

Take A Walk along Main Street

in

Historic Chester Village Chester, Vermont

The 16 stops on our walking tour tell the story of everyday life in Chester Village, one of Chester's three Historic Districts, during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The other districts, Chester Depot and Stone Village, will be covered on a future tour.

Graphic design: Lew Watters
Editor: Nancy Chute

Sources:

National Register of Historic Places Inventory (1985)
(<http://accd.vermont.gov/sites/accd/files/Documents/strongcommunities/historic/ChesterVillageHD.pdf>)
History of Chester, VT (2011), Chester Historical Society

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Contributions to Chester Townscape may be sent to:
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Welcome to Chester!

Chester Village is one of best preserved examples of Vermont village architecture, and the town is committed to maintaining that character. A fortunate location at the junction of early turnpikes and near rivers that powered its mills brought prosperity, and the railroad later transported goods as well as visitors attracted by the town's New England charm.

Chester's growth reflects America's confidence that followed the War of 1812. Looking at its architecture styles, you see that the village developed southeastward from upper Main Street, where many early 1800s Federal and 1830s-era Greek Revival buildings are located. Continuing prosperity late in the century generated ebullient Queen Anne styles in new constructions and decorative updates on modest older buildings. Our historic dialogue ends with examples of early 20th-century Colonial Revival, particularly the gambrel roof, in buildings such as the Fullerton Inn.

The tour begins at Brookside Cemetery entrance, opposite the Green, see map on back page.



1 HEARSE HOUSE (Former Hearse Shed), c. 1830, and PUBLIC TOMB, 1850, 184 Main Street

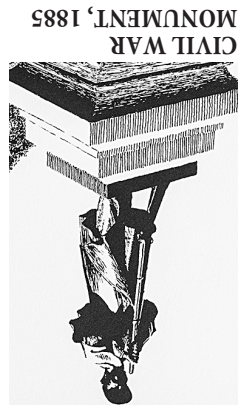
Two historic buildings related to cemetery use stand at either side of the entrance to Brookside Cemetery, which dates from the late 18th century. The Hearse House—a 1-story, wood-framed and clapboarded building with slate-shingled roof—has paneled sliding doors on the east side and two louvered window shutters facing Main Street. Built c. 1830, its original purpose was to store a horse-drawn funeral coach; more recently it held cemetery equipment.

Few such buildings remain in the state, and Chester's is one of the oldest. Part of an area restoration project by Chester Townscape, the renovated building is now a small seasonal museum that features the Town's hearse and associated photographs as well as information about death and funeral customs.

Public Tombs are used to store coffins during winter, when the ground is frozen. Stone blocks for the tomb building were quarried in the north part of Chester (Gassetts) and shipped via the new railroad. "AD 1850 PUBLIC TOMB" is inscribed in the pediment above the paneled metal door of this 1-story, slate-roofed structure.

The buildings are linked by cast-iron fencing on either side of the cemetery entrance. Stone walls define the cemetery's south side; Lovers Lane Brook is the north border. Granite, marble, and slate tombstones date to the late 18th century.

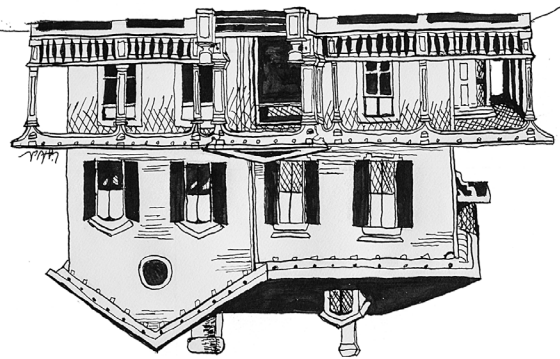
A bronze life-size figure of a Civil War soldier with rifle stands on a pedestal of Chester granite inscribed with names of local men who served. The monument was dedicated at Memorial Day ceremonies in 1885.



