

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings

Litchfield Historic District, Connecticut

Litchfield is probably New England's finest surviving example of a typical late 18th century New England town. The first settlers arrived in 1720-1721 and named the town Litchfield, after the old cathedral city of Lichfield in Staffordshire, England. The town was an outpost and trading center for the northwest frontier until late in the 18th century. Early maps of Litchfield show the streets located substantially as those in existence today. The four main thoroughfares, stretching toward the cardinal points of the compass, in time became known as North, South, East, and West Streets. At their intersection was the central common, now called the Green. Around this center the town gradually developed. Litchfield today has a total of 15 frame houses, largely in the Georgian style, that were erected in the last half of the 18th century. In addition, and situated in this same area, are three structures that were built between 1800 and 1828. Several of the Late Georgian houses, the Julius Deming House and Sheldon Tavern, were designed by the soldier-architect, William Sprat, a British officer taken prisoner with Burgoyne's army at Saratoga in 1777. Sprat's success with his wartime architectural commissions led him to remain in Connecticut after the Revolution to work as an architect.

The Historic District includes the east and west sides of North and South Streets, to the rear property lines, from Prospect Street on the north to Gallows Lane on the south, the Village Green between East and West Streets, and the structures fronting on the northeast side of the Green. Two of the buildings are open to the public and an information center and museum is available to visitors interested in touring the town.

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NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS

1. STATE Connecticut	2. THEME(S). IF ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE, WRITE "ARCH" BEFORE THEME NO. Theme XX - Architecture (Colonial)
3. NAME(S) OF SITE Litchfield Historic District	4. APPROX. ACREAGE 20 acres
5. EXACT LOCATION (County, township, roads, etc. If difficult to find, sketch on Supplementary Sheet) Litchfield, Litchfield County.	
6. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRESENT OWNER (Also administrator if different from owner) Mostly private.	

7. ~~IMPORTANCE AND DESCRIPTION (Describe briefly what makes site important and what remains are extant)~~

Boundaries of Historic District: Houses on the east and west sides of North and South Streets, to Prospect Street on the north and Gallows Lane on the south.

7. Importance and Description

Litchfield is a good example of a late 18th century New England town. The colonial setting, however, has been considerably altered and the architecture of the surviving 18th century structures is largely only typical of the period.

In 1720-21, the first settlers arrived and named the town Litchfield, after the old cathedral city Lichfield in Staffordshire, England. Palisades were built around five of the first houses as protection against Indian attack. The town was an outpost and trading center for the northwest frontier until late in the 18th century. Early maps of Litchfield show the streets located substantially as those in existence today. The four main thoroughfares, stretching toward the cardinal points of the compass, in time became known as North, South, East and West Streets. At their intersection the central common, now called The Green, was the site of three important structures, the first meeting house, the court house, and school. None of the 18th century structures are still standing. Around this center the town gradually developed.

Litchfield today has a total of 15 houses, located on North and South Streets and on the northeast side of The Green, that were erected in

(Continued)

8. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (Give best sources; give location of manuscripts and rare works)

See page

9. REPORTS AND STUDIES (Mention best reports and studies, as, NPS study, IIABS, etc.)

Historic American Building Survey:

/4469-77, 4504-15

10. PHOTOGRAPHS * ATTACHED: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11. CONDITION Excellent	12. PRESENT USE (Museum, farm, etc.) Residences	13. DATE OF VISIT Sept. 14, 1967
14. NAME OF RECORDER (Signature) <i>Charles W. Snell</i> Charles W. Snell	15. TITLE Historian	16. DATE Nov. 13, 1967	

\* DRY MOUNT ON AN 8 X 10 1/2 SHEET OF FAIRLY HEAVY PAPER. IDENTIFY BY VIEW AND NAME OF THE SITE, DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH, AND NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER. GIVE LOCATION OF NEGATIVE. IF ATTACHED, ENCLOSE IN PROPER NEGATIVE ENVELOPES.

(IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS NEEDED USE SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET, 10-317a, AND REFER TO ITEM NUMBER)

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SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

This sheet is to be used for giving additional information or comments, for more space for any item on the regular form, and for recording pertinent data from future studies, visitations, etc. Be brief, but use as many Supplement Sheets as necessary. When items are continued they should be listed, if possible, in numerical order of the items. All information given should be headed by the item number, its name, and the word (cont'd), as, 6. Description and Importance (cont'd) . . .

