16. ROBERT FAIRCHILD HOUSE ca. 1730 297 Main Street

Robert Fairchild, who built this house around 1730, was a silversmith – the first of at least three in Durham's history. He practiced his craft in town for nearly two decades, during which he was also a leader in civic affairs.

Fairchild married Anne Curtis in Durham. He was a founding member of the prestigious Book Company of Durham, the second private subscription library in America, and he represented Durham in the Connecticut General Court, the forerunner of the State House of Representatives, from 1739 to 1744.

But Durham, a small landlocked town of fewer than a thousand people, apparently couldn't provide much business for an artisan who specialized in goods made of precious metal. In the 1745 town tax lists, Robert Fairchild reported no income from silversmithing.

In 1746 Fairchild left Durham for his birthplace of Stratford, Connecticut, a much more populous community on Long Island Sound. But he apparently kept in touch with acquaintances made during his years in Durham. In 1758 and 1759, he served in Connecticut's forces in the French and Indian War, under Durham native Major General Phineas Lyman and Major Timothy Hierlihy of Middlefield.

In 1767, Fairchild moved to New Haven, one of Connecticut's largest towns and a center of maritime trade. Here he found a better market for his silver creations that ranged from simple spoons to elegant chafing dishes. Examples of Fairchild's work are included in private collections and that of the Yale University Art Gallery.

Fairchild went home one last time to Stratford in 1789. He died there in 1793, at the age of 89.

17. DANIEL MERWIN HOUSE ca. 1740 308 Main Street

In 1740 Sarah and Daniel Merwin, Sr., both in their fifties, were facing the colonial version of an empty nest; two children married, two in their late teens still at home. Nonetheless, that year Daniel gave his son the house the family had occupied for nearly two decades, and built this one.

Daniel may have constructed a big new house to demonstrate how prosperous he had become since moving from Milford to Durham in 1722. He also owned something else considered a status symbol in colonial New England: black slaves.

There had been slaves in Connecticut since the mid-1600s, but never very many. New England's soil and climate weren't suited to raising crops that required large numbers of unskilled workers to cultivate, like the Southern staples of tobacco and cotton. Out of Connecticut's population of 130,000 in 1756, only about 3,000 were black. Durham counted just 34 African Americans among its 800 residents that year.

A well-to-do colonial Connecticut household might include one or two slaves, more as a luxury or a convenience than an economic necessity. Black women would help with domestic work, while black men would work in the fields.

Connecticut slaves typically lived in the same house as their owners and ate at the same table. They attended worship services at the meetinghouse – although they were required to sit in a separate section – and they were baptized and sometimes married by the minister. Daniel Merwin owned two slaves, Cuff and Cate, presumably husband and wife. In 1749 Cuff and Cate had a daughter, Thankful, who, was baptized by Durham's first pastor, Nathaniel Chauncey, himself the owner of several slaves.

When Daniel Merwin wrote his will in 1758, he directed that Cuff and Cate continue as servants to his wife so long as the executors of his estate "shall judge their service will be profitable and Comfortable" to her, after which they were to be sold at the executors' discretion. There was no mention of Thankful, who would have been about nine years old; whether she had died, run away, been sold, or given her freedom is not known.

Sarah Merwin died in 1764. When Daniel followed her to the grave two years later, the list of his property didn't include any slaves. The fate of Cuff and Cate, like that of their daughter Thankful, remains a mystery.

