

## THE HISTORIC DISTRICT: A WALKING TOUR    ORANGE BICENTENNIAL 1822 -- 2022

The Orange Center Historic District, which includes the Orange Green and surrounding area, lies near the approximate geographical center of the 18 square miles of the Town of Orange. The historic and architectural resources, dating from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries, are clustered in a village around the town green at the top of a small hill in an area of gently rolling land. The district is physically cohesive, and the street pattern, which was established by the mid-19th century, has changed little. Orange Center Road was originally known as Main Street and Meetinghouse Lane was Church Street.

To the east and west of the Green, large farms were located. Their pastures and cultivated fields, delineated in part by stone walls and rows of trees, recall the predominant historic use of the land in Orange. The love of this rural environment by succeeding generations of land holders along with zoning foresight, has helped to keep this center and most of the Town of Orange in an unspoiled state.

### Historical Background

European settlement of Orange began after 1687. Orange Center was part of the tract granted to Richard Bryan by Sachem Ansantawae of the Paugussetts and known as Bryan's Farms. The rolling land was well situated for cultivation. By 1791, the small community of widely scattered farmhouses had set aside a green for public use and grazing and on it had constructed a meetinghouse for "winter preaching." In 1804, the state legislature granted the area separate religious privileges as the North Milford Ecclesiastical Society. The construction of the present Orange Congregational Church occurred soon thereafter, 1810.

During the 19th century, Orange Center became the focus for community life, although it grew slowly. Small shops and businesses operated out of homes near the Stone-Otis House. Improved westward turnpikes from New Haven ran north and south of the village. This kept heavy commercial traffic at a distance. The village of West Haven near Long Island Sound, a part of the town of Orange until 1921, was larger and more commercially active. Agriculture, including raising livestock and dairy farming, remained the chief activity around Orange Center.

Orange Center has changed relatively little in this century despite the town's substantial residential and commercial growth. The green and surroundings assumed much of their present appearance before World War II. Larger buildings for town facilities have risen on Orange Center Road, but their placement has kept the 19th century ambiance of the green intact. The historic district includes a large open parcel west of the green that is still agricultural. A local historic district, created in 1978, has helped to maintain the area's appearance.

Most buildings of the historic district were residential, although Orange Center's historic role in town commerce, education, and religious life is also well represented. The district consists of 58 structures, buildings and sites (i.e. Cemetery). The buildings and structures range widely in age from circa 1800 to 1937. Their diversity in age and style is evidenced by the community's gradual development. There are examples of several formal architectural styles including the Federal, Greek Revival, Queen Anne, and Colonial Revival. Alterations and additions were common which depict some buildings featuring more than one style.

**(#1) 580 Orange Center Road** (c. 1930) This house was originally a barn attached to the 584 Orange Center Road carriage house. In 1930, the barn was moved to its present location and converted into a large red shingled home. In 1969, a rear open porch was removed to accommodate an enlarged kitchen and a family room was added. In 1973, the front porch was removed and a larger one added as well as an addition to the south side.

**(#2) 584 Orange Center Road** (c. 1900) This home, originally a white clapboard house with a high front gable and enclosed front porch, was built in 1900 by Wellington Russell. The ornate sheathing makes for a modified stick Victorian style house. Interior high ceilings and parquet floors are typical of turn of the century buildings. Of importance to note is that this was one of the first homes in the area to have central heat.

**(#3) 586 Orange Center Road** (c. 1800) This large central door, white clapboard colonial house with two chimneys exhibits a well-preserved cornice under the front eaves. The bay windows on the south side were added about 1895. Eight antique fireplaces grace rooms both upstairs and down, and the original staircase in the large central hall remains. From 1895 to 1910, a portion of the house was used as a cigar factory by Rudolph Carlson. Around 1920, a large barn, horse stables and chicken coops were destroyed by fire. Along with interior renovations, a large addition at the rear of the building and open porch on the west was installed in the early 1990's.



**(#4) 590 Orange Center Road** (c. 1876) Originally built as a Victorian style, this home has a well-preserved barn with a cupola and a pasture to the south. This large side-door white shingled and black shuttered home was remodeled in 1926 in a colonial style. An antique fan light graces the front door. It is the same design as two found on two center door colonials built circa 1830, These were manufactured in Bridgeport. An old attached shed and summer kitchen were removed and several rooms were rearranged during the remodeling.

