

WELCOME TO HISTORIC NORWICH

Walk along Main Street in Norwich and experience the ebb and flow of life in an early Vermont town through the stories its historic buildings tell. Here is a community forged by the determination and skills of its early settlers. Their legacy survives in the architectural styles that line its streets. With commercial, residential, and public buildings clustered near its green, Norwich remains an engaged, vibrant community.

On July 4, 1761, Royal Governor Benning Wentworth of the Province of New Hampshire granted a charter for the town of Norwich to a group of Connecticut proprietors. Founding families like the Hatches and Burtons purchased large tracts of wilderness in the southern end of town, today's village center. Surviving an arduous journey up the Connecticut River valley, they cleared the land of trees and rocks, laid roads, and harnessed waterpower for grist and saw mills. A few decades later the Emerson family arrived and left its mark through construction of the elegant, classical architecture that defines the village center.

Many early residents settled near "the Center" on the hillsides north of town. As land was cleared, settlement shifted to the flatter "Plain," which offered fertile soil better suited to agriculture and easy access to the river. The construction of the South Meeting House in 1817 and the American Literary, Scientific and Military Academy in 1819 on the Plain secured its position as the new town center. The 1820s to 1840s were prosperous decades. The town exported apples, wool, and other



Norwich village, circa 1890



A picket fence frames a peaceful scene in 1910 along Main Street.

agricultural products. Tanneries and potash, cloth dyeing, and other factories joined the grist and saw mills on nearby Blood Brook. The presence of the academy (later Norwich University) and of Dartmouth College across the river in Hanover, New Hampshire, attracted educated, affluent people, who built stylish homes in the village center.

Prosperity began to erode in the 1840s, as the price of wool dropped and people migrated west to farm or to the cities for factory jobs. In 1866 the South Barracks of Norwich University burned, and the institution relocated to Northfield, Vermont. As the population declined, so too did the rate of new building.

When the waves of settlers who began to arrive in the 1760s receded in the mid 1800s, they left behind a rural townscape dotted with fine examples of early nineteenth-century architecture. The abundance of Georgian, Federal, and Greek Revival buildings reflects the wealth of this period. In the 1880s and 1890s, an increase in building activity is evident in styles like Queen Anne and Colonial Revival. Today Norwich residents protect this historic center through the preservation and sensitive reuse of its buildings.

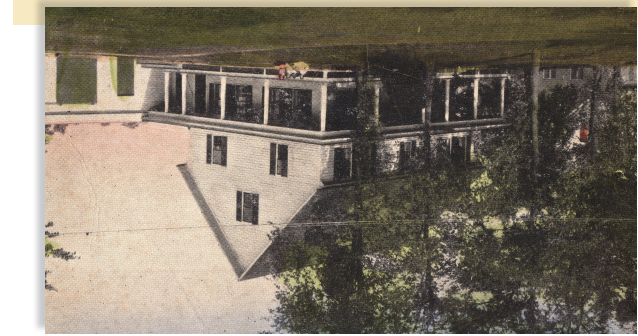
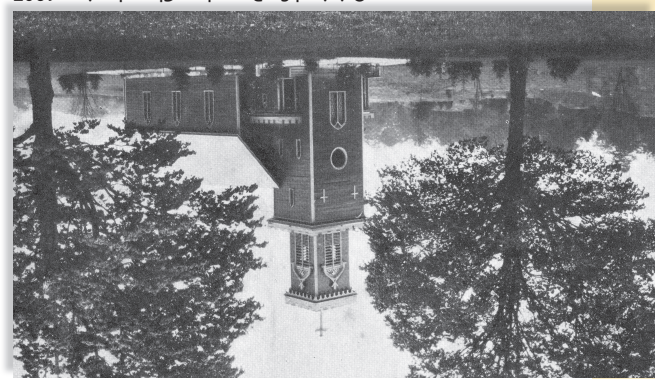
log cabin—the site of town meetings from 1768 to 1774—almost directly across from where he would build this house. The first timber-framed residence in the village area, its design reflects central Connecticut building traditions. Note the pairing of second-story windows on either side of the entrance with a fifth window centered over the door, rather than the more typical, evenly spaced arrangement. The boxy shape, center chimney, and facade with center entrance and five windows across are typical of the Georgian style (1700-1780), rare in Vermont due to its late settlement date.

