

**HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL  
RESOURCES INVENTORY FOR THE TOWN OF  
WILTON, CONNECTICUT  
Phase II**

Project Historians

**Stacey Vairo**

Scheller Preservation Associates, LLC.

**Lucas Karmazinas**

FuturePast Preservation

Project Director

**Mary Dunne**

*Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer*

Sponsors

**State of Connecticut**

Dannel P. Malloy

*Governor*

**Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office**

Mary Dunne

*State Historic Preservation Officer*

Wilton Historical Society

*Kim Mellin and Allison Sanders, Co-Directors*

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## Acknowledgements

The successful completion of a Historic Resources Inventory requires a collaborative effort between the professional hired to complete the task and the people who live, work and study within the town for which the survey is undertaken. The research team thanks the people of Wilton for allowing us to access your properties and for all of the knowledge that you shared with us about your homes. The collaboration inherently necessitates the contributions of many people, without whose insight and expertise this project would not be possible. Most notably Carol and Robert Russell, who shared their invaluable knowledge of Wilton's history. In addition to being long-time residents Carol and Bob continue to volunteer their time to the history room of the Wilton Public Library. Together they have amassed a tremendous collection both on paper and in ready knowledge that they easily and very generously shared. Former First Selectman Russell also wrote the definitive history of the town *Wilton Connecticut: Three Centuries of People, Places and Progress* and it is from this text that much of the history included in this report was gathered. We want to make a special mention of the staff of the Dodd Center at the University of Connecticut, who helped the researchers record hundreds of original photographs from the 1989 survey document. A debt of gratitude is also owed to staff and volunteers of the Wilton Historical Society Allison Sanders, Leslie Nolan, Janet Foster, Virginia Benin, Nick Foster; and to Mary Dunne, State Historic Preservation Office project director. Finally, a note of thanks to the many homeowners who reached out with information during the survey process and granted us permission to photograph their properties.

The research team has endeavored to generate an updated narrative history document and individual property forms that are as up-to-date and accurate as possible. This does not, however, preclude the value or need for additional data or corrections. Anyone with further information, including historic photos, corrections, or associated material related to any one of the subject properties, is encouraged to contact the Wilton Historical Society at 224 Danbury Road, Wilton, CT 06897. They can also be reached at [info@wiltonhistorical.org](mailto:info@wiltonhistorical.org).

Resource inventories are based primarily on the format applied in the *Historic Preservation in Connecticut* series, compiled by the Connecticut Historical Commission (since replaced by the State Historic Preservation Office). The template for this study was provided by the State Historic Preservation Office and drawn from the *Historical and Architectural Resource Survey of Simsbury, Connecticut*, prepared in April 2010 by Lucas Karmazinas of *FuturePast Preservation*.

Stacey Vairo and  
Lucas Karmazinas  
Scheller Preservation Associates, LLC.

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## I. Introduction

In the fall of 2016, the Wilton Historical Society applied for, and received, a grant from the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office for the preparation of an update to the existing Historic Resources Inventory completed in 1989. The update, also known as a Phase II Survey, includes the digitization of approximately 315 existing forms included in the original survey as well as the creation of approximately 150 new forms. The new forms include approximately twenty properties not included in the original survey and 130 new properties constructed between 1920 and 1940. This report contains the results of the study, prepared between June 2017 and December 2017. The expectation was that this survey would enrich the town's historical record and supplement the body of information previously compiled by the original survey completed in 1989 by Mary E. McCahon. The original survey of the town included buildings located throughout the town and did not include an extensive narrative history of the town. This project struggled to winnow the number of significant houses down to just 150 and it is recommended that additional surveys continue to document some of the town's lesser known resources.

This report follows the format found in the National Park Service publication, *Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning: National Register Bulletin #24*, and as identified by Connecticut's Statewide Historic Resources Inventory Update. It includes a historic and architectural overview illustrating the development of the survey area and commenting on its importance relative to the larger narrative of the town's history – in this case focusing on the time period of 1920 to 1940. It includes an individual inventory form for each resource surveyed identifying its historical and architectural significance. Additional sections highlight those resources potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, as well as those noteworthy for their connection to the history of women and minorities.

A primary objective of this survey was to identify and document the historic significance and integrity of the included structures. This was done to acknowledge the historic value of the resources in the survey area as well as to supplement the town's historic record. Extensively documented and adequately preserved historic resources are often limited to those related to notable figures, or are those that are the oldest or most architecturally detailed. Historic Resource Inventory studies, however, allow for a broad analysis of the resources in a survey area and help to draw out those that may have been overlooked or undervalued. In the simplest of terms, the Historic Resource Inventory represents the best examples of a town's historic buildings, structures, and sites, thus allowing for the recognition of a diverse body of resources.

Historic Resource Inventories play an important role in various governmental planning processes and allow both the town planning departments and the State Historic Preservation Office to identify state and federal projects that might impact historic resources. Well-preserved built environments contribute to an area's quality of life and municipalities benefit directly from efforts to maintain the unique makeup and aesthetic diversity of their historic neighborhoods. Historic Resource Inventories help to reduce the demolition of significant buildings, increase local infrastructure investment, and facilitate economic development by informing local governments and populations of the quality and character of their built environment, and by aiding in its protection and preservation. Historic structures gain their significance from the role they have played in the community and from the value the community places on them as a result. It is hoped that this Historic Resource Inventory will serve to increase appreciation of Wilton's historic resources and in turn encourage their preservation.

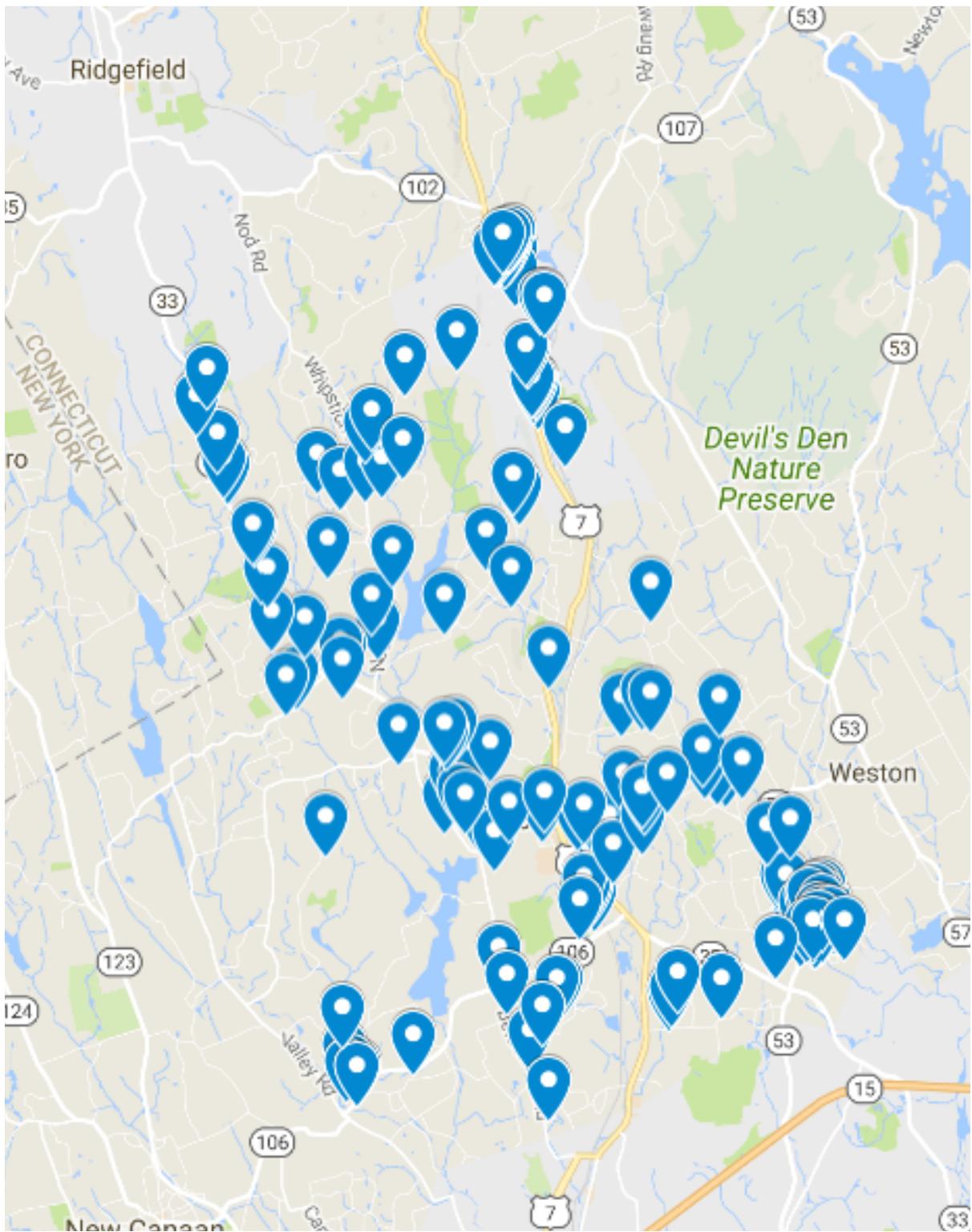


Figure 1. Map of Wilton and location of resources included in the inventory.

## **II. Methodology**

### **The Survey**

This survey of historic and architectural resources in the Town of Wilton, Connecticut was conducted by Scheller Preservation Associates, LLC, based in Woodbury, Connecticut. The principal architectural historians for the project were Stacey Vairo of Woodbury, Connecticut and Lucas Karmazinas of Hartford, Connecticut. Fieldwork, photo documentation, research, and writing were carried out between June and September of 2017. Copies of the final report and survey forms are deposited at the Wilton Historical Society, Wilton Library, and the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office, 450 Columbus Boulevard (Suite 5) Hartford, Connecticut, 06103. Copies of the report and survey forms will also be deposited by the State Historic Preservation Office at the Connecticut State Library in Hartford, and the Special Collections Department of the Dodd Research Center at the University of Connecticut in Storrs.

The majority of information needed to complete this Historic Resource Inventory was gathered through a “windshield” survey. This involved documenting each historic resource from the exterior and supplementing it with other public data, such as town tax assessor’s records. Additional information was gathered from the files and maps located in the Public History Room of the Wilton Library and from census records and historic directories. Neither the form, nor the survey in general, dictates what homeowners can do with their property nor does the included information violate the privacy of those whose property is included. For those homeowners who might be concerned about the implications of the survey, a review of the Historic Resource Inventory form demonstrates the public nature of the information included. Data collected includes: verification of street number and name; use; accessibility (public vs. private); style of construction; approximate date of construction (to be compared with assessor’s information); construction materials and details; condition of the resource; character of the surrounding environment; description of the resource; and exterior photographs.

### **The Surveyed Properties**

This Phase II Survey focused on capturing several properties not included in an earlier survey, this completed in 1989, and approximately 130 additional properties built between 1920 and 1940. The resources are geographically spread throughout Wilton and represent all of the town’s notable residential areas. According to the Town Assessor’s records, there were over 400 residences constructed between 1920 and 1940. Given the incredibly high number of resources that qualify for inclusion, the surveyed properties were chosen based on architectural style and level of integrity. The best representations of the most commonly found architectural styles were included, while lesser examples, or those with alterations, such as modern siding or replacement windows, were excluded. It is anticipated that subsequent surveys will need to be undertaken in the future to capture remaining structures throughout town that still merit recognition, but were not able to be included in this survey.

The Wilton Historic Resources Inventory survey area is a collection of extant period architecture set in a semi-rural environment. The identified resources illustrate the width and breadth of Wilton’s developmental history, beginning with the construction of rural New England Farmhouses and Cape Cod-style cottages during the 18th century. As the town transitioned into a self-sufficient agricultural center based largely around small mills and farms dotting the landscape during the mid-to-late 19th century, Federal and Greek Revival styles came into favor. During this time, the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Manufacturing Company plant began operations in town as well, this spurring the development of the town’s Georgetown neighborhood. The arrival of the rail line during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century brought improved communications and transportation of goods in and out of the town and resulted in the construction of small centers formed around depots at Cannondale, Wilton Center and South Wilton. As roads improved and automobiles began to replace public transportation, Wilton became a place for both seasonal residents and commuters. The Colonial Revival style flourished during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century along with some Tudor Revival examples. These building styles evoked the character of the many surrounding historic properties, while also allowing for the introduction of modern conveniences. Slightly later in the first half of the 20th century, variations of the Modern style could be found in Wilton. The resources chosen for this survey include an array of examples directly reflecting these developmental patterns and they illustrate the

wide variety of architectural styles applied to residential architecture. It should be noted that the majority of the town's institutional, administrative and commercial structures have been recorded as part of the Phase I Survey.

## Criteria for Selection

The Historic and Architectural Resources Inventory for the Town of Wilton, Connecticut was conducted in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Identification and Evaluation* (National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1983). The methodological framework was drawn from the National Park Service publication, *Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning; National Register Bulletin #24* Derry, Jandle, Shull, and Thorman, National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1977; Parker, revised 1985).

The criteria employed for the evaluation of properties were based on those of the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service under the supervision of the Secretary of the Interior. Properties recognized by the National Register include districts, structures, buildings, objects, and sites that are significant in American history, architecture, engineering, archaeology, and culture, and which contribute to the understanding of the states and the nation as a whole. The National Register's criteria for evaluating the significance of resources and/or their eligibility for nomination are determined by the following:

The quality of significance in American History, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess the integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and:

- A. that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history, or;
- B. that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past, or;
- C. that embody the distinctive characteristics of type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a distinctive and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction, or;
- D. that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important to prehistory or history.<sup>1</sup>

The focus area of this survey was houses constructed between 1920 and 1940. to include approximately 20 properties that were not included in the original survey, completed in 1989. The above criteria formed the basis for evaluating the buildings in this survey, however these parameters were also broadened to identify resources associated with individuals or events significant to Wilton's history, or those structures that displayed vernacular styles or methods of construction typical of the period in which they were built. Not all of the resources identified by this inventory have been judged to be eligible for individual inclusion on the National Register; however, several individual structures and small clusters of buildings are representative of Wilton's developmental and social history, and, as such, should be considered worthy of National Register recognition as historic districts. Those resources determined to be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, either individually or as part of historic districts, will be discussed later in the *Recommendations* section.

Historic Resource Inventories are often prepared by focusing on the oldest resources in a survey area. These are evaluated relative to the period in which they originated and are unified within the requisite overview study according to the chronology of the area's development. In this survey an effort was made to capture the best representative structures built between the years of 1920 and 1940. This was for a historically significant span of time in Wilton as it represented a period of extensive growth and a shift from rural farming community to semi-rural suburban enclave. Rather than trace the development of the town from its inception and then evolution into ten rather distinct neighborhoods, as was

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<sup>1</sup> *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation; National Register Bulletin #15*, By the staff of the National Register of Historic Places, finalized by Patrick W. Andrus, edited by Rebecca H. Shrimpton, (National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1990; revised 1991, 1995, 1997).

completed during the Phase I survey in 1989, this project sought to uncover the development of Wilton as a cohesive town that began to flourish in the years between the World Wars.

The resources are geographically distributed throughout the town due to the fact that as former farm lots were divided and early subdivisions were constructed, the building density increased at a steady pace. Some of these early developments, such as Chestnut Hill, may be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. During early part of the twentieth century, commercial development also began to replace residential buildings along Danbury Road. The steady improvement of the Town's roadways and construction of the nearby Merritt Parkway meant further residential and commercial development resulted in an effort to accommodate commuters. Approximately 150 new resources were selected for this study, these ranging in the period, style, and method of their construction. Although some possess alterations, most notably additions to the original block of the house, all retain the majority of their historic character, features, and form. Those that lost all significance due to extensive changes were removed from the survey list.

### **III. The Historic Resource Inventory Form**

A Historic Resource Inventory form was prepared for each historic resource surveyed. These were completed following a standard electronic document (.pdf format) created by the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office, the state agency responsible for historic preservation. Each form is divided into three main sections. These provide background, architectural, and historical information on the resource, and include; their street number and name, owner(s), type of use, style of construction, approximate date of construction, construction materials and details, physical condition of the resource, character of the surrounding environment, description of the resource, architect/builder (if known), exterior photographs, and historical narrative. A continuation sheet containing the bulk of the narrative text for each property and a photograph was also drafted in Word (.doc) format so that it can be easily updated by staff of the Wilton Historical Society as needed. These Word documents have also been converted to .pdf docs for easy uploading on a web site or transfer to building owners if requested.

Much of the information in this inventory was gathered from town Assessor's records between May 2017 and October 2017. Architectural descriptions were drafted from exterior photographs taken during this same period and the historical narratives were based on archival research. The majority of the fields on the Historic Resource Inventory form should be self-explanatory; however, the following is an elucidation of several of the more nebulous categories.

#### **Historic Name**

In many cases the historic name of a resource serves as an indicator of its historical significance. When referring to public or commercial buildings, churches, social halls, etc., a historic name is based upon a structure's earliest known use and is typically straightforward. In the case of residential buildings things become a bit more complicated. Homes that sheltered the same family for a number of generations typically carry the surname of this family as their historic name; however, those homes that frequently changed hands or were rental properties are difficult to classify in this manner.

#### *A Note on Exterior Visibility*

Homes built in the 18th and 19th centuries tended to be placed close to roadways and therefore easily accessible to photograph for the first Phase of the survey. Given the time period that is the focus of this study (1920-1940), houses tended to be sited with privacy in mind. Landscaping and fencing is also used to screen many of the homes from the street. In such cases where photographs were not possible a letter was sent requesting permission to photograph the house from the driveway. When permission was not granted, a combination of Bing, Google Maps and Wilton Town Assessor images were used to create the description.

#### **Interior Accessibility**

This was a survey of exterior features and all of the resources studied were private buildings. As such, access to the interior of these structures was not requested of the owners, nor was it necessary. In some instances, owners reached out to the consultant team to offer a tour of a building's interior or provided interior photographs of significant architectural features. Those cases are included in this study but are not the norm.

## Style

A building's style was characterized according to its earliest stylistic influences and regardless of later alterations or additions. Descriptions were based upon accepted terminology laid out in *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia and Lee McAlester (Alfred A Knopf: New York, 1984) and *American Houses; A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home* by Gerald Foster (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 2004). The most commonly applied architectural styles are described below. Many of the resources surveyed did not fall into a specific category as they lack the necessary attributes. These were simply classified as "vernacular." Such a term indicates construction typical of the period, yet lacking in many of the details and flourishes that would link it to a particular architectural style.

*Cape Cod Cottage (1690-1800, locally to c.1825)* – This New England style was tremendously popular during the colonial and early national periods and generally resembles a condensed version of the New England Farmhouse. Designed to withstand the harsh and unpredictable weather of the Atlantic Seaboard, these homes were compact, strong, and easier to build and move than their larger counterparts. Typically one to one-and-a-half stories in height, with a side-gabled roof and centered entry and chimney, variations range from balanced five-bay facades to "half-" and "three-quarter house" examples. Sheathing materials included horizontal board siding or clapboards, this largely determined by geography and climate, and early homes generally lacked decorative detailing. Later examples increasing incorporated Federal or Greek Revival influences as determined by local trends.

*New England Farmhouse (1690-1790, locally to c.1860)* – Development of the two-story New England Farmhouse followed the evolution of Postmedieval building patterns in the American colonies starting around 1700. Increasing prosperity and populations led to a greater demand for larger and more refined homes than the English cottages and Saltboxes that preceded them, the latter aspiration resulting in the prevalence of the Renaissance influences which largely categorized the style. Such homes were typically one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half stories in height, with rectangular footprints, symmetrical facades, centered entryways and chimneys, side-gabled roofs, and at times Federal or Georgian decorative details, particularly in the door surrounds. They were sheathed with narrow horizontal board siding and fenestration consisted of 12-over-12, nine-over-nine, or six-over-nine sash. Vernacular examples persisted in generally rural areas long after the style had been supplanted by others, including, most notably, Federal and Greek Revival forms. More elaborate examples of New England Farmhouses from this period are frequently referred to as being of the Georgian style, as if often the case in this survey.

*Federal (1780-1820, locally to c.1860)* – The Federal style shared most of the essential form of the New England Farmhouse and Georgian homes, however buildings from the Federal period relied much more heavily on elaborate Roman classical detailing and ornamentation. This was principally concentrated around the entry and window openings, and included detailed porticos and door surrounds, leaded semicircular or elliptical fanlights, entry-flanking sidelights, Palladian windows, keystone lintels, and classical columns and pilasters. Fenestration typically consisted of six-over-six double-hung sash, although other arrangements can be found, particularly in vernacular interpretations of the style.

*Greek Revival (1825-1880)* – Homes patterned in the Greek Revival style were most pervasive between 1825 and 1860, and as the name suggests, drew from the architecture of ancient Greece. Houses of this style have shallow pitched or hipped roofs, often with detailed cornices and wide trim bands. Fenestration consists of double-hung sash, tripartite, and at times, frieze band windows. Entry or full-width porches are common, typically supported by classical columns. Sidelights, transoms, pilasters, and heavy lintels often decorate doorways. Not limited to domestic applications, examples of the Greek Revival can be found in religious, commercial, and public buildings.

