

South Street

Litchfield a short history

Litchfield was founded in 1719, and during the next 100 years it became a prosperous commercial and legal center. Major stagecoach routes crossed in Litchfield, and the county courthouse drew many people to the area. The town boasted the first law school in the United States, constructed in 1784, 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 1810 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 1833, contributing to a period of economic decline in Litchfield's history. The population of the town decreased, and business in the formerly bustling community 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 is known as the Colonial Revival, and the movement was particularly influential in Litchfield in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Intent upon showcasing the community's traditional New England roots, local homeowners modified and expanded existing buildings and constructed new, fashionable homes 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 greens 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 an accurate restoration based on historical research, however, the Village Improvement Society promoted an idealized version of the colonial period that influences the look of our storefronts and streetscapes today.

South Street

- 1 **Moses & Mabel (Strong) Seymour Jr., 1817 (#24)** – Featuring a delicate leaded glass trefoil window in the gable, this house is a superb example of the Federal style. The shiplap clapboards are nailed on flush, rather than overlapping, for a smooth finish intended to resemble stone.
- 2 **George M. & Elizabeth (Parsons) Woodruff, 1855 (#44)** – The finest example of Italianate architecture in the borough, this home was constructed for attorney George M. Woodruff and his family. The yellow color scheme is typical of the post-Civil War era, when white was not in fashion. Based on the features of Italian villas, the low-pitched roof and square cupola are characteristic of the Victorian era.
- 3 **Tapping & Sally (Burr) Reeve House, 1773, and Litchfield Law School, 1784 (#82)** – The Tapping Reeve House & Law School are among the most historically significant properties in Litchfield. In 1773 lawyer Tapping Reeve built this center-chimney colonial home on a lot purchased from Moses Seymour. After he moved in, Reeve started teaching law in his parlor. He soon constructed the small building next to his house to accommodate his growing classes, thus founding the country's first law school. The Tapping Reeve House & Law School came under the ownership of the Litchfield Historical Society in 1928 and are now operated as a museum.
- 4 **Oliver Wolcott Jr. Library, 1799 (#160)** – The Oliver Wolcott Jr. Library is located six houses down from the Tapping Reeve House & Law School. Elijah Wadsworth built the structure in 1799, and Oliver Wolcott Jr., governor of Connecticut from 1817 to 1827, owned it at one time. The modern rear wing designed by Eliot Noyes was commissioned from the leading modernist in 1964–66 to provide adequate library space for the community. The contrast between old and new was deliberate.
- 5 **Seymour & Stephanie (Whitney) Cunningham, 1904 (#173)** – This 1904 Colonial Revival home was designed by E. K. Rossiter. The stucco house is an example of the stately summer homes built for wealthy part-time residents of Litchfield.
- 6 **Ephraim Kirby, circa 1773 (#113)** – This home is known for the man who completed its construction, Ephraim Kirby, later appointed a judge in the Louisiana Territory by Thomas Jefferson. The house underwent massive renovations in the early twentieth century and now displays prominent Colonial Revival features, including a central pavilion front with a Palladian window and porticos on both gable ends.
- 7 **Oliver & Lorraine (Collins) Wolcott Sr., 1753 (#89)** – Oliver Wolcott Sr., a signer of the Declaration of Independence, erected this house, which is the earliest remaining Georgian home in the borough. During the Revolution, a statue of King George III was brought from New York City to the backyard and melted down for bullets. Distinguished figures such as George Washington, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Alexander Hamilton visited this house. The presence of such important figures in town was a strong influence on the Colonial Revival, which celebrated Litchfield's prominence in the late eighteenth century.
- 8 **Buell-Cook, 1877 (#77)** – This home is an example of residential Victorian-era architecture and was probably originally painted in dark tones, a popular color scheme during the period of its construction. The house was designed as a duplex, and each side was separately owned. After 1982 it was converted into a single-family home.
- 9 **Alanson & Eliza (Woodruff Barnes) Abbe, 1832 (#65)** – This home is the best high-style example of residential Greek Revival architecture in Litchfield. The hipped roof is more typical of the earlier Revolutionary era, but the two-story portico with Doric columns exemplifies the Greek Revival. The white shiplap siding, with boards set flush, recalls the smooth stone finishes of the ancient models. Because the Greek Revival style reached the height of popularity during an economic downturn in Litchfield, such sophisticated examples are rare in the borough.
- 10 **St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, 1948 (#49)** – The Roman Catholic parish in Litchfield officially dates from 1882, but itinerant priests regularly visited the community beginning in the eighteenth century. The simple brick structure with white columns was built in 1948 after the first church was destroyed in a fire in 1944.
- 11 **St. Michael's Episcopal Church, 1921 (#23)** – This church is the fourth structure occupied by St. Michael's parish, founded in 1745. The Gothic church was designed by architects Rossiter & Mueller of New York and was built in 1920–21 in a style based on the English Ecclesiastical mode. The building is constructed of granite quarried in Roxbury, Connecticut. The interior features Moravian tile work and stained-glass windows from Tiffany & Co. of New York.



