



Torrington Historical Society

Since 1944 the Torrington Historical Society has been collecting and sharing Torrington's history with a growing audience. The Historical Society operates the Hotchkiss-Fyler House Museum, the Torrington History Museum, the John H. Thompson Library and Archives, and the West Torrington birthplace of abolitionist John Brown.

192 Main St. • Torrington, CT 06790 • 860-482-8260
www.torringtonhistoricalsociety.org



Nutmeg Conservatory

Torrington's Nutmeg Conservatory for the Arts is a premier training institute for Classical Ballet and Classical Music. Since its founding in 1970, the Conservatory has grown into a major, international arts center. In 2001, Nutmeg moved into a historic state-of-the-art building complex with a modern addition. Nutmeg Conservatory is used regularly by the community as a major gathering center.

58 Main St. • Torrington, CT 06790 • 860-482-4413
www.nutmegconservatory.org



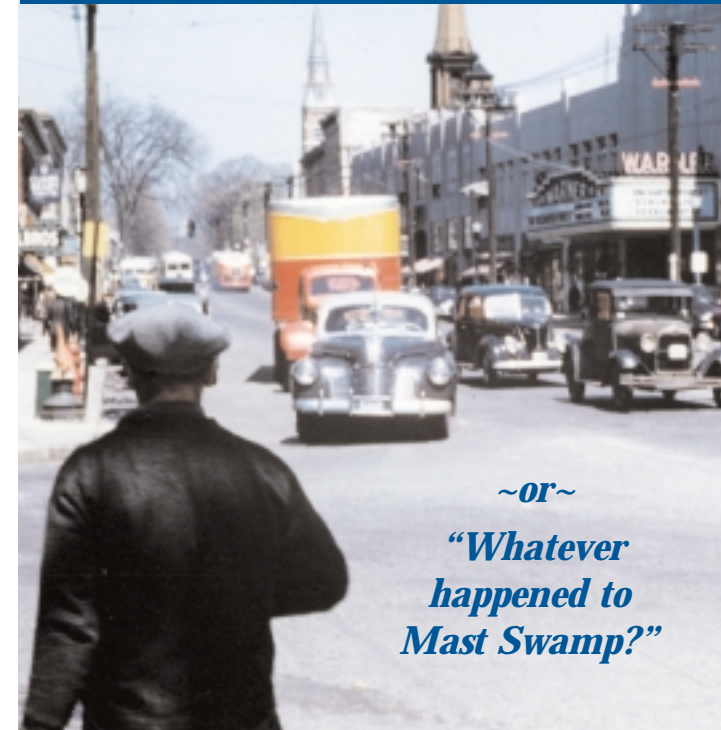
This walking tour is an ArtsCity project of the Nutmeg Conservatory and the Torrington Historical Society.

Sponsored by:

Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism,
 The City of Torrington, The Gleason Mortuary,
 The Rotary Club of Torrington,
 The Torrington Savings Bank



WALKING TOUR OF DOWNTOWN TORRINGTON'S NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT



~or~

*“Whatever
 happened to
 Mast Swamp?”*



In Colonial Times,

downtown Torrington was known as Mast Swamp. It was a low-lying, wet area covered with massive pines and hemlocks that were claimed as ship masts for England's Royal Navy. The land in Mast Swamp was divided among Torrington's early settlers and most of the trees were sawn into lumber at Wilson's Sawmill (1751) on the upper end of Water Street. Few, if any, became ship masts.

Torrington's downtown was built here because the Naugatuck River supplied water power for mills and factories in an era before steam power and electricity. A woolen mill was built on lower Water Street by Frederick Wolcott in 1813. This mill brought workers to the river valley and a village of stores and homes sprang up around it. The village became known as Wolcottville and would continue to grow into the urban center that we now call downtown Torrington.

Immigration from Europe greatly expanded Torrington's population between 1870 and 1900. During that time most of Wolcottville's wooden buildings were replaced with more fire-resistant brick structures. In the decades that followed, buildings were built or remodeled

in the popular Art Deco, Art Moderne, and Colonial Revival styles. Along the streets of downtown Torrington you will see the work of architects, builders, and property owners who have created a unique sense of place. Today, many of these historic buildings are home to arts and cultural organizations that are breathing new life into downtown Torrington.