*Gothic Revival (1840-1880)* – The Gothic Revival style is based on the architecture of medieval England. Resurgent forms gained popularity in that country during the eighteenth century before appearing in the United States in the 1830s. The style's definitive characteristics include steeply-pitched roofs with steep cross gables, wall surfaces and windows

extending into the gables, Gothic-inspired (typically arched) windows, and one-story porches. Decorative elements include intricate bargeboards in the gables, and detailed hoods over the windows and doors. This style was not very popular in Wilton given the decline in population and general lack of construction that took place during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

*Vernacular Victorian (1860-1910)* – The buildings classified as Vernacular Victorian are those which demonstrate an amalgam of the architectural styles popular during the Victorian period (roughly 1860-1910). These included Stick (1860-c.1890), Queen Anne (1880-1910), Shingle (1880-1900), and Folk Victorian (c. 1870-1910) designs. While vernacular manifestations lack the intricate details of the high-style buildings they reference, shared features include rectangular plans, and front-facing pitched roofs, and one-story porches. Windows are typically double-hung sash and doors are wood paneled. Again, few houses were built during this time period in Wilton and therefore examples are limited.

*Colonial Revival (1880-1955)* – This style gained popularity towards the end of the nineteenth century before becoming the most ubiquitous architectural form of the first half of the twentieth century. Many manifestations of this style emerged, most sharing influences derived from early American, or Colonial architecture, such as Georgian, Federal, and Dutch Colonial buildings. Houses of this type commonly have rectangular plans, and hipped, pitched, or gambrel roofs. Decorative features mimic classical models and include elaborate porticos or porches. Double-hung sash and multipane, symmetrically-placed, windows are common, as are sidelight-flanked entries. The Foursquare is a variation on this type. In Wilton the style tends to be expressed in larger Georgian buildings that have eclectic details. There are many fine examples of Colonial Revival styles, most notably those designed by local architects such as Frazier Peters and Nelson Breed.

*Tudor Revival (1890-1940)* – This style is loosely based on early English building traditions dating more precisely from the late Medieval Period. Most examples have high-pitched gabled roofs and elaborate chimneys. Defining characteristics include stucco, brick or stone cladding, half-timbering, and round-arched doorways with heavy board-and-batten doors. Windows tend to be smaller casements or double-hung sash and are often grouped in strings of three or more. The style first became popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and was used for large-scale architect-designed buildings. Later Tudor examples tended to be more modest with symmetrical facades embellished with Tudor elements. They faded in popularity in the 1930s and had a slight resurgence in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

*Craftsman/Bungaloid (1910-1930)* – The Craftsman, or “Arts and Crafts,” style has origins in English architecture, however the form came into its own through the work of architects Charles and Henry Green, who practiced in California during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Characteristically one-and-a-half-stories in height, the bungalows popularized by the Greene’s typically had rubble or cobblestone foundations and chimneys, low-pitched roofs extending over full-width one-story porches, widely overhanging eaves, exposed rafter tails, and bracketed eave lines. A variety of dormer arrangements are common, as are heavy columns or piers supporting the porch. While high-style examples are relatively rare, the form was popularized through a variety of publications and was widely available in pre-cut kits including lumber and detailing. As such, most homes of this style are perhaps best classified as “Bungaloid,” rather than as fully developed Craftsman-style forms.

*Spanish Eclectic (1915-1940)* – Prior to 1920, these buildings were considered adaptations of the Mission style. The Spanish Eclectic style was popularized by the Panama-California Exposition, which took place in San Diego, California in 1913. Organizer Bertram Grosvenor Godhue was a proponent and student of Spanish Colonial architecture and hoped to spread awareness of the styles origins beyond the Mission style. The style was most popular in the southwestern United States and in Florida, where the style is pervasive. It is characterized by Moorish, Gothic and Mission decorative elements including cross-gabled roofs covered in clay tiles, arched doorways emphasized by often elaborate surrounds and focal windows that range from tripartite, arched assemblies including balconets to squared casements. The style was most popular during the 1920s and was fell out of favor by 1940,

*International/Modern (1925-present)* – This relatively rare residential style came into being during the period between the two World Wars. Popularized by Le Corbusier in France and Mies van der Rohe in Germany, it sought to erase historic precedent in order to use modern materials to place function above form. In Corbusier’s words the house was “a machine for living.” The style is characterized by flat roofs, asymmetrical facades and windows that are set flush with the exterior walls. Large banks of windows are common as are unconventional building products such as a steel structural frame and

hung curtain walls. Locally the Modern style was popularized by the “Harvard five” Marcel Breuer, Eliot Noyes, John Johansen, Landis Gores and Philip Johnson. Many of their houses can be found throughout Fairfield County particularly in neighboring New Canaan.

### **Date of Construction/Dimensions**

Dates of original construction are based on the Town of Wilton’s Assessor’s records, architectural and historical evidence, and archival research. House plaques were also taken into consideration for this survey and were used as a basis for research when dealing with the group of older houses not included in the original survey. In cases where the date listed by the Assessor’s office or house plaque seemed questionable, and a specific date could not be found through historical research, a circa (c.) precedes the year indicated. This evaluation is an educated guess based upon the structure’s architectural detail, construction methods, and information gleaned from archival sources, including maps and atlases. The Wilton Assessor’s records were also used to confirm and/or determine the dimensions of buildings and to support the survey of materials used in construction.

### **Condition**

Condition assessments were based on a visual investigation of the exterior of inventoried structures. It was not possible to give a detailed assessment of the structural condition of the resources, as extensive and interior assessments could not be conducted. Buildings listed as being in “good” condition lack any glaring structural problems. Those listed as “fair” had problems, including badly peeling paint, cracked siding and windows, or damaged roofs, which if left unattended, could result in serious damage. “Deteriorated” indicates severe exterior problems and neglect.

### **Other Notable Features of Building or Site**

While many of the preceding fields list the basic details of a resource’s construction, specifically the style, original date, materials, structural system, roof type, and size, this category allows the surveyor to elaborate on a structure’s other architectural qualities. In the case of this survey it typically included a building’s orientation relative to the street, its floor plan (i.e. square, rectangular, or irregular), height, roof structure and materials, window types, wall cladding, and porch details. As the state does not expect inventories of this nature to address the interiors of private buildings, no such descriptions were compiled or included. This field also allowed the surveyor to comment on any substantial alterations made to a resource.

### **Historical or Architectural Importance**

Assessing the historical significance of each resource required detailed archival research. The methods applied varied, depending upon the information available for each structure, but did not include a complete chain of title research for each resource. Census records, maps, and atlases typically revealed the information necessary to confirm the dates given in the Assessor’s records, or as was the case with many structures, provide a different, yet more accurate, date of construction. This research also served to build a socio-historical narrative for each structure. These highlight the relationship between the building and its users and demonstrate each resource’s relevance to the development of the community. Deed research was outside the scope of this evaluation, but the information provided may serve as a starting point for further research.

This field also contains information indicating how a particular resource exemplifies architectural qualities characteristic of a certain style or period, if pertinent. Architectural significance is assessed by evaluating a structure’s historical integrity. This is determined by judging whether it retains the bulk of its original material, if contributes to the historic character of the area, or if it is representative of an architect’s work, an architectural trend, or a building period. Although many homes have been modified in some way, unless drastic alterations have been made, a building is likely to retain much of its historic character.

## **IV. Historical and Architectural Overview**

### **Plan of the Town and Early Architecture**

The houses of Wilton's first settlers were laid out along a series of rudimentary roadways that ran in a north-south direction linking Danbury to Norwalk. Unlike other towns, such as Norwalk to the south, Wilton developed around a series of crossroads rather than a town center. There were no assigned long lots laid out in a concentrated area; instead, the earliest settlement and house construction took place along the roads connecting Norwalk and Danbury – Danbury Road (now Route 7), Old Mill and Umpawaug roads. Most of these structures were recorded as part of the Town of Wilton's Phase I Historic Resource Inventory survey completed by Mary McCahon in 1989. Other areas of early concentrated development, Georgetown and Cannondale, grew up around the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Manufacturing Company factory and a railroad crossing, respectively. Since there was very little large-scale industry in town, and no industrial center, only a few examples of worker housing exist in the area and most have been well documented as part of the Georgetown Historic District. These areas have both been extensively studied as part of previous National Register nominations and therefore have been excluded from this study.

The scope of this Phase II survey consisted of identifying the houses built throughout Wilton between 1920 and 1940. The Colonial Revival is by far the most dominant residential style built during the period, these intermixed with numerous examples of Craftsman, Tudor Revival and Modern forms. The architectural resources in Wilton are generally fewer than three stories in height, and of wood, or stone construction. Houses built during this period tend to be set back farther from the road than those erected earlier. Many are placed on plots of land that were subdivided from large estates or farms. Over time, the development of Wilton's historic resources reflects a shift from rural agricultural town to bedroom community for prosperous city dwellers and artists drawn to Wilton's rural beauty and historic housing stock. As a result, architecture dating from the period of study tends to pay homage to Wilton's architectural past. Construction dating from this period often mimicked the Colonial building tradition with some faithful copies of early Colonial homes.

Concentrations of houses from the subject time period can be found in areas such as Own Home Avenue, Chestnut Hill, Drum Hill, and East and West Meadow Roads – all of which were subdivided during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Danbury Road developed as the commercial spine of the town during this period; however, considerable residential construction also took place along this corridor. Wilton Center contains commercial structures that generally date from the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, as such, these are not evaluated in this study. Properties were chosen based on their representative styles and level of integrity. Houses that have significant alterations or additions that obscure the original building form were excluded. Several properties excluded from the Phase I survey were included in this iteration but are

outside of the subject time period. Great care was undertaken to include as many representative sites as possible, but it is assumed that subsequent surveys will be undertaken to capture the remaining historic sites and structures.

## **The Lay of the Land**

The Town of Wilton, Connecticut lies at the southern end of Western Uplands, a region of Connecticut that extends from Washington in the northwest corner, to Bristol in the southeast and Wilton in the southwest. It includes 33 towns in four counties and lies between the Central Valley, Northwest Highlands and Western Coastal Slope regions. Wilton is one of a small group of towns within the Western Uplands that maintains a rural character or “feel” while still supporting some commercial areas.<sup>i</sup>

The topography of Wilton is typical of other towns in northern Fairfield County - a series of low ridges run from north to south between the Huckleberry Hills on the west and Sturges Ridge on the east. Several streams, including the East Branch of the Silvermine River, Comstock Brook, Spectacle Brook and the larger Norwalk River, are found between these ridges, eventually merging and emptying into Long Island Sound at Norwalk. The north-south ridges were formed during the Cenozoic Period when a process known as the Tertiary Uplift occurred. Connecticut’s land mass tilted upward along an even incline resulting in the elevation of Connecticut’s northwest corner.<sup>ii</sup> This “uplift” accelerated the movement of streams throughout the state and created the characteristic hills and valleys that remain today. Within the region, these series of north-south ridges facilitated road construction and therefore travel in a north-south direction, while it impeded movement from east to west. Glaciation over the course of several ice ages deposited rock and soil along the landscape. Wilton’s rocky soil spotted with large boulders is a remnant of this process, as are the stone walls that were built as fields were cleared.

Streets Pond and the South Norwalk Reservoirs are the two largest bodies of water in town and both were created as reservoirs to provide drinking water for the surrounding community of Norwalk. The South Norwalk Reservoir was created first in 1890 and the Streets Pond later in 1930. The land was long ago cleared of any native forest, but when the first English settlers arrived it was blanketed with native chestnut, pine and oak. These forests were cleared for building material and burned to create agricultural fields.

## **Norwalk and the Founding of Wilton Parish, 1640 -1781**

### **Foreign Shores and Native Americans**

Prior to 1726, when Wilton was granted charter to become its own parish, the history of English settlement in the area is shared with that of Norwalk. In April of 1640, Captain Daniel Patrick of the Connecticut Colony purchased land between the Five Mile River and Norwalk River from local sachems Mahackem, Naramake and Pemenate Hewnompom.<sup>iii</sup> On February 26, 1641, Connecticut Magistrate Roger Ludlow purchased “all lands between the two rivers [the Saugatuck and Norwalk] from the sea a day’s walk into the country”<sup>iv</sup> from a local sachem of the Norwalke tribe known as Mahackmo.<sup>v</sup> Ludlow took control of Patrick’s holdings shortly after he was murdered in 1644.<sup>vi</sup>

A group of “River Men” from Hartford, Wethersfield and Windsor led by Richard Olmstead and Nathaniel Ely purchased Ludlow’s land in June of 1650 for the sum of 15 pounds. They were granted permission by the Connecticut Colony to establish a settlement if they could find 30 families to settle the land and enlist a Congregationalist clergyman to lead the local Parish. The early settlers were all born in England and included surnames such as Keeler, Betts, Fitch and Ketchum.<sup>vii</sup>

The first settlement on Ludlow’s former land was in East Norwalk along what is now Fort Point Street and East Avenue. Northern land was cheap but remained empty due to the fact that roads were poor and attendance at Sunday church services was required by law. The Norwalk proprietors controlled all government affairs, including the job of dividing lands. As a result, the process was slow and deliberate.<sup>viii</sup>

At the time of English settlement, there were 12 Native American groups living in southern New England, all of whom belonged to the Algonquin language group. The Norwalke Indians were a subgroup of the Siwony people who inhabited portions of Fairfield and Westchester counties in Connecticut and New York, respectively. These tribes shared common ancestors who arrived in the region sometime after 1000 AD.<sup>ix</sup> All were hunter-gatherers who moved often throughout the year in order to make the best use of seasonal resources and they paid tribute to the Mohawks of the Iroquois Confederation in neighboring New York State.<sup>x</sup>

Throughout the 1670s, the early colonists continued to interact with the local Native Americans – mostly in the form of negotiating planting rights.<sup>xi</sup> Following King Philip’s War in 1675-1676, relations between the Colonial and Native American populations appear to have broken down and a watch was established by the colonists. But, as in the rest of Connecticut, by the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Native American population had been decimated by illness and survivors were pushed out of their traditional hunting and fishing lands.

### **Early Settlement and the Creation of Wilton Parish**

The first push to assign Norwalk's undivided lands came in January of 1676 when the proprietors voted to reward soldiers of King Philip's War with up to 12 acres of land in return for their service.<sup>xii</sup> By 1700, two-thirds of the land in what is now Wilton was privately owned by the Norwalk proprietors and their heirs, but there were still no permanent residents. Jonathon Wood became the first permanent settler in 1706. Wood was a weaver from Long Island who settled above Pimpewaug at a site now occupied by the house at 555 Danbury Road.<sup>xiii</sup> Much of northwest Wilton, however, remained common land until 1738.<sup>xiv</sup>

Early settlement of Wilton Parish followed no particular pattern. There were no long lots as there were in lower Norwalk and no town green. Rather, land was divided on an as-needed basis by the Norwalk proprietors to those who already lived in Norwalk, and who were searching for more space, or to outsiders (usually from towns such as Lebanon and Litchfield, Connecticut) who sought a new life in Wilton. The rest were mainly from other towns in New England and were of English Heritage, specifically from East Anglia.<sup>xv</sup> The Keeler, Abbott, Birchard and Hickox families were among this group of early residents.

Benjamin Hickox started a grist mill on Comstock Brook behind the Congregational Church (located at the northeast corner of what is now Ridgefield Road and Lover's Lane) It was built ca. 1711-1723 and operated until the 1890s. It was finally taken down after the Hurricane of 1938.<sup>xvi</sup> Hickox was one of the founders of the Wilton Congregational Church and was the one of the first individuals to be buried in Sharp Hill Cemetery.<sup>xvii</sup> The Abbott family settled on Chestnut Hill in the 1710s.<sup>xviii</sup> David Lambert and wife Lurany Bill from Lebanon, Connecticut, built a house at 150 Danbury Road in 1727. Lambert went on to serve as a Norwalk Selectman by 1745.<sup>xix</sup> Members of the Betts family, descended from Thomas Betts, built houses along Danbury Road around 1724 and John and Matthew St. John built a sawmill on Falls Branch of the Comstock Brook in 1727.<sup>xx</sup>

Homes were built on or near the oldest roads to Danbury throughout the 1730s and 1740s (Old Mill Road and Umpawaug, which dated from before settlement). The roads running through what is now Wilton to Ridgefield (now Belden's Hill Road and Drum Hill Road) were built by 1713. Other roads were constructed soon after to connect areas settled by the Norwalk proprietors. Many of Wilton's roads were laid out between 1740 and 1742 and are still in use today<sup>xxi</sup>. Some examples include Chicken Street, Chestnut Hill, Honey Hill and Sharp Hill roads. The northeast district of Georgetown was not connected via these early highways and, as a result, was one of the last areas to be settled, after Pimpewaug, Belden Hill and Chestnut Hill.

In 1726, 31 families petitioned the Connecticut General Court to establish a separate parish within Norwalk. At the time, Ridgefield was already established to the north; however, the areas comprising the future towns of Redding, New Canaan and Weston were not yet established.<sup>xxii</sup> The new parish was divided into three main areas - Kent or South Wilton, Belden's Hill and Pimpewaug. The source of the name Wilton is unknown, but it likely has English origins.<sup>xxiii</sup> On June 7, 1726, Wilton was granted parish status. A meeting house was built on the southside of Wolfpit Road on common land donated by the Norwalk proprietors. It was located between what is now Range Road and Route 7, near the geographic center of town, but there was no associated town green or center. Wolfpit Road was constructed to provide a

public road to the meeting house in 1727. Richard Bouton was named Parish Clerk and Reverend Robert Sturgeon was the first minister.<sup>xxiv</sup> A house lot was found for Sturgeon, who was originally from Scotland, on Danbury Road between what are now Gaylord Drive North and South. The townspeople built the minister a house there between 1726-1727 and it remained on that site until the 1930s<sup>xxv</sup>. The meeting house was described as a simple square building that could fit 150 people. At the first meetings, 42 people were seated according to wealth and position in the community, as was common practice.<sup>xxvi</sup> More than half of the Wilton Parish members came from the home church in Norwalk.

Despite these developments, most of land in Wilton was still held in common by the Proprietors. Common lands could be sold to buyers if they were approved by the town's "Proprietor's Committee," this founded in 1721.<sup>xxvii</sup> A decision was made in March of 1730 to dispose of all the common lands, but it wasn't until after the Revolution that the final accounting was made.<sup>xxviii</sup> Wilton was part of an area known as the Upper Division, which was divided after 1738.<sup>xxix</sup>

Wilton's population tripled between 1726 to 1770. The majority of these settlers came from Norwalk and were either new families or second-generation relatives of the Proprietors.<sup>xxx</sup> In 1770, the town was divided into northwest, southwest, southeast and northeast quadrants, with the southwest and its 62 households being the most populated. The northwest quadrant had 56 families; the northeast had 52; and the southeast had 33 residences.<sup>xxxi</sup>

## **Early Agriculture, Industry, and Trade**

Wilton's stony fields made farming difficult and often large areas of land were required to produce a successful crop. The earliest farmers were self-sufficient and grew potatoes alongside grains such as oats, rye, barley and buckwheat. Flax was also grown and sent to local mills to create finished linen. Apple trees were commonly kept for cider production. Oxen were used to work the fields and they were kept on common lands along with chickens, pigs and cows. Animals were identified by specialized ear notches for each family. Any stray animals were rounded up into communal animal pounds and then recollected.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Several mills operated along Wilton's waterways, the Norwalk River and the Comstock Brook, the latter also known as the Falls Branch. In 1723, a grist mill was built on the falls at Comstock Brook by Benjamin Hickox (this was taken down in 1938). He built a sawmill nearby along with partner Matthew St. John in 1725.<sup>xxxiii</sup> There were two more sawmills built in the same area around 1750 by Daniel Belden II and James Olmstead. By 1826, Aaron Chichester operated a mill along the Norwalk River in Pimpewaug to grind grist and flax and by 1856 it operated as a carding mill. Even later, it became a hoe factory and it is now the site of the Gregory's Saw Mill, which is still in operation (though no longer powered by water). A second sawmill on the Norwalk River was built in 1754 by Josiah Marvin and Nathan Hubbell Jr. north of Seeley Road.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Several other small mills were found along Comstock Brook and Spectacle Brook, and still others along the Silvermine River.<sup>xxxv</sup>

The Connecticut Code of 1650 required that every town contain at least one tavern run by an official tavernkeeper. He (for it was invariably a he) was required to provide food, lodging and a stable that could accommodate at least two horses.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The Lambert House was an early example of a Wilton tavern operated by David Lambert from 1748 to the 1760s.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Stephen and Nathan Betts also ran a tavern between 1731-1743 in Pimpewaug. Jeremiah Mead served as tavern keeper in 1741 at his establishment located at the corner of DeForest and Ridgefield roads. Given the importance of Danbury Road connecting Danbury with Norwalk, several were found along that main thoroughfare as well. One located at the corner of Kent and Danbury roads was operated by Daniel Betts, and the Marvin Tavern at 405 Danbury Road (listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1984) was run by Wilton's longest-serving tavern keeper, Matthew Marvin V, who held a license for 60 years beginning in 1762.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

## **Religion and Society**

From 1745 to 1750 the philosophies of the Great Awakening were spreading across New England. The religious revival started by Reverend Jonathan Edwards in England was taken up in America by the Reverend George Whitfield. Whitfield was an English evangelical preacher who traveled from Newport to Boston and across Connecticut preaching a doctrine of religious fundamentalism. Reaction to his strict doctrine created a schism between the "New Lights" and more traditional "Old Lights." The New Lights were more conservative and fundamental in their religious beliefs, but much more liberal politically.