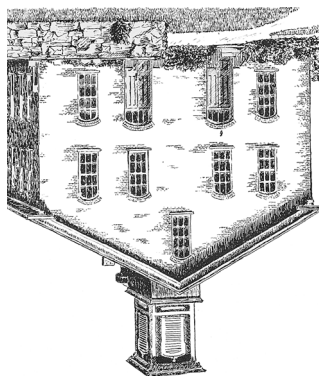
CIVIL WAR MONUMENT, 1885

3 FREDERICK FULLERTON HOUSE

1861, 308 Main Street



A curtain of spruce trees shields Chester's finest example of Italianate Revival. The 2-1/2-story, wood-framed and clapboarded villa has stylistic paint treatment and an oculi on east and south gables. The main entrance faces east, off center, marked by a projection of the deep veranda. Two urns on paneled pedestals announce a stairway leading to double-leaf doors. The house, which took 50 men two years to build, was designed by W. P. Wentworth for Frederick E. Fullerton, owner of a woolen mill and Chester philanthropist.



2 CHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

(Former Central High School), c. 1881
230 Main Street

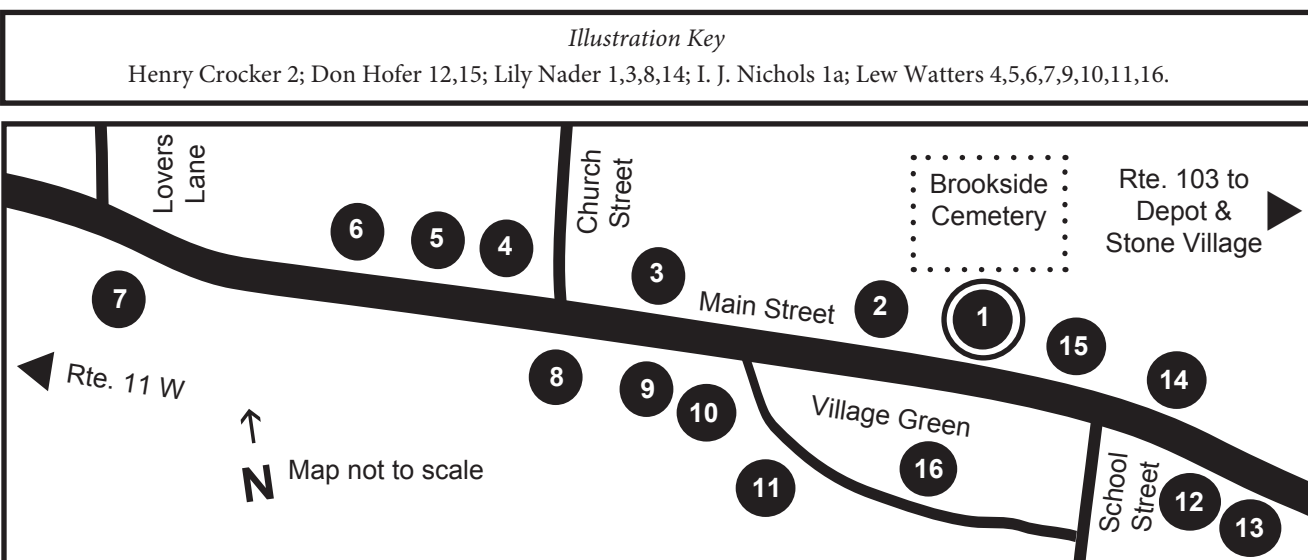
Chester's first public high school stands on the site of Chester Academy, a private secondary school built in 1814 and demolished to make way for this c. 1881, 2-1/2-story brick and granite structure. The Italianate Revival-style features include segmental arched windows and a louvered square bell cupola. The building has twin entrances—one for boys and the other, girls. It was used for a primary school 1911–1960s. It was then used for the Chester Art Guild, and currently is leased from the Town by the Chester Historical Society.



16 The Common, Chester Village's main business area along the south side of the Village Green

This tight row of storefronts anchored by Fullerton Inn (#11) forms a companionable blend of architectural styles. The elaborate 1900–1901 Queen Anne building with peaked corner tower (3rd from left) was briefly a residence—mixing commercial enterprises with homes was typical.

Although most businesses now are centered between Maple and Church Streets, Chester Village also has quarries and light industries, many earlier ones water-powered with mill ponds supplied by canals and channels from the Williams River. Continuing the tradition of yesterday's inns and taverns, today's inns, B&Bs, and restaurants cater to travelers, shoppers, and visitors attracted by Chester's convenient location, shops, and village ambience.



