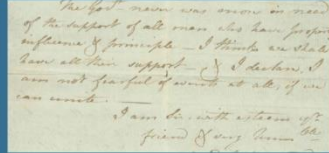




LITCHFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

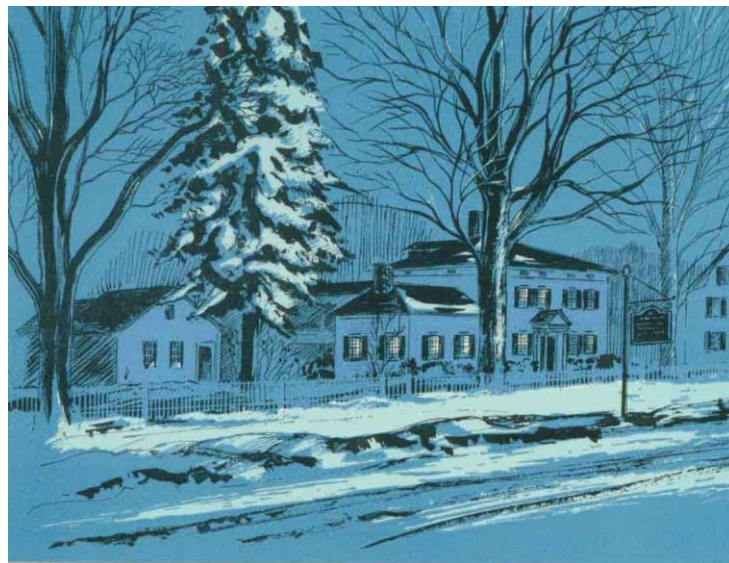
MUSEUM | INGRAHAM LIBRARY | TAPPING REEVE HOUSE | LITCHFIELD LAW SCHOOL



## A Holiday Walking Tour of Litchfield's Historic District

### OUR TOUR BEGINS AT THE TAPPING REEVE HOUSE AND LAW SCHOOL (82 SOUTH STREET)

300 years ago, this land was inhabited by the Potatuck Tribe, part of the Paugussett confederacy. In 1715 the land was purchased for 15 pounds by English settlers from Hartford and Windsor and soon after the town of Litchfield was established. Starting in 1751, Litchfield was the home for the county court where civil and criminal cases were heard. The designation as the county seat attracted many ambitious legal professionals, such as Oliver Wolcott, Tapping Reeve, and Elisha Sheldon.



*This image of the Tapping Reeve House and law school was made by the greeting card company Lilac Hedges, which operated in Litchfield in the 1950s and 1960s. The house on the right was Judge Tapping Reeve's home. He founded the Litchfield Law School in the small building to the left, now a museum.*

Tapping Reeve and his partner James Gould revolutionized the way law was taught in this country, educating over 1000 young men who became leaders in law, politics, education, and business. Alumni of

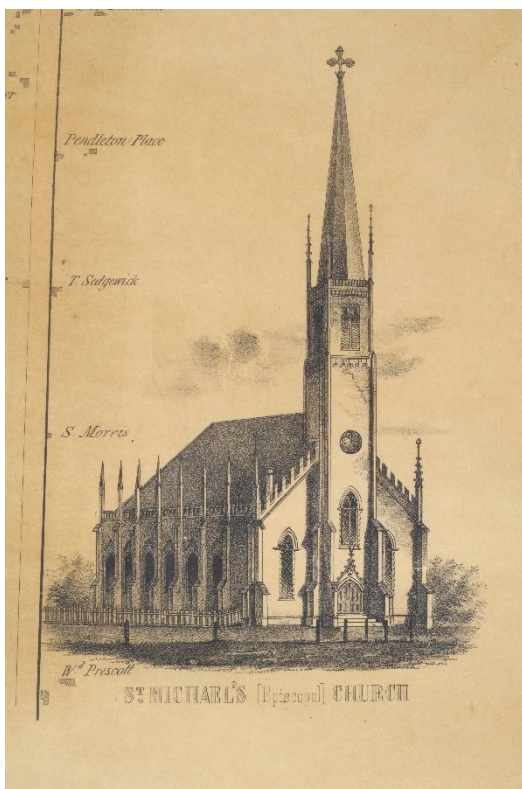
the school include 2 vice presidents, 101 United States congressmen, 28 United States senators, and 6 cabinet members, 3 justices of the United States Supreme Court, 14 governors, and 13 chief justices of state supreme courts. Many more graduates held state and local political office; others became leaders of the nation's emerging corporate, mercantile, industrial, and financial establishments.