The schism allowed many new churches to proliferate. In 1708, the Saybrook Platform, an accord reached by the most prominent church leaders at the time, created a more centralized church and a return to strict Puritanism. It led to a period of religious tolerance as those who disagreed with this strict doctrine left the church to explore other options. It also facilitated the growth of the Baptist Church in Connecticut.<sup>xxxix</sup>

In Wilton, there was some local religious upheaval as well. Within three years of his election, the townspeople of Wilton grew dissatisfied with Reverend Sturgeon and he was succeeded by Reverend William Gaylord, a strict Congregationalist who served until his death in 1767.<sup>xl</sup> In 1736, a new meeting house was built at the corner of Danbury and Sharp Hill Roads. This building was larger than the original square building and was rectangular instead of square in plan.<sup>xli</sup>

The town's first burial ground, which operated between 1726 to 1739, was located adjacent to the meeting house at Wolfpit Road, but the exact location is now lost.<sup>xlii</sup> In 1738, Sharp Hill Cemetery was established at the site of a new meeting house on Sharp Hill Road. It was expanded in 1755 and Mable Elmer is the name on the earliest legible gravestone, this dated January 25, 1744. Most of the early graves were fieldstones set on their edge.<sup>xliii</sup>

In 1714, the Connecticut Colony passed a law requiring every parish to have a school. In Wilton this took some time to accomplish – almost fifteen years, in fact. On December 4, 1728, the Wilton Society voted to establish a school

with the Congregationalist minister as the teacher. School tuition was initially directly contributed by parents. In 1730, the society voted to establish districts: Belden's Hill, Pimpewaug, Kent and Chestnut Hill. In 1738, two more were established at Buckingham Ridge (Hurlbutt Street) and Salt Pound Hill (Middlebrook). Initial schooling took place in private homes as no school houses were built until 1741.<sup>xliv</sup>

In 1774, the Connecticut General Assembly passed a law prohibiting the importation of slaves into the Connecticut Colony. Following the conclusion of the Revolutionary War in 1784, Connecticut began to pass laws granting emancipation to all slaves born after 1784 when they reached the age of 25. In 1797 the age of emancipation was lowered to 21.<sup>xlv</sup> Many of Wilton's most respected members of society kept slaves. The census of 1790 indicates that there were 12 slaves in Wilton in that year. By 1810, there were 16 captives in a total population of 1728 people. These men and women were owned by the Marvin, Middlebrook, St. John, Lambert and Belden Families. The Reverend Gaylord kept a black servant named Ham. The records of the Congregational Church indicate that a number of African-Americans were baptized between 1750 and 1760s.<sup>xlvi</sup>

## **The American Revolution**

Like many other Connecticut towns, the breakdown of political relations between the British and Colonial governments during the 1760s sparked anger and a call for rebellion amongst much of Wilton's population. Forced to help shoulder the mountain of debt that the British government had incurred during its wars with France, the Stamp Act of 1765 generated substantial anger among Wilton's residents. Injustices grew in the form of increased taxes and punitive trade laws. Regardless, many families in this part of Connecticut, and in Wilton itself, remained loyal to the Crown.

As tensions grew and war seemed inevitable, every town in the Connecticut Colony was required to establish and train a militia. The Wilton Society Committee organized the local militia and voted to train under the leadership of Lieutenant Nathaniel Ketchum, with Matthew St. John serving as Ensign. The Wilton Train Band, as it later came to be known, was designated the 7<sup>th</sup> Company of the 9th Regiment of the Connecticut Militia.<sup>xlvii</sup> In surrounding communities, like Redding, there was a strong Tory population that was loyal to King George III. In fact, Redding formally pledged allegiance to the King in 1775.<sup>xlviii</sup> In Wilton, there was also notable loyalty to the crown among the wealthier and more well-established classes (David Lambert and Samuel Belden were both Tories), but they were easily outnumbered by Patriots. Tories were reluctant to break with the British for fear of treason and because of their strong cultural and economic ties to Britain.<sup>xlix</sup> Several other individuals, such as Nathan Fitch and David Lambert, Jr., were listed as "inimical persons" with the Wilton Town Clerk.<sup>1</sup> Job Burlock's house was confiscated due to his loyalty to the Crown. When the war began he left for Long Island., but his former neighbors could not forget his loyalties and he was shot dead on his doorstep upon his return in 1783.<sup>li</sup>

Captain Mathew Mead took command of the first local company of men in Norwalk on May 1, 1775. Later that year, from September to December of 1775, he served as Captain of the Norwalk Company of the 5<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Regiment.<sup>liii</sup> This included 100 men, 31 of whom were from Wilton<sup>liiii</sup>. Mead was wounded on September 6, 1775, while fighting at the siege of St. John's in Canada. Seth Chase was Wilton's first casualty of the war and he was killed on October 12 of 1775. Wilton men served at the siege of Boston in January of 1779 and were eventually sent to New York to fortify the city under Captain Mead.<sup>liv</sup>

Thirty-six Wilton residents served in the 8<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Regiment of the Continental Army in January 1777.<sup>lv</sup> The Wilton Train Band, under the leadership of Captain Samuel Comstock, responded to Major General William Tryon's Raid on Danbury when the British landed at Compo Beach in Westport on April 25, 1777. Two days later, the Wilton militia engaged the British in the Battle of Ridgefield under Seth Abbott's command. After burning supplies in Danbury, the British passed along Ridgefield Road looting some houses along the way. They then detoured down Mill Road and found and destroyed 100 barrels of rum, arms, cartridges, tents and the bellows of a blacksmith that were hidden there. Tryon continued up Dudley Road where a skirmish with Continental Army troops took place on Chestnut Hill. Tryon then detoured again and crossed into Westport where he eventually reached Compo Beach and his boats. After this, shore towns remained more vigilant.<sup>lvi</sup> Colonel Matthew Mead was placed in charge of the defense of all towns west of New London. Tryon and his troops again struck Norwalk on July 11, 1774. They burned the town and many inhabitants fled to Wilton Parish and the surrounding towns.

As the war dragged on, Wilton men participated in the battle of Yorktown on October 19, 1781, a decisive turning point in the war.<sup>lvii</sup> In September 1783, the Peace of Paris was signed acknowledging the United States of America as an independent nation.<sup>lviii</sup> In all, Wilton sent 300 men to fight in the Revolution in Continental Army or Connecticut Militia units. Nineteen men died in battle or from disease during service, among them being men from the Betts, Gregory, Keeler and Olmstead families.<sup>lix</sup>

## **Post-Medieval Architecture**

The earliest houses built during the mid- to late-18th century were likely small, crude, and hastily constructed structures and surprisingly many have survived. However, the previous survey indicated that it is unlikely any houses built before 1740 survive, and if any do, it is likely that they have been incorporated into later residences. Despite this fact, the technology and techniques of construction applied in this area throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century were largely the same as those used decades earlier. This included hand-hewn and pit-sawn post-and-beam timber frames laid on quarried or fieldstone foundations, and having prominent central chimneys, clapboard siding, wood shingle roofs, and small multi-pane windows.

Examples of Saltbox-style homes in Wilton are few, while those that could be characterized as New England Farmhouses or Georgian-style homes were common even at an early date. Such homes were typically one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half stories in height, with rectangular footprints, symmetrical facades, centered entryways and chimneys, side-gabled roofs, and at times Georgian or Federal decorative details, particularly in the door surrounds. They were sheathed with narrow, horizontal board siding and fenestration consisted of 12-over-12, nine-over-nine, or nine-over-six sash. Vernacular examples persisted in rural areas long after the style had been supplanted by others, including, most notably, Federal and Greek Revival forms.

The best examples of this type in Wilton are the Lambert House at 150 Danbury Road (1724); The Fitch House, headquarters of the Wilton Historical Society, at 249 Danbury Road (1792); the Betts House at 224 Danbury Road (ca.1730) and the Davenport House at 108 Ridgefield Road (ca. 1791). New England Farmhouses typically feature flush eaves and were originally fitted with twelve-over-twelve windows, which were used well into the 1830s. They are most often arranged on a five-room plan with a central rear kitchen and a dog-leg staircase set against the chimney at the front entrance. Following the Revolution, the proportions of the New England Farmhouses changed slightly and took on more of a Georgian feel – rooms and window openings became larger and the ceilings higher. Most 18<sup>th</sup> century houses in Wilton postdate the American Revolution and the majority of these date from the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a time when Wilton’s population of successful and self-sufficient farmers grew and prospered.

Typically, one to one-and-a-half stories in height, with a side-gabled roof and centered entry and chimney, the Cape Cod Cottage was popular throughout New England due to its ease of construction and durability. Being smaller in scale than the Garrison and Saltbox Colonials that preceded them, Capes could be more easily constructed by fewer builders and their simple plans were highly versatile. Both characteristics meant that those who did not need, or could not afford, a fully-formed Cape could build a half of three-quarter manifestation and add on to it later. Another version, the “raised Cape,” was achieved by simply raising the corner posts of the building, typically from eight, to ten or 12 feet. This increased the amount of space in the attic, thus making it more accommodating for use as a sleeping area and allowed for a proper boxed staircase to be added in order to provide access to the upper story.<sup>lx</sup>

Good examples of early Capes are found at 229 Olmstead Hill Road (ca. 1790), 516 Danbury Road (ca. 1790) and 12 New Canaan Road (the James-Gilbert House, ca. 1800). The Cape was the most popular house form in Wilton and it is common to find them built well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These tend to have been “updated: with later Federal or Greek Revival details, but the core form of the one to one-and-a-half-story, central chimney form typically remains intact.

## **The Early Industrial Period, 1781-1865**

### **Wilton Becomes a Town**

During the late-18<sup>th</sup> and early-to-mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Connecticut transformed from being characterized by quiet communities of self-sufficient farmers led by the Congregational Church, to a diverse society led by a two-party political system. The Constitutional Convention took place in 1787 and established state's rights. Wilton residents generally forgave former Tories who assimilated fairly easily back into society due to their wealth and high rank (the exception being Mr. Burlock).<sup>lxi</sup>

Larger cities in the Western Uplands prospered while small farming communities remained static or lost population. Prior to the Revolution there were only five towns in the Western Uplands region - Derby, Newtown, Redding, Waterbury and Woodbury. By 1856 that number had grown to 25, including Wilton. These dispersed settlement patterns led to the creation of separate ecclesiastical societies and school districts.<sup>lxii</sup> In December of 1800, a movement began in Wilton to formally separate from Norwalk and on May 20, 1802, Wilton was granted permission to become a town by legislative act. The first town meeting was held on June 21, 1802. Town officials were elected, and nine school districts were established. That year, there were 300 families living in the parish of Wilton. When the first census was taken in 1810, the population had grown to 1728.<sup>lxiii</sup> The Wilton Proprietors held their final meetings in 1794 when they voted to turn the rest of the common lands over to the Selectmen (with the exception of some lands along the Five Mile River). Those last parcels were turned over to town control in 1805.<sup>lxiv</sup>

Political tensions with Great Britain following the Revolution impacted the West Indian trade, but an expansion in European markets made up for the loss. Farmers in the southern part of the Western Uplands, including the towns of Redding, Easton and Wilton, exported goods overseas through ports in Stamford, Bridgeport, Fairfield and Norwalk.<sup>lxv</sup> Later in the period, the Jefferson Embargo, in 1807, and the War of 1812 halted foreign trade and local farmers turned to domestic markets such as New York City.<sup>lxvi</sup>

As noted, the Great Awakening brought about the rise of the "New Lights," who along with other dissatisfied Congregationalists revolted against the "Old Lights" of the traditional church.<sup>lxvii</sup> The earliest waves of European immigration brought with them greater ethnic diversity and religious choice as Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Congregationalists began to establish places of worship in Wilton.

Transportation improvements had a major impact on all aspects of life in the Western Uplands during this period. Turnpikes linked towns to one another and created trade routes that accelerated movement of goods, people and communication. Later, those towns and cities connected to rail lines flourished and developed rapidly, while others remained isolated and rural. Communication improvements such as newspapers and telegraph service united communities and brought the news of the larger world to small towns like Wilton.<sup>lxviii</sup>

Wilton's population continued to grow in the decades following the Revolutionary War. There were 250 families in 1780, and 300 by 1801.<sup>lxix</sup> Despite an overall increase in residents, inexpensive and more fertile land inspired some residents to migrate away from Wilton. Several families moved to Litchfield County, while approximately 30 families moved to Ballston, New York.<sup>lxx</sup> Land in Vermont and the Western Reserve in Ohio also enticed Wilton émigrés during this period.

## **Agricultural and Transportation Development**

Through the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Wilton was still a self-sufficient farming community. Roads remained in poor condition and railroads did not arrive until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Much of the land was cleared for agricultural use during this period. Craftsmen, tradesmen and millworkers provided all of the necessary means to form a strong community. Merchants provided foods, rum, iron goods, furniture and pottery, as well as paper products.<sup>lxxi</sup> Everything else remained a part of the self-sufficient lifestyle of farmers. Many mills were located along Wilton's waterways to process raw goods grown on local farms.

Local merchants such as Samuel Middlebrook (1743-1811) operated an import-export business and store at the corner of Drum Hill and Ridgefield Roads. Middlebrook sold farm products to the West Indies and imported molasses, rum and sugar.<sup>lxxii</sup> His endeavors made him one of the wealthiest men in the parish. Samuel Belden's store was started in 1771 at the northwest corner of Danbury and Ridgefield Roads. Captain Daniel Betts IV and Captain Asahel Raymond III opened a store around 1784 at the intersection of what are now Danbury Road (Route 7) and Westport Road (Route 33). It operated for nearly 100 years.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

Wilton's largest industrial concern, the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Manufacturing Company, was started by tanner Benjamin Gilbert in the Georgetown section of town in 1818. The origins of the company began prior to 1800 when the Birchard family used horsehair (a by-product of the tanning process) to weave sieves. Charlotte Birchard was one of the main weavers, and she married tanner Benjamin Gilbert of Weston in 1809<sup>lxxiv</sup>. Together they wove sieves used to sift flour and meal in their home in Georgetown.<sup>lxxv</sup> The concern grew and occupied several sites over the years, but machines were added to separate animal hair for use in mattresses and cushions in 1826. An overshot water wheel was used to power hair pickers and hair rope twisters. In the mid-1830s Mr. Gilbert used a carpet loom to weave wire and became the first woven wire produced in America.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Gilbert & Bennett produced cheese safes, poultry netting, and coal ash sifters. Benjamin Gilbert died in 1847 and his two sons and sons-in-law (including Sturges Bennett) assumed control. The following year, the company began purchasing several former mills in Georgetown, including Timothy Wakeman's sawmill site, which became known as the Gilbert & Bennett Upper Mill.<sup>lxxvii</sup> In 1861 Gilbert & Bennett produced the first insect wire screening in the United States.

David Coley Jr. operated an iron forge and triphammer on Old Mill Road beginning in 1792.<sup>lxxviii</sup> Coley purchased iron ingots from Roxbury and Brookfield and used his 700-pound triphammer to forge large iron bars. He sold the forge to Lyman Edwards in 1798. It operated as the Georgetown Iron Works under Stephen Perry during the War of 1812. It passed through several more owners before finally becoming the Winslow Booth and Comb works in 1824. Ten years later, it was purchased by Gilbert & Bennett and became known as the Old Red Mill.<sup>lxxix</sup>

There were several home industries located throughout town making shirts, hats and other finished goods that were sold in Norwalk and New York City. Hatting was an important industry in Wilton during the first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The last known hatter was named LeGrand Sturges.<sup>lxxx</sup> Ebenezer Taylor made hats near Chicken Street in a wagon shop operated by David Nichols.<sup>lxxxi</sup>

Transportation was also slowly improving during the Early Industrial Period thanks to the development of turnpike companies. After 1792 there were at least 75 private turnpike companies across the state. In exchange for tolls charged each company maintained the roads under their jurisdiction. The County Road (now Danbury Road or Connecticut Route 7) was the main north-south route through Wilton. It connected the nascent town with other communities in Fairfield County, particularly Danbury. The Norwalk & Danbury Turnpike Company was established in 1796. The company was co-sponsored by Captain Timothy Taylor of Danbury and Captain Eliphalet Lockwood of Norwalk.<sup>lxxxii</sup> The charge was eight cents per cart and four cents per horse or man. The road began in Wilton at Belden's Bridge over the Norwalk River and continued north of Mather Street following Old Mill Road into Redding. It then continued up Umpawaug Road into Bethel, which at the time was still part of Danbury. The turnpike became the principal route for wagon goods to be transported from Litchfield to harbors in Norwalk and Saugatuck and resulted in increased traffic through Wilton at the time.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

A stagecoach line also utilized the turnpike. The journey from Danbury to Norwalk by stagecoach took approximately six hours. By 1829 two additional turnpikes passing through Wilton were incorporated. The Sugar Hollow Turnpike, chartered in 1801, traveled north through Georgetown and connected to the Danbury and Ridgefield Turnpike.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> The Newtown Turnpike originated in Norwalk and followed the same basic path as Routes 33 and 106 today.<sup>lxxxv</sup> By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the costs to maintain the turnpikes had become financially unsustainable. Many folded and the roads reverted to town control.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Eight milestones used to mark the turnpike roads are still in place along Danbury and Ridgefield Roads in Wilton.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

Beginning in the 1840s railroads had the single greatest impact on the development of Connecticut's cities, transforming small manufacturing centers into industrial cities within the matter of a few decades. The Danbury and Norwalk Railroad originated in 1835 as a 23-mile-long horse-drawn line known as the Fairfield County Railroad. It connected the two developing manufacturing centers of South Norwalk and Danbury. In 1850, it was reorganized and renamed the Danbury and Norwalk Railroad. The right-of-way through Wilton was seven miles long and six feet wide. The rail workers who built the line were largely Irish immigrants and the vast majority of the work was done by hand.

The first train traveling along the Fairfield County Railroad from Norwalk reached Danbury on February 22, 1852. It made two return trips per day. During the Civil War management of the railroad was overseen by LeGrand Lockwood of Norwalk (builder of the Lockwood-Matthews Mansion in South Norwalk). In 1886, the Danbury and Norwalk Railroad was leased by the Housatonic Railroad and was eventually absorbed by the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad (NY, NH & H) in 1892.

Prior to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Wilton was made up of a series of small hamlets or neighborhoods rather than one unified parish. A kind of municipal center had formed at the intersection of Ridgefield, Belden Hill and Mill Roads. The Congregational Church, the Town Hall, the Wilton Academy, the Comstock Store and a blacksmith shop were in the vicinity. After completion of the rail line in 1852, Wilton Center, as we know it today, began to form.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

The Cannondale section of Wilton was originally known as Cannon Station, this named for businessman Charles Cannon who operated a general goods store beginning in 1793 along County Road (now Danbury Road) near the river crossing.<sup>lxxxix</sup> A shirt factory maintained by Ed Husted was housed on the second floor of Cannon's store and the area also contained a coal yard, livery stable and rooming houses.<sup>xc</sup> Additional development followed the construction of the Zion Hill Methodist Church in 1844, and further growth came about as a result of construction of the rail line in 1852.<sup>xci</sup> The rail station functioned as a flag stop at first (train stopped when flag was hoisted), but by 1856 it was on a regular schedule.<sup>xcii</sup> A portion of Cannondale along Cannon, Danbury, Seeley, and Olmsted Hills Roads, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1992.

The first train station in Georgetown, known as Godfrey Hall, was built on Old Mill Road in 1852. Silliman Godfrey built the long, narrow building that contained the Georgetown Post Office, a store and the passenger and freight station on the first story, and a hall on the second story that was operated as a shirt factory by Henry Fanton for a short period. The building was destroyed by fire in 1902.<sup>xciii</sup>

Retail stores and other small commercial operations were found along Grumman Avenue and Danbury Roads during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Eliphalet Whitlock Store operated from 1810 to 1820 at the corner of Grumman Avenue and Danbury Road. A brewery run by Jehiel Grumman was located on the west side of the road and produced beer and sparkling white wine. A comb factory operated by Charles James near Kent Road eventually became the Kent Bolt Factory. Lewis Olmstead operated a store and shirt factory at the corner of DeForest and Ridgefield Roads. Olmstead started the shirt factory in 1834. Orders came in from New York and women worked out of their homes cutting patterns and completing orders by hand. Elbert Olmstead joined him in the business around 1850. The 1860 census showed that the shop employed 50 people.<sup>xciv</sup>

William Comstock donated a site along Danbury Road to build Wilton Station.<sup>xcv</sup> Soon, a kind of town center formed around the station. In 1860 Nathan Comstock built a store there. Nathan's son John Comstock served as station agent in 1852. The station remained in use until 1941 when it was replaced by the current building.<sup>xcvi</sup>

The development of Wilton Center began with a five-and-a-half-acre parcel owned by William A. Sturges. Sturges owned the original St. Matthew's Episcopal Church building, dating from 1800, which he moved there and converted into a meeting hall – later known as Sturges Hall. It also contained a depot, general store and post office at 770 Danbury Road that were all in operation by 1863.<sup>xcvii</sup> The area was referred to as “near the Depot” and the Sturges' building remained in operation for 102 years. It was sold to the Keeler family and eventually became the Village Market.<sup>xcviii</sup>

In 1810 Wilton's population numbered 1,728 residents. By 1830, the population had grown another twenty percent; however, it soon stalled. Between 1830 and 1850 the population of the United States doubled, while in Wilton the population only grew by 150 to reach a total of 2208 by 1860. The 1850 Federal Census shows that in that year, Wilton contained 219 farmers, 155 shoemakers, 31 farm laborers, 15 carpenters, 14 hatters, two shoemakers and two clothiers. There were also several tanners, harness makers, butchers and grocers. The building trades were represented by four masons, two painters, several blacksmiths, millers, wheelwrights and one sieve maker. Professionals included teachers, physicians, clergymen and lawyers.<sup>xcix</sup> Many women worked in cottage industries such as the shirt-making businesses identified above.

