as his office and apothecary shop. The original location reflected the custom of renting residential and commercial buildings. In 1812 the shop was moved to its present location on the north side of the village green. It is the oldest commercial structure in Litchfield.

**West Street**

**United Methodist Church, 1885**

(109) The church building standing today was dedicated December 8, 1885. A renovation in the early 1980s revealed that before the church was painted white in 1910, it was decorated in dark brown and gray. The congregation returned the church to its 1885 color scheme and painted the roof to resemble the colonial date stripes of the period. The intricate gingerbread decoration makes this the town’s most significant example of a Victorian building in the Carpenter Gothic style.

**Litchfield County Courthouse, 1889**

(103) This courthouse building dates from 1889, when it was constructed in the Romanesque Revival style. In 1913–14, the courthouse was remodeled because some members of the community felt that the Victorian style did not reflect the colonial character of Litchfield. The 1913–14 alterations included the addition of a classical portico and corner quoins to “colonialize” of Litchfield and were key supporters of the 1913 Colonial Revival alterations to the Litchfield County Courthouse and the ante-room in the commercial district.

**Cobble Courtyard, 1889**

The nineteenth-century cobblestone courtyard house is a livery stable that serviced the hotel once located on the corner. The hotel burned in the fire of 1886, which destroyed much of the town’s business district. A second fire in 1889 was equally disastrous. The present brick buildings fronting the courtyard date from 1889, though they appear much older. The late nineteenth-century remodeling reflects the impact of Colonial Revival taste.

**North Street**

**Julis & Dorothy (Champion) Deming, 1794**

(15) – It is difficult to know the original appearance of the Goodwins’ 1828 home, as it was updated in the academic Colonial Revival style in 1925 by its owner, Ludlow Bull. Bull’s remodeling was so thorough that virtually nothing of the original styling remains. Ludlow Bull and his brother Kingsley played prominent roles in the early twentieth-century.

**Leonard & Marian (Galpin) Goodwin, circa 1828**

(14) – The confection of the Georgian-style house, designed and built by the noted local architect and builder William Sprats, reflects Julius Deming’s success as a merchant. The design suggests the prosperity of Litchfield’s residents during the town’s heyday. The symmetrical facade, large Palladian window, and corner quoins made this house particularly stylish. The hipped roof, widespread in 1830, is notable for the flared eaves.

**Rubes & Abigail (Hubbard) Smith, 1770**

(46) – This center-chimney colonial structure was home to Dr. Reuben Smith, a prominent physician, and his family. The overhangs above the first and second stories were a common feature of early colonial architecture and lasted into the late 1700s.

**The Painter House, 1685**

(211) – This dwelling was built circa 1685–85 on the green in West Haven, Connecticut. When the property was threatened, the Hatheways (a local family) purchased the house and moved it to its present location in 1899–90. The property is the former home of the famed Becket family. The red color of the house is reportedly based upon the original hue, which was derived from the iron ore in an inexpensive paint known as Spanish brown.

**Lyde & Lucy (Sheldon) Lord, 1770**

(46) – The tall gambrel roof and overhang framed by an elaborate Colonial Revival fence are noteworthy features of this house. Lynde Lord’s ability to afford a house of such ample proportions reflects his prominent position in the community as sheriff of Litchfield County. The door treatment and porch are later designs.

**Sheldon’s Tavern, 1760**

(9) – Dr. Reuben Smith of North Street erected this little building next door to his house on North Street to serve as his office and apothecary shop. The original location reflected the custom of renting residential and commercial buildings. In 1812 the shop was moved to its present location on the north side of the village green. It is the earliest commercial structure in Litchfield.

**Litchfield Historical Society**

(104) – This classically inspired structure of brick and limestone was designed in the Beaux Arts style and features a bow-front entry and a Palladian window fitted with stained glass. The building was donated in 1902 by E. Polk & Vanderpool in memory of his grandmother, Julia Tallmadge Noyes, and from 1902 to 1965 it housed both Litchfield’s public library and historical society. The public library moved to the Oliver Wolcott Jr. house in 1965, and since then the Litchfield Historical Society has occupied the entire building.

**Central Square**

**Litchfield County Courthouse, 1889**

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**Charles Deming, 1900**

(195) – This stucco house was designed by E. K. Rossiter for Charles Deming, grandson of Julius Deming. Like the Cunningham house on South Street, the structure is an example of the new homes built in the Colonial Revival style at the turn of the twentieth century.

**The Star House, 1650**

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**Dover’s (Champion) Deming, 1793**

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**Litchfield History Museum and Helga J. Ingraham Memorial Library, 1905**

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