A Walking Tour of Historic Litchfield





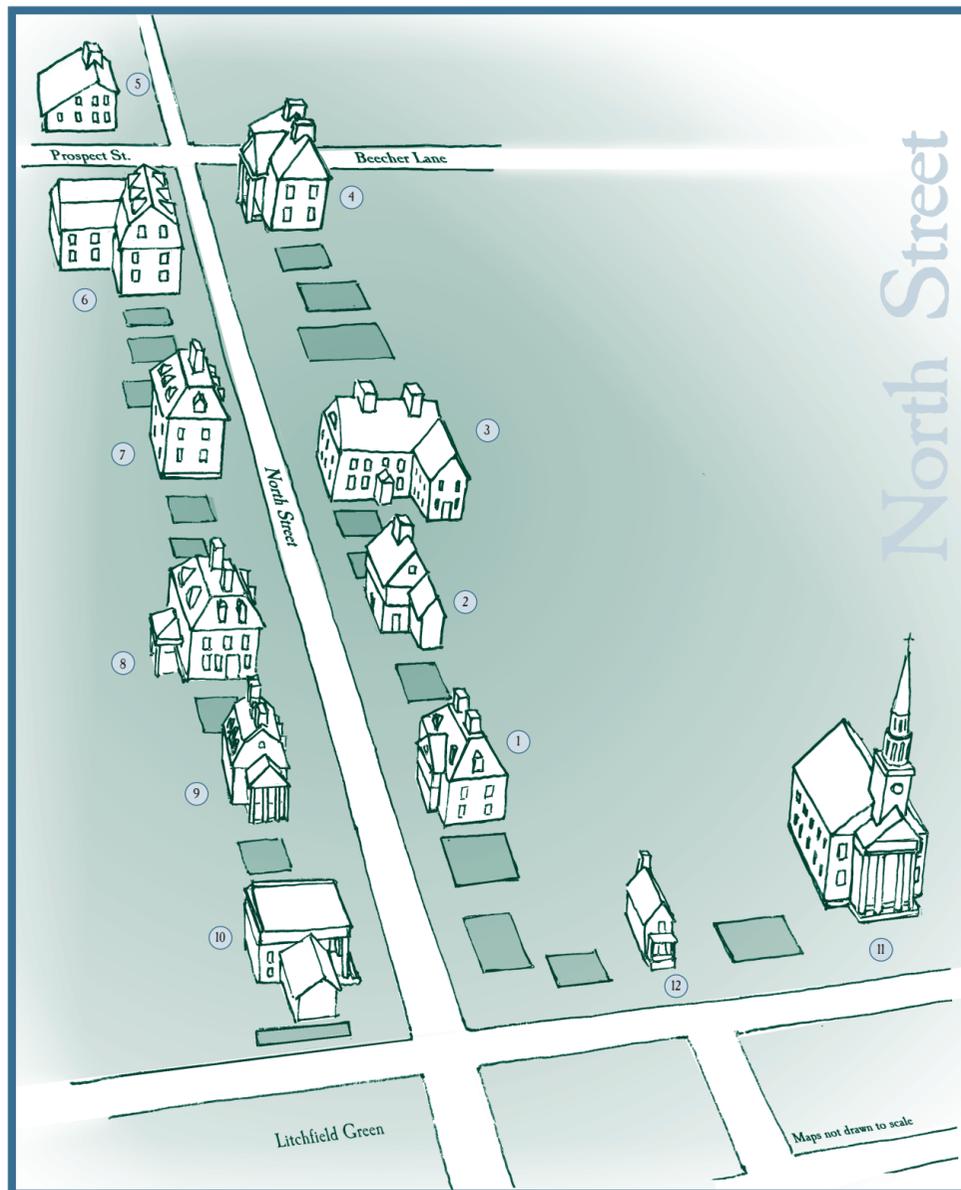
The Litchfield History Museum uses seven galleries of furniture, fine arts, costumes, and household objects to investigate the evolution of a small New England town. Period objects and hands-on areas invite visitors to discover the town while learning about national, social, cultural, and political history. (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 nineteenth century. Through role-playing, hands-on areas, and interpretive exhibits, visitors explore timeless issues of travel, communication, education, and community. (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 year-round: Tuesday-Friday 10 a.m.-12 p.m. and 1-4 p.m., as well as by appointment.)