When used as a dairy and potato farm, it also contained a carriage house, horse stables and many sheds. Prior to 1926, Elford Russell, for whom the house was built, conducted a road construction business from the premises. In 1974, an enclosed porch and patio were added to the south and west sides at the rear of the structure.

**(#5A and #5B) The Green** A tall flagpole dominates the area. There is a community tree which is lit each December for the holidays. On the southern portion are two monumental stones, one commemorating those Orange residents who lost their lives in the country's wars. The other honors deceased firefighters.

Approximately two thirds comprising the northern section (5A) belongs to the Congregational Church, while the southern section (5B) is Town property. When the first meeting house was erected in 1791, a plot of land was designated as a Green. In 1810 when the present church was begun, the old meeting house was moved to a plot on the east side of Orange Center Road opposite the Green. It burned circa 1840.

In 1830 Erastus Scranton, the first pastor, who owned considerable land in the center, deeded a plot of land to be forever used or occupied as a Green for the benefit of the public in general. This portion is now owned by the town. No building of any kind was to be erected on it.

In succeeding years, the Green was used for grazing and it gradually deteriorated. In 1891, the citizens restored it by plowing and seeding the area. In the 20th century, the annual firemen's carnival was held here as well as 4-H fairs until 1973. The Green is maintained in its present attractive state through the efforts of the Town and the Garden Club who installed sprinklers in 1979.

**(#6) 602 Orange Center Road (Parsonage)** During the 1940's, it became apparent that the parsonage of the Congregational Church, then in use at the corner of Meetinghouse Lane, west of the Green, had deteriorated beyond restoration. The church voted to build a new home for its pastor on the same lot which had been deeded to the church with the stipulation that if it was not used for the "support of the gospel," it

should revert to the American Board of Foreign Missions.

The new parsonage, designed by Henry Kelly in 1953 for continuity of design with the church, was placed to the rear of the old house which was then torn down. The house is a large square colonial with a central front door, symmetrically placed windows and generous roof. The design of the attached garage gives the effect of old-time attached sheds.

**(#7) 218 Meetinghouse Lane** (c. mid. 1800's) This two-story clapboard house was probably built in the early 19th century since it is first known to have belonged to D. Stevens in 1856. Data indicates that Meetinghouse Lane, prior to 1850, ran south of this house and straight through the present Green to Orange Center Road. The present rear of the house would have originally been the front thus causing both interior and exterior modifications. There is a large stone chimney base in the cellar containing many little ash doors and huge oak supporting beams. The roof rafters are hand hewn and pegged. Since the first land deed on which buildings appear has not been found, historians question whether this could have been the first schoolhouse built in 1750.

**(#8) 209 Meetinghouse Lane (1940)** This colonial style home is near the foundation of a house which was built prior to 1831 and burned in 1909. The original house was owned by William T. Grant, a shoemaker. In 1952 a two-story addition was built as well as a one-car garage and a large flagstone patio at the rear.

**(#9) Orange Congregational Church** Facing Meetinghouse Lane and to the north end of the green, stands the white frame church on land which was donated by Samuel Treat. It is rich with history and deserves a stop on your tour.

A simple meeting house was erected by the inhabitants of what was then called North Milford in 1791 so that services could be held during the winter by means of a traveling minister from Milford. In 1804 a charter was granted to the new North Milford Ecclesiastical Society. The present church on the Green, designed by a prominent architect of the period, David Hoadley, was erected in 1810 by the North Milford Society to replace the original meeting house and dedicated on April 17, 1811. The Congregational Church is of high architectural importance because it is a well-executed Federal style example of an early 19th century New England Meetinghouse. Its position as one of the first religious buildings associated with David Hoadley, a master builder of Connecticut churches, adds to its interests.

David Hoadley was involved in the construction of some of Connecticut's finest churches during the first quarter of the 19th century. His most important

commission as a builder was the United Church (1813-1815) on the Green in New Haven. The Orange church is less imposing and sophisticated than the later works associated with him, but its fine construction, proportions and detailing help trace the development of Hoadley's career.

"No specific evidence exists to assign Hoadley the role of architect in any churches of the period, although he is mentioned in records as joiner or contractor for several. Some commentators, however, suggest his central artistic contribution in these designs and others, in part because of the many similarities among them." (credit: Sinnott, Meetinghouse and Church in Early New England, pp. 102-106).