For more information about the history of Torrington visit the Torrington Historical Society's permanent exhibit **No Place Like Home: The History of Torrington.**

Hours of Operation: April 15–October 31
Tuesday–Friday 10–4; Saturday–Sunday 12–4

1 HOTCHKISS-FYLER HOUSE, 1900 192 Main Street

Built in 1900, before the automobile arrived here, the Hotchkiss-Fyler House typifies an era when stately homes were built within walking distance of downtown. This house was built for Orsamus and Mary Fyler. Mr. Fyler was a Civil War veteran and had a notable business and political career. The house was designed in a Queen Anne, "chateausque" style and was constructed by Hotchkiss Brothers Company of Torrington. In 1956, Fyler's daughter, Gertrude Hotchkiss, donated the home to the Torrington Historical Society for use as a museum. The home remains furnished as it was during Mrs. Hotchkiss' lifetime.



2 BRICK ACADEMY, ca. 1835 4 George Street



This is the oldest building in the downtown historic district. It is now a private residence and it is an excellent example of Greek Revival architecture. By 1835, downtown was expanding with new businesses and homes and this school was constructed to serve the growing school age population. Typical of the Greek Revival style, the gable end with its triangular pediment faces the street. The Greek Revival style was popularized in America during the early nineteenth century when Americans looked beyond traditional English architecture and politics to the pure forms and ideals of ancient Greek democracy.

3 ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI CHURCH, 1887 168 Main Street

Irish immigrants began arriving in Torrington around 1845. Roman Catholic religious services were first held in Irish homes until a wooden church was built on this site in 1859. As Torrington's Irish-Catholic population grew, so did the need for a larger church. The present Gothic-style church with its 151-foot steeple was built to replace the wooden church that once stood here. Shortly thereafter, the parish constructed a rectory, two brick school buildings behind the church and a convent.





4 CENTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, 1867
155 Main Street

Although not the first church on this site, the present Center Congregational Church is one of the older buildings in downtown Torrington. The Congregational Church built a wood-framed meeting house on this site in 1829. It was replaced with the present Gothic Revival style church built of local granite in 1867. The parish house with its distinctive square tower was added in 1899. Tragedy struck in 1979 when an arsonist set fire to the church and destroyed all but the solid granite walls. Although the interior of the church is modern, the building retains its historical appearance and significance.

5 TORRINGTON SAVINGS BANK, 1938
129 Main Street

This bank building as well as the Torrington City Hall (1936) across the street were designed by Torrington architect Carl Victor Johnson. Both buildings show the influence of the Colonial Revival Movement. The bank also incorporates classical influences such as the triangular pediment above the second floor. The bank also shares several stylistic elements with the Torrington National Bank which was built twenty years earlier on Prospect Street. The Torrington Savings Bank was established in 1868. Until this building was built, the bank was located in the Granite Block, which at one time stood opposite the Warner Theatre.



6 CONLEY'S INN, 1891 (YANKEE PEDLAR INN)
93 Main Street

When Conley's Inn opened in 1891, it was billed as "equal to any in Connecticut." Frank Conley had been a hotel keeper in Philadelphia when he entertained a group of men from Torrington. These businessmen saw a need for a first-class hotel to boost Torrington's image and convinced Conley to relocate here. The original hotel had 52 rooms and was thoroughly Victorian. During World War I, a large demand for surgical needles prompted Torrington Company officials to recruit workers from outside Torrington. A shortage of housing led the company to purchase Conley's Inn in 1918. Two years later, a large three-story addition was constructed to serve as a boarding house for female employees. A Tudor-style pub called the Yankee Pedlar was added along Maiden Lane in 1940. In 1956, the name of the hotel itself was changed to the Yankee Pedlar Inn.



7 MERTZ DEPARTMENT STORE, 1930
84-94 Main Street

The W.W. Mertz Company operated Torrington's premier department store in a period when locally-owned department stores were the anchor and pride of America's Main Streets. This pride was reflected in both the quality of merchandise as well as in the design of the building itself. The façade of the Mertz building is a fine example of modernistic architecture in Torrington. Designed by Torrington architect William E. Hunt, the building displays intricate geometric details made of cut Indiana limestone and a front entry surrounded by smooth, dark green Vermont marble. The retail business was established by Walter S. Lewis who built a Victorian-era commercial building on the site. After the death of Lewis, the business was taken over by his son-in-law, W. W. Mertz who greatly expanded the floor space and built the modernistic façade. It is now owned by the Warner Theatre.