Durham Historic District Walking Tour

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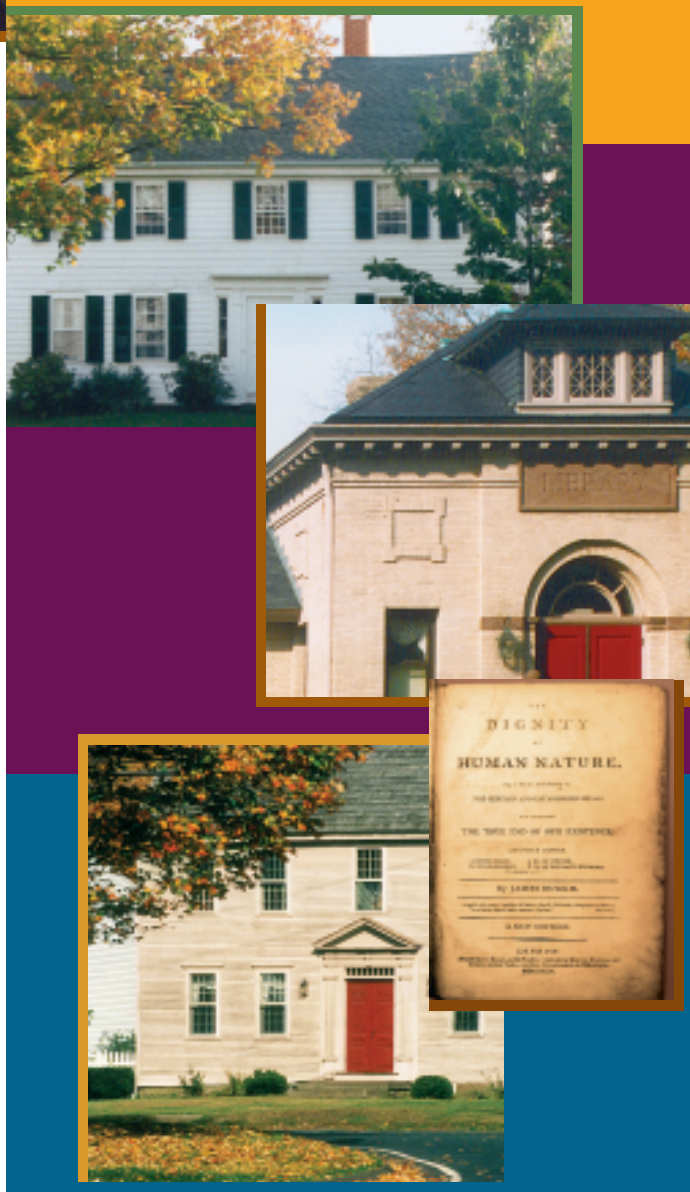
Durham Historic District Walking Tour



Historic District Commission

Start your tour at the south end of Main Street at Higganum Road and Route 79.

1. JAMES WADSWORTH HOUSE 1708

Northeast corner Higganum and Madison roads

This is one of the oldest surviving houses in Durham. James Wadsworth, a Durham founder whose family dominated local politics for 80 years, wielded considerable influence throughout Connecticut.

In colonial Connecticut, it was common for one man to hold several public offices at the same time. If he proved capable and trustworthy, voters often re-elected him year after year.

James Wadsworth was town clerk for 49 years, a justice of the peace for 40, and a colonel in the militia. Durham residents repeatedly chose him as their representative to the General Court, the colonial version of the State House of Representatives. For more than 30 years voters across Connecticut elected Wadsworth to the Governor's Council, the colonial equivalent of the State Senate.

When a respected public servant retired or died, colonial voters often chose a relative to replace him. Upon James Wadsworth's death in 1756, the baton of public service passed to his namesake grandson. The younger James was elected to all the same offices his grandfather had held, and served as a colonel in the militia.

2. REV. ELIZUR GOODRICH HOUSE 1763

42 Main Street

This impressive house, built by Durham's second pastor, reflects the Congregational minister's role as the most influential figure in any eighteenth-century Connecticut town. Congregationalism, spiritual successor to the faith of New England's Puritan settlers, was Connecticut's established, government-supported religion throughout the 1700s. As a result, Congregational ministers were respected, powerful men locally, and often on the colonial and later state level as well.

The Reverend Elizur Goodrich, a Yale graduate, was minister of Durham's Congregational Church from 1756 until his death in 1797. He was known throughout Connecticut and beyond for his brilliant intellect; in 1777 he tied with Dr. Ezra Stiles for 7th president of Yale but chose to step aside in favor of Stiles.

The Durham pastorate remained in the same family by marriage for 126 years. Elizur Goodrich wed a granddaughter of the Reverend Nathaniel Chauncey, Durham's first Congregational minister. One of the Goodrichs' daughters in turn married the Reverend David Smith, who succeeded Elizur Goodrich as Durham's Congregational minister in 1799 and held the post until 1832.

3. TOWN GREEN 1707

For 125 years after its creation, the Durham town green, or "commons," looked nothing like today's grassy open space. The Congregational meetinghouse stood on the green's northeast corner from 1737 until 1835; Sabbath day houses like the one standing today next to Town Hall, and the sign post to which public notices were attached were there as well. There was probably more dirt than grass, due to the constant traffic of humans, horses, and the hogs and geese the town allowed to run free.

The most historic event to occur on the green was the November 12, 1787, vote on whether Connecticut should ratify the newly proposed Constitution for the United States. Men literally took a stand on the issue, in one of two rows that extended south from the meetinghouse. Sixty-seven voters lined up against ratification; only four in favor.