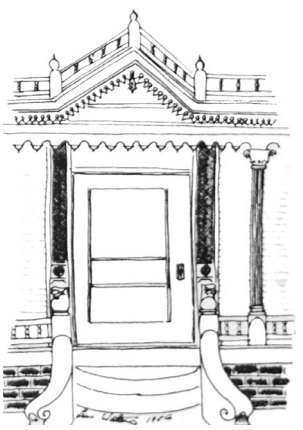
The tour begins at Brookside Cemetery entrance, proceeds west on Main Street to Lovers Lane, and returns to finish at the south side of the Green.

4 CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH (Union Meeting House), 1828–29
418 Main Street



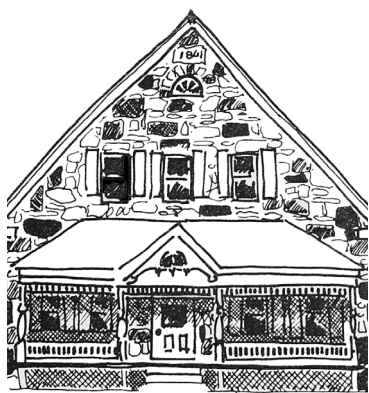
A significant Chester landmark, this building is a sophisticated interpretation of ecclesiastical Federal architecture. Its soaring, 5-stage clock-and-bell tower with belcast cap and weathervane rises above a pedimented 3-bay entrance pavilion with semi-elliptical fanlight. This elegant 2-story, slate-shingled and wood-framed building built in 1828-29 served as the Union Meeting House for Congregational, Methodist, and Universalist parishioners until around 1848. The interior was subdivided horizontally in 1878-79 and further changes were made in 1898 and 1947.

5 DR. JOHN STEVENSON HOUSE
c. 1840. 442 Main Street



An array of Steamboat Gothic embellishments added later in the century transforms this 1-1/2-story wood-framed building's c. 1840 prim Greek Revival temple form. Curved marble steps with scrolled ends and eagle-headed marble newel posts take visitors to a full-width, valance-trimmed porch supported by Corinthian fluted columns. Metal ridge cresting decorates the slate-shingled roof. Dr. John Stevenson lived here in the early 20th century and his office was next door.

6 EMERY BOLLES HOUSE, 1841
548 Main Street



Two stone houses standing side by side are the historic district's only examples of the sneaked ashlar rubblestone construction used in Stone Village buildings. This home was built in 1841 for Emory Bolles, who had his wagon shop next door. Its 1-1/2-story, gable front design is a combination of Federal and Greek Revival styles similar to others along the street. The elaborate full-width porch likely dates to the 1890s.

7 WILLIAM CILLEY HOUSE, 1819
735 Main Street



Three fine Federal-style examples of early settlement along Upper Main Street are located where Lovers Lane joins Main Street. The 5-bay front of this wood-framed clapboarded house sits perpendicular to the street, opposite its c. 1820 brick contemporaries flanking the lane. The recessed Greek Revival-style doorway may be a later update. William Cilley, its owner in the second quarter of the 20th century, was a teamster and plowed town sidewalks with horses in winter.

At Lovers Lane, retrace your steps to the crosswalk and go down the south side of Main Street.

8 NEWSBANK (Meetinghouse-Readex Microprint Building), c. 1840, c. 1880, 1970–75. 397 Main Street

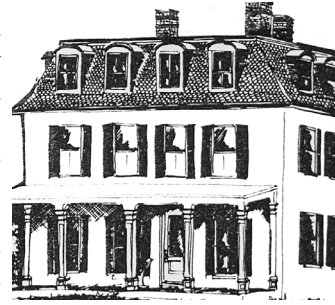


The upper part of this unpretentious wood-framed building was a c. 1840 meetinghouse brought here and set on a lower story. Before acquisition in 1950 by Readex Corporation, now NewsBank, Inc., its many uses included a harness shop, cheese factory, and undertaking parlor.

A semi-elliptical louvered fan marks the meetinghouse's central entrance (now clapboard infilled). The storefront is sheltered under an Italianate canopy supported by curved brackets with pendants. Low rear additions in 1970-75 permit commercial activity with little visual impact on the townscape, an excellent example of adaptive reuse. NewsBank has also restored other historic buildings along Main Street for company use.