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7. Continued:

the last half of the 18th century. In addition, and situated in this same area, are also three structures that were built between 1800 and 1828.<sup>1</sup>

The major changes to the colonial scene within the boundaries of this historic district are as follows:

1. The great elms which now form a broad and beautiful archway over North and South Streets were planted in the early 19th century.
2. Interspersed among the 15 most important colonial structures are a good number of early mid-19th century houses, which are typical representatives, architecturally, of their period, but nevertheless, do form an intrusion on the colonial scene.
3. Fourteen of the 15 colonial structures are good examples of the typical architecture of the colonial period, but all have been altered to some degree. Two of the buildings are open to visitors and the remainder are used as private residences.

A brief description of these buildings follows:

Colonial Houses on North Street.

1. Lynde Lord House, built in 1771, this is a large two-story frame clapboarded structure with high gambrel roof and twin chimney.
2. Sheldon's Tavern, built in 1760, the house was remodeled in the Georgian style by William Spratt around 1790. The large two-story frame structure has a hipped roof, with balustrade and dormers, and a projecting central pedimented pavilion. The pavilion has four columns on the first floor and a palladian window above, done in the usual Spratt manner. A central hall extends through the building and contains a good Georgian staircase. The fireplace walls of three rooms are paneled, while the northwest room on the second floor is paneled throughout. The three-story addition at the rear of the house is modern.

<sup>1</sup>These early 19th century structures include the 1812 jail and 1815 bank, both located on North Street, and the 1828 Congregational Church, which is situated on the northeast side of The Green.

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7. Continued:

- 3. Benjamin Talmadge House, built in 1775. The tall, gambrel-roofed frame house is flanked by two lower two-story wings, each supported by two columns, The dormered roof is crowned by a captain's walk.
- 4. Julius Deming House, 1790-93. This is a magnificent example of a Late Georgian House and was designed by William Spratt (Site recommended for classification).
- 5. Reuben Smith House, 1770. This is a large two-story frame Georgian house with a central chimney. The structure has a one-story service wing on one end.

Houses on the Northeast Side of the Green.

- 1. Corner House, 1792. A Two-story frame house, with central chimney; altered in 19th century.
- 2. Collins House, 1782. A large two-story five-bay frame house, with two interior chimneys and a double overhang.
- 3. 1781 Apothecary Shop. Small frame one-story building with gable end to street. Now used as a bookstore.

3.

Houses on South Street.

- 1. Episcopal Rectory, 1782. A two-story frame Georgian house.
- 2. Tapping Reeve's House, 1773. A hipped-roof two-story frame house with a central chimney. The ventilators under the roof and the doors are features that were added much later. Restored and owned by the Litchfield Historical Society, this structure and the adjacent Law School, are open to visitors.
- 3. Law School, 1784. A tiny one-story frame building that has been restored.
- 4. Oliver Wolcott, Jr., House, 1779. A large frame house that has been extensively altered.
- 5. Ephraim Kirby House, 1773. An imposing two-story frame house with wings that are supported by two-story columns. These wings and the numerous palladian windows in the gables are later additions.
- 6. Oliver Wolcott, Sr., House, 1753. A large two-story frame house with a central chimney and overhang. The structure has a pedimented central porch that is supported by four Ionic columns.
- 7. Benjamin Banks House, 1780. A long, low, two-story frame double house.

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8. References:

Connecticut--A Guide to its Roads, Lore, and People (American Guide Series) (Boston, 1938), 193-200; Dorothy and Richard Pratt, A Guide to Early American Homes--North (New York, 1956), 116-119; John Frederick Kelly, Architectural Guide for Connecticut (New Haven, 1935), 23; Some Historic Sites of Litchfield, Connecticut (Litchfield Historical Society, 1933); H. F. Randolph Mason, Historic Houses of Connecticut Open to the Public (Stonington, Conn., 1966), 15 and 16; J. Frederick Kelley, Connecticut's Old Houses, A Handbook and Guide (Stonington, Conn., 1963).