**HEAD NORTH ON SOUTH STREET TOWARD THE CENTER OF TOWN. CROSS THE STREET IN FRONT OF ST. ANTHONY'S CHURCH, TURN LEFT AND CONTINUE WALKING NORTH.**

**OUR NEXT STOP IS ST. MICHAEL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH (25 SOUTH STREET)**

Litchfield's early settlers were primarily Calvinist who attended the Congregational Church and did not celebrate Christmas. They believed Christmas should be treated like any other day of the year, in prayer.

Unlike the Congregationalists, the Episcopalians celebrated Christmas. In 1811, the first St. Michael's church was built on this site and at Christmas time, the decorations shocked the town. In 1814, Mary Hunt, who lived with a strictly Congregational family, visited St. Michael's, and wrote in her diary



*"There was a candle in front of every pane of the windows, and it looked very beautiful. We thought it grand because we had never seen anything like it before. Even then, I had not heard of giving presents to one another."*

The decorated church also made an impression on a young Harriet Beecher. In Pogonoc People, a fictionalized account of her childhood in Litchfield, she writes of her protagonist visiting the Episcopal Church and finding church goers

*"dressing the church with grand pines, laminating the church, and a candle in every pane of glass, making the church as "light as day"*

*There have been three St. Michael's churches. The first, built in 1811 was described as "neat, ornamental, and convenient." The second one, shown in the image to the left in 1855, was a wooden gothic church. The elegant stone church standing today was built by Erik. K. Rossiter in 1920.*

**CONTINUE NORTH ON SOUTH STREET. TAKE THE NEXT CROSSWALK TO CROSS THE STREET IN FRONT OF THE POST OFFICE. TURN LEFT INTO COBBLE COURT.**

**OUR NEXT STOP IS COBBLE COURT**

By the mid-1800s, Litchfield's West Street had developed into the town's commercial center.

An inventory of business from 1845 include Printer, Blacksmith, cabinet maker, saddle maker, hardware merchant, dry goods, boots & shoes dealer, looking glass dealer, wagon maker, book seller, hair dresser, grocer, tailor, hatter, shoemaker, tinner, seamstress, painter, tanner, watch maker, and deputy sheriff.



*The image above shows West Street in the mid-1800s. The large building on the left is the Mansion House (where @the corner is today). The steepled building on the right is the 1797 courthouse.*

On the corner stood the Mansion House. While Litchfield has been a destination for visitors since the 1830s, the availability of railroad travel to Litchfield in the mid-1850s encouraged tourism and many businesses catered to visitors, such as the Mansion House. What is now Cobble Court had been the stables and blacksmith for the hotel.

On June 11, 1886, a fire broke out in the northwest corner of South St, where you are now standing. The fire raged through the night and burned West Street to the ground. Just two years later, a second fire again burned the street. The town restricted building with wood, and today we see a West Street rebuilt in brick.

### **CROSS WEST STREET TO THE CENTER GREEN.**

### **OUR NEXT STOP IS CIVIL WAR MONUMENT ON THE CENTER GREEN.**

During the Civil War, men and women from Litchfield have celebrated the holidays far from home or without family members present.

Alva Stone, born in Litchfield in 1817, served in the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Volunteer Infantry. While stationed near Annapolis in 1861, Alava wrote home to his wife Lucy describing his Christmas celebration:



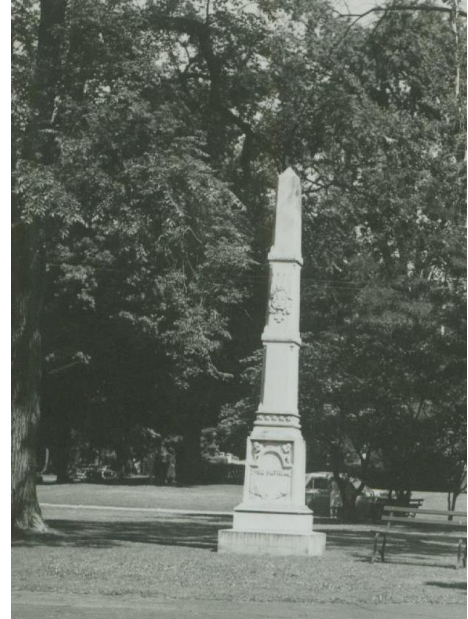
... . Last night being Christmas we wanted to do something big so our tent (no 6) and the Lieuts tent chipped in the coppers and got a pail of Cider few a dozen of ginger cakes went into the Lieuts tent called in our friends and partook of the luxuries and tried to make believe we were at home – of course every one had his story to tell (we sometimes tell stories in camp) a song of two closed the evening for us.