## **Religion and Society**

The period between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, brought a progressively liberal political climate to Wilton that resulted in a call for greater religious freedom. The approval of the Connecticut Constitution in 1818 brought an end to the strong union between state government and the Congregational Church. Because of this newfound freedom, more and more individuals created places of worship where they could freely express their beliefs.

The Congregational Church remained unsettled during this period as the New Lights and Old Lights battled for control. The Third Meeting house, which is still in use today as the Wilton Congregational Church, was constructed at the corner of Lover's Lane and Ridgefield Road and was dedicated in 1790<sup>c</sup>. Its design was based on the Norwalk Meeting House. At the beginning of this period, Wilton's Congregational Church was led by the controversial Reverend Sylvanus Haight. Haight was a strong personality with firm political beliefs. He served as a chaplain in the War of 1812, a conflict that was unpopular with many members of his congregation. Upon his return from the conflict, he resided for a time in the Betts-Sturgis-Blackmar House (now the Wilton Historical Society).<sup>ci</sup> Haight's preaching inspired one member, Susan Comstock, to become a missionary among the Osage Indians of Missouri. The majority of the congregation, however, was less than inspired by the Reverend's overbearing and confrontational manner and he left Wilton in 1831<sup>cii</sup>. Haight was replaced the following year by the Reverend Samuel Merwin. Merwin was born in Milford, Connecticut, in 1761, and was a graduate of the Yale College class of 1802. He was popular among his congregation and quickly rose to a position of great influence within the town. He participated in the completion of the Town Hall in 1832 and led the local temperance movement. Reverend Merwin retired in 1838 and was succeeded by John Smith, an evangelical preacher who quickly doubled the size of the congregation. By 1847, a new entry hall and stairways were added to the meeting house in order to accommodate the new parishioners.<sup>ciii</sup> During the 1850s and 1860s the Congregational Church went through an unsettled period with a total of six ministers leading the flock, but the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church in 1876 brought the congregation together for a town-wide celebration.<sup>civ</sup>

While the Congregational Church celebrated its history, other denominations began to emerge and strengthen. The Episcopal or Anglican Church was first established locally in 1771 and the congregation initially worshiped at St. Paul's Church in Norwalk. Reverend George Ogilvie led the congregation there and also preached from the Pimpewaug school house during the 1790s. The Wilton Episcopal Church Society gradually withdrew from the Norwalk parish in the period between 1812 to 1815. Wilton resident John James Lambert donated land for use as a burial yard in 1815 and a plan for a meetinghouse soon followed. St. Matthew's Episcopal Church on Danbury Road was dedicated on August 11, 1819 with Reverend Charles Smith as its first leader.<sup>cv</sup> Smith resigned in 1823 and was succeeded by the Reverend Origen Holcomb and Reverend Charles J. Todd. By 1833 there were 64 families attending services and a new building and parsonage were completed in 1862 on Danbury Road to accommodate the growing flock.

The Reverend William Black and Reverend Cornelius Cook preached the Methodist doctrine in Norwalk as a reaction to the perceived strictures of the Congregationalist Church.<sup>cvi</sup> Methodist classes were first held in 1790 in Georgetown and worshipers soon went on to form the Georgetown Methodist Church on Church Street.<sup>cvi</sup> Notice for the organization of an Episcopal Society in Wilton was posted as early as 1802. Prior to 1830, the Methodists in Wilton held meetings in district schoolhouses or in private residences. Four Methodist churches were built in Wilton between 1835 and 1857 at Bald Hill, Zion Hill, Kent and Georgetown (only Zion Hill and Georgetown are extant). Georgetown was the first to be built in 1798 at 49 Church Street.<sup>cvi</sup> Zion Hill was established in 1844 at 470 Danbury Road. The Kent Methodist Church was built in 1851 on land granted by then First Selectman Samuel P. Randle. The congregation struggled to support their minister and it closed in 1872. It was reopened in 1874 but was shuttered for good in the early 1900s. The building was sold in 1916 to the Meyer Brothers who converted it into a carpentry shop.<sup>cix</sup>

Baptists were also found in early Wilton, but due to their small numbers they had no formal house of worship.<sup>cx</sup> The first Baptist group was organized in the 1780s under Reverend Dikeman, later a leader in the abolitionist movement.<sup>cx</sup>

Wilton's earliest burial grounds were Sharp Hill Cemetery and the private Comstock burial ground. The Comstock family cemetery began in 1782 on Ridgefield Road near Signal Hill Road. By 1805 the town leased the land from the family and operated the cemetery until 1851. Hillside Cemetery, now one of the largest in town, was established on Ridgefield Road in 1817. It was originally a private burial yard owned by Jonathon Middlebrook and was expanded during the 20<sup>th</sup> century as more land was donated by the Middlebrook family.<sup>cxii</sup> Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century several other cemeteries were laid out across town, these including St. Matthew's Cemetery on Danbury Road (1825), Zion Hill Cemetery on Danbury Road and Bald Hill Cemetery on Ridgefield Road (the last two were associated with Methodist Churches). Several private family plots were also located throughout town.<sup>cxiii</sup>

In 1795, proceeds from the sale of the Western Reserve lands went to the Connecticut School Fund to build local schools throughout the state. In 1798, a state law took control of the school committee away from the Congregational Church and transferred it to a local School Society.<sup>cxiv</sup> Each society was comprised of districts, with each district having a schoolhouse and teacher. Schools were built in Wilton in order to accommodate the growing population, including those

in Drum Hill (Center), Nod Hill and Bald Hill, which were all established by 1792. Georgetown's schoolhouse followed in 1823.<sup>cxv</sup> A nationwide educational reform movement began in the 1830s to establish a lengthened school year, graded schools and high schools.<sup>cxvi</sup> Many of Connecticut's schoolhouses were small, poorly equipped and had no effective oversight.

Hartford-born educator, lawyer and State Legislator Henry Barnard led a school reform movement beginning in 1838 with the passage of an act that provided for the state-wide supervision of local schools.<sup>cxvii</sup> That same year he established the Board of Commissioners of Common Schools. In May of 1838, the Free School Law was passed requiring that public schools funded by taxpayers be made free to all students. Wilton's schools were open only six months of the year. During the winter months attendance was dismal with only 167 out of 301 students attending.<sup>cxviii</sup> In 1854, the Wilton town budget included money for schools. The Optional Consolidation Act of 1856 encouraged Connecticut towns to eliminate district school societies and establish a Board of Education in each town. Wilton created a Board of School Visitors around 1860 to provide consistency across its ten districts and recommended funding for each district at the Annual Town Meeting.<sup>cxix</sup>

Private academies were also established to serve as secondary schools and to prepare some students for college. Wilton Academy was established in 1818 by Hawley Olmstead, a Yale College graduate of the class of 1816. Olmstead served on the Connecticut Board of School Commissioners. Wilton Academy was considered a prestigious school. Approximately half of the students came from Wilton. It was technically co-educational, but 80 percent of the students were male in the early years. Louisa Jessup was the first woman to graduate from Wilton Academy, known locally simply as the "Academy," and continue through university. She graduated from Rutgers College ca. 1840.<sup>cxx</sup> The Academy originally operated out of the second story of a building located near the corner of Belden Hill and Ridgefield Roads known as the Townhouse, which later became Nathan Comstock's store. Wilton Academy founder Hawley Olmstead retired in 1839 and he was succeeded by his son Edward. Edward's wife Marian Olmstead (1830 -1920), a DAR member, was a notable local author and historian. Under Edward's leadership the Academy's reputation continued to grow. He moved the Academy to an outbuilding adjacent to his house on Mill Road (33 Lover's Lane) in 1868. In 1881 he moved the Academy into a wing of his house where it continued until his death in 1898. Other private schools located in Wilton included the Wilton Boarding Academy for Boys, established by Abel and Augustus Whitlock in 1847, and one founded by Aaron Lockwood in 1850. Lockwood's school operated out of his house at 496 Danbury Road before eventually moving to 43 Cannon Road.<sup>cxxi</sup>

Wilton's first post office was established at the corner of Wolf Pit and Danbury Roads in December of 1810 with Aaron Hyatt serving as Postmaster. Delivery service was initially limited to once a week; however, by 1832 it was expanded to six times per week.<sup>cxxii</sup> The post office moved several times during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, including to the Lambert House at 150 Danbury Road for a short period before eventually ending up in the store adjacent to Joseph Fitch's house in 1839. A second post office was established at Bald Hill in 1832, but it operated out of a store run by James St. John at the corner of Millstone and Ridgefield Roads for just five years.<sup>cxxiii</sup> The North Wilton post office, located at the

corner of DeForest and Ridgefield Roads, ran from 1850 to 1861.<sup>cxxiv</sup> The Georgetown Post Office was opened in 1852 on Old Mill Road in Wilton under Postmaster Sillman Godfrey. Post offices in Cannondale, South Wilton and on Hurlbutt Street were all established later in century.<sup>cxxv</sup> Limited Rural Free Delivery throughout town was finally established in 1899.

In 1860 Wilton's population was 2,208; however, that would soon decline due in part to the success of the Homestead Act of 1862, which encouraged western migration and the expansion of the railroads following the conclusion of the Civil War. This exposed Wilton's citizens to opportunities in other parts of the country.<sup>cxxvi</sup> As a result, many of Wilton's youth chose to move away to take advantage of opportunities in cities or places where land was plentiful, productive, and cheap. As a result, in 1910 there were only 438 houses in Wilton, the same number found in 1860.<sup>cxxvii</sup>

In this early period Wilton had a Selectmen and Town Meeting form of government (and still does). Annual and specific town meetings were held in order to facilitate public participation. Special Town meetings were called for as needed by petition.<sup>cxxviii</sup> The town's early leaders, elected at the first Town meeting on June 21, 1802, included Revolutionary War veterans such as Colonel Matthew Mead and Major Samuel Comstock, as well as leading businessmen such as Samuel Belden and Matthew Marvin.<sup>cxxix</sup> Erastus Sturges was elected Selectman in 1809 and he continued to serve for 21 one-year terms until 1843.<sup>cxxxx</sup> Town meetings established taxes, authorized the construction and maintenance of town roads and bridges and established a plan of care for the town poor. Wilton joined Norwalk, Weston and Fairfield in the operation of a poor house built in the central town of Weston, but it was disbanded due to the high cost of upkeep by 1831.<sup>cxxxi</sup>

Plans for a new town meeting hall were discussed and then rejected as early as 1808. By 1818, a state law was passed making it necessary to have a town meeting place separate from the Congregational Church. Planning for such a space began in 1827. The following year, Nathan Comstock offered a corner plot of land across from the Congregational Church on Danbury Road. Work began on the first town hall in 1828 and it was completed in 1832. It served the town until a new building was constructed in 1931.<sup>cxxxii</sup>

Wilton's first doctor was Abraham Chichester, who settled in Pimpewaug in 1783. By the 1830s, Dr. David Willard also served Wilton's population; making his rounds on horseback. Willard was the first local doctor trained in a formal medical college. He graduated from Columbia College in 1812 and made his home at 12 Station Road, before later moving to 225 Danbury Road.<sup>cxxxiii</sup>

National reform movements began during this period as a popular way to deal with the nation's various issues of concern, including poor educational systems and public intoxication. It was also a common way for women to coordinate organized activities during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In Wilton, one such group was the Ladies Benevolent Society (also known as the Sewing Circle), started by Reverend Merwin's wife, Calrina. The group raised money, knit and sewed items for local causes and sent money to missionaries performing service in the western United States.<sup>cxxxiv</sup>

The temperance movement was one of the more popular national reform movements of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Public intoxication was pervasive in the United States during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly after the Congregational

Church loosened its control on the population. Whiskey, rum and brandy were all popular, as was applejack - a hard cider made from the area's plentiful apple trees. Rum was widely sold in general stores and was given to soldiers as part of their daily ration. The Connecticut Temperance Society was formed in 1829 and local chapters were organized all over the state. In Wilton there were initially 27 members, but that number quickly grew to 71 within a year.<sup>cxxxv</sup> The Reverend Samuel Merwin was elected the first Secretary of the Fairfield County 12th Senatorial District Temperance Society in 1832.<sup>cxxxvi</sup> By 1840, the movement was making a noticeable impact. Private stills became illegal and a total statewide prohibition law was passed in 1854.

The issue of slavery was obviously a central debate in the years leading up to the Civil War. In 1784 a gradual emancipation act freed all children born to enslaved women after March 1, 1784. The Connecticut Legislature formally prohibited slavery in the state in 1788.<sup>cxxxvii</sup> In 1790, the census indicated that there were 2764 slaves in Connecticut – a total of one percent of the population. That same year, antislavery societies formed in Litchfield and Wilton. In 1800 there were still 1000 enslaved people in Connecticut, while by 1820 the number had decreased to 97 enslaved persons. The number dropped to 17 by 1840, with the last people finally being granted freedom in 1848.<sup>cxxxviii</sup>

Local records indicate that Samuel Middlebrook manumitted a slave by the name of Phebe in January of 1811. In February of 1812 Matthew Marvin freed "Betty, a black woman." In January 1824, a 17-year old woman by the name of Grace was sold to Hiram Betts by William Belden for a period of three years, until she reached age of 21. Her contract ensured that she was provided with "food, medical care and comfortable and decent clothes." At the end of her service Grace was assured "two sets of cloths one for daily use and one for holidays or church use."<sup>cxxxix</sup> The last slave recorded in Wilton was Mrs. Haggar Tonquin, who was 60 years old in the 1830 Federal Census. She was enslaved by Samuel Belden, II and was married to Bill Tonquin, A Native American slave. Together they lived with their three children Prince, Nancy and Black Jack in the Belden Store at the corner of Danbury and Ridgefield roads.<sup>cxl</sup>

The Abolitionist movement in Connecticut was led by members of the Quaker, Baptist and Methodist churches. Many members of the more established Congregational and Episcopalian churches were conservative and reluctant to change. Some even had economic ties to the Southern cotton trade. Moses Stuart spearheaded the local abolitionist movement in Georgetown beginning in 1833. That year, the Reverend Nathaniel Colver, an organizer for the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society, was invited to preach in the Georgetown Baptist Church on November 26, 1838.<sup>cxli</sup> He had recently lectured to a group of hatters in Danbury where he was very poorly received. Colver spoke in Georgetown on November 26, 1838, with an aim to organize a local Anti-Slavery Society. He lectured again on November 27 and 28 and the following day the Baptist Church was damaged by a keg of gunpowder placed under the pulpit. Colver reacted by calling Fairfield County "the Georgia of Connecticut," the dark part of the state full of intemperance and the spirit of slavery."<sup>cxlii</sup>

Despite these violent reactions, the Anti-Slavery Society survived, and the Baptist Church was rebuilt. It hosted the first meeting of the Fairfield County Anti-Slavery Society in December of 1838. Dr. Erasmus Hudson, another abolitionist, came to preach at the home of David and Aaron Chichester in Pimpewaug. It too was attacked, and the house's windows were blown out.<sup>cxliii</sup>

The Wakeman house at 36 Seeley Road was one of two locations in Wilton with verified connections to the Underground Railroad, the other being the Chichester House at 2 Pimpewaug Road. William Wakeman was a local station keeper, conductor and Wilton's best-known abolitionist.<sup>cxliv</sup> Wakeman's house had a room fitted to hide fugitive slaves as he helped to move them from one place to the next.<sup>cxlv</sup>

The Underground Railroad became a much riskier endeavor following passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, which made it a Federal offense to assist an escaping slave. After 1852, sympathy for enslaved people was bolstered by the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Two years later Connecticut passed the Act for Defense of Liberty which made it a crime to seize a free person with the intent to enslave them.<sup>cxlvi</sup> Even after slavery was abolished in Connecticut, freed blacks lived an isolated existence along the margins of society. Even in death, burial grounds were segregated.<sup>cxlvii</sup>

## Civil War

The American Civil War began on April 12, 1861, after Confederate troops fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. A public draft was put into effect almost immediately at the start of the war; however, public outcry forced it to be suspended within a month. Instead, voluntary enlistments were encouraged by offering to pay a sum to each enlisted man. Under the Conscription Act of March of 1863, it became possible to pay for an exemption. It was even more common for men to pay for a proxy and in this way many men, most notably Wilton's affluent merchants and farmers, bought their way out of the war. The 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment of the Connecticut Volunteer Infantry was organized in April of 1861 and consisted of 1,080 men from throughout the state. Wilton men served in Connecticut's 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Volunteer Infantry Regiments.<sup>cxlviii</sup>

By 1863 the Union Army began drafting soldiers and quotas were set for enlistments.<sup>cxlix</sup> After recruitment started, forty-seven local men served in the 17<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Infantry Regiment which fought at the battle of Gettysburg. Company E of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Connecticut Regiment included 65 men from Georgetown, Cannondale, Nod Hill, Branchville and upper Weston under the command of David H. Miller.<sup>cl</sup> They were organized as the war was building up as the "Home Guards" and later became known as the "Lincoln Guards." Fourteen Wilton men also served under Lieutenant James S. Coley in the 1<sup>st</sup> Connecticut Cavalry Regiment.<sup>cli</sup> In total, two hundred Wilton men joined the Union Army, roughly nine percent of the town's population. Thirty-six were lost in service, 12 in battle, three in captivity at Andersonville prison and 21 died of typhoid fever and other illnesses throughout the war.<sup>clii</sup>

In May of 1863 the War Department issued General Order 143, which permitted blacks to enlist in the Union Army.<sup>cliii</sup> The 24<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> Colored Infantry Regiments left Connecticut in November of 1863. Those who served in these regiments suffered from higher mortality rates than their white peers as they were often assigned more dangerous missions.<sup>cliv</sup> Five black soldiers served from Wilton, three of whom died for the cause, Henry and Samuel Dullivein and

Sherman Roberts.<sup>clv</sup> Wilton also contained some Confederate sympathizers, among them being Charles H. Betts, who served in the Confederate Army. Wilton Selectmen supported enlistment and conscription with bonuses and support for families and recruiting agents.<sup>clvi</sup>

The Union Club was also formed in Wilton in order to support war effort. Women knit socks and arranged hospital supplies to send to the troops and money was raised to help the sick and wounded. Local manufacturers such as Gilbert & Bennett were impacted by the loss of their southern market for wire sieves and shifted their production to newly-invented wire window screen in order to stay afloat. Wilton's hat makers were also impacted yet produced hats for the Union Army throughout the war.<sup>clvii</sup>

### **Neo-Classical and Romantic Architecture**

The Federal and Greek Revival-style houses built in Wilton often used classical details in order to reflect the wealth and stature of the owner, as well as to display their worldliness and knowledge of the latest building styles. These styles, most common in the last decades of the 18th and first three-quarters of the 19th century, were driven by influences popularized in England during the middle of the 18th century through the work of brothers Robert and James Adam. After traveling throughout the Mediterranean, Robert, the elder of the Adams, introduced a variety of classical details into his work, the result being a renewed interest in the monuments of ancient Greece and Rome.

In the United States, the popularity of the Adam style corresponded with the conclusion of the Revolutionary War and, as such, it is often referred to as the Federal Style, after that political period. The Federal Style shares much of the essential form of the New England Farmhouse and Georgian homes that preceded it, however buildings from the Federal period relied much more heavily on more refined and elaborate Roman classical detailing and ornamentation. This was largely concentrated around the entry, which was located on the long elevation of the house, rather than the gable end. This elevation typically faced the street and its entryway details might include elaborate porticos and door surrounds, sidelights flanking the entry, and leaded semicircular or elliptical fanlights above. Detailed entablatures with denticulated or modillioned cornices were also common. High-style examples were generally limited to churches, commercial buildings, or the homes of prominent and wealthy citizens, while more simple residences and farmhouses tended to be characterized by the application of a limited number of the aforementioned elements to otherwise vernacular buildings.<sup>clviii</sup>

Despite being a rural community, Wilton was rather sophisticated and at its prosperous during the period in which the Federal style flourished. Though sophisticated, the style was also somewhat conservative and, therefore, persisted much later in Wilton than was common in urban centers. The most common Federal house form used in Wilton can be seen in the Marvin House at 444 Danbury Road (ca. 1810), which is three bays wide with an offset entrance, asymmetrically arranged windows that correspond to the interior, four-room arrangement, six-over-six double-hung windows, and delicately molded cornices that return on the gable ends. The gable ends are frequently filled with lunettes

or small, double-hung windows, or in the instance of the Marvin House, an oval window with radiating muntins. The highlight of many of the Federal Houses dating to the 1820s and 1830s are the superb pilastered tri-partite frontispieces with side lights and transoms.<sup>clix</sup> Often incorporating the classical moldings typical of the Greek Revival style, which would eclipse the Federal style in the 1840s, the frontispieces are a regional architectural feature that is also found in Westport and Fairfield. The entrance bay is often sheltered by a pent porch, like those found on 49 Old Danbury Road (ca. 1830) and-or a delicately detailed Tuscan columned porch with an arched soffit. The interior of the four or five-bay plan is arranged around the central chimney which services the three main rooms. Examples of this type include the five-bay Comstock-Winton House at 69 Ridgefield Road (ca. 1826) and the Marvin House at 444 Danbury Road.