4 St. Barnabas Church and Rectory

Church: 262 Main Street, 1918
Rectory: 254 Main Street, circa 1808

This is the second Gothic Revival church on the site, designed by Hobart B. Upjohn, the grandson of Richard Upjohn (1802-1878), a leading figure in the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival movement. The original church incorporated a 1797 meeting house from Orford, New Hampshire. In 1863 the meeting house was placed on blocks, floated down river to Norwich, and renovated in the Gothic Revival style. Known as the "Orford Ark," the church faced the parade ground of Norwich University, its orientation perhaps influenced by university president Edward Bourne, rector from 1852 to 1866. When the church burned in 1917, its replacement faced Main Street. The rectory, originally a private home, has been church property since 1914. One of the earliest brick houses in town, its bricks probably came from a local brick-yard active in the early 1800s. Many pre-1830 Norwich houses used the narrow, porous, salmon-colored brick, often painted to prevent water damage.

Original St. Barnabas Church, circa 1907

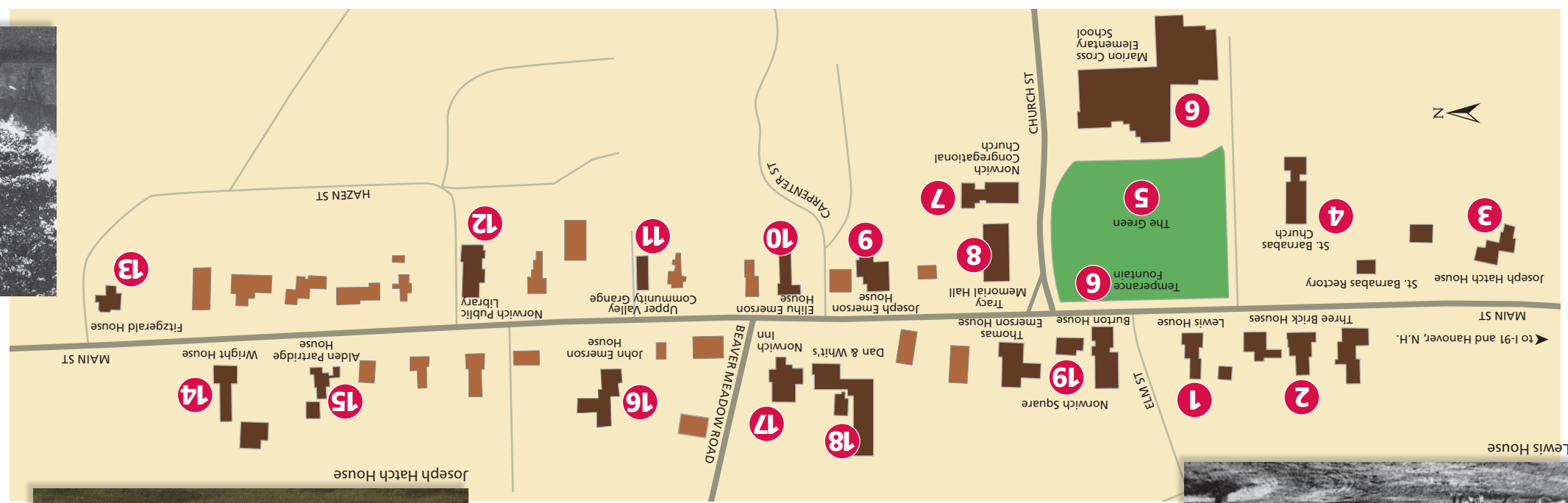
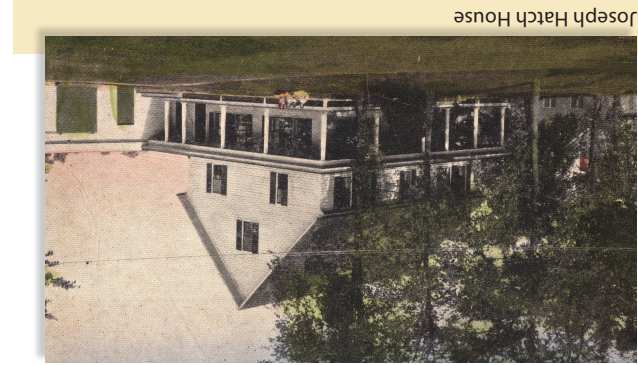


3 Joseph Hatch House

236 Main Street, circa 1773

house that Joseph Hatch probably built for his son Reuben. In 1818 Reuben's son Horace, a physician, inherited the house and likely hired Joseph Emerson to build the Federal addition. Dr. Hatch's sister Lucy and her husband Rufus W. Bailey, the first pastor of the South Meeting House, probably resided in the older brick and clapboard structure behind the center brick's Federal addition (#261). The rectangular shape, symmetry of the windows and door, and entrance designs of these houses link them to the Federal style (1780-1830).