The green's transformation began in the early 1800s. Sabbath day houses and stables were torn down, the pigs and geese were penned up. In 1835 the meetinghouse was razed, and the green looked much as it does today. In 1885 historian H.G. Newton called it "the chief ornament of the town."

The Durham green remains the heart of community activity, with Town Hall and the public library adjacent and the post office across the street. The annual Memorial Day parade concludes with a solemn ceremony of remembrance at the veterans' monument on the green's south end. And for three days every September the green hosts part of the activities of the Durham Agricultural Fair, the largest in Connecticut.

and three daughters. Abigail died in 1826, and John followed her to the grave in 1832, leaving behind five unmarried daughters, the oldest 57, the youngest 44.

The sisters occupied the family home for the next 28 years. Legend says one of the women had a suitor, but they never wed because he didn't want to break up the set. Only death could do that.

Nabby and Rhoda Johnson were the first to go, both in 1860. Eunice died in 1867 and Nancy in 1868. As each passed away, she was buried next to her sisters in Old Durham Cemetery, where examples of their father's stonecarving still can be seen.

Left alone in the world, Almira Johnson sold the house that had been in her family for 93 years. In 1870 she joined her sisters in the graveyard, buried beneath a stone that identifies her poignantly as "The Last One." Ever since the street on which this remarkable sorority of spinsters lived has been known as Maiden Lane.

14. DURHAM ACADEMY 1844

253 Main Street

By the 1840s publicly funded education in Connecticut was a disgrace. Schools were small, shabby, ill- equipped, and crowded. Poorly paid, untrained instructors taught only the most basic subjects to classes composed of students of all ages who weren't required by law to attend.

Many parents of means wanted better for their children. To satisfy that demand, private schools began springing up across Connecticut, including the Durham Academy, established in 1843, which moved into this new building in 1844.

Local students attending the Academy were joined by scholars from surrounding towns and as far away as Wisconsin and Colorado and even China and Japan. Its Greek Revival building also hosted much of what Durham had to offer in the way of high-brow programming, including public lectures, dramatizations, and poetry readings.

The Durham Academy flourished for nearly four decades. But after major reform of Connecticut's public schools was carried out during the mid-1800s, it was no longer necessary to send a child to a private institution to get a good education. The Durham Academy shut down in 1884, but its educational role was not over.

In 1891 the town bought the Academy building and transformed it into the Coginchaug School, which merged two smaller schools and also offered, for the first time in Durham history, two years of high school instruction. High school classes were dropped for financial reasons in 1898, and for the next 14 years Durham students who wanted instruction beyond middle school attended Middletown High School.

The Durham Academy building once again became the high school in 1916. It fulfilled that role until 1923, when Strong School on Main Street was built to house all Durham students from grades one through twelve.

15. MOSES AUSTIN HOUSE ca. 1745

256 Main Street

In 1821, Moses Austin was a man with a grand plan. The adventurer, born in this house in 1761, had laid the legal and diplomatic groundwork for an Anglo-American colony in Texas, then part of Spanish-controlled Mexico. Fulfillment of that plan by Moses' son Stephen set the stage for Texas independence, and its eventual admission to the United States.

Moses Austin lived in Durham until he turned 21. He became one of the thousands of footloose, ambitious sons of Connecticut who would seek their fortune far from home. He tried his hand at being a dry-goods merchant first in nearby Middletown, then in distant Philadelphia. Next he delved into lead mining in Virginia, then in Missouri, where his quest for fortune finally paid off.

In Missouri Moses Austin built a large house he named "Durham Hall" in honor of his birthplace. He sent his son Stephen back to Connecticut to be educated at the Bacon Academy in Colchester.

But an economic depression wiped out Moses Austin's fortune. Undaunted, in 1820, the 59-year-old Austin embraced a new opportunity. From the governor of Spanish-controlled Mexico, he wrangled permission to settle 300 Anglo-American families in Texas, then part of Mexico.

But Moses Austin died in 1821, his Texas venture still a dream. His deathbed wish was for his son Stephen to fulfill that vision.

Stephen Austin succeeded in settling more than 1,500 Anglo-American families in Texas, for which he is honored as the "father of Texas." He also fought in the war that won Texas its independence from Mexico in 1836, but died before year's end. In 1839, Texans named their new capital Austin, for the man who, by fulfilling his Connecticut Yankee father's vision, had sown the seeds of their new nation.

modate travelers. The furnishings of his inn included 38 chairs, nine beds, 16 pairs of sheets, and 22 sets of "pillow coats" or pillow cases.