Emerging around 1825, the popularity of the Greek Revival style overlapped with that of the Federal. By 1840, however, the Greek Revival had supplanted its aesthetic cousin and established itself as the dominant American architectural form. The Greek Revival drew its inspiration from the temples and monuments of ancient Greece. While initially only found in the design of public buildings, the style soon became the favored form for use in residential construction through work by Asher Benjamin found in publications such as *The Country Builder's Assistant* (1797) and *The American Builder's Companion* (1816); and Minard Lafever in *The Young Builder's General Instruction* (1829), the *Modern Builder's Guide* (1833), *The Beauties of Modern Architecture* (1835) and *The Architectural Instructor* (1850). Typical Greek Revival details include shallow pitched or hipped roofs, usually with the gable end oriented towards the street, raking cornices, wide trim or frieze bands, and entry or full-width porches supported by classical columns. Sidelights, transoms, pilasters, and heavy lintels are commonly found around the entryways.<sup>clx</sup>

The Greek Revival style was less popular in Wilton than in surrounding towns such as Norwalk and Westport. There is only one archetypal temple-form house with a giant-order portico, this located at 137 Sturges Ridge Road (ca. 1845). Many of the other Grecian-style homes in town are repetitions of more familiar house forms with applied, Greek-Revival-style features such as corner pilasters, pedimented gable ends and trabeated frontispieces. The Cannon-Miller House at 436 Danbury Road (ca. 1835) is an excellent example of the Greek Revival form, as is the Grumman House at 83 Grumman Hill Road (ca. 1840). The Greek Revival-style was very a popular choice for public buildings such as churches and schools. The Wilton Congregational Church in Wilton Center (70 Ridgefield Road) was renovated in the Greek Revival style with the addition of a fine portico *in antis*. The Zion Hill Methodist Church constructed in 1844 (470 Danbury Road), is another example of a Greek Revival-style ecclesiastical structure.<sup>clxi</sup>

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the Picturesque Movement came to the fore with its myriad of exotic revivals, such as the Gothic, Egyptian, and Oriental Revivals, however, these styles were not popular in Wilton. From 1860 to 1920 Wilton's economy and population both remained stagnant. Most families lived in older homesteads rather than constructing new homes in more fashionable styles and many children of the older families moved away. Therefore, there are no good examples of Gothic Revival architecture found in Wilton. Instead local examples include vernacular interpretations of these styles, such as those found at 37 Cannon Road (ca. 1900) and 218 Danbury Road (ca. 1880) as well as 71 Old Belden Hill Road (1875).

A further Romantic style, the Italianate, likewise began in England before making its way into the American built environment during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This style was influenced by Italian country homes and Renaissance-era villas, yet developed into an entirely indigenous form once established in the United States. Italianate homes are typically two or three stories in height and have low-pitched (usually hipped or gable) roofs with widely overhanging eaves and detailed brackets. Tall, narrow windows are common and often have arched or round-headed window tops. Windows and doors are frequently crowned with decorative hoods. While well represented in surrounding communities this style is only found in a handful of Wilton houses. The Sturges-Schlicting House at 83 Ridgefield Road (no longer extant, but a form was prepared in the Phase 1 Survey), was built as a summer home and was one of only two outstanding examples of a suburban Italian villa in Wilton. The second example is found at the Hiram St. John House at 49 Church Street (ca. 1870). More commonly, the Italianate style was expressed in verandahs added to earlier houses. Examples can be found at the Raymond house at 257 Hurlbutt Street (1799/1890) and the Gregory homestead at 2 Pimpewaug Road (1790/1880).

## **The Late Industrial Period, 1865-1929**

### **The Decline of Agriculture and the Development of a Summer Community**

In 1900 Wilton was still a sleepy farming town with a population numbering just under 1600; this actually being 600 fewer persons than in 1860<sup>clxii</sup>. This decline was primarily due to emigration to the Western lands, as well as Vermont and New York, where land was inexpensive, and the crop yields were generally greater than in rocky, thin-soiled Connecticut. While Wilton's population declined, the nearby industrial centers of Danbury, Bridgeport and Norwalk grew exponentially due to an influx of foreign-born individuals who came to work in the factories there. In the 1880s and 1890s Wilton had a modest increase in its immigrant population. Scandinavian families were mainly drawn to work in the Gilbert & Bennett wire mill in the Georgetown section of town. Prior to 1900, crops such as corn, oats, rye, buckwheat, potatoes and hay were still important to the local farmers. Dairy farms sold milk, cheese and butter in neighboring towns such as Norwalk.<sup>clxiii</sup> Wilton resources such as timber, quarried stone and ice were shipped along with the agricultural goods mentioned above by rail to New York City. The ease of transporting goods along rail lines often made imported farm goods less expensive than local ones. This further contributed to an overall decline in the agricultural economy and population between 1860 and 1910.

A decreased population meant that few new houses were constructed during this period. After 1895, the town became home to an increasing number of summer residents drawn by inexpensive land, accessibility to the rail line and existing housing stock. Summer residents continued to settle in town well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

By 1930, Wilton had 2,133 full-time residents, still slightly less than the population in 1860, and 812 houses.<sup>clxiv</sup> Despite this decrease in population, Wilton came together to form a single town identity. As noted, prior to this time the town was made up of several neighborhoods that formed around crossroads such as Cannon's Crossing, Pimpewaug and Nod Hill. Of interest is the fact that the 1920 Federal Census recorded an incorrect decrease in population totaling a loss of 422 people or roughly 25 percent of the population relative to 1910. When town officials compared the population numbers against new construction and school enrollment, they were perplexed and commissioned an independent census in 1925. This showed that the town had indeed grown to a new high of 1878 residents.<sup>clxv</sup>

## **Town Development and Local Businesses**

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Wilton Center possessed four stores (among them being the Keeler General Store, which became the Village Market in 1935), a factory and a coal yard. The New England Glove Company, under George Alfred Davenport, began producing heavy work gloves out of a shop where the Barringer Building is located today (72-96 Old Ridgefield Road). He continued operations for about a decade beginning in 1899.<sup>clxvi</sup>

The residential development of Wilton Center began as early as 1887 when George Taylor and a local investor and builder, Frederick Banks, constructed five Craftsman-style houses between the river and Old Ridgefield Road. The houses became known as Cottage Row (located south of the American Legion Hall). Taylor also served as Postmaster and operated the Post Office out of his home on Cottage Row before moving it to a permanent building in 1918.<sup>clxvii</sup> In 1914, Edwin Godfrey purchased eight acres near Wilton Center from Silas Olmstead. The piece of property located south of the Gorham house was subdivided into about a dozen lots between 1916 and 1922.<sup>clxviii</sup>

After construction of the rail line, Cannondale, or Cannon's Station, developed into a small community surrounding the rail depot and the Methodist Church. It contained two stores, a shirt factory operated by Charles Cannon, a wire mill, carriage factory, livery, and two boarding houses or hotels. There was also a steam cider mill, two shoe shops, two private schools and a district school all within the vicinity of the depot, which also served as a general store. The "Old Red Store" continued operation in Cannondale until around 1860 (the store is now part of the Lambert Corners property). The original depot building burned in 1877 and a new building was constructed that contained a post office and general store on the first story and a meeting hall on the upper floor. The meeting space became known as the Cannon Opera House or Reed's Hall.<sup>clxix</sup> In 1882, Lucy Renoud became Wilton's first female postmaster when she took charge of the Cannon's Station post office. That building was also destroyed by fire in 1891. The railroad built a new station building in 1892 and that is the structure that still stands today.<sup>clxx</sup>

After World War I, commercial development began along Danbury Road in South Wilton. A grocery was established in 1912 by Mr. and Mrs. Ignatz Kuehnel and operated out of a house at 26 Danbury Road (it was removed in the late 1940s).<sup>clxxi</sup> A nursery was also started around 1912 by Jacob Van Heiningen (the land was later sold to the

Perkins-Elmer Corporation in 1960).<sup>clxxii</sup> Charles Orem ran an ice cream stand along Danbury Road and operated a dairy farm in the area to provide milk to Wilton residents. In 1921 Orem added delicatessen items and began operating the business as Orem's Diner.<sup>clxxiii</sup> The diner was later leased by Lyle and Florence Talmadge, who operated it starting in 1941. It was relocated in 2003 in order to accommodate the widening of Route 7.

Georgetown continued to expand after the turn of the century around the growing Gilbert & Bennett factory. The company expanded production on a national and international level and, as it prospered, the owners began to construct a kind of utopian factory town. The company constructed a new corporate office building in 1875 and continued to construct buildings and residences for the benefit of its workers well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The area contained four churches including a Methodist Church, a Roman Catholic Church, a Swedish Lutheran Church and the Gilbert Memorial Congregational Church.<sup>clxxiv</sup> A new Georgetown post office and depot were completed in December 1908. In 1915, Gilbert & Bennett constructed a new school built in the Beaux Arts classical style and fitted with all modern conveniences at the northern end of New Street.

One of Wilton's most common cottage industries, shoemaking, shifted from a small, cottage-based industry to factory production as the process became more mechanized. Wilton residents also worked in Norwalk industries and some even commuted into New York via one of Wilton's four passenger stations. By 1892, the express train ran from Wilton Station to New York City and the ride took one hour and 32 minutes.<sup>clxxv</sup>

Roads remained a challenging aspect of life for Wilton residents throughout this period. They were filled with muddy ruts in the spring and only sleighs could maneuver them during the winter months.<sup>clxxvi</sup> In the most difficult months "corduroy roads" were created by rolling large logs onto the roadways. Maintenance remained spotty despite the fact that a Surveyor of Roads was appointed to each of Wilton's twelve districts.<sup>clxxvii</sup> The State Highway Department was established in 1895 and soon the "Good Road Act" was passed. Iron bridges replaced wooden bridges throughout town beginning in the 1890s.<sup>clxxviii</sup> The first gravel road in Wilton was constructed in 1896 from Norwalk to Sharp Hill Road. Automobiles first began to appear around 1905. Despite their popularity, autos only just outnumbered horses in 1920 at a rate of 259 automobiles to 252 horses.<sup>clxxix</sup>

As cars become a more common mode of transport, the Connecticut Highway Department began to upgrade major highways. Danbury Road in Wilton was repaired and in 1926 and in 1927 the concrete bridge over the Norwalk River north of Wilton Center was constructed.<sup>clxxx</sup> Filling stations and repair garages soon opened throughout town. Irving Pleasant's Wilton Garage on Danbury Road opened in 1902 and Miss Jessie Lofink's Station was opened in 1925 on the northwest corner of Danbury and Old Ridgefield Roads.<sup>clxxxi</sup>

Ice cream parlors and tea rooms were built to accommodate motorists, such as Mr. Hartwig's shop at 354 Danbury Road.<sup>clxxxii</sup> Sarah Davenport opened the Wilton Inn out of her house at 224 Danbury Road (Wilton Historical Society) and it later became known as the Green Lantern Tea Room. The Elms Hotel stood at 96 Danbury Road and the Hollyhock Inn was located on southeast corner of Grumman Hill and Danbury Roads.<sup>clxxxiii</sup>

The City of Norwalk began to purchase land in Wilton during this period in order to provide drinking water for its growing population. It built Crystal Lake and Rock Lake reservoirs after 1875, but as Norwalk's industries prospered and the population exploded, the demand for water increased. Norwalk purchased 405 additional acres and built the City Lake or South Wilton Reservoir (completed in 1890). It resulted in the reconstruction of Old Huckleberry Road and the road to New Canaan on causeways.<sup>clxxxiv</sup> In 1902, over 300 acres were purchased by South Norwalk to construct a reservoir between Nod Hill and Ridgefield Roads; however, it was never built.<sup>clxxxv</sup>

Subdivisions began to emerge in rural Wilton shortly after the turn of the century, forever changing the character of the town. In the Spring of 1907, George Edward Kent, a lawyer from New York, purchased land in the Bald Hill area with the intent of building an estate. The 240-acre area was planted with linden trees by landscape architect Samuel Parsons, but Kent's house was never constructed. The land was eventually sold in 1957 and divided into the lots comprising the Linden Tree Road development.<sup>clxxxvi</sup>

Wilton's first residential subdivision was located in Georgetown and was known as Own Home Heights. It consisted of 104 building lots laid out in 1915 by Jordon and Selleck, developers from Bridgeport.<sup>clxxxvii</sup> It was targeted at Gilbert & Bennett employees who were encouraged to purchase their "own home." Lots sold for \$45 to \$160 for each one-quarter-acre lot – five dollars down and five dollars per month could buy a lot. Gilbert & Bennett was known for paying workers a good weekly wage (\$25.20 a week for men) and encouraged home ownership by financing up to 90 percent of the cost of an employee's new house if purchased anywhere in Georgetown.<sup>clxxxviii</sup> Despite a promising start, Own Home Heights was never fully developed and only about a dozen houses were eventually built. Later residential developments included two laid out in 1927. The first was located in the vicinity of what is now Deerfield Road (35 subdivided lots) and was known as Meadowood, while the second consisted of an upscale development known as the "Chestnut Hill Properties," which was established on the former Disbrow and Gorham Farms, along what are now High Ridge Road, East and West Meadow Streets, and Woodway Lane. The latter development was targeted at wealthy buyers and featured large lots (most around two acres) laid out for high-end homes, many of these priced around \$40,000 in a period when the average house in Wilton cost around \$6,000. A number of the houses in the development can be attributed to local architect, Frazier Peters, who was notable for his use of natural materials, particularly stone, in creating designs sympathetic to the surrounding environment.<sup>clxxxix</sup>

## **Educational and Social Developments**

As was typical throughout Connecticut, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, children in Wilton were educated at home or in local district schools. In 1898, a state law was passed that required towns to establish high schools or pay tuition for children attending private high schools. The first of several attempts to consolidate school districts under a statewide mandate began in Wilton in 1897, but continually failed as residents remained attached to their existing system.

A second effort was made in 1907 to consolidate the districts; however, it, too, was roundly defeated. School attendance during this period was poor, with an average of 70 percent of children attending at any one time. In 1909, the State of Connecticut passed a law known as “An Act for the Town Management of the Public Schools.” It specified that district school committees and the old Board of School Visitors would be replaced by a town-wide School Committee.

Formerly a resident of New York, lawyer Ralph S. Rounds moved to Cannondale in 1911. He was a strong supporter of school consolidation and secured funding from Columbia University to have Wilton participate in a rural education study program.<sup>cxv</sup> Wilton continued to resist the dissolution of its districts, yet eventually accepted consolidation in 1911 in part because of the Columbia study.<sup>cxvi</sup> As noted, in Georgetown, Gilbert & Bennett funded the construction of a new school as a gift to community. The elegant brick school, designed by W. H. and Henry McLean of Boston, was completed at the northern end of New Street in 1916.<sup>cxvii</sup> The closing of the small and rundown Center School in 1912, the burning of Chestnut Hill in 1927, and the pressure from the state to consolidate district schools resulted in the demise of the one-room schools. In 1927, Frederic Middlebrook donated land in Wilton Center and architect Lawrence Moore designed the four-room Center School. It was built on Old Ridgefield Road by the Meyer Brothers and opened in 1929. That same year, Bald Hill, Kent, Nod Hill, Middlebrook, and Cannondale Schools were closed and their students attended the new Center School. The Belden Hill and Hurlbutt Street district schools were finally closed in 1935.<sup>cxviii</sup>

The Hurlbutt Street School at 157 Hurlbutt Street (ca. 1834/1877) is the best-preserved of Wilton’s one room schools and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1996. In 1929, a Ladies Auxiliary was formed to raise funds and support school programs at Hurlbutt Street, such as creation of a playground and a hot lunch program. In 1937, the Auxiliary reformed as a non-profit known as the Hurlbutt Street Community House, Inc. The organization purchased the schoolhouse, moved it to a donated site nearby and restored the building. It became a community meeting spot hosting everything from prayer meetings to the Red Cross and Girl Scouts.<sup>cxix</sup>

After the turn of the century, Wilton’s farmers underwent a transition from raising traditional grain and vegetable crops toward specialized fruit and dairy production. The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, or simply the Grange, was organized in 1867 for the purpose of encouraging local farming practices and to provide a forum for farmers to share the latest innovations and technology. The Cannon Grange was established in 1899 and first met in the Cannondale Schoolhouse.<sup>cxv</sup> Several local Agricultural Society fairs began to pop up in the 1860s. One of the largest was the Fairfield County Agricultural Society Fair in the Winnipauk area of Norwalk which began in 1866. The Danbury Fair began in 1869 and was hugely popular with farmers and non-farmers alike. A Farmer’s Club was organized on Hurlbutt Street in 1878 and continued until 1886.<sup>cxvi</sup>

The largest dairy operation to be built in Wilton was the Gunning Farm at Catalpa Heights. Thomas Brian Gunning Jr. purchased 184 acres and named it Castecoote Farm. The money behind this massive operation came from the family of Gunning’s wife’s. Christine Lathrop Gunning was a great niece of Leland Stanford, one of the owners of the Central Pacific Railroad. Gunning built a massive cow barn, creamery and rectangular stone silo which was eventually meant to serve 1000 cows. The cornerstone for the silo was laid in 1888; however, just a year later Stanford focused his

energy and money on building a University in honor of his recently deceased son. Gunning and Stanford reportedly had a disagreement resulting in Stanford cutting off all funds for the dairy. The project soon collapsed and all that remains of the grand project is the cornerstone on the side of Catalpa Road.<sup>cxvii</sup>

Several public services, which were revolutionary at the time, had their start during this period. Rural Free Delivery (RFD), a program that delivered mail to farming families, began in December 1899 and resulted in the closure of the post offices on Hurlbutt Street and in North Wilton.<sup>cxviii</sup> Telephone service arrived in Wilton beginning in the 1880s. The Southern New England Telephone Company served Wilton beginning in 1907 and built an exchange on Cottage Row by 1912.<sup>cxix</sup> The Housatonic Electric Company brought electricity to Wilton in 1911 and the first electric lights illuminated the Town Hall in 1912.

Wilton's Fire Protection Committee was formed in 1923; however, the town lacked an organized fire department. In 1928, the Georgetown neighborhood organized a volunteer fire department staffed by employees of Gilbert & Bennett to oversee that rather densely-populated area. A formal proposal was presented to create a volunteer fire department in Wilton at a Town Meeting on March 1, 1929. Half of the money to purchase two fire trucks was raised privately, while the town matched the other half. The Wilton Volunteer Fire Department (WVFD) operated out of an old carriage barn formerly owned by the Reverend Meeks. Fritz Meyer served as the first Fire Chief starting in 1929. The WVFD stayed at its original location for fifty years until a new firehouse was eventually built in 1981<sup>cc</sup>.

News and other information was delivered to Wilton residents via several daily newspapers, among them being the Norwalk Gazette, the Danbury News Times and the Ridgefield Press, which was started 1875. A local paper known as the Georgetown Star also ran between 1875 and 1879<sup>cci</sup>.

The Wilton Library was founded by a group including Ellen Scofield Betts, Miss Katherine Sturges, Anna Carpenter, Reverend William Hart of the Wilton Congregational Church, the Reverend William Hooker of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, and the artist Henry Thomson. Mrs. Betts and Miss Sturges organized a series of successful fundraising events in 1893 in order to generate funding. Postmaster George Taylor provided a room in his residence on Cottage Row to house the 150-book collection and the library was opened in May of 1895. The collection was moved to the studio of Henry Thomson four years later and remained there for nearly two decades before the permanent library building was completed in 1918.<sup>ccii</sup>

In 1916, the Library Association was incorporated as a free public library with no annual fee (prior to that it had been 25 cents a year) and a permanent building became the goal of the organization. More fundraisers were held, and a building site was offered by Frederic Middlebrook in Wilton Center. The library was designed by architect Thomas Elliot and built by the Meyer Brothers and was dedicated on July 4, 1918.<sup>cciii</sup> The first town librarian was Miss Ethel Hart who was employed in 1907 and remained in her position until 1952.<sup>cciv</sup>

In August of 1916 the polio epidemic struck New York City. Summer camps and swimming holes closed in Wilton, and children were quarantined in order to stem the spread of the disease. Just two years later, the nation was hit by

the horrific Spanish influenza epidemic. In New York City it was estimated that 5,000 people died on a daily basis. In total, over 530,000 Americans died from the disease, including 17 Wilton residents.<sup>ccv</sup>

Following the Civil War, financial stability and increased mobility resulted in shifting patterns regarding how Wilton's citizens spent their free time. As modern conveniences and reduced working hours became the norm, recreation became a more common part of the American way of life. Recreational activities and civic organizations were established in town in an attempt to improve the quality of life for residents. Baseball became a popular sport among Wilton's young men in the 1860s, as did a series of local drama groups.<sup>ccvi</sup> Weekend outings to nearby Lake Waccabuc in South Salem, New York, or to Rowayton's Roton Point in Norwalk were also popular.