land in the southern part of town, where he erected a Connecticut about 1766. He purchased a large tract of



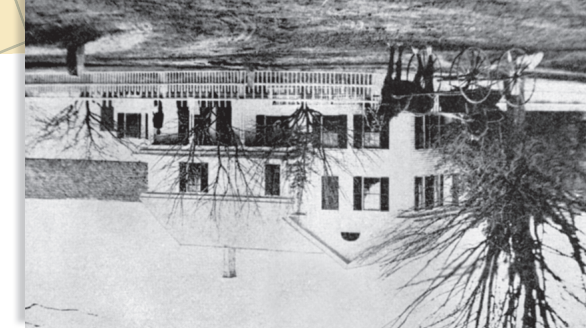
Built on land once owned by Joseph Hatch, these Federal-style brick houses form a striking entrance to Norwich. The house at #267 was built by Joseph Emerson and boarded cadets from Norwich University in the 1840s and 1850s. Behind the Federal addition to the southernmost house (#253) is a circa 1780 clapboard

2 Three Brick Houses

267/circa 1822, 261/circa 1825, 253/circa 1821



A common house plan around the country, it derives its name from its popularity in Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa. The house remained in the Lewis family until the Norwich Historical Society purchased it in 2003.



From 1846 to 1892, long-time town clerk William E. Lewis lived and worked in this house. He was the grandson of Dr. Joseph Lewis, who arrived in 1767 and purchased land along the Connecticut River near today's Ledyard Bridge. For years the area, called Lewiston, was a vibrant hamlet with mills, farms, a creamery, an icehouse, stores, post office, and railroad station. The construction of Exit 13 on Interstate 91 required extensive demolition in this area in 1967. The Lewis House was built in the early 1800s by Joseph Burton, who added the Federal section to an existing eighteenth-century frame dwelling. It is one of many "L-houses" in the village—two rooms wide but only one room deep instead of the usual two.

1 The Lewis House

277 Main Street, circa 1807

NORWICH, VERMONT
EST. 1761

NORWICH, VERMONT
EST. 1761

HISTORIC WALKING TOUR



Norwich, Vermont, is located 5 miles north of White River Junction, Vermont.

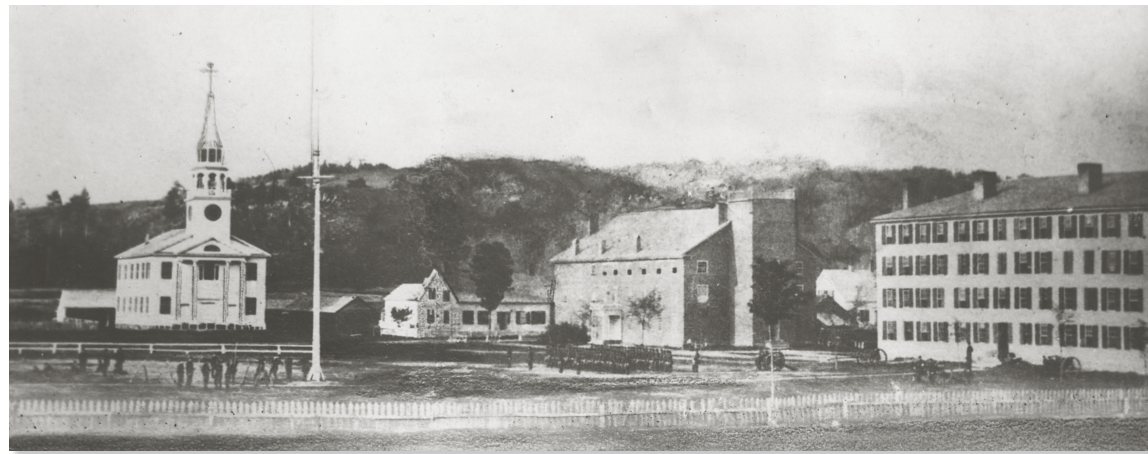
Historic Preservation Commission
Norwich, Vermont



DARTMOUTH PRINTING COMPANY

Special thanks to the National Park Service for its contribution through the Certified Local Government Program, administered by the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

Images courtesy of the Norwich Historical Society, except as otherwise noted. Cover photograph by Chad Finer.



The South Meeting House (left), North Barracks (center), and South Barracks (right) in the 1800s

university accepted an offer of land and buildings from Northfield, Vermont. Its decision to relocate contributed to a decline in population and construction.

