

# Walking Tour Explores Canterbury's Historic Green



Ellen Wilson of the Canterbury Historical Society describes the history of the town's Congregational church during a Nov. 5 history walk. (Janice Steinhagen/Courant Community)



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**T**he home of Connecticut's state female hero – and the place where the state's most infamous traitor was a student – were among the stops on a recent history walk through Canterbury.

Approximately 20 history and architecture buffs turned out at Canterbury's original one-room schoolhouse on the green Nov. 5 for a narrated tour through the center of town.

The walk was the latest installment in the "Explore Connecticut Towns" series, co-sponsored by the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History and the Connecticut Archeology Center at the University of Connecticut.

At the school house, where a fire in the wood stove heated the chilly fall air, Ellen Orlowski recalled the days before Canterbury built the Helen Baldwin Consolidated School in 1947. At one point in its history, she said, Canterbury had 12 one-room school houses, scattered throughout town so that school children wouldn't have to walk further than a mile or two to school.

Orlowski said that when her father was middle-school age, he had the job of starting the fire in the one-room schoolhouse – a task for which he was paid 10 cents a day. After Baldwin School opened, the schoolhouse on the green served as the town's library until 2001, when the community center was built.

"It was one of the last public libraries in Connecticut without indoor plumbing," she said.

Patrons who needed to "go" would have to borrow the key for the church next door, she said.

Ellen Wilson, of the Canterbury Historical Society, led the remainder of the walk, which took participants to five different houses in the vicinity of the green and offered an overview of several different architectural styles.

Most 18th-century Connecticut homes were single-story, she said; the more atypical, larger, two-story structures have survived in greater numbers, however, since they were typically owned by more wealthy homeowners.

The so-called "Canterbury style," exemplified by the Prudence Crandall House, built in 1805, was not unique to Canterbury, said Wilson. This style, incorporating Palladian windows and neoclassical elements like pediments, was originally attributed to carpenter John Dyer.

More recent research, however, indicates that "if there's one person responsible for this style of architecture, it's Thomas Gibbs, of Plainfield," she said.

Wilson showed participants an Adams-influenced federal-period house, built in 1810, which has far more delicate and restrained molding than the Crandall house. She also discussed the home of George Washington Smith, built in 1885, one of Canterbury's few Victorian homes.

Unlike Willimantic, which had a thriving industrial base in the late 19th century, Canterbury's population actually dropped during that century, Wilson said. Few Victorian-era homes were built in Canterbury

because of "Ohio fever" – the town's young people were leaving to homestead in the Western Reserve, following the lead of Canterbury native son Moses Cleveland, after whom the city in Ohio is named.

The walk ended at Wilson's own home, a two-story colonial on the green, with hot mulled cider and cookies served in a period-decorated room, complete with a roaring fire in the hearth.

David Colberg, program and public information coordinator for the State Museum of Natural History, said that the town history series is intended to give people from around the state a chance to learn more about the specific history of the state's towns.

"The goal is to hit as many towns as possible," he said.

Previous walks have examined the histories of Essex, Wethersfield, Manchester, and Stonington, among others.

The next town in the series, to be resumed next spring, will be the Whitneyville section of Hamden, where inventor Eli Whitney established his manufacturing village.

For more information, visit [www.cac.uconn.edu/mnhcurrentcalendar](http://www.cac.uconn.edu/mnhcurrentcalendar) or call 860-486-4460.

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