

## **Suffield Walking Tour**

### **North and South Main Street, High Street and One House on Mapleton Avenue**

All of the houses listed on the tour are part of the Main Street Historic District and were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. The architectural styles seen on the tour are noted below.

**Beaux Art** design elements are symmetry, columns and triangular pediments, a raised first story and stone or stone-like materials. An example is the Kent Legare Library, #119 High Street.

**Center Chimney** houses evolved early in the 18th century in New England. The massive center chimney created hearths for all the main rooms on the two stories. On either side of the small entryway were living and parlor areas with the kitchen in the rear. The style disappeared by the early 19th century as new heating and framing systems created more flexible plans. An example of a center chimney house is the King House Museum, 232 South Main Street.

**Cape Cod** (1690-1800, locally to ca. 1825) This New England style was tremendously popular during the colonial and early republic periods. These homes were compact, strong, and easy to build and move. Typically, they are one to one-and-a-half stories in height, with a centered entry and chimney. Early homes generally lacked decorative detail. An example of this style is the James Hall House, #15 High Street.

**Colonial Revival** designs feature symmetry, hipped roofs, fan or Palladian windows. An example of this style is #300 South Main Street.

**Dutch Colonial** was an early American house style originating in the 1600s. They were built where there were Dutch settlers such as in the Hudson Valley area, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania and parts of Connecticut. The most recognizable feature of Dutch colonial houses is their gambrel roofs, which give them a barn-like appearance. The houses are also symmetrical with a centered front entrance and dormer windows. The design was out of favor for several decades but became popular again in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. An example of this style is #394 North Main Street.

**Georgians** (1700-1800) are formal two-story houses, marked by a symmetrical arrangement of doors and windows with proportions based on the classical architecture of Greece and Rome. Ornamentation is typically restrained. A center chimney or two paired chimneys on the inboard of the gable roof are features of this type of house. An example is the Elihu Kent Jr. House, #161 South Main Street.

**Federal** (1780-1820, locally to about 1860) The Federal style shared the formal Georgian structure but included a more elaborate entry, often with sidelights on either side, detailed window openings, porticos, columns and fanlights and sometimes tripartite windows. Also, while the Georgian style contains only square or rectangular rooms, the Federal style incorporates round, octagonal and elliptical rooms and projecting bay windows. An example of this style is the Harvey Bissell House (Suffield Commons), #82 North Main Street.

**Greek Revival** (1825-1880) drew characteristics from ancient Greek temples such as detailed cornices, tripartite windows and wide porches supported by wide columns. They have hip roofs which are shaped like a gently pitched pyramid. An example is the Moses Rowe House, #78 South Main Street.

**Italianate** (1840-1885) was influenced by Italian country homes. They typically have two or three stories, with a boxy and symmetrical form and nearly flat roofs. Tall and narrow arched windows are common. An example is the George Loomis House (St. Joseph Rectory), #166 South Main Street.

**Italianate Villa** (1840-1885) has two main distinguishing features: a prominent tower, which was often called a campanile (an Italian church bell tower), and a picturesquely asymmetrical construction. The style was popular in San Francisco and New York. An example is the Charles F. Loomis House, #257 North Main Street.

**Modern architecture** features an open floor plan, large windows, and modern building materials such as concrete or steel and clean lines. An example is the Kent Memorial Library, #50 North Main Street.

**Romanesque Revival** (1840-1900) buildings are identified by their pronounced round arches and heavy, massive stone or brick construction. Most have round towers and squat columns. The style is especially suited to churches, university buildings, prisons and other public buildings. An example is the First Congregational Church, #81 High Street.

**Second Empire** (1855-1885) This French-inspired style was contemporary with the reign of Napoleon III (1852-1870). The Second Empire ornamentation has many decorative details including iron cresting on the roof, heavily bracketed cornices, quoins, and balustrades and they typically feature a mansard roof, shallow-pitched and level with dormers. An example of this style is the Henry P. Kent House, 264 South Main Street.

