

Mansfield Hollow: Background and Properties

Mansfield Hollow is a cohesive village of late 18th and early to mid-19th century structures, including residences, a former store, and a silk mill. The district is both historically and architecturally significant. Most of the houses' original owners were connected with the Hollow's early enterprises, which included grist, saw, carding, fulling, oil, cotton and silk mills, and a machine shop.

The importance of small-scale manufacturing to the Hollow's economy is recalled today by the stone mill, which, like the earlier mills, was powered by the swift Natchaug River flowing along the District's southern boundary.

The village is typical of rural Connecticut architecture and shows development of the basic farmhouse inherited from the 18th century. Most of the early inhabitants combined farming with their mill activities. The two earliest extant houses, Captain George Swift House and Oliver Bingham House, are 1 ½ and 2 ½ story versions of the unelaborated center chimney, gable roofed design. The Fearing Swift House (before 1815) shows country applications of the Georgian classical details. It was during the Greek revival period, however, that the greatest architectural development occurred. To some extent the 18th century ideas of house building were continued. The Nathan Rixford House has pilastered corners and an entablature over the doorway but it is still a center chimney plan with ridge pole parallel to the street.

In the Hinckley House and A.S. and G.F. Swift House however, the Greek revival transformation is more complete with the gable ends turned to face the road. In the A.S. and G.F. Swift house a concern with proportion is an important component of Greek design. These last two were built by Mansfield master architect, Edwin Fitch, who designed both sophisticated and rustic Greek revival houses in the Mansfield area.

One of the more historical properties in the Mansfield Hollow District is Kirby Mill. Operating as a silk mill as early as 1833 under owner Zalmon Storrs, the mill changed hands a number of times over the next half a decade. The mill was sold to National Thread Company, a cotton thread manufacturer, in 1880. Two years later the wooden mill was torn down and replaced by the large stone mill that exists today.

Despite modifications to some of the buildings, the district's small scale and clustering of houses retain the feel of a 19th century village. There is only one house of recent construction which interrupts the district's continuity.