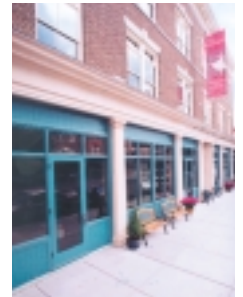


8 WARNER THEATRE, 1931
68 Main Street

Built by Warner Brothers, the Warner Theatre replaced several Victorian-era, brick, commercial blocks on the east side of Main Street. Construction began in 1930 and the theatre opened on August 19, 1931. Designed by noted theatre architect Thomas Lamb, the Warner incorporates many modernistic design concepts of the period both on the exterior façade and in the interior finishing. Lamb's aim was to create an atmosphere of "compelling abandon and relaxation" for the spectator. The theatre operated primarily as a movie palace until 1981 when it closed. There was talk of turning it into a parking lot when, in 1982, a group of preservationists and theatre enthusiasts spearheaded a grassroots fundraising campaign to purchase this landmark and create a performing arts center. The theatre is operated by the Northwest Connecticut Association for the Arts which has completed the theatre's exterior and interior restoration.

9 CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BUILDING, 1916
56-66 Main Street

The original Neo-Classical architecture of this building and its recent restoration and rehabilitation represent the aspirations of two successful organizations in two separate centuries. The original three-story brick building was built by James Mallette, who came to Torrington as a stable boy and became Torrington's leading real estate developer and financier. His strong support for the Chamber of Commerce led him to construct this substantial building, in part, as a home for their operations. The building is now the headquarters of the Nutmeg Conservatory and the Nutmeg Ballet, who have rehabilitated the original structure, adding a new first-floor façade and a soaring glass-and-steel dance studio to the rear of the building.



10 ALLEN BUILDING, 1930, 1935
42 Main Street

This building is another fine example of modernistic architecture by Torrington architect William E. Hunt (see also Mertz Building). The northernmost part of the building was built in 1930 adjacent to a nineteenth-century wood-frame hotel on the corner. The hotel, known as the Allen House, was severely damaged by fire in 1934 and demolished to make way for the rest of this building (1935) that wraps around the corner. As a whole, the building is a significant modernistic statement in an important commercial location.



12 VENETIAN RESTAURANT, 1844, 1901
50-52 East Main Street

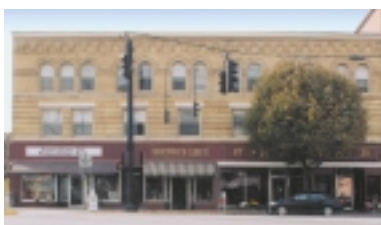
The Venetian building showcases several architectural styles as well as the history of two prominent immigrant groups, Germans and Italians. The rear portion of the Venetian is a wood frame building constructed in 1844 as a store and dwelling. It is probably the oldest structure in the commercial district. The neo-classical masonry addition on the front of the building was built around 1898 by German immigrants William Witzke and Oscar Stoeckert who operated a saloon. At this time, many of the businesses on East Main Street were owned and operated by people of German descent. Meanwhile, Torrington's Italian population was growing and, in 1925, the building was purchased by Charles Giampaolo who opened an Italian restaurant and named it the Venetian.



In 1930, the façade and interior were remodeled with the addition of art deco glass block, a classic neon sign, and interior murals of Venice.

11 LILLEY BLOCK #2, 1896
11-21 Main Street

This building is an elegant example of a type of commercial block built in American cities at the turn of the century. These mixed-use buildings often contained first floor stores with apartments above which gave cities a resident population to support a variety of businesses. The third story arched windows and arched brick work of the cornice identify this building as Victorian Romanesque Revival. Waterbury developer George Lilley built this commercial block in 1896, 13 years before becoming governor of Connecticut. Lilley purchased most of the property between Water Street and the river after an 1894 fire destroyed the Turner and Seymour Manufacturing Company buildings on this site. Between 1896 and 1912, Lilley built four commercial buildings along Main and Water Streets.



13 LYFORD BUILDING (REIBMAN'S), 1924
20 East Main Street

George D. Lyford built this building for his hardware and sporting goods store in 1924. It was designed with neo-classical influences by Torrington architect William E. Hunt (see Mertz Building). This retail building had two stories of display windows as is evidenced by the two-story, cast-stone surround on the front of the building. Hunt later remodeled two other buildings with this "new" look, the Meara building (25 Main Street), next to Lilley Block #2, and the Torrington Co-Operative store, north of the Mertz building (98 Main Street). From 1935 to 1970, this building was a Sears Roebuck store. This building also has a well-developed façade on the Franklin Street elevation.