The four-square front tower rises from the ground and features paneled double doors topped with glass lights (there were 3 front doors at one time). Above is a handsome Palladian window. Far above is a painted black oval "window," a typical Hoadley touch. At the top the domed belfry rises, surrounded by picket fence louvered openings. A weathervane completes the picture. The original bell was found defective and replaced in 1822. It was used to call the townspeople to worship and to town meetings, and also tolled for each death.

The raising of the building took 4 days. The oaken posts are 10 inches square, and the ridge pole, 7 inches. Hoadley's fee of \$825 was the largest single item in the cost of the building.

A remodeling took place in 1864 and in 1886 a pipe organ was installed. When the church body celebrated its centennial in 1905 another remodeling brought a two-story addition to the north end. A 3-day gala marked the occasion.

The fieldstone foundation had been laid without a basement excavation. In 1926 the men of the church gathered around and dug out the basement under the building. This most difficult task resulted in space for a dining hall and kitchen, still in use. Horse sheds built in 1851 and 1870 were removed in 1933.



**(#10) 630 Orange Center Road** (c.1824-1860) This red house with black shutters is a two-story frame wood shingled house that originally had a large barn

located on the north side of the house. It was moved to the rear of the property about 1920 and then used for livestock, chickens and hay storage. Severely damaged by a hurricane in 1955, the barn was removed. The Victorian style porch is not original and a glass enclosed porch in the back was added in 1979.

Two original fireplaces remain on the second floor, and the front parlor contains the old mantel and nicely paneled doors. Upstairs there are wide floorboards, and the roof beams are hand hewn and pegged. In 1920, three central fireplaces on the first floor were removed and the present kitchen and bath were developed from an attached shed at the rear of the structure. Beyond the split rail fence there now stands an old, embossed cast iron letter box in the front yard and a well on the south side.

**(#11) 636 Orange Center Road** In 1937, the Southern New England Telephone Co. purchased from Henry F. Clark a plot of land just south of the Orange Cemetery. A one and one-half story red brick building with dormers to give a colonial feeling, was erected in October of that year. The building has a domestic rather than industrial look and is suitable to the area. Additions were made in 1952 and again in 1962. Its function is to meet the telecommunication needs for all Orange residents and commercial establishments. With the past mergers and the sale of S.N.E.T., Frontier Communications is now the owner of the building.

**(#11A) Orange Cemetery** Established in 1804 and still in use today, the cemetery lies at the historic district's northern border. Lining its roadways, oriented east to west forming long rectangular blocks, grave markers in a variety of shapes and materials can be found and most are in good repair. Segmental-headed marble slabs from the early 19th century are common, as are tall multi-stage granite monuments with the incised foliated detailing typical of the 19th century. Three of the most ornate from this period are manufactured monuments made of stamped zinc plates. A significant number of early settlers are buried in the northern sections with the familiar old-style gravestones.

**(#12) 647 Orange Center Road** This white with black shutters, front gable clapboard house is of the Victorian vintage. A bay on the south side rises to a full two and one-half story height, as does an ell on the north side. The Victorian front porch is marked with four columns and a railing of shaped pickets. The attic window has a curved top.



**(#13) 643 Orange Center Road (c.1875)** This cream with blue shutters house is of the late 19th century era. The decorative gable of batten boards with saw tooth trim, fronted by a cut out piece, shields a rounded attic window indicating Victorian design. The eaves have a generous overhang. The present front entrance replaces a small Victorian porch. The rear porch is of the same design as the gable. When the property was owned by St. Paul's Church Corporation of West Haven, the house was used for religious classes until 1951.

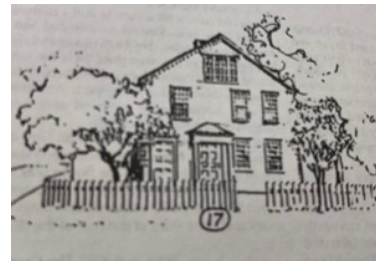
**(#14) 647 School House Lane (c. late 1800's)** This beige with cream trim two-story wood frame house was originally located on the south side of School House Lane, then Clark Street. It was moved to its present site in 1934 to allow room for expansion of the Orange School. Of Victorian design, a porch extended across the front of the house. The original was replaced by a smaller porch and shingles were applied. In 1985 the clapboards were installed and the front porch removed.

