

## Suffield Walking Tour

### South Main Street East

#### **#34 Charles L. Spencer House (1899)**

Charles Luther Spencer (1860-1921) razed the Austin Tavern to build this elaborate house. Spencer had many titles including President of the Connecticut River Banking Company and Vice President of the First National Bank of Suffield. He also served as a Connecticut State Representative and Senator.

The Austin Tavern is shown in the photo below. The right-hand smaller section of the tavern was moved to 105 Bridge Street and still exists. The Austin Tavern was famous during the Revolutionary War era. According to local legend, George Washington had his midday meal at the tavern when he passed through Suffield at the end of June 1775 on his way to take command of the army at Cambridge. John Adams also frequently ate and stayed at the tavern. Mary Seymour Austin (1732-1815), the wife of Seth Austin (1731-1806), the tavernkeeper, wrote to Washington in 1789 because Seth had been accused of passing counterfeit money near the end of the Revolutionary War. At the time Mary wrote to Washington the family still owed a large portion of the fine. Mary asked Washington if the court order could be redressed. There is no knowledge that Washington was able to aid the Austins.

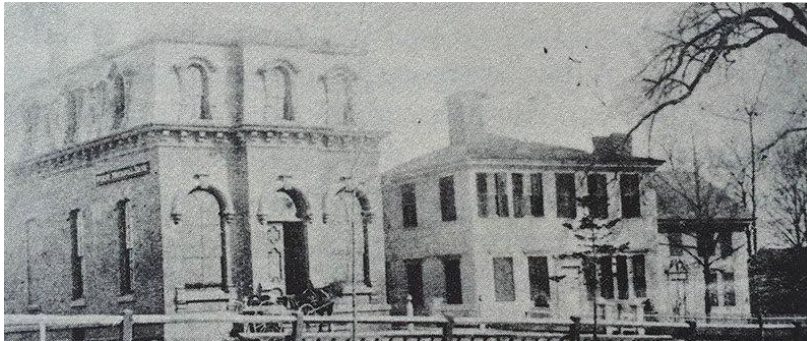


Photo shows the Suffield Savings Bank on the left (now an empty lot) and the Austin Tavern

#### **#52 Dr. Asaph Bissell House - Greek Revival (circa 1823-1835)**

Asaph Bissell (1791-1850) graduated from Yale Medical School in 1815, the first doctor in Suffield to receive a medical degree. He served as a doctor in town from 1815 to 1850. In addition to seeing patients in his home, he made house calls using saddlebags to carry his medicines when he rode to patients' houses. The saddlebags with some medicines still intact were donated by the family to the Yale Medical School. Isaac, Asaph's father, was one of a number of post riders, like Paul Revere, who alerted towns of the British attack on Lexington on April 19, 1775.

#### **#60 Charles Shepard House - Federal (1824)**

This ample and graceful house features graceful arches, fan-shaped windows and a columned entrance. Charles Shepard was a prominent lawyer who practiced in Suffield (1820-1829) and in Hartford (1830-1850). He was also a state legislator and President of the Hartford County Mutual Fire Insurance Company during the Civil War.

**#78 Moses Rowe House - Center Chimney (1767), Greek Revival (1830-1840)**

This is one of the older homes on the street. Moses Rowe (1733-1799) lived here with his wife Huldah Norton Rowe (1736-1822) and nine children. At some point Horace Sheldon (1802-1888) bought the house and sometime between 1830 and 1840, he modified it to emulate Greek Revival architecture, fashionable at the time. Rectangular columns were placed on the corners, a decorative doorway was added and the roof was raised, positioning the wide entablature below the roofline. The side porches may have been added as well. The additions in the back are a more modern build.

**#88 John Wells Loomis House - Center Chimney (1846), Greek Revival (1854)**

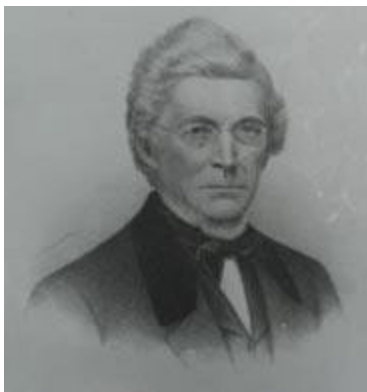
This house was originally built as a center chimney house for Dr. Aretus Rising (1801-1884). It was a curious choice of architectural style as center chimney houses were by then outdated. Dr. Rising graduated from the Berkshire Medical School in 1826. He was a doctor in town from 1845 until 1871. In 1854, the house was bought by John Wells Loomis (1805-1879). John was the head of the Loomis family which made a fortune in the tobacco industry in Suffield, rolling and shipping tobacco to California and other far places. Loomis operated his cigar business in a large warehouse, now gone, behind the house. Loomis converted the house to a center hallway, two chimney house with a Greek Revival front entrance. Loomis later built an Italianate house at 166 South Main Street for his son, George W. Loomis.

