TOWN OF FAIRFIELD
Town Hall — Fairfield, Conn.
FAIRFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

<u>Proposed Changes and Additions to the Handbook</u>
REVISED ON May 24, 2011
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KEY: Strike-out = deletion
Underscore = addition

SOUTHPORT HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Southport Historic District consists of over 150 buildings, most of them constructed in the nineteenth century. The district is significant because of its high percentage of landmark quality buildings representing all major nineteenth-century styles. These buildings include churches, commercial buildings, institutional buildings and residences, many of which were built for the wealthy and located on generous-sized lots. This unusually large number of noteworthy buildings reflects Southportôs nineteenth-century affluence due to shipping and specialized agriculture (i.e., onion trade).

Although its period of significance lies mainly in the nineteenth century, the district includes several notable eighteenth-century buildings. The sole pre-Revolutionary War dwelling is 824 Harbor Road which shows its origins in its box-like, four-bay façade, but also features later Federal alterations such as gable fanlights and ornamented cornices. At first glance, 668-670 Harbor Road, at the corner of Main Street, might appear to be a mansard-roofed commercial building, but it is actually a rare example of Dutch Colonial influence, characterized here by two rather low-pitched gambrel roofs intersecting at the street corner. At a later date, the house was lifted up and set up on the present commercial story, resulting in the present 2 - story structure.

Southportôs architectural significance basically begins with the Federal style, of which there are over a dozen examples, including two that are truly exceptional. The older, 608 Harbor Road, built in 1808, features a central, pedimented pavilion and includes an extraordinary number of refined Classical details, primarily in the modillion and dentil courses that ornament the gables and cornices. Also noteworthy are the leaded, trefoil windows in the side gables and an oval, leaded window in the central gable. A later example of the styles, 564 Harbor Road is distinguished by its hexastyle Ionic portico, pedimented side gables, and the period trademark, the leaded elliptical fanlight over the entry.

The Greek Revival is the most important of all the styles that have created Southportôs distinctive architectural character. The large number of significant examples produces a concentration which is not only locally significant, but on a state and nationwide level as well. Southport has no less than six examples of the prostyle (temple-front) form, characterized by a

pedimented, two-story portico. 750 Harbor Road features a Doric-columned portico, with smaller porticoes on its side wings, and a Doric-pilastered entrance. Number 712, next door, shows massive, high-style Corinthian columns as well as an anthemion motif in its tympanum. 678 Pequot ~~Road~~ Avenue features a rare pentastyle (five-columned) version of Greek Revival, with Ionic columns and matching pilasters, and a Palladian window with Ionic colonettes lighting the tympanum. An almost identical version at 45 Westway Road differs only by the use of a fanlight in its tympanum. Among the less monumental, but still very impressive examples are another pair of near twins: 104 Old South Road and 212 Center Street. Both display Ionic-columned entry porticos, pedimented gables, and Doric-columned side wings.

Subsequent nineteenth-century styles are not as well represented, but do include high-quality examples of each. The Gothic Revival is represented by two churches and one residence. Trinity Episcopal Church, located at 375 Pequot ~~Road~~ Avenue, is an exceptional version of a symmetrical, wooden Gothic Revival church. Its pronounced sense of verticality is created by a central tower and steeple at the front of the building, its crenellated roof parapet, and the pinnacles located at each corner of the church and its steeple. In contrast, the Southport Congregational Church, not too far to the east at number 504, is a later, asymmetrical example of Gothic Revival constructed of cut stone. It is composed of a central gabled nave, a high, buttressed tower to the right, and a gothic-arched porte-cochere crowned with a slender bell-cote and spire. The best residential example of the style is 176 Main Street, build in 1861, which features a steeply-pitched front gable with lancet windows and Gothic tracery on the bargeboards, a wrap-around porch with an ogee-arched valance. The building has a 3 ½ story tower which was constructed 25 years later, but in the same style.

The Italianate style is best represented by 249 Old South Road. An example of the Italian Villa subtype, it features a tall, central tower with paired, arched windows, bracketed eaves and a balustraded front porch. Vernacular versions of the Italianate are represented by the front-gable dwelling at 25 Westway Road and the flat-roof house at 46 Station Street. Both these examples display elaborate, jig-saw ornamented porches.

While there are few examples of the Stick style in the district, there is one which is of exceptional quality. 139 Main Street was built in 1871 and features an off-side, three-story tower and a long, front porch. As is typical of the Stick style, the underlying structure is expressed on the exterior of the house in the form of various forms of applied horizontal and vertical sticks and diagonal braces. Several different kinds of siding i.e. clapboard, board and batten and shingles are set within the exterior framework.

The Second Empire style is readily identified by its trademark mansard roof. It is represented by several outstanding examples, including 658 Pequot ~~Road~~ Avenue, a symmetrical version defined by a central pavilion, modillioned eaves, a front porch with paired columns, and elliptical arched windows. 418 Harbor Road features a much lower mansard roof and mainly flat-headed windows.

The Queen Anne style, probably the most complex in form and surface treatment, is also represented by several significant examples. 134 Center Street features a tall, 3 ½ story tower, sharply pointed gables, a surface covering of patterned shingles, and an extended porch and porte-cochere. A more typical example can be found at 67 Westway Road, which has lost its half-timbered gable ornament and wrap-around porch but retains its complex asymmetrical

arrangement of elements, including a polygonal corner tower, overhanging gables and balconies, a front porch with a stick valance, and a skin of clapboards and patterned shingles.