**(#15A) 637 Orange Center Road (Orange School - 1910)** The town constructed its first central school known as The Orange School in the form of a red brick one and a half story building. It was set off by a front gable with white trim and recessed front door. The land was donated by Frank C. and Watson S. Woodruff. Two additional parcels of land were acquired in 1934 for larger athletic fields. Originally, it consisted of four classrooms and contained grades 1 through 8. Four rooms were added in 1925 in the same style as the original building. In 1950, a complete new building of 11 rooms and large auditorium-gymnasium was connected to the older building. In 1956 the school was renamed to honor Miss Mary L. Tracy, teacher and principal of the school for many years, and a native of Orange.

In 1979, the building's use as a school was terminated and it was used for a short period of time as a community center. Today it is the center for all pre-school and kindergarten classes and the Board of Education.

**(#15B) 625 Orange Center Road (Fire House - 1935)** The Orange Volunteer Fire Association was incorporated in 1926 and remains an independent entity serving the community. Before the present red brick fire house was built, equipment was kept in the abandoned station of the New Haven and Derby Railroad which stood on the site of the Orange Center Road shopping center just north of the historic district. The building was expanded in 1963. On the front of the building a large white round-faced clock was installed in memory of Frank W. Knight, and a plaque recognizing past fire chiefs hangs below that.

**(#15C) 617 Orange Center Road (Town Hall — 1967)** The land on which the town hall stands was purchased from the Clark family and was the site of an old farmhouse (c. 1830) and outbuildings. This large red brick building with cream-colored wood trim and topped by a wooden cupola was designed by Carponi Associates of Orange. It is Neo-Colonial in style, with the front entrance under a swan's neck pediment. The front entrance, protected by a pillared porch, stands above grade on a landscaped terrace. The basement is partly above ground. An elevator was constructed in 1985. Prior to the building of this new structure, the Town offices were located in the old Academy building. Today the building houses the town government offices, several committee rooms, and a large two-story vault for the safekeeping of town records.

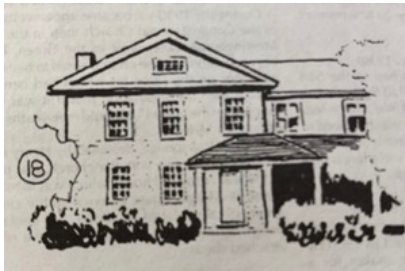


**(#17) 615 Orange Center Road (Stone-Otis House c.1830)** This two and a half story white house with two gold front doors was built in the Federal style with a Greek revival entry portico. The portico is original except for the two front pillars. Mutule blocks are found under the roof and entryway cornice. In 1950-55 the house was shingled over clapboards. There are 12 over 12 pane windows on both floors and a three section Palladian window in the west peak of the attic. Windows are capped with drip moldings. The rear and front doors appear to be original. The outbuilding close to the rear of the house was used as a carriage shed, a tool house and a garage.

Research indicates that a store-post office-gathering spot was established in the northwest room subsequent to the closing of Bryan's store across the green in 1839. Mr. Stone was postmaster circa 1855 as well. In 1848 a newspaper reported a 2-day church fair being held there.

During WWI, Red Cross workers used the house. Residents also recall members of the Dorcas Society of the church meeting there for quilting bees. The property was purchased by the Town of Orange in 1967 and served as headquarters for the Public Health Nursing Service.

In 1980, the house was leased to the Orange Historical Society. The interior and exterior of the house were restored to their original configurations between 1980 and 1986. The house is open for tours in the summer. An herb garden and landscaping similar to the 1800's was initiated by the Garden Club of Orange.



**(#18) 607 Orange Center Road** (c. 1838) This white-trimmed grey home was built in 1838 by Benjamin Treat Clark and owned at one time by Dr. Josiah Colburn and Leverett Treat. It also has a history of being used as a boarding school by a Mrs. Kirby and around 1850 Mr. Ingham occupied the home with his shoe shop. Later it was rented to George White, the station master. The present kitchen area was added at this time. In 1902, when mail was delivered by horse and buggy, this house served as home for Orange's first rural mail carrier, Albert M. Clark. It was even used as a corn crib. From 1916 to 1972, it was the office for the Orange Cemetery Association. It is now a home once again. Groundskeeping equipment is still in use in the rear outbuildings.



**(#19) 605 Orange Center Road** The first Academy was built in 1821 on property given by Benjamin Clark, with its location close to Orange Center Road. At a town meeting in 1878, \$1500 was voted

to build the present building and Benjamin Clark donated a larger parcel to the Town of Orange School Society. This larger building, which was constructed in 1879, is distinguished by the Victorian charm of its exterior. The original building was moved in back of the present-day convenience store location but was destroyed by fire in 1885.