**#98 Dr. Aretus Rising House – Italianate (1854)**

This house was built for Dr. Rising next door to his first house at 88 South Main Street. This house has a wide porch with wooden columns and valence in a lacy lattice pattern.

**#130 Daniel Norton House - Georgian (circa 1813)**

The house was bequeathed to Daniel Washington Norton (1799-1874) at age 14, upon the death of Daniel Norton (1751-1814), his father. The father was a veteran of the American Revolution who had responded to the Lexington Alarm in April 1775. The son became a wealthy businessman: an agent for the Aetna Fire Insurance agency, an investor in mining, paper and textile companies, a partner in a tobacco enterprise and founder and first president of the National Bank of Suffield. His papers are archived at Yale. After his death in 1874, the Norton family continued to own the house until around 1939.



Daniel Washington Norton

### **#140 St. Joseph Church – Colonial Revival (1952)**

Suffield Polish immigrants organized the St. Joseph Polish Society in 1905, purchasing land for a church from Edwin D. Morgan. Suffield had been under the care of priests from Windsor Locks, but the town's Polish Catholics wanted a pastor of their own. Services were first held on Easter Sunday in 1918 in a converted barn on the property. This second church building was built by funds from families and fundraisers. The church was closed in 2017 when the parish merged with the Sacred Heart Church.



St. Joseph Church first building was a converted barn

### **#166 George Loomis House - Italianate (1860)**

This large, square, wooden house was built by John Wells Loomis for his son George Wells Loomis (1832-1903). It is noteworthy for its two-story front porch and the elaborate roof overhang. In 1881, two years after his father's death, George Loomis sold the tobacco business founded by his father and moved to New Haven. In 1912, Polish residents bought the house which became the rectory for St. Joseph Church. The barn on the property became the first sanctuary of St. Joseph Church.

### **#232 Alexander King House Museum – Georgian Center Chimney (1764)**

This is a fine example of Connecticut Valley's early version of the Georgian built by Eliphalet King (1743-1821). The wide side porch is unusual for this time period but believed to be original as it was probably used as the entrance to Dr. King's office. The interior of the house is notable for the lovely corner cupboard. A similar cupboard is in the house at 309 Mapleton Avenue, another house built by Eliphalet King.

Alexander King (1737-1802) was the great grandson of James King, an original proprietor, commonly known as a first settler, who arrived in Suffield in 1682. Alexander King graduated from Yale, the first in his family to attend college. He was Suffield's principal physician for 40 years. He was a church deacon, justice of the peace, and town clerk. King was a town selectman for 32 years from 1768 until 1802 except during 1775-76, perhaps because some townspeople thought he was a Tory. At times he was both the town clerk and a selectman. He also served as a deputy and representative to the Connecticut General Assembly.

At a town meeting on July 4, 1774, exactly two years before the Declaration of Independence, King was part of a committee which agreed that Suffield would suspend all commerce with

Great Britain, aid Boston and abide by a forthcoming Congressional plan to secure and preserve “Liberties, Privileges and Freedom.”

The house was donated to the Suffield Historical Society by Samuel Reid Spencer in 1960. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Houses in 1976. The Museum is open from May until the end of September when free tours are offered to view its fine 18<sup>th</sup> century Georgian interior woodwork and great collection of early Connecticut Valley furniture.

#### **#264 Henry P. Kent House - Second Empire (1872)**

This house built by John C. Mead (1840-1889) is a prime example of the Second Empire style. It displays the tremendous wealth of Henry P. Kent (1803-1887), one of the first tobacco merchants to box cigars for shipment throughout the country. The stunning house features bay windows, cornice brackets, a full-length porch, mansard roof and turret. The house was later owned for 60 years by Samuel Reid Spencer (1871-1961) who served as a Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut.



Samuel Reid Spencer

#### **#300 Colonial Revival (Circa 1900)**

This house was built for Hugh Meade Alcorn, a longtime Connecticut State’s Attorney. The house is a two-story rectangular block topped by a hip roof with dormers. The building was enlarged by Hugh’s son, Robert Hayden Alcorn who added Greek influences to it with the one-story wings on either side and a huge two-story Ionic columned portico.