Several small community organizations were also started in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in an effort to promote community spirit and encourage active lifestyles. In 1916, the mother-daughter team of Helen and Jeannie Howard moved to Wilton from New York City and started a riding academy at 808 Ridgefield Road. It contained a series of riding trails and a camp.<sup>ccvii</sup> The local chapter of the YMCA was organized in November 1917 with Tim Merwin as Chairman and a local chapter of the Girl Scouts was formed the following year.<sup>ccviii</sup> Several singing clubs were formed after the turn of the century, including the Milk Maids and the Community Singing Club.<sup>ccix</sup> The Wilton Garden Club was started in 1921 by Florence Gotthold, a local gardener, botanist and artist.<sup>ccx</sup>

The Wilton Golf Club was organized in 1897 by a group of men and women including Frederic Middlebrook, Sarah Middlebrook, Herbert Ogden, Thomas F. Gilbert and Ellen Scofield Betts.<sup>ccxi</sup> It included a nine-hole golf course, tennis courts and barns located on the Middlebrook's farm on Ridgefield Road. It remained popular throughout the 1930s, but after WWII many of Wilton's men and women were occupied with the war effort and interest declined. The club property reverted to farm pasture by the late 1940s.<sup>ccxii</sup>

During this period many local women became politically active and a number of women's groups were formed both for recreational purposes and to advance political agendas such as the Suffrage Movement. Grace Schenck led Wilton women in the Connecticut Women's Suffrage Association beginning in 1911. She also headed the local chapter of the Equal Franchise League and no doubt led the celebrations when women were finally granted the right to vote in 1920.  
<sup>ccxiii</sup>

The Wilton Ladies Improvement Society was formed in 1893. The name was changed to the Village Improvement Society the following year. It was incorporated by 19 prominent men and women in 1906 but was disbanded after only two years and a failed attempt at erecting street lamps in town.<sup>ccxiv</sup> In 1911, the organization was revamped as the Women's Civic League, later the Civic League. The goals of the organization were to complete community projects and to get women involved in town government. Louise Goepler Taylor became the first woman to hold an appointed position in town government when she became Assistant Town Clerk in 1893.<sup>ccxv</sup> The first elected woman official was named in 1914 when Estelle DeWitt served on the School Board.<sup>ccxvi</sup> By 1927 Wilton had elected more women to office than any other small town in the state, among them being Town Clerk, Helen Chichester, and Town Constable, Margaret McClure.<sup>ccxvii</sup>

Women were also leaders in the local Temperance Movement. Drunkenness was viewed as a common issue in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During that time, Wilton had five operating distilleries, these producing over 1500 gallons of whiskey annually.<sup>ccxviii</sup> When a national prohibition law was first passed in 1854 Wilton stopped all legal sale of alcoholic beverages. In 1872, the law was repealed but Wilton voted to continue a ban on alcohol within the town limits. The country once again banned alcohol through passage of the Volstead Act in 1919. This was repealed by the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment in 1933, but Wilton remained more or less a “dry” town well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (sale of alcohol in restaurants was restored in 1992 and in 2010 liquor stores were allowed to operate in town).<sup>ccxix</sup>

One Wilton resident made it his life’s work to take on the epidemic of addiction. Dr. J. Edward Turner planned to build a Woman’s National Hospital to fight addiction on Turner Ridge near Middlebrook Farm Road. The land came from Turner’s wife’s, Gertrude Middlebrook, daughter of Colonel George Middlebrook, a wealthy farmer. The “Inebriate Asylum” was meant to deal with women’s addiction issues – specifically alcohol and opium. Turner, who was born in 1822, studied medicine in Philadelphia and traveled throughout Europe studying addiction as a disease that could be treated. He first opened a facility in Binghamton, New York, which failed due to a disagreement with board members related to methods of treatment. The board members continued to speak out against Turner even as he traveled the country trying to raise money for another facility. His hospital charter was revoked in 1885 and he died four years later. He is buried in Hillside Cemetery.<sup>ccxx</sup>

In 1882, artist Julian Alden Weir (1852-1919) traded Erwin Davis a painting and ten dollars for a large farm property on Nod Hill Road in the Branchville section of Wilton.<sup>ccxxi</sup> Weir was known as one of the founders of American Impressionism along with colleagues Child Hassam and John Twachtman. Both Hassam and Twachtman visited Weir at his Wilton studio, which served as inspiration for their own works.<sup>ccxxii</sup> Weir Farm was designated a National Historic Site by the National Park Service in 1990.

Henry Grinnell Thomson (1850-1937) was another local landscape painter who was influenced by Weir and William Merritt Chase. Henry and his wife Agnes (Sturges) lived in the house now part of Wilton Arms. Thomson exhibited his work in New York and in the nearby village of Silvermine for many years.<sup>ccxxiii</sup> Thomson’s studio was formerly part of Wilton Academy and, as noted, was later used to temporarily house the Wilton Library.

The village of Silvermine extends from the southwest corner of Wilton into the neighboring towns of Norwalk and New Canaan. The area was first developed as a small-scale mill village that had reverted to a quiet rural setting by the late 1890s. Sculptor Solon Borglum (1868-1922) moved to Silvermine from New York in 1908. Borglum was a sculptor of western scenes. His studio was a large converted barn and house in Wilton at what is now 97 Borglum Road. Borglum was soon joined by several friends and colleagues who were drawn to the bucolic setting and readily available real estate in close proximity to New York City. Soon the disused mills and barns were converted into studios and homes. Artists such as Johnny Gruelle, creator of Raggedy Anne; Austin W. Lord, Dean of the Columbia School of Architecture; and cartoonist and metalworker Clifton Meek joined Borglum in Silvermine. Carl Schmitt, an artist specializing in landscapes, portraits and still life, eventually lived on a hillside overlooking the Silvermine River at what is now 116 Borglum Road in

Wilton. Schmitt was a graduate of the National Academy of Design in New York and was trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence.<sup>ccxxiv</sup>

These and a variety of other artists came together in Borglum's barn for weekly meetings of the Knockers Club – a forum to critique artworks and exchange ideas.<sup>ccxxv</sup> This group became known as the Silvermine group of artists. Borglum died unexpectedly from complications of a ruptured appendix in 1922. The Silvermine Guild of Artists was founded in September of 1922 in part as a legacy to his memory.<sup>ccxxvi</sup>

In addition to established artists, Wilton also became home to notable writers, inventors, educators and craftsmen. Two of the best known were the Meyer Brothers. Frederick Meyer (1835 – 1917) came to Wilton in 1860 and began work as a shoemaker. His two sons Fritz (1886-1964) and Charles (1890-1959) trained under builder George Taylor and became two of the most prolific builders in Wilton. The Meyer Brothers built houses, bridges, and public buildings throughout Wilton. Examples include the Wilton Library (1918), Center School (1929), the American Legion Hall, the Barringer Building and Wilton Arms. They built houses in the Bostonville (Horseshoe Road) and Gaylord Drive neighborhoods in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>ccxxvii</sup> The Meyer Brothers mill shop was located along the river at Wolfpit Road. It was there that they concentrated on producing windows doors, fine millwork and cabinetry following World War I. The mill was demolished in 1969 to make way for a highway Right-of-Way.<sup>ccxxviii</sup>

One of Wilton's most compelling visitors during the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century was known as the Leatherman. Every 34 days from 1860 to 1889, he would visit Wilton as a stop on his route through Connecticut and Westchester County. Clad in a suit made from scraps of leather, he communicated only with hand gestures and stayed in a series of caves along the way.<sup>ccxxix</sup> After his death in 1889, he was laid to rest in Ossining, New York. The name on his grave was given as Jules Bourglay of Lyon, France although his true identity remains unknown.

## **The First World War**

The United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917. Almost immediately, Wilton appointed two special constables to guard the local reservoirs. The Conscription Act was put into place on May 18 of that year and in total one hundred of Wilton's men and women would serve in the conflict. The Wilton Library was set up as a Red Cross Headquarters. The local chapter knit sweaters and made jam, rolled bandages and sewed clothing to send to troops overseas. Victory gardens were planted, and money was raised for War Bonds. Two Wilton residents died in the conflict – Marine Corporal James B. Whipple and Charles Frederickson. Despite these terrible losses, the conflict in Europe remained somewhat remote to the people of Wilton. A local chapter of the American Legion was organized in Wilton after the war ended and a plaque commemorating those who served overseas as well as volunteered with the Red Cross and YMCA now stands in front of the Piersall Building (44 Ridgefield Road).<sup>ccxxx</sup>

## Victorian and Early Twentieth-Century Architecture

Wilton's landscape in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century consisted of much more open land than it does now. In 1860, nearly 80 percent of land in Wilton was cleared for agricultural use. There were 263 farms operating on 14,038 acres of improved land. Since there was very little growth in population, few homes were built in Wilton during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, there are few Victorian buildings in Wilton, but those that remain are significant. The railroad depot in Cannondale represents a specialized form of Gothic-influenced Victorian styling. It is characterized by its low, rectangular form with wide, overhanging eaves, vertical-board walls, decorative bargeboards and heavy eave line brackets. Also, in Cannondale, the Grange building is an example of a simple building form that was ornamented with patterned shingles and mass-produced wooden decorative trim at the gable end to create a Victorian appearance. Examples of vernacular Victorian-inspired houses, as well as preexisting residences renovated in Victorian forms during the period, can also be found throughout the town. These are not true Victorian buildings, but rather feature characteristic porch ornament, patterned shingles and ornamental gable treatments.

The popularity of the Romantic styles faded by the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as they were slowly supplanted by what came to be known as the Eclectic Movement. The latter was inspired by a renewed interest in historical influences and resulted in styles including the Classical Revival, Italian Renaissance, French Chateausque, and Beaux-Arts, as well as the Colonial and Tudor Revivals. The most favored of these in Wilton was the Colonial Revival, which gained initial popularity during the 1880s and eventually grew to become the ubiquitous architectural form of the first half of the 20th century. Many manifestations of the style emerged, most sharing influences derived from early American Colonial architecture, such as the Georgian, Federal, and Dutch Colonial forms. Houses of this type commonly have rectangular plans and hipped, pitched, or gambrel roofs. Decorative features mimic classical models and often include elaborate porticos or porches. Double-hung sash and multi-pane, symmetrically-placed windows are common, as are sidelight-flanked entries.<sup>ccxxxi</sup>

The centennial celebration of the American Revolution brought a renewed interest in America's earlier architectural styles. The New York architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White championed a Georgian aesthetic and a return to classicism. They displayed their work at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago and acquired a great number of admirers who copied their work. These influences and an overall appreciation for architectural history brought about the rather eclectic early Colonial Revival style, which incorporated aspects of Classicism, Tudor and Colonial-era styles. One of the earlier examples in Wilton is the Miller House at 426 Danbury Road (1907). It has hipped, intersecting roofs, boxy massing and columned porches. More modest versions of the style can be found at 34 New Street (1925) and 214 Sturges Ridge Road (1913).

Following the Second World War, the style became more academic in nature and the copies of Colonial forms became more faithful to the original examples. In some cases, it is difficult to distinguish between the two. Fine examples

of the academic Colonial Revival style can be found at 156 Chestnut Hill Road (originally built ca. 1830, renovated 1954) and the Azor Belden House at 539 Danbury Road. Both of which were renovated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century incorporate period dwellings. In fact, most of Wilton's houses built before 1900 have some evidence of late 19<sup>th</sup> century "improvements"; elaborate trims were removed. The result was that the house retained a much more "colonial" look than many of the surrounding communities in which the Victorian improvements remained in place. The Hickok-Rounds house at 109 Cannon Road in Cannondale (ca. 1805), the Betts-Blackmar House at 224 Danbury Road (ca. 1785) and the Gregory House at 169 Belden Hill Road (ca. 1755) all had 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian embellishments that were removed and replaced with colonial features.

The last style to emerge in Wilton during late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was the Craftsman or Bungalow. This architectural form was popularized in the United States through the work of Californian architects Charles and Henry Green. Characteristically one-and-a-half-stories in height, bungalows typically had rubble or cobblestone foundations and chimneys, low-pitched roofs extending over full-width one-story porches, widely overhanging eaves, exposed rafter tails, and bracketed eave lines. A variety of dormer arrangements are common, as are heavy columns or piers supporting the front porches. A small number of Craftsman-type houses dating from the 1910s through the 1930s were found in Wilton. Some notable examples of late 19<sup>th</sup> century construction are the five houses built by Frederick Banks on Cottage Row near Wilton Center in 1888. Around the same time Edwin Gilbert of Gilbert & Bennett built six houses on Bunker Hill (now known as Portland Avenue). The house at 46 Cheese Spring Roads an excellent example of a Craftsman residence that was designed by Gustave Stickley. It was built as a seasonal house for wool merchant Frank Carpenter.

## The Modern Era, 1929-Present

Between 1930 and 1970 Wilton underwent a dramatic transformation from a farming village to the suburban town it is today. At the beginning of the period population density was less than one person for every six acres; however, farms soon began to disappear. Farm labor was expensive, and developers were willing to pay high prices for land. Between 1940 and 1970 the town's population increased from 3,200 to 13,572. This substantial increase in residents required the construction of 2,750 new houses, seven new schools, and 160 new roads.<sup>ccxxxii</sup> The character of Wilton's main north-south thoroughfare, Danbury Road, changed from primarily residential to commercial; however, despite these changes, Wilton's first traffic light located, at the intersection of Route 33 and Danbury Road, was not installed until 1950.

As the town changed, residents recognized the need for a new town hall as early as 1919. In 1929, the location for a new town hall was finally found along Danbury Road on property owned by the former Reverend Marks. Architect Cyrus Thomas was hired in March of 1930 and the cornerstone laid on August 19<sup>th</sup> of that year by contractor Wales Lines DeBussey of Meriden. The building was dedicated on Valentine's Day 1931.<sup>ccxxxiii</sup> The Garden Club took over maintenance of the old Town Hall property after 1934.<sup>ccxxxiv</sup>

On December 18, 1930, a devastating fire broke out in Wilton Center and destroyed the First National Store, the New England Glove Company building and two houses.<sup>ccxxxv</sup> Two years later the Meyer brothers constructed a new brick Colonial Revival-style building on the site for owner George Barringer with four storefronts including the Wilton Post Office and a barber shop. Ralph Piersall moved the Village Market from the old Keeler Store to the center in 1935<sup>ccxxxvi</sup>. Ed Cooke's gas station designed by Nelson Breed opened in 1939 next to the Village Market along with a Plymouth and Raymond Keeler's hardware store built by the Meyer Brothers.<sup>ccxxxvii</sup> The post office moved to the building in 1944 and stayed there until 1953 when Post Office Square was built near Hubbard Place.<sup>ccxxxviii</sup>

After much discussion, the town took steps to establish new zoning regulations during the 1930s. The proposition of a Zoning Commission was first brought up in 1930; however, it was turned down by the town in 1931 and 1932. After October of 1938 all commercial applications were heard by the Board of Selectmen.<sup>ccxxxix</sup> A Zoning Commission was finally established in April of 1946.

Transportation via automobile continued to improve during this period, bringing Wilton into the modern era. State roads were established along Danbury Road, Ridgefield Road and Westport Roads, which were all straightened and paved by the State. On June 29, 1938 the portion of the Merritt Parkway from the New York line in Greenwich to Norwalk was opened bringing a new group of visitors to Wilton. These "Sunday Drivers" took drives for pleasure rather than out of necessity and encouraged the development of gas stations, tea rooms and antique shops, particularly along the southern end of Danbury Road.<sup>ccxli</sup>

Improvements were made to rail service as well. At-grade rail crossings were eliminated, and a new overpass was built in the town center in 1937 to cross the river and tracks on a high bridge. In 1941, the Wilton Station dating to 1852 was replaced by and relocated south of the old station on the east side of the tracks.<sup>ccxlii</sup> These improvements were required

to accommodate the large number of new developments found throughout town. Subdivisions such as the one constructed at Powder Horn Hill, by local architect Donald Douglass ca. 1941 proliferated to provide much needed housing.<sup>ccxlii</sup>

In 1937 Connecticut State College (later the University of Connecticut) undertook a study evaluating the effects of suburbanization on three Connecticut towns - Windsor, Norwich and Wilton. It found that 13 percent of the population of Wilton was seasonal, of whom 82 percent were from New York City.<sup>ccxliii</sup> Twenty eight percent of the residents moved to Wilton between 1933-1937. Professionals comprised half of the population during the 1930s and 30 percent of them worked in New York City and commuted to work by train. The town also attracted artists, businessmen and writers who were hoping to escape from the city and take advantage of Wilton's low taxes and good schools. In 1937, 459 children attended Wilton's public schools. Residential conditions in this period, however, were nowhere near as "modern" as one might think. There were 24 percent of residents without a telephone, 23 percent were without central heating, 22 percent were without an indoor bathroom, and 14 percent were without running water.<sup>ccxliv</sup>

Kenneth Lynch, originally from New Haven, opened a silver shop in Wilton in 1938. Lynch was trained in silversmithing at the International Silver Company in Meriden and opened his first shop in Manhattan after returning from service during World War I. After moving to Wilton, Lynch's projects ranged from x-ray shields and bulletproof vests to decorative spandrels for the Merritt Parkway's bridges. His best-known works included the park benches found in Central Park and the stainless-steel eagles found on the Chrysler Building. He also completed a renovation of the Statue of Liberty in the late 1920s. By 1950, Lynch's business was operating as Kenneth Lynch and Sons and it occupied a complex of 31 buildings at 78 Danbury Road in Wilton.<sup>ccxlv</sup> During World War II, Lynch left his factory to fight in the war and the manufacturers of Pederson Golf Clubs rented space in his factory. They turned their production to gun stocks for the duration of the conflict. Kenneth Lynch and Sons continues to operate, yet moved to Oxford, Connecticut, in 2007.

The Gilbert & Bennett Wire Manufacturing Company continued to expand during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1929, fishermen along the Norwalk River discovered a large number of dead trout. When the water was tested it was found to contain sulphuric acid from the Gilbert & Bennett mill. The newly-formed Wilton Association pressured the plant to install a water treatment system in July of 1930, despite the great cost to the company.<sup>ccxlvii</sup> Refuse was also a local issue. There were dump sites located along Belden Hill, Range, Wolfpit, Cheese Spring and Ridgefield Roads, but in October of 1931 Wilton decided that it would no longer accept trash from neighboring towns<sup>ccxlviii</sup>. Wilton could not decide on a location for a town dump and used a lot in Weston for many years before settling on a site along Mather Street in 1967.<sup>ccxlviii</sup>

Many notable figures were among the artists, writers, and craftsmen who arrived in Wilton during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wilton's finest Colonial Revival architect, Nelson Breed (1890-1976), moved to Wilton in 1930. His work is distinguished for its excellent proportions and detailing. His houses are fine examples of the Georgian Revival, many of new construction rather than restorations of existing structures. Breed was trained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and when he came to Wilton, purchased and remodeled the house at 464 Nod Hill Road (ca. 1820) as his own residence. He designed over 50 houses and commercial buildings in Wilton, as well as completed countless

additions and renovations. Nelson's wife Vera Poggi Breed was a well-known landscape architect who practiced throughout New England. One of her best-known works is the sunken garden created for J. Alden Weir's daughter Cora Weir Burlingham at Weir Farm.

Writer, composer and educator John Erskine (1879-1951) lived seasonally at 200 Nod Hill Road with his wife, Pauline, beginning in 1919. Erskine was a professor of English at Amherst College and Columbia University and was widely credited with starting the Great Books Movement. The father and son team of John and Alan Lomax travelled around the American South recording folk musicians for the Library of Congress Archives in the 1930s. They are credited with discovering the folk and blues musician, Leadbelly, in a prison in Angola, Louisiana, and helped secure his release. John Lomax was an author of books on American folk musicians and songs. He was best known for collecting cowboy songs such as "Home on the Range", while Alan was an accomplished musician in his own right. The Lomaxes hosted Leadbelly and his fiancé, Martha Promise, at their home on Belden Hill Road. Leadbelly and Promise were married in the living room of the Lomax home in January of 1935. As a result of the relationship, the Lomax's authored *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Leadbelly*, a book providing rich details on each song.<sup>ccxlix</sup>

## **The Great Depression and Second World War**

Following the stock market crash of 1929, Wilton residents sought relief from Federal Agencies. Road construction proved to be a rich source of employment for Wilton men. In the fall 1933, Weston and DeForest Roads were rebuilt with the help of many local men. Many more found work building the Merritt Parkway through nearby Norwalk in 1934.<sup>cccl</sup> That same year, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) program identified those in greatest need of assistance. Twenty Wilton men were chosen by this program to further improve public roadways throughout the town - Davis, Old Highway and Hulda Hill Roads were all completed as a result of this program. The Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) employed many of Wilton's artists to embellish and decorate public buildings. Artists Thomas Herbert Smith and Frank Fleming painted murals found in Wilton Town Hall and Norwalk.<sup>cccli</sup>

In the 1930s, the residents of Wilton increasingly enjoyed the comforts of a "modern" age. Radios and electric refrigerators were common. There was a growing abundance of leisure time. Organizations such as the Wilton Riding Club and the Wilton Playshop were formed. After 1929, baseball games were regularly played at Orem's Field behind 213 Danbury Road.<sup>ccclii</sup> Residents continued to engage in local civic organizations. The Wilton League of Women's Voters was organized in January 1940 and the Rotary Club was formed with 24 members in 1942.<sup>cccliii</sup>

While the Depression years seemed to be taken in stride by Wilton's residents, the Hurricane of 1938 had a devastating effect on the town. On September 21, 1938, the great storm that ravaged Connecticut downed hundreds of the town's historic trees and devastated the local fruit crops.<sup>cccliv</sup> On December 7, 1941, America was once again brought into a global conflict. Like in most other cities in Connecticut, blackouts and air raids were common. Thanks to the advent of

newsreels and improved newspaper reporting, the war was acutely felt by the population of Wilton. Rallies were held and money was raised by purchasing war bonds. In a town with a total population of 2,900, 400 Wilton men and women served overseas.<sup>cclv</sup> Selective Service began in November of 1940 and required all men between the ages of 21 and 36 to register. In February of 1942, the program was expanded to include men up to 45 years in age.