9 INN VICTORIA (Hilton House) c. 1850, c. 1880, 1970–75. 321 Main Street

This imposing 2-story brick building with curbed mansard roof is the only example of French Second Empire in Chester Village. Paneled, pedestaled pillars embellish a porch extending across the main facade. Originally (c. 1850) the house had a simple gable roof parallel to the street, and its owner, Dr. Abram Lowell, used the adjoining small building for his medical office. After his death, his daughter and son-in-law, George Hilton, enlarged the house (c. 1880) in the distinctive fashion popularized by Napoleon III.



10 ST. LUKE'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, 1871
313 Main Street

Chester Village's only fully developed example of the Gothic Revival style is well illustrated by its steeply pitched, slate-shingled roof and tall bell tower with pyramidal-peaked cap. This wood-framed, clapboard building, erected in 1871, was designed by the noted Boston architect, W. P. Wentworth. On the front pavilion a large pointed-arch stained glass window with intersecting Gothic tracery commemorates its major benefactor, the Frederick E. Fullerton family who lived across the street (#3). The S. S. Hamill Opus 135 pipe organ was fully rebuilt and repositioned in 2006.



11 FULLERTON INN (Chester Inn), 1921
40 The Common



The railroad's arrival brought need for a larger hotel, which soon attracted businesses to locate nearby. Fires destroyed the 1862-63 inn and its replacements, including the first Fullerton Inn. This 3-story, wood-framed and clapboarded hostelry, built in 1921, is dominated by an imposing Colonial Revival-style, slate-shingled gambrel roof and large projecting front veranda. Its lobby fireplace contains 27 stone varieties from the Chester area.

12 WILLIAM POLLARD HOUSE
1899–1900. 137 Main Street



This highly ornamental residence ranks among Vermont's best examples of the Queen Anne style and was built in 1899-1900 for William Pollard, co-owner of a thriving shirtwaist factory with his brother James, who lived in the c. 1850 Greek Revival house next door. The intricately detailed 2-1/2-story, wood-framed, clapboarded and shingled structure highlighted by its 3-story octagonal corner tower, displays a builder's catalog of features that created a spectacular presence in the community.

13 WHITING LIBRARY, 1891–92, 1995
117 Main Street



Large horseshoe-arched and smaller semi-circular windows, all highlighted in marble, distinguish the town's library, designed by Vermont architect George H. Guernsey and built 1891-92. Named to honor Chester physician Laurin G. Whiting and his wife, Abigail, whose bequest provided the land and monies, the 1-1/2-story polychromatic brick-and-granite masonry building blends Romanesque and Queen Anne features, including a square, pyramidal-peaked corner tower. Woodwork of quartersawn and paneled oak enhances the interior. The same architectural style was maintained in the 1995 addition.

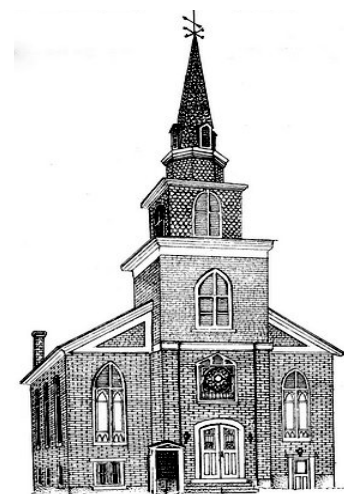
Cross Main Street.

14 HUGH HENRY HOUSE, c. 1820, c. 1875, c. 1910. 116 Main Street



The Hon. Hugh Henry, descendent of original owner, Hugh Henry, entertained President McKinley's party here in 1897 during the president's visit to Chester. The Federal style of this c. 1820, 2-1/2-story wood-framed and clapboarded building acquired Italianate updates later in the century. Georgian Revival renovations and enlargements made c. 1910 by Judge Henry show a 3-bay design with two front dormers, central entrances—the second-story door opens onto the roof of a full-width veranda—and 2-story bay windows on its west face. The home has been converted to offices.

15 BAPTIST CHURCH, 1835, 1872–73, 1953, 1999. 162 Main Street
east end of Cemetery



The 1788 Federal-style Baptist meetinghouse was moved opposite the Congregational Church (#4) and is now an apartment house. This impressive brick building, erected in 1835, originally combined the Greek Revival temple form with a Gothic Revival-style crenellated tower and pointed window arches. The tower's Gothic details were replaced with a high slated spire during a major renovation in 1872-73. That spire was destroyed in 1953 and reproduced in 1999. Town meetings were held in the basement or at Stone Church for many years until Town Hall was built.

Walk down School Street to #16 (back page).