5 The 19th-Century Green

Educational and religious buildings dominated the green in the 1800s. The South Meeting House (1817), moved to its current site on Church Street in the mid 1850s, once stood where the bandstand is today. The South Barracks of the American Literary, Scientific and Military Academy (1819) stood on land now occupied by additions to the Marion Cross School.

Founded by Captain Alden Partridge (1785-1854), a Norwich native and Dartmouth College alumnus, the academy combined civilian and military studies to develop “enlightened and useful” citizen soldiers. Partridge, who also graduated from West Point and served as its acting superintendent, developed a pioneering approach to education that expanded beyond the classics. He considered physical education essential to the development of a student; field trips and rigorous “Pedestrian Marches,” some 60 miles in a single day, were part of the curriculum. Stories of the friendly rivalry between the university cadets and Dartmouth College students abound. Legislation creating the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) in 1916 drew on educational concepts introduced by Partridge.

Built by Joseph Emerson and modeled after the early brick buildings at Dartmouth College, the academy campus included the South Barracks (1819) and the North Barracks (circa 1831). The latter stood where the 1898 portion of the Marion Cross School is. In 1834 the academy was incorporated as Norwich University. When a fire destroyed the South Barracks in 1866, the

6 The Green Today

Marion Cross School, 1898

When it opened in 1898, this was the only graded school in Norwich. Two additions followed in 1950 and 1989. The current K-6 school and the community share use of the green. The school is part of the Dresden School District, the first interstate school district in the country, formed in 1963 by an act of Congress. Today Norwich students attend middle and high school in Hanover.

The Temperance Fountain, 1925

The Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Norwich erected this concrete drinking fountain to quench the thirst of both man and animal. Similar drinking fountains across the country were installed during Prohibition to discourage the consumption of alcohol.



Norwich Public School, circa 1914

11 Upper Valley Community Grange #581

344 Main Street, 1892

Organized in 1905 as the University Grange #335, the grange purchased this former harness shop for a permanent home in 1916. Members initially met in Union Hall on the second floor of today’s Dan and Whit’s General Store. It merged with the Hartford, Vermont, Cascadnac Grange in 2002 to become the Upper Valley Community Grange. Today it is an active community hub, hosting pancake breakfasts and other events.

12 Norwich Public Library

368 Main Street, 1901

Small, yet impressive, Colonial Revival libraries like this—with oversized columns and pediment—were popular in the early 1900s. Founded as a membership association in 1880, its collection originally was housed in the Congregational Church vestry and the North Barracks. When the latter burned in 1897, the library built this home.

Until 1920 it was a private book club with a 75-cent annual membership fee. The design of the 1999 addition complements the original structure.



Norwich Public Library, circa 1902

13 Fitzgerald House

410 Main Street, circa 1905

Built by Fred Fitzgerald, this house has the varied gables, bay windows, and porches typical of the Queen Anne style (1880-1910). It contained a telephone exchange in an ell behind the house, where the family fielded calls between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m. A call-box system in a bedroom was reserved for emergencies. Fitzgerald, the town constable, kept offenders in two jail cells in the garage. Hobos traveling the rails knew this as a good place to get a hot meal and a bed for the night—albeit in jail! The “lock-up” is on display at the Norwich Historical Society.



The Fitzgerald House in the early 1900s

14 Wright House

395 Main Street, circa 1825

Built by John Wright, a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy and a lawyer and postmaster in Norwich, this house has the facing gable front and side hall entrance plan typical of the Greek Revival style (1830-1860). Since 1961 the barn of this house has been the site of the manger for the annual Christmas Pageant, a tradition honored by successive owners.

15 Partridge House

383 Main Street, circa 1820

Alden Partridge, founder of the American Literary, Scientific and Military Academy, lived in this house during his presidency of what later became Norwich University. Built by Joseph Emerson, the house exhibits some of the finest elements of the Federal style. Note the Palladian-style door and window arrangement above the central door, with its



Captain Alden Partridge in front of Norwich University

7 Norwich Congregational Church

15 Church Street, 1817

Prior to construction of this Federal church, settlers worshipped in a simple meeting house (circa 1785) in the original town center north of the present village. Joseph Emerson may have designed the church, originally known as the South Meeting House, drawing inspiration from builder’s guides published by noted architect-master builder Asher Benjamin (1773-1845). These books depicted stylistic details like the three-part Palladian window over the entrance, the multi-tiered steeple, and the triangular pediment resting on slender columns. The church boasts the oldest Paul Revere bell in the state.



The Tracy Farm occupied land west of the Congregational Church.