At home, residents used ration books to record their allowances of such items as tires, gas and sugar. The Wilton Ration Board was established in January of 1943 to hear appeals.<sup>cclvi</sup> Vegetable gardens were planted and scrap drives were held.<sup>cclvii</sup> The first black outs were held on February 21, 1942, and airplane spotting posts were staffed around the clock at 12 Middlebrook Road and 807 Ridgefield Road until October 1943.<sup>cclviii</sup>

Local industries converted to the manufacture of military products. Pederson Manufacturing made gun stocks instead of the usual golf clubs. The American Rubber Company made debarkation ladders. Oliver Kallas, who normally made picture frames converted his plant to the production of wooden rungs for landing ladders. Gilbert & Bennett produced camouflage netting, airfield landing mats and temporary road tracks.<sup>cclix</sup>

### **The Post-War Period and Suburbanization**

Following the Japanese surrender on August 14, 1945, Wilton began to transform at a rapid pace from a quiet rural enclave to a suburban town. As automobiles became commonplace and new highway systems were built to accommodate commuters and recreational drivers, Wilton became a suburb of both New York and the surrounding industrial cities. Thousands of new residents, including returning veteran and commuters, came to Wilton to experience its charming character and excellent public schools.<sup>cclx</sup> From 1945 to 1970 the population increased from 3,200 to 13,572. During the same period, 2650 homes, 160 roads, seven schools and three school additions were built. An average of 300 people per year were coming into Wilton after the war; by the 1960s the numbers rose to 500 a year.<sup>cclxi</sup>

These increases meant that new housing developments were inevitable. To meet the demand, G. Evans Hubbard purchased a building in Wilton Center in 1946 and added a large wing to the rear that contained 16 apartments. The complex was named Wilton Arms. The Crossways apartment complex was also erected by William Edwards along Farmers Lane. Subdivisions proliferated throughout the town. In 1947, the areas of Saunders Drive, Sugarloaf Drive, and Fairview, Olmstead Hill, and Undercliff roads were laid out on one acre lots. Other large subdivisions built after the war included those on Olmstead Hill Road, Saunders Drive, Sugarloaf Drive, Fairview Road and Undercliff Road. In 1947, local architect Donald Douglass addressed the post-war shortage of lumber by designing a number of pre-fabricated steel houses. Several were built on Cricket Lane, Powder Horn Hill, and Cheese Spring and Westport Roads by Harmon Homes.<sup>cclxii</sup> In 1950 the Planning Committee acted on an average of fifteen applications per month resulting in an average of one hundred homes being constructed annually throughout the 1950s. The development on Signal Hill Road was one of

Wilton's largest<sup>cclxiii</sup>. Signal Hill Road, Sunset Pass and Valeview Road were also constructed during this time. This rate of growth was outpaced during the following decade when an average of 130 houses were built per year.

Wilton's historic and natural resources were threatened by the pressure to accommodate growth. Spurred on by a national movement to protect historic resources, the Wilton Historical Society was founded in 1938. The initial impetus was in response to the removal of horse sheds on the property of the Congregational Church. The group initially met at the home of Julian Gregory and included Marion Olmstead, David Van Hoosear, Richard Fitch and G. Evans Hubbard.<sup>cclxiv</sup> Their efforts to save the horse sheds failed but the group went on to become an important part of the local community. One of the Society's most enduring successes was the adaptive reuse project at Lambert Corner. Eighteen buildings were moved to the site of the Lambert House (located at intersection of Routes 7 and 33) over several decades.

To further protect the character of the town's historic architectural resources, a series of Local Historic Districts (LHD's) were approved in 1961,<sup>1</sup> and the town's Historic District Commission was established in 1962 with architect Nelson Breed serving as Chair.<sup>cclxv</sup>

## **Schools and Town Development**

Wilton's Parent Teacher Association (PTA) was organized in the fall of 1927. The PTA was responsible for implementation of the school hot lunch program in 1930, and also purchased radios, projectors and mimeographs for the schools.<sup>cclxvi</sup> Prior to 1930 Wilton students attended high schools in surrounding towns.<sup>cclxvii</sup> In 1936 Wilton, Weston and Redding formed a joint study committee chaired by Tim Merwin who secured 65 acres at Harb's Farm, which was located at the intersection of School and Danbury Roads. Educational consultant Englehardt & Englehardt advised the committee and recommended that Wilton could support its own school based on population growth in the Center alone in less than a decade.<sup>cclxviii</sup> Wilton High School was eventually completed in February 1958.<sup>cclxix</sup>

A Town Association was formed in 1945 to study perspective changes in Wilton and "the probable need for additional facilities and to promote and support activities which may prove desirable."<sup>cclxx</sup> In 1948, the organization recommended the creation of a Planning Commission and a town-sponsored planning study committee was appointed in April of 1951.<sup>cclxxi</sup> The committee succeeded in getting the first street lights installed in Wilton in 1954, as well as created the town's civil defense system.

In a 1946 town meeting a zoning ordinance was approved and the first Zoning Commission approved a one-half acre residential lot size. By 1952, the town had realized that this was too small and instituted a two-acre minimum for building lots and a one-acre minimum for properties along Danbury Road.<sup>cclxxii</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A full list of Local and National Register Historic Districts are included in Appendix I.

The Post Elementary School was opened in 1954 in order to accommodate the town's expanding population. Soon after, a six-room addition to the building was planned and this was completed in 1960.<sup>cclxxiii</sup> A second elementary school, the Strong Comstock School, opened in 1956, and a new Wilton High School was erected in 1958. It's first class graduated in 1959.<sup>cclxxiv</sup>

Local churches were revitalized by the surge in the population following the conclusion of the World War II. Many of the older institutions were expanded, among them being the Congregational Church on Ridgefield Road, which built a new parish hall in 1952.<sup>cclxxv</sup> Catholics had been holding services in the American Legion Building prior to 1943; however, that year they built Our Lady of Fatima Church along Danbury Road. The associated parochial school was built shortly thereafter. A Quaker Meeting House was built in 1952 on New Canaan Road in South Wilton after the congregation's original building was destroyed by the Hurricane of 1938.<sup>cclxxvi</sup>

The character of some areas along Danbury Road, particularly in Cannondale, Georgetown and South Wilton, transformed from residential to commercial in the post-war period.<sup>cclxxvii</sup> Commercial development was creating pressure as early as 1940 when the Fitch House was threatened by commercial development. Luckily the plans fell through. The Wilton Historical Society purchased the Lambert House property in 1964 and used the house as its headquarters. When funding allowed, the Society moved to acquire the Fitch House in 1970.<sup>cclxxviii</sup> Studies to widen or bypass Danbury Road/Route 7 with a new highway began in the 1950s. The State of Connecticut began to acquire property along Danbury Road/Route 7 in 1966. While some buildings were relocated to other sites throughout town, over 100 structures along Danbury and Wolfpit roads were removed by 1970, including the Meyer Mill.<sup>cclxxix</sup> In response to this loss, the Wilton Historical Society moved to acquire the Kent Schoolhouse and the Batchelder Real Estate Office in 1971 and moved both properties to the Lambert House parcel<sup>cclxxx</sup>. The debate over the State Department of Transportation's plan for "Super 7" continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Wilton Historical Society and the Historic District Commission were largely founded to help protect the town's historic resources threatened by these development pressures.

The Flood of 1955 wiped out eight of the town's bridges and damaged several others. In response to this disaster, the Army Corps of Engineers channelized the Norwalk River and had it straightened and dredged. Public water supply was installed in Wilton Center in 1966 and was expanded throughout town in the following decades.

## **Post-Depression Era and Post-World War II Architecture**

Wilton's Post-Depression and Post-World War II era housing stock represents a number of the styles generally popular throughout the eastern United States during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These include Colonial Revival and Minimal Traditional forms (Capes), as well as vernacular interpretations of earlier styles. These houses are interspersed with historic homes and converted former agricultural buildings along the town's main arteries and are more densely-sited in the aforementioned post-war developments.

By far the most popular style in the town is Colonial Revival. This style persisted well into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and guided many restorations and renovations of earlier houses in town. Again, both academic versions of the style, which adhere strictly to true New England Colonial, Cape and Farmhouse styles, and later more interpretive versions of this style are found throughout the town. Early Colonial Revival examples often featured exaggerated forms that took inspiration from colonial features. The most common were Georgian and Federal examples and included elements such as symmetrical facades lined with multi-pane sash windows, colonial door surrounds and cornice dentils. Other influences included Post-Medieval English and Dutch Colonial examples, which featured gambrel roofs examples or garrisoned second-story overhangs. More academic examples appeared between 1915 and 1935, supported by the publication of books and periodicals on colonial architecture (the White Pine series of monographs was one such example). The economic depression of the 1930s followed by materials shortages during World War II led to a simplification of the style which featured stylized door surrounds, cornices, and symmetrically placed openings merely suggesting a colonial precedent.

Frazier Forman Peters (1895-1963) was educated as a chemical engineer before he moved to Westport in 1919 in order to take up work as a farmer. Peters was inspired by the stone houses he saw while serving in Europe during World War I and began researching construction methods for stone buildings. His goal appeared to be to find an affordable means of building a durable and beautiful home without the help of an architect. He perfected a method of placing a stone exterior on a poured concrete interior facing – a method originally developed by notable New York architect, Ernest Flagg. Peters went on to become an accomplished self-taught architect and builder. Most of his designs were built in Westport during the 1920s and 1930s; however, numerous examples exist in Wilton as well.

Other notable twentieth century housing types include the Tudor Revival and Mission Styles. Examples of Tudor-style homes can be found at 8 Deerfield Road (ca. 1923), 80 Chestnut Hill Road (ca. 1925) and 79 East Meadow Road (ca. 1929). Both make use of intersecting gables, massive chimneys and small Tudor-style details such as smaller accent windows and heavy wooden doors. The house at 2 East Meadow Road (ca. 1930), which may have been designed by Peters, is an excellent example of the Mission Style, as is the more vernacular version found at 48 Own Home Avenue (ca. 1915).

Despite an overall trend toward conservative and traditional architecture, Wilton contains some interesting examples of excellent and innovative Modern designs. Modern architecture had a strong influence in the area – most notably in neighboring New Canaan where Mid-century Modern homes could be found by the “Harvard Five” (Marcel Breuer, Eliot Noyes, John Johansen, Landis Gores and Philip Johnson). One Modern example can be found at 221 Millstone Road (a house built for Dave Brubeck in 1963). This low, modular house has strong Asian influences, including a wide overhanging roof and an entry gate topped by a massive curved lintel. A “moon gate” leads to the garden. The Foster House (commonly referred to as the Round House) at 295 Olmstead Hill Road was built in 1967 and is one of Wilton’s most unique residences. It is a circular house with glass walls set on a stone pedestal. The steel-framed house

circulates 360 degrees and features a continuous porch. The house at 128 Hulda Hill Road was designed in an early interpretation of the International style by architect Almus Pratt Evans of New York.

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<sup>i</sup> Geoffrey L. Rossano, *Historic Preservation in Connecticut. Volume II. Western Uplands: Historical and Architectural Overview and Management Guide*. (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Commission. 1996), 5.

<sup>ii</sup> Rossano, 6.

<sup>iii</sup> Reverend Charles M. Selleck, *Norwalk*, Norwalk, Connecticut: Published by the Author, 1896), 31.

<sup>iv</sup> In 1669, when the first survey was made of the northern boundary of the town, and it reached 12 miles inland to what is now the upper border of Wilton.

<sup>v</sup> Selleck, 30.

<sup>vi</sup> Robert R. Russell, *Wilton, Connecticut: Three Centuries of People, Places and Progress*, Wilton, Connecticut: Wilton Historical Society, 2007), 5.

<sup>vii</sup> Russell, 11.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> Rossano, 6.

<sup>x</sup> Russell 10.

<sup>xi</sup> Selleck, 48.

<sup>xii</sup> Selleck, 63.

<sup>xiii</sup> Russell, 12.

<sup>xiv</sup> Russell 12.

<sup>xv</sup> Russell, 29.

<sup>xvi</sup> Russell, 13.

<sup>xvii</sup> Russell, 14.

<sup>xviii</sup> Russell, 15.

<sup>xix</sup> Russell, 24.

<sup>xx</sup> Russell, 25.

<sup>xxi</sup> Russell, 37.

<sup>xxii</sup> Russell, 18.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Russell, 17.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Russell, 21.

<sup>xxv</sup> Russell, 22.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Russell, 24.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Hubbard, G. Evans. *Wilton Village: A History* (Wilton, CT: Acorn Press, 1971), 86.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Hubbard 86.

<sup>xxix</sup> Hubbard, 89.

<sup>xxx</sup> Russell, 36.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Russell, 59.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Russell, 50.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Russell, 51.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Russell, 52.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Russell, 53.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Russell, 54.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Russell, 55.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Russell, 48.

<sup>xl</sup> Russell, 35.

<sup>xli</sup> Russell, 46.

<sup>xlii</sup> Russell, 56.

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- xl<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.
- xl<sup>iv</sup> Russell, 44.
- xl<sup>v</sup> Russell, 55.
- xl<sup>vi</sup> Russell, 56.
- xl<sup>vii</sup> Russell, 105.
- xl<sup>viii</sup> Russell, 110.
- xl<sup>ix</sup> Russell, 113.
- l<sup>i</sup> Russell, 114.
- l<sup>i</sup> Russell, 114.
- l<sup>ii</sup> Russell, 116.
- l<sup>iii</sup> Russell, 115.
- l<sup>iv</sup> Russell, 116.
- l<sup>v</sup> Russell, 123.
- l<sup>vi</sup> Russell, 125.
- l<sup>vii</sup> Russell, 137.
- l<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.
- l<sup>ix</sup> Russell, 138.
- l<sup>x</sup> Gerald Foster, *American Houses: A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home*, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 22.
- l<sup>xi</sup> Russell, 142.
- l<sup>xii</sup> Rossano, 36.
- l<sup>xiii</sup> Russell, 160.
- l<sup>xiv</sup> Hubbard, 105.
- l<sup>xv</sup> Rossano, 29.
- l<sup>xvi</sup> Rossano, 29.
- l<sup>xvii</sup> Rossano, 37.
- l<sup>xviii</sup> Rossano, 25.
- l<sup>xix</sup> Russell, 143.
- l<sup>xx</sup> Russell, 144.
- l<sup>xxi</sup> Russell, 161.
- l<sup>xxii</sup> Ibid.
- l<sup>xxiii</sup> Russell, 162.
- l<sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid.
- l<sup>xxv</sup> Russell, 210.
- l<sup>xxvi</sup> Russell, 211.
- l<sup>xxvii</sup> Ibid.
- l<sup>xxviii</sup> Russell, 163.
- l<sup>xxix</sup> Russell, 164.
- l<sup>xxx</sup> Russell, 165.
- l<sup>xxxi</sup> Russell, 211.
- l<sup>xxxii</sup> Russell, 165.
- l<sup>xxxiii</sup> Ibid.
- l<sup>xxxiv</sup> Russell, 166.
- l<sup>xxxv</sup> Ibid.
- l<sup>xxxvi</sup> Rossano, 26.
- l<sup>xxxvii</sup> Russell, 172.

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- lxxxviii Russell, 205.
- lxxxix Bruce Clouette and Matthew Roth. *Cannondale Historic District*, (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1992), 8-2.
- xc Russell, 253.
- xcI Clouette and Roth, *Cannondale Historic District*, 1992, 8-2.
- xcii Russell, 221.
- xciii Russell, 221.
- xciv Russell, 209.
- xcv Russell, 220.
- xcvi Russell, 221.
- xcvii Russell, 249.
- xcviii Russell, 250.
- xcix Russell, 214.
- c Russell, 148.
- ci Russell, 182.
- cii Russell, 183.
- ciii Russell, 184.
- civ Russell, 246.
- cv Russell, 180.
- cvi Russell, 151.
- cvii Ibid.
- cviii Russell, 186.
- cix Russell, 189.
- cx Russell, 191.
- cxI Russell, 151.
- cxii Russell, 58.
- cxiii Russell, 59.
- cxiv Russell, 146.
- cxv Russell, 44.
- cxvi Rossano, 39.
- cxvii Russell, 172.
- cxviii Russell, 240.
- cxix Russell, 239.
- cxx Russell, 174.
- cxxI Russell, 242.
- cxxii Russell, 197.
- cxxiii Ibid.
- cxxiv Russell, 198.
- cxxv Ibid.
- cxxvi Russell, 228.
- cxxvii Russell, 226.
- cxxviii Russell, 175.
- cxxix Ibid.
- cxxx Ibid.
- cxxxi Russell, 159.
- cxxxi Russell, 177.

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- exxxiii Russell, 180.
- exxxiv Russell, 183.
- exxxv Russell, 196.
- exxxvi Russell, 197.
- exxxvii Rossano, 40.
- exxxviii Rossano, 40.
- exxxix Ibid.
- exl Meghan Downey, Eve Mandel, Nina Mellin, Kyle Nash and Ian Sanders. "Slavery in Wilton; A Hidden Legacy", Prepared for the Wilton Historical Society, June 16, 2017, 5.
- exli Russell, 193.
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## VI. Resources Related to Women and Minorities

A complete and detailed history of Wilton could not be completed without mention of the important role that women and minorities played in the development and daily activities of the town.

### Minority History in Wilton

Enslaved persons were commonly held by a number of Wilton's wealthiest citizens during the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some of the most well-documented slave-holders in Wilton history include the Comstock, Keeler, Lambert and Middlebrook families. In 1784 a gradual emancipation act freed all children born to enslaved women after March 1, 1784, while the Connecticut Legislature formally prohibited slavery throughout the state in 1788.<sup>i</sup> In 1790, the Federal Census indicated that there were 2,764 enslaved persons in Connecticut – a total of one percent of the population. In 1810 there were 16 people listed as slaves in Wilton; in 1820 there were 7 and by 1850 there were none listed in the census.<sup>1</sup>

Local records indicate that Samuel Middlebrook manumitted a slave by the name of Phebe in January of 1811. In February of 1812 Matthew Marvin freed "Betty, a black woman." In January 1824, a 17-year old woman by the name of Grace was sold to Hiram Betts by William Belden for a period of three years, until she reached the age of 21. Her contract ensured that she was provided with "food, medical care and comfortable and decent clothes." At the end of her service Grace was assured "two sets of cloths one for daily use and one for holidays or church use."<sup>ii</sup> Many of Wilton's slaves were admitted to the Congregational Church and were seated alongside their masters. Slaves were also expected to marry within the church. The fact that slaves were allowed to marry and attend church is little proof that they enjoyed any real sense of freedom in society.

The abolitionist movement in Connecticut was largely led by members of the Quaker, Baptist and Methodist churches. Many members of the more established Congregational and Episcopalian churches were conservative and reluctant to change. Some even had economic ties to the Southern cotton trade. Moses Stuart spearheaded the local abolitionist movement in the Georgetown section of Wilton beginning in 1833. That year, the Reverend Nathaniel Colver, an organizer for the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society, was invited to preach in the Georgetown Baptist Church on November 26, 1838.<sup>iii</sup> He had recently lectured to a group of hatters in Danbury where he was very poorly received. Colver spoke in Georgetown on November 26, 1838, with an aim to organize a local Anti-Slavery Society. He lectured again on November 27 and 28 and the following day the Baptist Church was heavily damaged by an explosion. A keg of gunpowder had been placed under the pulpit.

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<sup>1</sup> Meaghan Downey, Eve Mandel, Nina Mellin, Kyle Nash and Ian Sanders *Slavery in Wilton, A Hidden Legacy* Prepared for the Wilton Historical Society, June 16, 2017.