The first floor of the building was used for school society meetings, church and town meetings, while the second floor was used as a high school. The building functioned thus until the early 1900's when students were given a choice of attending high schools in surrounding towns.

The building's belfry is empty, and the whereabouts of the original school bell which was mounted there is unknown but the Orange Historical Society is seeking a bell to replace the one gone missing.

Town records, having outgrown the private residence of the town clerk, were moved to the Academy building in the late 1940's. The Town Court met on the second floor. Other town offices and functions moved in as the need arose. Additions were made to the rear of the building and a vault for record storage was also built. Administrative use by the town continued until 1967 when the new Town Hall was built. The Academy building was taken over by the Board of Education for its administrative and executive use.

Today the Academy is the home of the Orange Historical Society, a museum of Orange history, an antique shop, a recreated 19<sup>th</sup> century school room, the Mary Woodruff Research Center with a Southern New England Telephone Company exhibit, and in the basement, a fully operational railroad of the 19<sup>th</sup> century New Haven and Derby line.

**(#20) Library on the Green** Once known at the Orange Public Library, this building was built in 1961 on land owned by the Clark family with the express purpose of a town library. It has since changed its tenants with the Orange Economic Development, and the Orange Chamber of Commerce offices on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and a complete Visiting Nurse Association occupying the first floor.

In 1961 the red brick, white trimmed Orange Public Library was opened on land formerly belonging to the Clark family and used for farming for many years. The Lions Club of Orange raised funds for the land purchase, and a fund drive helped to defray costs of the building. The facade features bay and dormer windows.

A bequest from Marian Merwin Halliday provided funds for a large addition to the building which was erected in 1973. It provided space for reading rooms, a children's area, more than 10,000 volumes in stacks reached by an inner ramp, plus a collection of tapes, prints and records. An outside ramp was constructed

to provide access for the handicapped. The library began its existence as a volunteer project and was located in a shopfront in the Firelite Shopping Center on Old Tavern Road. In 1974 the library became a department of the town.



**(#21) 603 Orange Center Road** (c.1800) This large white central colonial Federal style house with green shutters has well preserved farm related buildings which include a large barn and a Victorian building which was moved from the old fairgrounds opposite High Plains School on Orange Center Rd. This helps maintain a significant link to the agricultural pursuits that were historically central to Orange Center's economic life.

The property deeds for this house are difficult to trace but it is known that Benjamin Clark owned the property in and around the house ca. 1810. The interior contains a large central hall with 2 rooms on either side. A wide Dutch door with its original bolt and cast-iron knocker is topped by a handsome leaded fanlight. There are four fireplaces in the house, one of which has a granite hearth. The front room on the north side has a dentil molding in the ceiling with the same motif repeated at the fireplace. A Victorian porch was added on the side and later removed. An enclosed porch at the rear was later added.

**(#22) 593 Orange Center Road** (c. 1958) This one-story tan clapboard home with maroon-colored shutters was built by Edward Marchant, husband of Louise Clark. The two-car garage formerly stood at the rear of the property and was used as a summer cottage by the Marchant family from 1930 to 1958. The size of the narrow lot, established before zoning existed, defined the design and future additions to the house. A room was added to the south side in 1980.

**(#23) 589 Orange Center Road** (c. 1908) A local carpenter, Charles S. Johnson built this spacious white with black shutters two and a half story home for his own use. It remains largely unchanged, with a full porch, and two dormer windows in the generous attic. This turn of the century home has a traditional center hall with parquet oak floors on the first floor, and chestnut woodwork and staircase. A rear addition and deck were added in the early 1980's.