He writes again to Lucy the following Christmas

– I am thinking that this is the second Christmass I have spent away from home & the thot. Comes up how many more are to be passed before this struggle is bro't to a finish – You know when I left you – you asked How long the war would last – I then told you – One year, or at the farthest not over 18 months – It is now going on 15 months since I left & if I was asked the same question now I should not attempt to set any time

Alva was medically discharged in February of 1863 and returned home.

*This Civil War Monument was erected in 1874 to remember the soldiers from Litchfield who died during the war. The engraving PRO PATRIA translates to "For One's County."*



#### **CROSS EAST STREET TO NORTH STREET AND HEAD NORTH**

#### **OUR NEXT STOP IS THE DEMING HOUSE (148 NORTH STREET), THE THIRD HOUSE ON THE RIGHT**

After the American Revolution, the town was a leader in education. At the same time as the Litchfield Law School was operating, a pioneering school for women, the Litchfield Female Academy, was attracting young ladies from across the United States to study in Litchfield.

The Deming family built their grand home here in 1793. All four of the Deming daughters attended the Litchfield Female Academy. While, the academic education the students received set the school apart from the more traditional finishing academies for women, training for society and building relationships



with other students, including law students, was an important aspect of their education.

One of the most important forms of social life were the many dances, balls and cotillions given at the academy, by the students at the Litchfield Law School and by private families. These formal events, planned by the school, were considered an important test of a young woman's social maturity and development. Almost any occasion could be the excuse for holding a ball -- election days, the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Eve, Washington's birthday,



***This dance invitation to Lucretia Deming, was for a Christmas Ball held in 1802 around the corner at the Phelps tavern.***

**CONTINUE NORTH ON NORTH STREET AND CROSS THE STREET AT THE NEXT CROSSWALK. TURN LEFT AND HEAD SOUTH ON NORTH STREET.**

**OUR NEXT STOP IN THE TALLMADGE HOUSE (47 NORTH STREET)**



Benjamin Tallmadge is best known for his role as George Washington's spymaster during the American Revolution. After the war, Tallmadge moved to Litchfield and settled into a career as a businessman and politician. In this house, Mary Floyd Tallmadge had seven children with her husband Benjamin.

Litchfield was an ideal town for the Tallmadge's to settle into domestic life. Many influential families lived in town and the Litchfield Female Academy and Litchfield Law School offered supreme educational opportunities. Additionally, the town's rural charm provided for many pastoral pursuits, especially in the winter when sleigh rides were possible.



In 1817, Benjamin Tallmadge wrote to his son-in-law John P. Cushman

*“I have taken Master Tallmadge in a sley [sleigh] to Goshen, to his abundant Satisfaction – the snow with us is thin, but they sleighing [sleighbing] is very fine”*

Another law school student, Edward Deering Mansfield, wrote in his personal memories that the “grand occasions” were

*“when we got sleighs with fine horses, and buffalo robes, and foot-stoves, and invited the belles of Litchfield, who never hesitated to go, and set off to the distant village to have a supper and dance. I seldom danced, and some of the girls did not, but there were always some who did, and we had jolly times”*



***The sleigh bells above are in the Litchfield Historical Society's collection. The photograph above shows a sleighing party on the center green. The cannon can be seen in the center of the photo and several existing buildings can be identified in the background.***



On Christmas Day in 1806 Betsey Reynolds wrote,

*"in the Evening while at prayers I saw an unusual sight indeed. It was so remarkable that I shall not forget it."*

Reynolds did not go on to share what remarkable thing she had just seen, but one hopes that every special occasion be filled with unforgettable memories.

Happy Holidays and Best Wishes for a Safe New Year!



**The image above is from the Lilac Hedges Collection. Lilac Hedges was a greeting card company founded by Ralph P Hinchman III and featured various artists, such as Hilary Knight who created this playful scene of the 12 nights of Christmas.**