Spelman operated the tavern until his death from smallpox in 1783, at age 47. His widow, Elizabeth, left with seven children to support, took over the tavern. She ran it until 1790, when, "to her great Surprise," Durham officials refused to support renewal of her tavern license.

The Widow Spelman appealed to the Connecticut General Assembly. More than 65 Durham residents backed Elizabeth Spelman's request for a tavern license with a petition testifying that "by industry, prudence & Oeconomy she has kept a reputable House." Her supporters pointed out that tavernkeeping was the most feasible and appropriate way for a widow to earn a living, since its activities occurred "altogether in & about the House, where a woman can inspect it." The General Assembly rejected her appeal.

But apparently Elizabeth Spelman didn't give up easily. In 1793 the town again refused to support granting her a tavern license. It declared that the three taverns in operation in Durham were "abundantly sufficient" for accommodating travelers, and that "the unnecessary increase of taverns have a Tendency to promote Tavern haunting, occasion mispence of Time and Corrupt the Morals of People." They voted that it was "the opinion of this Town that licensing of Mrs. Elizabeth Spelman to keep Tavern in Durham the year ensuing will be unnecessary to accommodate Travailers and detrimental to the good order and Morals of inhabitants."

Elizabeth Spelman lived in Durham until her death in 1801. But she seems never to have run a tavern again.

That reference to licensing Elizabeth Spelman as a tavernkeeper being "detrimental to the good order and Morals of inhabitants" has led some modern readers to speculate she was in fact operating a house of prostitution. Given her husband's sacrifice to run the tavern, her own satisfactory operation of it for six years after his death, and the strong support she herself received from dozens of her fellow townsmen, that seems unlikely. But the question of why officials so adamantly opposed her running a tavern remains unanswered.

12. UNITED CHURCHES 1847

228 Main Street

On Thanksgiving Day in 1844, fire destroyed Durham's Congregational meetinghouse. The subsequent turf war over where to build a replacement proved so bitter that it split the congregation in two.

The Durham meetinghouse stood on the northeast corner of the town green from 1736 until 1835. When it came time to replace that century-old building, a power struggle ensued over whether the new meetinghouse should be located near the green or be built north of Allyn Brook. Those living south of Allyn Brook agreed to make a larger contribution toward the building, which was constructed where Town Hall now stands.

But when that new house of worship went up in flames (suspected but never proven to be a case of arson) less than 10 years later, the north-south squabble over the meetinghouse site resurfaced with a vengeance. There followed two years of lawsuits and even appeals to the Connecticut General Assembly.

This time the North Siders won. Insurance money on the meetinghouse that burned paid for this Greek Revival structure, dedicated in 1847. As compensation, South Siders paid nothing toward the new meetinghouse, and were reimbursed for what they had contributed toward building the one that burned.

But that didn't solve the dispute. In 1847, 62 members left to form the South Congregational Church. In 1849 they dedicated their own meetinghouse, which today serves as Town Hall.

Such fights over the location of a meetinghouse were common in Connecticut towns. Typically they had less to do with convenience – Durham's two meetinghouses were just half a mile apart, and a sturdy new stone bridge had eliminated Allyn Brook as an obstacle to getting from one side of town to the other – and more to do with small-town rivalries.

The two congregations were reunited in 1886. The Town of Durham purchased the Center meetinghouse for use as a town hall. In 1941, Durham Methodists joined the Congregationalists to form the United Churches of Durham, with the 1847 meetinghouse as their home.

13. JOHN JOHNSON, JR., HOUSE

ca. 1750 19 Maiden Lane

Maiden Lane commemorates a quintet of spinster sisters who occupied this house for nearly a century. Rhoda, Eunice, Nabby, Nancy, and Almira Johnson were the daughters of gravestone carver John Johnson, Jr., and his wife, Abigail, who bought the house in 1773.

John and Abigail were the parents of nine children. They buried their only son

4. SABBATH DAY HOUSE

Town House Road

During the 1700s, Connecticut law required every person to attend all-day Sunday worship, no matter how far it was to the meetinghouse or how bad the weather. People fortunate enough to own a horse could ride to Sabbath services, but most walked.

There was a break between morning and afternoon preaching sessions to allow worshippers to get something to eat. In the winter that mid-day recess also was a time when people could thaw out from a morning sitting in an unheated meetinghouse.

But many worshippers lived too far from the meetinghouse to return home to eat and warm up. The solution—for those who could afford it—was to secure town permission to build on the green a simple shelter like this one, known as a "Sabbath day" house.