**(#24) 585 Orange Center Road** This gray two-story shingled home was built in the 19th century. The roof

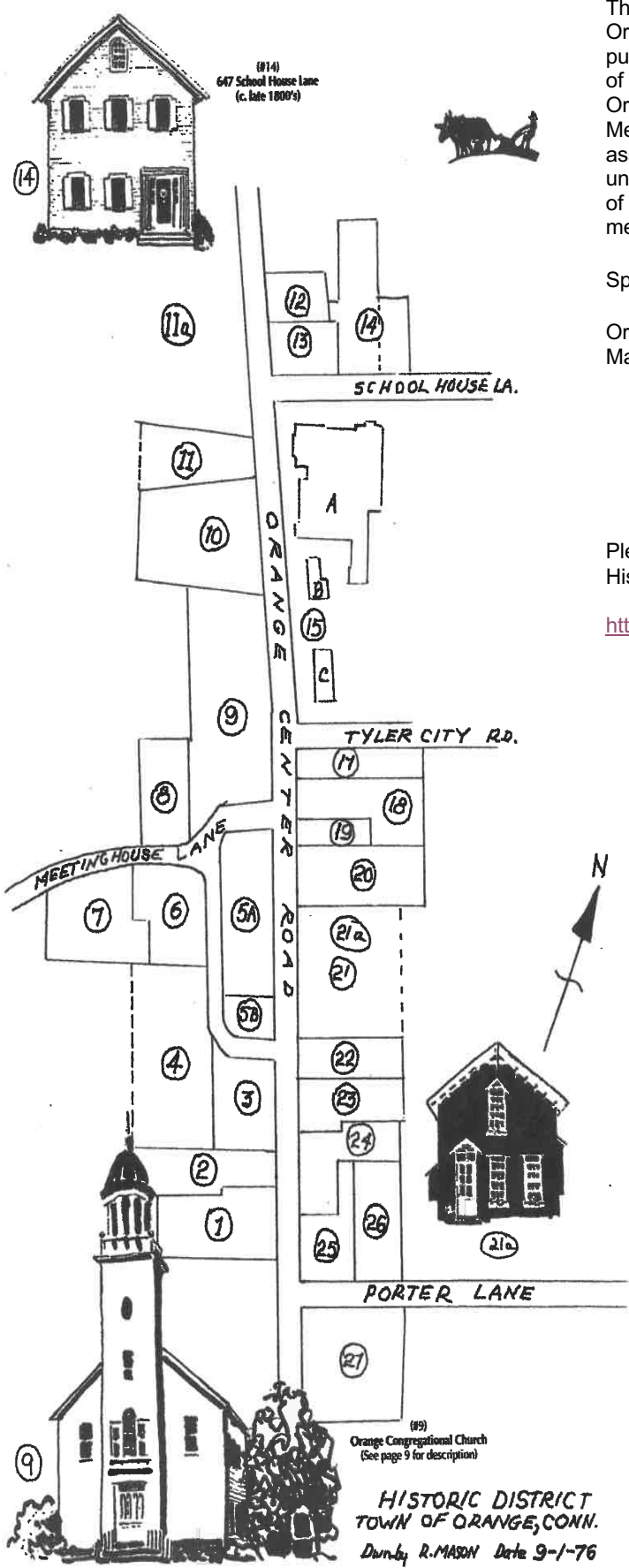
beams in the front portion of the house are hand hewn rough timbers. There are wide floorboards in the front portion of the second floor. The rear portion, including the kitchen, was built after the front portion. Circa 1980 the front porch and small addition to the north side was added.



**(#25) 575 Orange Center Road** (Prior to 1810) This green side door Federal style shingled house was formerly sided with clapboard. The interior includes three open fireplaces on the ground floor and one on the second. The original paneling and cabinets remain around the central fireplaces, and there are original pine floors throughout. It was restored in the 1950's, after being almost completely destroyed by fire. An addition on the north side was once used as a Post Office, and a green hitching post is still in place at the front of the house. An attached barn on the east side collapsed during the hurricane of 1938.

**(#26) 167 Porter Lane** A part of this white with black shutters house was formerly the rear portion of the house that stood on the property at 562 Orange Center Rd. During WWII when building materials were scarce, Mr. and Mrs. Frank C. Woodruff moved the above portion to Porter Lane. Between 1955 and 1960, the kitchen was enlarged and a garage was moved and connected to the house. During the next five years, a back porch and another wing were added. It is believed that three of the doors were part of the original building.

**(#27) 567 Orange Center Road** (Prior to 1846) The first building mentioned on this property was in a deed dated 1846. During the 1800's a knife maker and a shoemaker, named Ellsworth Foote, lived there. Later a bookbindery shop was operated in an outbuilding. A small portion of this yellow house is pictured on an early 1900's postcard. In 1934, a fire destroyed the barn on the property and another barn and chicken coop were removed at a later date. In 1975, an old summer kitchen at the rear was removed to add a two-story addition. A field stone well sits in the side yard.



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Original drawings by Penny Vaughn  
Map by R. Mason

Please visit our website to begin your tour of the Historic District.

<https://www.orangehistory.org>

(#9)  
Orange Congregational Church  
(See page 9 for description)

**HISTORIC DISTRICT  
TOWN OF ORANGE, CONN.**  
Drawn by R. MASON Date 9-1-76