14 COE PARK, 1906
Corner South Main and Litchfield Streets

This recently refurbished urban park was created in 1906 to beautify the center of Torrington and create a green space for the town's rapidly growing population. The park land was a gift from the children of Lyman W. Coe and Eliza S. Coe whose home occupied the land. During his career, Lyman Coe built Torrington's Coe Brass Company into the town's major industry. The bequest of land to create the park stipulated that the Coe house be removed from the property. The footprint of the original house is now outlined by low stone walls. Over the years, other homes were acquired by the city to further enlarge the park. The large memorial boulder at the front of the park was moved here from Migeon Avenue by E.J. Kelley with a heavy-duty wagon and a team of 20 horses. The war memorial with its towering flagpole was built in 1924. The granite foundation was built in 1981 and dedicated as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

15 TORRINGTON LIBRARY, 1901
12 Daycoeton Place

The Torrington Library is owned and operated by the private, not-for-profit Torrington Library Association. The library was first organized in 1864 as the Wolcottville Library. In 1881, the name was changed to the Torrington Library Association. The present library building was first opened in 1901. The land on which it is located and the funds for construction were donated by industrialist and library president Elisha Turner. The building was designed by New York City architect Ernest Greene in a Greek Revival style with Ionic columns at the front entrance and a white marble exterior. The interior woodwork of quarter-sawn oak is by Hotchkiss Brothers Company of Torrington.



16 LILLEY BLOCK #4 (ODD FELLOWS BUILDING), 1912
15-23 Water Street

This Renaissance Revival building was the last of the Lilley Blocks to be built on the former site of the Turner and Seymour Manufacturing Company. Historically, the property on this side of Water Street was also the site of Torrington's first woolen mill (1813) and later a cotton mill (1844) before being purchased by Turner and Seymour for their hook-and-eye and brass casting business. The third floor of this building was designed with high ceilings as a lodge for the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, a fraternal and charitable organization symbolized by the three links of Friendship, Love, and Truth. These three links are carved in stone and set into the third floor brickwork. Artwell, a community arts organization, now operates a gallery on the first floor.



18 W. H. MORRISON BUILDING, 1896
63 Water Street

This is a well-preserved, Italianate, commercial building from the late-nineteenth century. The original owner, William H. Morrison, operated his plumbing and hardware business from this location. Until 1930, the second floor was rented for the offices of the Southern New England Telephone Company. The front of the building has fine examples of pressed metal trim above the windows and at the third story cornice. It is interesting to note that the first floor of the building has been occupied by a hardware store since its construction in 1896.



17 LILLEY BLOCK #3, 1896
29-57 Water Street

One of Torrington's most visually distinctive buildings, this massive structure was one of the first of the Lilley Blocks to be built on the former site of the Turner and Seymour Manufacturing Company. George W. Lilley hired the best architects in Waterbury to design commercial buildings with elaborate brick façades. This structure, which steps up Water Street in five distinct segments, was designed by Theodore S. Peck

with commercial storefronts on the first floor and large, well-appointed apartments on the floors above. The arched windows on the third floor give this Victorian commercial block a Romanesque flair.

19 TRINITY CHURCH, 1897
220 Prospect Street

The original Episcopal Church on this site was built of wood in 1844. It also had a square bell tower. Some of the earliest members of this church were English laborers imported to work in the fledgling Coe Brass Company. The present Gothic Revival church made of granite was constructed in 1897. The Tudor style rectory located on the corner of Maiden Lane was built in 1917. The church, parish house (1908), and the rectory surround a central courtyard and create an enclave unlike any other in downtown Torrington.



20 TORRINGTON NATIONAL BANK, 1917
236 Prospect Street

As Torrington prospered in the early-twentieth century, business expanded along Prospect Street. This building was built at a time when banks were designed with the look of stability, security, and grandeur. The marble and brick exterior is done in the popular Colonial Revival style and was built by Torrington contractors, Mascetti and Holley. In 1958, the bank merged with the Hartford National Bank and Trust and later with the Connecticut National Bank.

21 ALLAN C. BRADY HOUSE (GLEESON'S MORTUARY), 1867
258 Prospect Street

This Victorian residence was built in 1867 for retired Union Army Brigadier General Allan C. Brady at a time when this section of Prospect Street was entirely residential. Before the Civil War, Brady operated a cotton mill on lower Water Street with an outlet store in New York City. After the war, he built a hotel in Wolcottville and later moved to North Carolina to rebuild a cotton mill there. Since 1927, the Brady house has been used as the Gleeson Mortuary.