On Sunday mornings a servant or a child would leave home ahead of the rest of the family to kindle a fire in the Sabbath day house hearth and get the mid-day meal started. When morning services ended, a warm shelter and hot food were just a few steps away.

During the early 1800s, the law requiring attendance at Sabbath services was eliminated, and stoves were installed to heat meetinghouses. As a result, Sabbath day houses became obsolete. Most were torn down or removed and used for other purposes. This one was moved to Indian Lane in Durham and converted into a house. In 1967, it was brought back to the green and restored to its original appearance.

5. CENTER SCHOOL HOUSE 1775

Town House Road and Maple Avenue

Connecticut law required towns to teach children to read so they could read the Bible, the foundation of the Congregationalist faith. Schools were built and supported by a combination of local taxes and fees paid by students' parents. But both taxpayers and parents were eager to spend as little as possible, which meant the typical public or "common" school was, unlike Center School, a small, shabby, one-story, one-room structure.

6. DURHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY 1901

7 Maple Avenue

Durham had a reputation as a center of intellectual inquiry from its earliest years. The town's first minister, Nathaniel Chauncey, was the first graduate of Yale. And in 1733, 25 residents established the Book Company of Durham, the second private subscription library in North America.

Books were expensive luxuries during the 1700s. There were few printing presses in the colonies, so most publications came from England. In 1731 a young Philadelphia printer named Benjamin Franklin came up with an idea for making books available to fellow tradesmen who couldn't afford to buy them: the Library Company of Philadelphia. Subscribers contributed to a fund used to buy books that members could borrow.

Two years later, Durham residents established a similar private subscription library, the Book Company of Durham. The collection, housed in a member's home, included works on such serious topics as theology, history, and philosophy. It was so fine an assemblage of texts that the presidents of Yale and of King's College (later Columbia College) in New York made use of it.

The Book Company of Durham existed for more than a century. It was disbanded in 1856, rendered obsolete by advances in printing that made books much more affordable.

But the ideal the Book Company represented, the sharing of access to knowledge and information, lived on. In 1894 voters established the Durham Public Library, from which any town resident could borrow.

By 1901 the library's collection and circulation had increased so dramatically that construction began on a building. In 1902 that building, today the northernmost part of the present library, was dedicated. A donation of volumes from the original Book Company linked that pioneering collection to the modern public library.

7. GENERAL JAMES WADSWORTH HOUSE ca.1755 127 Main Street

When General James Wadsworth moved into this house in 1782, he was riding the crest of a 30-year career in public service. Less than a decade later that career was over, destroyed by Wadsworth's decision to put principle ahead of political expediency.

Wadsworth, the grandson of Durham founder James Wadsworth, graduated from Yale in 1748. He practiced law in Durham, and proceeded to follow in his grandfather's distinguished political footsteps. He held the posts of town clerk and county judge, was elected repeatedly to represent Durham in the version of the modern Connecticut House of Representatives and to a seat on the Governor's Council, the forerunner of the modern State Senate. He was a major general in the Connecticut Militia during the American Revolution and represented Connecticut for a term in the Continental Congress.

In 1782 Connecticut granted this house, the original part of which dates back to 1755, to Wadsworth as payment for "Civil and Military Services." Connecticut had confiscated the property from Boston Tory Gilbert Deblois, who had been banished from Massachusetts. Wadsworth added the second story and the ell.

Wadsworth's fall from political grace began in 1787, when a new framework for national government, today known as the U.S. Constitution, was submitted to the states for ratification. Wadsworth, fearing the strong federal government provided for by the Constitution would encroach on the rights of individual states, spearheaded the fight in Connecticut against ratification.

Durham voters supported Wadsworth, voting 67 to 4 against ratification. But state-wide the vote was overwhelmingly in favor of ratification. Bucking the political tide cost Wadsworth, 57, his political career. He failed to be re-elected to the Governor's Council, and turned down re-appointment as a judge because that post required he swear allegiance to the Constitution, which he considered a betrayal of his fidelity to Connecticut.

The people of Durham stood by the man who had served them for nearly two generations. In 1788 they re-elected Wadsworth to one final term as their representative in the Connecticut General Assembly. Wadsworth lived the rest of his life in Durham, dying in 1817 at the age of 87.

In 1976, Town Clerk Marge Hatch proposed that, in honor of the American Revolution Bicentennial, Durham reconsider its original vote on the Constitution. This time voters approved the Constitution.

