

Spring Hill:

Background and Properties

Spring Hill, a state historic district since 1972, is one of a handful of small villages which developed within the town of Mansfield, Connecticut. The town's large square tract of land is traversed by streams and divided by hills and valleys. Most of Mansfield's villages, such as Mansfield Hollow, Gurleyville and Eagleville, grew where early textile manufacturers built riverside mills. Spring Hill, located at the crest of a big domical hill, did not have sources of water power; rather, its development stemmed from its central location within Mansfield, and its location on the Norwich-Springfield Turnpike (now Rte. 195). Along this roadway and surrounded by farms, the village center condensed. During various periods, it contained the town hall, a Baptist Church, a store, a blacksmith shop, and homes. Twenty-four structures are encompassed in the historic district, whose development occurred in three major phases; 1740-1776, 1835-1852, and 1930-1936. Throughout its development, Spring Hill's buildings have shared similarity in scale and materials. Close and regular spacing has helped to sustain the quiet spirit of a small rural settlement.

Pleasant, tree-shaded, with homogenous buildings, the neighborhood is by an asset to the town of Mansfield. Mansfield is not typical among the remote farm towns of northeastern Connecticut, primarily due to its having the University of Connecticut within its borders. The University was founded in 1881 as a land grant agricultural college with land and funds given by town residents Charles and Augustus Storrs. Less than a mile from Spring Hill, the large state university has transformed Mansfield from a rural town to one that is increasingly suburban in nature. Two farms within the district are now university owned and operated; one as a horticultural station, the other as an animal pathology laboratory. Two of the districts' 20th century houses were built by university faculty.

The first silk mill in the U.S. was established in Hanks Hill, Mansfield in the early 1800's. Mulberry trees were grown by many nearby residents, and a few trees surviving the blight of 1837 stand on Spring Hill. In Mansfield, as in many rural areas, roads were not commonly paved until the early 20th Century when state governments acquired domain over privately-operated toll routes. Rte. 195 which runs through the center of the Spring Hill District, was paved in 1930. WPA funds were used for construction of various buildings at the University of Connecticut in addition to the town office on Spring Hill. [CT Trust for Historic Preservation]