North Street

1 Julius & Dorothy (Champion) Deming, 1793

(#50) – The elegance of this 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, redesigned in 1936, is notable for the flared eaves.

2 Reuben & Abigail (Hubbard) Smith, 1770

(#74) – 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.

3 Leonard & Marian (Galpin) Goodwin, circa 1828

(#114) – 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 Kingsbury played prominent roles in the early twentieth-century

"colonializing" of Litchfield and were key supporters of the 1913 Colonial Revival alterations to the Litchfield County Courthouse and the storefronts in the commercial district.

4 Charles Deming, 1900

(#180) – This stucco home 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.

5 The Painter House, 1685

(#211) – This dwelling was built circa 1683-85 on the green in West Haven, Connecticut. When demolition threatened, the Hatheways (a local Litchfield family) purchased the house and moved it to its present location in 1959-60. The property is the former homesite of the famed Beecher family. The red color of the house is reportedly based upon the original hue, which was derived from the iron oxide in an inexpensive paint known as Spanish brown.

6 Lynde & Lucy (Sheldon) Lord, 1771

(#179) – The tall gambrel roof and overhang fronted 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.

7 Dr. Daniel Sheldon, 1785

(#115) – This house was built in 1785 for Dr. Daniel Sheldon, a local physician (no relation to the other Sheldon family of Litchfield). Daniel Sheldon's daughter, Lucy Sheldon Beach, occupied the home until 1889. During her ownership, the eighteenth-century home underwent Victorian alterations, including the addition of a verandah and a dark exterior paint scheme. There is no trace of these once-stylish features, which were later removed in an effort to eliminate any sign of "inappropriate" Victorian taste.

8 Sheldon's Tavern, 1760

(#73) – Elisha Sheldon, father of Lucy Sheldon Lord, built this home in 1760. It was updated around 1795, when William Sprats added the central pavilion and Palladian window, which is similar to the treatment on the Deming house across the street. The structure features shingles rather than the more common clapboard siding. The house operated as a tavern for several years in the late 1700s, and it is documented that George Washington slept here during that time.

9 Benjamin & Mary (Floyd) Tallmadge, 1775

(#47) – This five-bay Georgian-style house is known for its most famous owner, Benjamin Tallmadge, who was an aide to George Washington during the Revolution and was later elected to Congress. In 1782 Tallmadge moved to Litchfield and purchased the house from Thomas Sheldon, son of Elisha. Porches supported on columns in the Tuscan order were added during Benjamin Tallmadge's ownership.

10 First National Bank of Litchfield, 1816

(#13) – The bank was founded in 1815 as a branch of the Phoenix Bank of Hartford, with Benjamin Tallmadge as its first president. This Federal-style commercial structure features a symmetrical facade with Ionic columns and a fanlight in the gable. It was built in 1816, when the First National Bank of Litchfield was incorporated. The bank is the oldest business in continuous operation in Litchfield.

On the Green

11 Congregational Church, 1829

The first meetinghouse was built in 1723 on the village green. A second church structure replaced it in 1761, and the present Congregational church was not built until 1829. This structure served as the third 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 reconsecrated in 1929 after it was restored to its original location and renovated in the Colonial Revival style. The steeple and interior date from a 1929-30 remodeling.

12 Dr. Smith's Apothecary Shop, 1781

(#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 intermixing 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.



West Street

1 United Methodist Church, 1885

(#69) 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 1906, 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 colored slate shingles of the period. The intricate jigsaw decoration makes this the town's most significant example of a Victorian building in the Carpenter Gothic style.

2 Litchfield County Courthouse, 1889

(#15) 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 cupola and corner quoins to "colonialize" the structure with a more proper Georgian design.

3 Cobble Courtyard, 1889

The nineteenth-century cobblestone courtyard housed 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 1888 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.

4 Litchfield Historical Society

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

(#7) – 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 1901 by John A. Vanderpoel II 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.