8. ALLYN BROOK BRIDGE 1823

Main Street

Motorists who drive over the bridge across Allyn Brook probably aren't even aware they're crossing a body of water. But the innocent-looking stream was the culprit in one of the most memorable tragedies in Durham history, occurring on this spot in 1822.

By 1822 Main Street was an important stagecoach and postal route. A wooden bridge, 94 feet long and 21 feet high, carried travelers over Allyn Brook.

On February 21, 1822, thick ice covered Allyn Brook. Then before sunrise a powerful strong south wind brought heavy rain. Around 10 in the morning a flash flood rushed down Allyn Brook, cracking the ice into large chunks that the rushing water smashed against the bridge supports, splintering one.

Less than an hour later a stagecoach came rumbling down the road from Middletown. A man who lived near the bridge warned the driver that the span had sustained damage. But the driver, ignoring his three passengers' pleas to let them out, drove on across the bridge. Just as the first pair of horses in the team reached the southern end of the bridge, the entire span collapsed, plunging the coach and passengers into the roiling, ice-choked brook.

The stagecoach was destroyed.The driver and one passenger survived the fall. But two passengers were killed.

Determined there would be no repeat of the tragedy, Durham officials the next year replaced the wooden bridge with a new one of stone that served for a century. In the

1920s it disappeared entirely beneath the surface of a new bridge, and was soon forgotten.

When time came in 1994 to once again make improvements to the bridge over Allyn Brook, construction workers were surprised to discover the stone structure underneath. Plans for the new bridge were altered to leave the west side of the arched stone bridge exposed to view. A catwalk allows the curious to get a close look at the 1823 bridge, and read a plaque with the story of the tragedy that led to its construction.

9. TIMOTHY HALL HOUSE ca. 1750

153 Main Street

It's impossible today to imagine the terror that engulfed this household when its head, 49-year-old Timothy Hall, contracted smallpox in the summer of 1771. Smallpox is a highly contagious disease for which there is no treatment or cure. Typically it killed one out of every six of its victims, and left many who survived blind or hideously scarred.

Local officials sought to prevent the disease from spreading by quarantining victims in a "pest house" – sometimes euphemistically called a "hospital." This was a small structure northwest of Mount Pisgah in a remote part of Durham. There physicians who were immune to smallpox, either from having survived a case or undergoing the risky procedure of inoculation, cared for victims until they recovered or died.On July 29, 1771, Timothy Hall died at the pest house. He was buried there, for fear someone might contract smallpox from his corpse if it was brought back for interment in the burying ground in the center of town.

But Hall's survivors made sure he wouldn't be forgotten. A simple stone marks his grave at the pest house, while an elaborate and expensive one was erected in the graveyard within sight of the home to which he had never returned.

Timothy Hall left one daughter and five sons between the ages of 22 and six. Three sons, Daniel, Ebenezer, and Gad, served in the American Revolution.

10. OLD DURHAM CEMETERY ca. 1700

Main Street and Cemetery Road

A stroll among the tombstones in Durham's first burying ground is one of the most direct routes to understanding the town's past. The gravestones, with their evocative carvings and sometimes terse, sometimes poetic epitaphs constitute an outdoor museum of local history and folk art.

For more than a century after it was opened around 1700, the Old Durham Cemetery was the final resting place for everyone in town, rich or poor, powerful or powerless, black or white, slave or free. But only about one in ten graves were marked with tombstones, which were expensive luxuries.

Gravestones were the only form of sculpture produced in New England before 1800. Carvers developed their own unique artistic styles, and displayed varying levels of talent and creativity. Gradual changes in tombstone images and decoration reflect fundamental changes in Congregationalism.

Gravestone inscriptions offer glimpses into the world of 250 years past. They speak of lives tragically short or lived long and well, of unimaginable sorrow and enduring love, of ambition and sacrifice, of faith and patriotism.

11. SPELMAN TAVERN ca. 1740

Main Street and Route 68

Connecticut law required every town to have at least one tavern to provide food and lodging for travelers. That was particularly important for Durham, located about mid-way on the heavily traveled Boston Post road midway between Hartford and New Haven.

During the American Revolution Durham officials had a hard time getting someone to keep a tavern, because lodgers and diners would inevitably pay with the only money in circulation: paper bills that out-of-control war time inflation had rendered nearly worthless. In 1779, Durham leaders prevailed upon a reluctant Phineas Spelman to operate a tavern in this building, his house.

Spelman sank substantial money into furnishing his house to accom-