**Queen Anne Victorians** (1880-1910) can feature an abundance of decorative elements, steeply pitched roofs with irregular shapes, cross gables, asymmetry, porches, towers, bay windows and spindle trim on porches and gables. An example of this style is the Charles Kurvin House, #169 South Main Street.

**Vernacular** is a building not based upon any specific architectural style such as Gothic or Italianate Villa. It is built with construction materials available at the time, and the talents and traditions of local builders and craftsmen who are mostly anonymous. An example of this type of house is #357 North Main Street

### **Builders and Architects**

In colonial New England, house builders were local craftsmen who also typically built furniture. Many were anonymous. These craftsmen soon gave way to professional builders and trained architects. Benjamin Latrobe, considered by some to be the Father of American architecture,

was hired by George Washington to be the surveyor of public grounds and buildings in Washington D.C. in 1803. Others consider Charles Bullfinch, from the Northeast, who built his first building in 1788, to be the first professionally trained architect.

Suffield follows that pattern. There were excellent craftsmen such as Joseph Howard and Eliphalet King who built houses and furniture in colonial America and until shortly after the Revolutionary War. Not much later, in the early 1800s, professional architects were hired to construct the houses and buildings in Suffield. The following men were craftsmen and architects of many of the houses on this walking tour.

**Asher Benjamin** (1773-1845) Oliver Phelps remodeled the house he bought from Shem Burbank to reflect his wealth and sophistication. For the construction of an addition, he sought the services of Thomas Hayden (1745-1817) of Windsor, who in turn entrusted a 21-year-old Asher Benjamin to design its entry. Benjamin would rise to become an influential architect of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1797, Benjamin published *The Country Builder's Assistant* which was a pattern book of the rudiments of building designs, the first book of its kind to be published in America. He also designed and built several houses and buildings.

**Daniel Burnham** (1846-1912) is the most famous architect on this list. Sidney Kent engaged Burnham to design Suffield's first public library, now known as Suffield Academy's Kent Legare Library. Burnham's Chicago firm designed many well-known buildings including the Flatiron building, Wanamaker's Department Store, Marshall Fields, Union Station in Washington D.C., and the Merchants Exchange Building in San Francisco.

**Joseph Howard** (1736-1810) was a master craftsman who built furniture and buildings. His account book indicates he built houses for Timothy Swan, #99 High Street, Timothy Phelps #155 South Main Street, and David Tod #285 South Main Street and participated in the building of the Oliver Phelps addition on the Phelps Hatheway House #55 South Main Street.

**Eliphalet King** (1742-1821) was born in Suffield. He was a builder who also made a considerable amount of furniture. The fine detail of the corner cupboards in the houses he built, the King House Museum at #232 South Main Street and #309 Mapleton Avenue, shows his fine craftsmanship.

**John C. Mead** (1840-1889) was born in Suffield and is credited with building 40 to 50 churches in Connecticut. He built the present 1<sup>st</sup> Congregational Church in the Romesque Revival style and the Henry P. Knox House at #264 South Main Street in the Second Empire style.

**Henry A. Sykes** (1810-1860) was born in Suffield and trained with Ithiel Town, an architect in New Haven. He designed buildings in Western Massachusetts including work at Amherst College where he received an honorary degree for his work. In Suffield, he is noted for designing the 1835 rendition of the 1<sup>st</sup> Congregational Church which was replaced by the present Congregational Church building designed by Mead in 1869. Sykes also built the current 2<sup>nd</sup> Baptist Church in 1840.

This Suffield Walking Tour was compiled by Jackie Hemond for Suffield's Economic Development Commission and the Suffield Historical Society, using material from these sources.

Lester Smith's *A Tour on Main Street, Suffield, Connecticut*

The National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the Suffield Main Street Historic District

<https://lostnewengland.com/>

<https://buildingsofnewengland.com/>

<https://historicbuildingsct.com/>