Colver reacted by calling Fairfield County “‘the Georgia of Connecticut,’ the dark part of the state full of intemperance and the spirit of slavery”.<sup>iv</sup>

Despite these violent reactions, the Anti-Slavery Society survived, and the Baptist Church was rebuilt. It hosted the first meeting of the Fairfield County Anti-Slavery Society in December of 1838. Dr. Erasmus Hudson, another abolitionist, came to preach at the home of David and Aaron Chichester in Pimpewaug. It too was attacked, and the house’s windows were blown out.<sup>v</sup>

The last slave recorded in Wilton was Mrs. Haggar Tonquin, who was 60 years old in the 1830 Federal Census. She was enslaved by Samuel Belden, II, and was married to Bill Tonquin, a Native American slave. Together they lived with their three children Prince, Nancy and Black Jack, in the Belden Store at the corner of Danbury and Ridgefield roads.<sup>vi</sup>

The issue of slavery was obviously a central debate in the years leading up to the Civil War. The Underground Railroad became a much riskier endeavor following passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, which made it a Federal offense to assist an escaping slave. After 1852, sympathy for enslaved people was bolstered by the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Two years later Connecticut passed the Act for Defense of Liberty, which made it a crime to seize a free person with the intent to enslave them.<sup>vii</sup> The Wakeman house at 36 Seeley Road was one of two locations in Wilton with verified connections to the Underground Railroad, the other being the Chichester House at 2 Pimpewaug Road. William Wakeman, was a local station keeper, conductor and Wilton’s best-known abolitionist.<sup>viii</sup> Wakeman’s house had a room fitted to hide fugitive slaves as he helped to move them from one place to the next.<sup>ix</sup>

After slavery was abolished in Connecticut, freed blacks still lived an isolated existence along the margins of society. Black Jack Tonquin was well-known in Wilton and cared for by the town when he lost his sight in his later years, but he was not integrated into the broader society. Even in death, burial grounds were segregated.<sup>x</sup> Town records indicate that the “Spruce Bank” cemetery was a slave burial ground located near the banks of the Norwalk River. Despite efforts to uncover its exact location, the cemetery has not been found.<sup>xi</sup>

### Women’s History in Wilton

Wilton has long been home to remarkable women who made substantive changes to the history of the town. Women writers, actresses and artists have long called this place home and many of their individual histories are mentioned in the house forms. One early example of a woman who helped record Wilton’s history was Marion Hyde Olmstead (1830-1920). Olmstead was a writer, historian and wife of Edward Olmstead, a professor at Wilton Academy. Several of her books included *The Colonial Houses of Wilton, Norwalk,*

*Westport, Darien and Vicinity* (1901); *Wilton Parish 1726-1880* (1900); and the *History of Wilton Academy* (1912).

One woman who had a lasting impact on the place of women within Wilton's society was Grace Knight Schenck (1877-1931) who moved to Wilton in 1911. Mrs. Schenck worked as the head of surgical nurses at Roosevelt Hospital in New York City prior to meeting her husband, Dr. Ernest Schenk, and marrying him in 1909. Together, they purchased a former squabbery known as the Solomon Farm and named it Graenest (a combination of their names). From the moment she arrived in Wilton, Grace proved to be a powerful force in the community and an individual passionate about advancing women's rights. She organized the first women's suffrage meeting in town, the local chapter of the Red Cross, the Wilton branch of Equal Franchise League and the Civic League.<sup>xii</sup> She led the Women's Land Army during WWI, an organization that replaced male farmers serving in the military with women. She was also active in the local branch of the Farm Bureau and was a member of the Wilton Garden Club. She served as Justice of the Peace in 1920 and was the town Health Officer.

Grace Schenck's impact encouraged other Wilton women to step forward into public roles. By 1927, Wilton had elected more women to office than any other town of its size in the state.<sup>xiii</sup> That year women held the following positions: Helen Chichester served as Town Clerk; Helen Howard and Katherine Jennings served on the School Board; Isabel Bunker served as Grand Juror; Margaret McClure was Constable; Grace Schenck served on the Board of Relief and Bessie Fischer served as the Justice of the Peace.<sup>xiv</sup> Fischer went on to serve until 1934 and was elected again in 1946. She stated that, "Whether a man respects the woman or not, he must respect the court."<sup>xv</sup> Grace Schenck died unexpectedly at the age of 55 in 1932.<sup>xvi</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Rossano, 40.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Russell, 193.

<sup>iv</sup> Russell, 192.

<sup>v</sup> Russell, 194.

<sup>vi</sup> Meghan Downey, Eve Mandel, Nina Mellin, Kyle Nash and Ian Sanders. "Slavery in Wilton; A Hidden Legacy", Prepared for the Wilton Historical Society, June 16, 2017, 5.

<sup>vii</sup> Russell, 196.

<sup>viii</sup> Russell, 193.

<sup>ix</sup> Russell, 195.

<sup>x</sup> Rossano, 40.

<sup>xi</sup> Downey et al, 2017, 9.

<sup>xii</sup> Russell, 343.

<sup>xiii</sup> Russell, 325.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xvi</sup> Ibid.

## VII. Recommendations

### Recommendations for the National Register of Historic Places

A major purpose of a Historic Resource Inventory study is to identify those resources which satisfy the criteria for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. As the people of Wilton have long been committed to the preservation of their history, and the resources related to it, many areas of town have structures, buildings, sites, or districts already listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This section identifies those resources and consists of recommendations as to which properties are likely future candidates, either listed individually, or as historic districts.

These recommendations are an informed opinion only and should not be construed as excluding any site from consideration for National Register of Historic Places designation. The sites listed below possess qualities that appear to make them eligible for listing on the National Register, however a separate and specific study must be made to determine confirm this. This process, and final evaluation, is administered by the State Historic Preservation Office of the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Hartford, CT 06103.

### Existing National Register Properties in Wilton

- **Cannondale Historic District** Roughly bounded by Cannon, Danbury and Seeley Roads. Listed November 12, 1992 (NPS# 92001531)
- **Hurlbutt Street School** 157 Hurlbutt Street. Listed January 25, 1996 (NPS#9600074)
- **David Lambert House** 150 Danbury Road. Listed July 24, 1992 (NPS #9200098)
- **Marvin Tavern** 405 Danbury Road. Listed April 26, 1984 (NPS # 84000806)
- **Sloan-Raymond-Fitch House** 224 Danbury Road. Listed April 29, 1982 (NPS# 82004344)
- **Wilton Center Historic District** Roughly the area around the junction of Lover's Lane, Belden Hill and Ridgefield roads. Listed August 19, 1992 (NPS #92001003)
- **Weir Farm National Historic Site** 735 Nod Hill Road. Listed October 31, 1990 (NPS#03000284)

### Local Historic Districts in Wilton

#### Historic District #1

Lambert Corners, 150 Danbury Road  
David Lambert House, c. 1727 \*  
Wilton Railroad Station, 1852  
Hurlbutt Street General Store & Post Office, c. 1889  
Kent Schoolhouse, c. 1843  
Davenport Barn, c. 1860  
Outhouse, c. 1880  
Cannon General Store, c. 1790  
Corncrib, c. 1880

#### Historic District #2

Daniel Gregory House, 11 Belden Hill Road, c.1775 \*  
Alan Spierer House, 16 Deacon's Lane, 1988  
Original Congregational Church Parsonage, 65 Ridgefield Road, 1832 \*  
Old Town Hall, 69 Ridgefield Road, 1832 \*  
Congregational Church, 70 Ridgefield Road, 1790 \*  
Nathan Comstock House, 77 Ridgefield Road, c.1810 \*  
Winton House, 80 Ridgefield Road, 1926 \*  
Halsey House, 98 Ridgefield Road, 1934 \*  
Deodate Davenport House, 108 Ridgefield Road, 1791 \*

#### Historic District #3 – INCLUDED WITH #5

Historic District #4

Hurlbutt Street Schoolhouse, 157 Hurlbutt Street, 1834 \*

Historic District #5

Wilton Historical Society Museum Complex, 224 Danbury Road

Raymond/Fitch House, 1772 \*

Betts/Sturges/Blackmar House, c. 1740

Basil Burt Barn, c. 1860

Abbott Barn, c. 1860

Abbott Blacksmith Shop, c. 1890

Historic District #6

Georgetown Neighborhood of Church Street, West Church Street, & Redding Road

3 Church Street

23 Church Street

33 & 37 Church Street

49 Church Street

13 West Church Street

16 West Church Street

17 West Church Street

21 West Church Street

22 West Church Street

25 West Church Street

28 West Church Street

31 West Church Street

32 West Church Street

25 Redding Road

27 & 29 Redding Road

Georgetown Neighborhood south of Redding Road (Route 107)

1 Church Street

12 New Street Terrace

16 New Street Terrace

17 New Street Terrace

20 New Street Terrace

10 New Street

20 New Street

24 New Street

28 New Street

34 New Street

38 New Street

42 New Street

48 New Street

49 New Street

50 New Street

5 New Street Extension

6 New Street Extension

9 New Street Extension

## Recommended National Register Districts

Most of the study area was historically farmland with areas of concentrated development located around several crossroads and along the major thoroughfares. As a result, houses are widely-spaced and a considerable amount of infill construction has taken place. Also, many of the newer houses are set back from the street and therefore do not contribute to potential districts. Despite this fact, there are areas of 20<sup>th</sup> century development that provide contiguous resources which may form an eligible district, particularly those that fall within the period of study (1920-1940).

The Chestnut Hills subdivision is one of the most architecturally intact groupings in Wilton. The majority of the houses are architect designed and represent a wide variety of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century revival styles. Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival and Spanish Revival are best represented here. The subdivision was first laid out in 1928 and several of the homes were designed by architect Frazier Forman Peters. Despite later infill, the area is potentially significant under National Register of Historic Places Criteria A and C for its architectural significance and as an exceptional example of a successful early subdivision and a model of those that came to define the suburban character of Wilton.

1. 2 East Meadow Road
2. 11 East Meadow Road
3. 15 East Meadow Road
4. 23 East Meadow Road
5. 40 East Meadow Road
6. 52 East Meadow Road
7. 66 East Meadow Road
8. 75 East Meadow Road
9. 79 East Meadow Road
10. 85 East Meadow Road
11. 86 East Meadow Road
12. 93 East Meadow Road
13. 8 West Meadow Road
14. 21 West Meadow Road
15. 31 West Meadow Road
16. 32 West Meadow Road
17. 38 West Meadow Road
18. 39 West Meadow Road
19. 57 West Meadow Road
20. 58 West Meadow Road
21. 64 West Meadow Road
22. 71 West Meadow Road
23. 72 West Meadow Road
24. 83 West Meadow Road
25. 93 West Meadow Road
26. 96 West Meadow Road
27. 105 West Meadow Road
28. 115 West Meadow Road
29. 125 West Meadow Road
30. 133 West Meadow Road
31. 136 West Meadow Road
32. 9 Woodway Lane

Deerfield Road, located just off of Danbury Road, contains a small assemblage of vernacular houses dating mainly from the late 1920s to 1940. It is an example of the kind of modest housing built during this time period and many of the buildings have retained a high degree of integrity. The proposed district would include the following houses:

1. 7 Deerfield Road
2. 8 Deerfield Road
3. 9 Deerfield Road
4. 12 Deerfield Road
5. 14 Deerfield Road
6. 18 Deerfield Road
7. 2 Fairfax Avenue
8. 14 Fairfax Avenue

### Properties That May Be Individually Eligible for the National Register

The following properties in the study area may be eligible for nomination individually to the National Register:

1. 87 Charter Oak Drive
2. 145 Piper's Hill Road
3. 128 Hulda Hill Road
4. Ambler Farm, 257 Hurlbutt Street. Although this resource was included in the previous survey, its significance coupled with local interest in its preservation make it a strong candidate.

In addition to the areas mentioned above, it is important to note the historic buildings that remain along Route 7, particularly along the stretch between Lambert Corners and Cannondale. Although a linear district would be difficult to achieve due to infill development, a multiple property nomination may be a possible alternative to capture the buildings and structures that remain.

### VIII. Street Index

Inventory #	Number	ADDRESS	Date	Style
1.	78	Belden Hill Rd	1924	Craftsman Bungalow
2.	112	Belden Hill Rd	1929	Colonial Revival
3.	320	Belden Hill Rd	1940	Modified Cape
4.	364	Belden Hill Rd	1934	Cape
5.	461	Belden Hill Rd	1927	Colonial Revival
6.	560	Belden Hill Rd	1939	Colonial Revival
7.	87	Charter Oak Dr	1936	Colonial Revival
8.	31	Cheese Spring Rd	1937	Colonial Revival
9.	92	Chestnut Hill Rd	1930	Dutch Colonial Revival
10.	119	Chestnut Hill Rd	1924	Colonial Revival
11.	132	Chestnut Hill Rd	1930	Colonial/Tudor Revival
12.	181	Chestnut Hill Rd	1940	Colonial Revival
13.	182	Chestnut Hill Rd	1934	Colonial Revival
14.	274	Chestnut Hill Rd	1940	Colonial Revival
15.	284	Chestnut Hill Rd	1940	Colonial Revival
16.	23-29	Chicken St	1913,1956	Craftsman, Vernacular
17.	9	Connery Street	1924	Craftsman
18.	28	Connery Street	1935	Vernacular
19.	224	Danbury Rd	ca. 1690	Colonial
20.	238	Danbury Rd	1930	Colonial Revival
21.	395	Danbury Rd	ca. 1760	Colonial/Georgian
22.	687	Danbury Rd	1930	Craftsman Bungalow
23.	699	Danbury Rd	1930	Craftsman
24.	703	Danbury Rd	1929	Craftsman
25.	707	Danbury Rd	1928	Craftsman
26.	711	Danbury Rd	1937	Craftsman

27.	759	Danbury Rd	ca. 1930	Vernacular Commercial
28.	763	Danbury Rd	ca. 1925	Craftsman Bungalow
29.	7	Deerfield Rd	ca. 1930	Dutch Colonial Revival
30.	8	Deerfield Rd	1923	Tudor Revival
31.	9	Deerfield Rd	1929	Arts and Crafts
32.	12	Deerfield Rd	1937	Cape Cod Cottage
33.	14	Deerfield Rd	1940	Cape Cod Cottage
34.	18	Deerfield Rd	1938	Cape Cod Cottage
35.	75	Deforest Rd	ca. 1940	Colonial Revival
36.	105	Deforest Rd	ca. 1940	Cape Cod Cottage
37.	113	Drum Hill Rd	1936	Colonial Revival Cape
38.	136	Drum Hill Rd	1923	Colonial Rev/Ranch Cottage
39.	140	Drum Hill Rd	ca. 1930	Colonial Revival
40.	170	Drum Hill Rd	ca. 1940	Cape Cod
41.	186	Drum Hill Rd	ca. 1920	Vernacular Cottage
42.	2	East Meadow Rd	ca. 1930	Spanish Mission
43.	52	East Meadow Rd	ca. 1930	Colonial/Tudor Revival
44.	66	East Meadow Rd	ca. 1930	Tudor Revival
45.	79	East Meadow Rd	ca. 1929	Tudor Revival
46.	85	East Meadow Rd	ca. 1930	Craftsman
47.	86	East Meadow Rd	1938	Colonial Revival
48.	93	East Meadow Rd	1934	Cape Cod Cottage
49.	2	Evergreen Ave	ca. 1930	Craftsman Bungalow
50.	2	Fairfax Ave	1929	Tudor Revival
51.	14	Fairfax Ave	ca. 1925	Vernacular
52.	6	Godfrey Pl	ca. 1920	Craftsman
53.	9	Graenest Ridge Rd	1924	Chateausque
54.	39	Grumman Hill Rd	1929	Colonial Revival
55.	43	Grumman Hill Rd	1928	Tudor Revival
56.	139	Grumman Hill Rd	1929	Tudor Revival
57.	19	Hanford La	1927	Vernacular
58.	9	High Ridge Rd	ca.1930	Colonial/Tudor Revival
59.	2	Horseshoe Rd	ca. 1925	Vernacular with Greek Revival influences
60.	14	Horseshoe Rd	1924	Dutch Colonial Revival
61.	17	Horseshoe Rd	ca. 1940	Cape Cod Cottage
62.	18	Horseshoe Rd	ca.1930	Cape Cod Cottage
63.	32	Horseshoe Rd	1929	Cape Cod Cottage
64.	92	Horseshoe Rd	1928	Cape Cod Cottage
65.	128	Hulda Hill Rd	1938	International
66.	148	Hulda Hill Rd	1933	Colonial Revival
67.	66	Hurlbutt St	ca. 1925	Vernacular
68.	77	Hurlbutt St	1835	Vernacular
69.	97	Hurlbutt St	1924	Colonial Revival
70.	118	Hurlbutt St	ca. 1940	Craftsman Bungalow
71.	434r	Hurlbutt St	1926	Vernacular
72.	43	Indian Hill Rd	1932	Vernacular
73.	69	Liberty St	1923	Dutch Colonial Revival
74.	94	Mather St	1927	Vernacular
75.	201	Millstone Rd	1850	Converted Mill
76.	239	Millstone Rd	ca. 1739	Georgian
77.	20	Mountain Rd	1914	Vernacular
78.	52	Nod Hill Rd	ca. 1920	Modified Cape Cod

79.	77	Nod Hill Rd	1941	Colonial Revival
80.	184	Nod Hill Rd	1929	Colonial Revival
81.	351	Nod Hill Rd	1938	Colonial Revival
82.	354	Nod Hill Rd	1932	Colonial/Tudor Revival
83.	415	Nod Hill Rd	1924	Colonial Revival
84.	441	Nod Hill Rd	ca. 1930	Classical Revival
85.	7	Old Highway	1929	Craftsman Bungalow
86.	21	Old Highway	1929	Colonial Revival
87.	108	Old Highway	ca. 1935	Vernacular
88.	157	Old Highway	ca. 1925	Colonial Revival
89.	74	Old Kings Highway	1937	Cape Cod Cottage
90.	185	Old Kings Highway	ca. 1930	Ranch
91.	187	Old Kings Highway	ca. 1925	Craftsman Bungalow
92.	189	Old Kings Highway	ca. 1910	Craftsman Bungalow
93.	193	Old Kings Highway	1921	Craftsman Bungalow
94.	195	Old Kings Highway	ca.1940	Tudor Revival
95.	101	Old Ridgefield Road	1928	Colonial Revival School
96.	134	Olmstead Hill Rd	1929	Vernacular
97.	323	Olmstead Hill Rd	ca. 1930	Vernacular
98.	23	Own Home Ave	ca. 1925	Dutch Colonial Revival
99.	29	Own Home Ave	1932	Craftsman
100.	34	Own Home Ave	1924	Craftsman
101.	40	Own Home Ave	1924	Vernacular
102.	42	Own Home Ave	ca. 1915	Vernacular
103.	48	Own Home Ave	ca. 1915	Spanish Mission
104.	14	Partrick La	1927	Vernacular
105.	145	Pipers Hill Rd	1938	Colonial Revival
106.	35	Pond Rd	ca. 1938	Colonial Revival
107.	151	Range Rd	ca. 1945	Cape Cod Cottage
108.	163	Range Rd	1929	Cape Cod Cottage
109.	221	Range Rd	1938	Dutch Colonial Revival
110.	136	Ridgefield Rd	1955	Modern (Miesian)
111.	208	Ridgefield Rd	ca. 1920	Colonial Revival
112.	211	Ridgefield Rd	ca. 1830	Modified Colonial Cape
113.	225	Ridgefield Rd	ca. 1930	Modified Cape
114.	475	Ridgefield Rd	ca. 1940	Colonial Revival
115.	481	Ridgefield Rd	1927	Colonial Revival/ Barn
116.	550	Ridgefield Rd	1742	Modified Colonial
117.	605	Ridgefield Rd	1755	Georgian Colonial
118.	691	Ridgefield Rd	ca. 1900	Colonial Revival
119.	765	Ridgefield Rd	1927	Tudor Revival
120.	771	Ridgefield Rd	1927	Colonial Revival
121.	901	Ridgefield Rd	1720	Colonial/Former Mill
122.	911	Ridgefield Rd	1920	Vernacular
123.	957	Ridgefield Rd	1929	Vernacular
124.	1031	Ridgefield Rd	1932	Vernacular
125.	1078	Ridgefield Rd	ca. 1930	Vernacular
126.	26	Rossimur Ct	1932	Tudor Revival
127.	14-16	Sharp Hill Rd	ca. 1920	Craftsman
128.	77	Sharp Hill Rd	1921	Dutch Colonial Revival
129.	114	Sharp Hill Rd	ca. 1925	Colonial Revival
130.	122	Sharp Hill Rd	1928	Tudor Revival
131.	167	Sharp Hill Rd	1922	Foursquare

132.	105	Skunk La	ca. 1935	Colonial Revival
133.	143	Skunk La	1936	Vernacular
134.	167	Skunk La	1931	Colonial Revival
135.	9	Sunset Hill Rd	1932	Vernacular
136.	10	Sunset Hill Rd	ca. 1930	Craftsman
137.	16	Sunset Hill Rd	1937	Cape Cod Cottage
138.	12	Sunset Pass	1931	Dutch Colonial Revival
139.	17	Sunset Pass	ca. 1930	Vernacular
140.	20	Sunset Pass	1929	Vernacular
141.	30	Sunset Pass	ca. 1925	Vernacular
142.	355	Thayer Pond Rd	1932	Vernacular
143.	39	Trails End Rd	1939	Tudor/Colonial Revival
144.	8	West Meadow Rd	1927	Colonial Revival
145.	21	West Meadow Rd	ca. 1930	Tudor Revival
146.	32	West Meadow Rd	ca. 1930	Tudor Revival
147.	38	West Meadow Rd	1931	Tudor Revival
148.	39	West Meadow Rd	1931	Colonial Revival
149.	57	West Meadow Rd	1928	Tudor Revival
150.	64	West Meadow Rd	1922	Colonial Revival
151.	71	West Meadow Rd	1929	Tudor Revival
152.	72	West Meadow Rd	ca. 1930	Vernacular
153.	83	West Meadow Rd	1928	Spanish Eclectic
154.	96	West Meadow Rd	1939	Eclectic
155.	105	West Meadow Rd	1927	Eclectic
156.	115	West Meadow Rd	1938	Eclectic
157.	133	West Meadow Rd	1928	Tudor Revival
158.	136	West Meadow Rd	1926	Tudor Revival
159.	230	Westport Rd	1929	Dutch Colonial Revival
160.	9	Woodway Ln	1928	Tudor Revival Influences