The quieter Shingle style is also represented by several excellent structures. This periodôs emphasis on complex, asymmetrical massing rather than applied ornament can be seen in 683 Pequot Avenue, which also displays Colonial Revival elements such as Tuscan columns and a Palladian window. The characteristic shingle skin serves as a unifying element. Its neighbor, 715 Pequot Avenue, shows a more vertical configuration with multiple, gambrel roofs and a rounded, domed tower. Here again these elements are tied together by an all-encompassing covering of shingles.

The Richardsonian Romanesque style is similar to the Shingle style with its complex, horizontal massing, but is a masonry style and most commonly found in public buildings such as the Pequot Library, located at 581 Pequot Avenue. This landmark quality building features an expansive tiled roof, ribbon windows and an unusual arcaded entry with a multi-gabled parapet.

The best example of nineteenth-century commercial architecture is the Southport Saving Bank at 226 Main Street. Here again, Southportôs wealth and sophistication is reflected in high-style architecture, in this case an excellent example of Italian Renaissance Revival. This brick structure, constructed in 1863, is distinguished by its high-relief details such as a modillioned and dentilled pediment, drip moldings over arched windows, and prominent window cornices.

Southport features two notable examples of civic architecture from the early twentieth century. The Wakeman Memorial Boyôs Club at 638 Harbor Road is an excellent example of the Georgian Revival phase of the Colonial Revival style. It features bold modillion and dentil courses along its gambrel roof, pedimented dormers and flat-arched, keystoned lintels. The Pequot School at 214 Main Street an elongated, one-story structure built in 1917 shows Georgian Revival influence in its corner quoins and octagonal cupola, and Mediterranean influence in its green tile roof. Its entry is distinguished by an ornate Baroque plaque resting on a denticulated cornice and scrolled console brackets.

Twentieth-century domestic architecture in the district is almost based entirely on Colonial and Federal antecedents~~, and is not as significant as the districtôs nineteenth-century stock~~. There are several good representatives of the Dutch Colonial Revival, especially an early, eclectic example at 46 Willow Street, and a later, more ñcorrectò version at 350 Harbor Road. Consistent with the Colonial Revival movement, ~~O~~other Colonial Revival dwellings ~~tend to be quite~~ are also derivative in their style, culminating in the ~~s~~Saltbox reproductions at 935 Harbor Road, 560 Pequot Avenue, 155 Westway Road, and the reconstructed pre-Revolutionary ~~s~~Saltbox that was dis-assembled and moved from its original location in East Haven, Connecticut and re-assembled at 450 Harbor Road. While Neo-Federal dwellings and alterations might be said to be based on existing ~~Southport~~ examples in the Southport Historic District, ~~no such case can be made for~~ the ~~s~~Saltboxes relate generally to earlier examples elsewhere in the Town of Fairfield and colonial New England, and to examples in the District itself now since demolished or relocated.

Relatively rare in the district but equally important are examples of the two new kinds of residential housing stock added to the area of the Southport Historic District in the early and

mid-twentieth century--the Cape Cod and Modern styles. Both styles are present in the Southport Historic District, though there are very few examples of either. The Cape Cod houses at 179 Main Street and 45 Church Street anticipated the popular adaptation of the style in other parts of Fairfield as part of the post-World War II housing boom. The house at 179 Main Street is especially important since it was built in 1928, making it the only pre-war Cape Cod house in the Southport Historic District, and a prototype in Fairfield for this very important architectural stylistic development that reflected the changing socio-economic conditions in Fairfield and the country at large in the aftermath of the war. There is also a good example of the Cape Cod style at 260 Harbor Road, though it is significantly later--built in 1954. Demonstrating the relative rarity of Cape Cod houses in Fairfield's historic districts, there are none in the Greenfield Hill Historic District and only one--an example from the 1950s--in the Old Post Road Historic District. The most prominent example of the Modern style in the Southport Historic District is 575 Harbor Road, a house designed by a New Haven architect. It was built in 1966 and was thus the only Modern house in the Southport Historic District at the time of its creation in 1967. With Cape Cod and Modern style houses being so infrequently found in the town's historic districts, the early examples in Southport underscore the rich variety of architectural styles represented in the Southport Historic District.

In 2007, the Southport Historic District was expanded northerly to include a number of dwellings on Spruce Street as well as Southportôs two railroad station buildings. As such, the Spruce Street expansion not only added several excellent examples of the architectural styles found elsewhere in the District but also, and perhaps more importantly, references the importance of the railroad, which came to Southport in 1848, to the history and evolution of Southport and the Connecticut coastal towns more generally. With the introduction of the railroad, the village character of Southport began to change from a primarily trade-oriented coastal harbor town to a more residentially-oriented area more directly connected with the larger cities of New York, New Haven, and Boston.

The development of Spruce Street occurred primarily after the Civil War as advances in land engineering help to make the area, which was originally a boggy extension of the local river basin, suitable for residential development. Some of the first homes built along the street were built in the Italianate Style and feature the genreôs classic cube form elaborated with paried arched windows, bracketed eaves and window cornrices, and fully detailed cupola top. Examples include 62, 53, 51, and 26 Spruce Street. 44 Spruce Street, which was actually the second home to be built on the street, is an exceptional example of the Gothic Revival style and features a façade porch highlighted by chamfered posts and angled open-work spandrels with center drops. 80 Spruce Street is also noteworthy. Originally constructed as a simple gable-to-street house with a front porch supported by Tuscan posts, the home was remodeled extensively in 1894 to introduce a new architectural style to the neighborhood: the Queen Anne. The last ñhistorically-styledò home built in the neighborhood is the Federal Revival house at 71 Spruce Street which was completed in 1926. Some of the last homes built in the area include 83, 101, and 115 Spruce Street. These houses, which contribute greatly to the rhythm of the streetscape, were all erected just after World War II and reflect what is now a genuinely historic style of modest housing common for those returning from war and starting life anew.