8 Tracy Memorial Hall

300 Main Street, 1939

Cabinetmaker James Tracy bequeathed his farmhouse and land to Norwich to erect this fireproof town hall. A grant from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and local tax money financed construction. The balanced window and door arrangement and the fanlight and pilasters, or flat columns, framing the Church Street entrance are features of the Colonial Revival style (1870-1940).

puzzle work of window shapes and geometric tracery. Partridge addressed his cadets from the balcony of an earlier entrance portico.

16 John Emerson House

351 Main Street, circa 1810

John Emerson, an uncle of the three Emerson brothers, built this simple, transitional Georgian/Federal residence. Note the nine-panel entrance door capped by a rectangular transom window. The first furnace and bathroom in Norwich were installed here in the late 1890s. A contemporary addition respects the original design.

17 Norwich Inn

325 Main Street, 1890

A lodging establishment has occupied this site for over 200 years. Jasper Murdock, an early resident of Norwich, built a Federal house on the site in 1797. In 1801 Murdock sold his home to Oliver Hatch, who operated a tavern within the house. When an 1889 fire destroyed the building, it reopened two years later as the Newton Inn, an elaborate Queen Anne/Stick Style structure with two imposing towers, decorative shingle and plaster work, and a front porch. A careful restoration has returned it to close to its 1891 appearance.

18 Dan and Whit’s

319 Main Street, 1890-1891

This beloved community institution is the descendant of a commercial enterprise that first occupied the site about 1829. In 1875 E.W. Olds moved his mercantile into the original building. The 1889 fire that destroyed the inn began in his store, but Olds rebuilt and continued to sell clothing. In 1891 L.K. Merrill opened a general store on the left side of the building. On the second floor was Union Hall, a large room accessible through a second story bridge from the inn; the bricked-in, arched entrance is evident in the north gable of the store. Grange plays, dances, and town meetings took place here. Dan Fraser and Whit Hicks purchased the store in 1955. Still in the Fraser family, its motto is, “If we don’t have it, you don’t need it.” Be

9 Joseph Emerson House

316 Main Street, circa 1815

Many of the finest buildings constructed between 1810 and the 1830s in Norwich are associated with the Emerson brothers. Joseph and Thomas spent only a few years in Norwich in the late 1700s before leaving to establish lucrative businesses in Montreal and Detroit.



Note the striking contrast of paint colors in this 1890s photograph of the Joseph Emerson house.

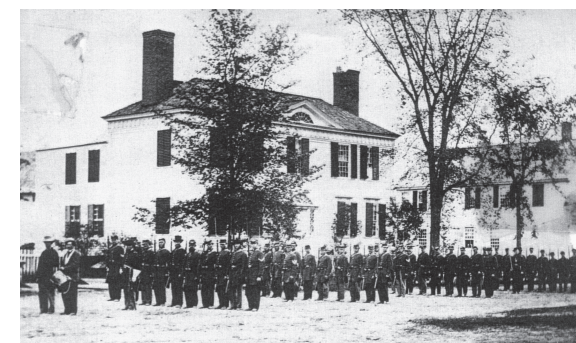
Upon their return, Joseph became active in design and construction. Though he lacked formal training, he was a skilled carpenter.

This Federal house attests to Joseph’s skill as a builder. Note its delicate details, including the arched window above the elaborate central door and the decorative diamond and rosette shapes.

10 Elihu Emerson House

326 Main Street, 1820

Elihu Emerson, a blacksmith, merchant, and farmer, probably commissioned his brother Joseph to build this handsome Federal house. Note the extensive detail, including the low pediment with fanlight above the central window.



The Vermont State Militia trains for the Civil War on June 28, 1864, in front of the Elihu Emerson House.



The former L.K. Merrill’s (left) and the Newton Inn (right)

sure to explore the array of merchandise by following the hall to the right of the meat counter to the “Green Door” on your left and the stairs to Union Hall on your right.

19 Norwich Square

Thomas Emerson House, 295 Main Street, circa 1822

Burton House, 289 Main Street, circa 1775

Norwich Square incorporates these two residences into a lively shopping area blending historic and contemporary buildings. By the time Thomas Emerson built his Federal house, he was a prosperous merchant and state legislator. Note its delicate detail, including a tracery-filled transom window above the door and scalloped trim below the cornice and around the windows. The former stable houses the post office. Elisha Burton’s early Georgian house is one of three residences that stood on the Norwich Plain from 1775 to 1795. Elisha’s father Jacob arrived in 1765 and, with the help of five sons, cleared most of the land that is today’s village center, as well as built mills along Blood Brook.



Thomas Emerson House