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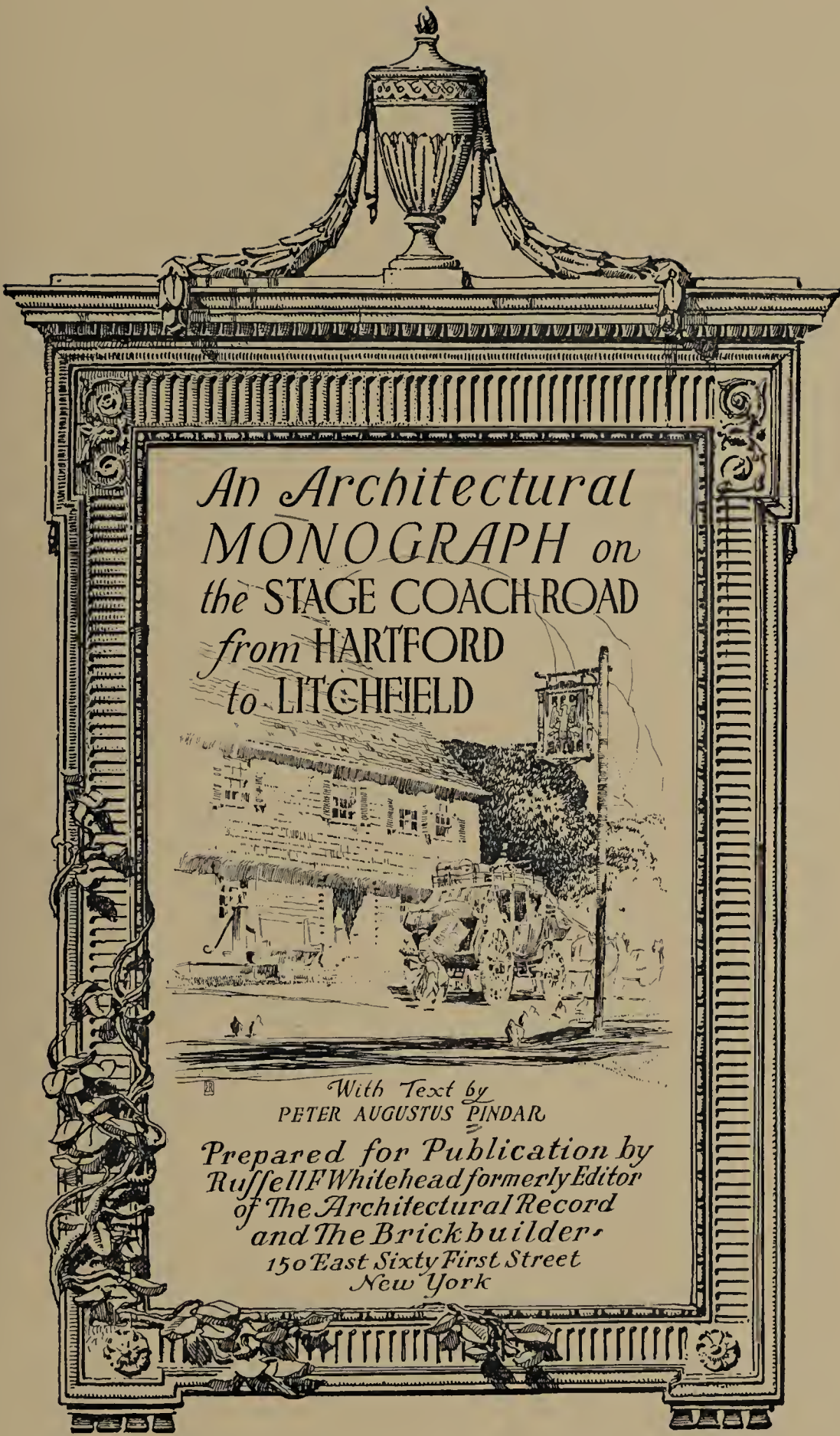
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The
STAGE COACH ROAD
from
HARTFORD *to* LITCHFIELD

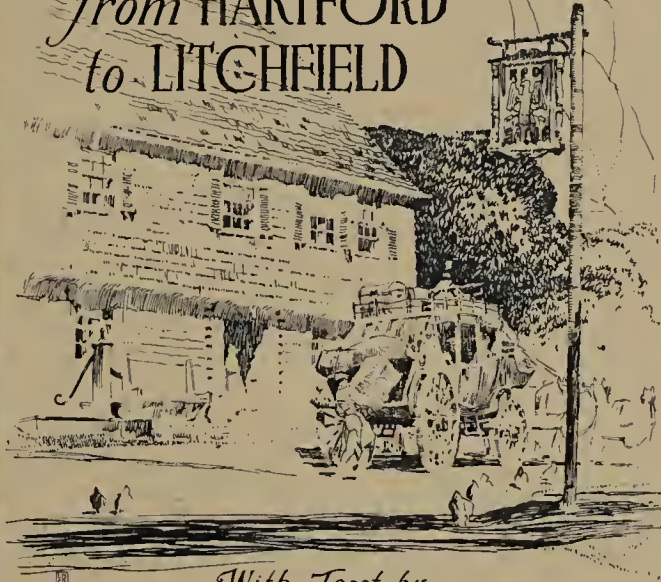
With Introductory Text by
Peter Augustus Pindar

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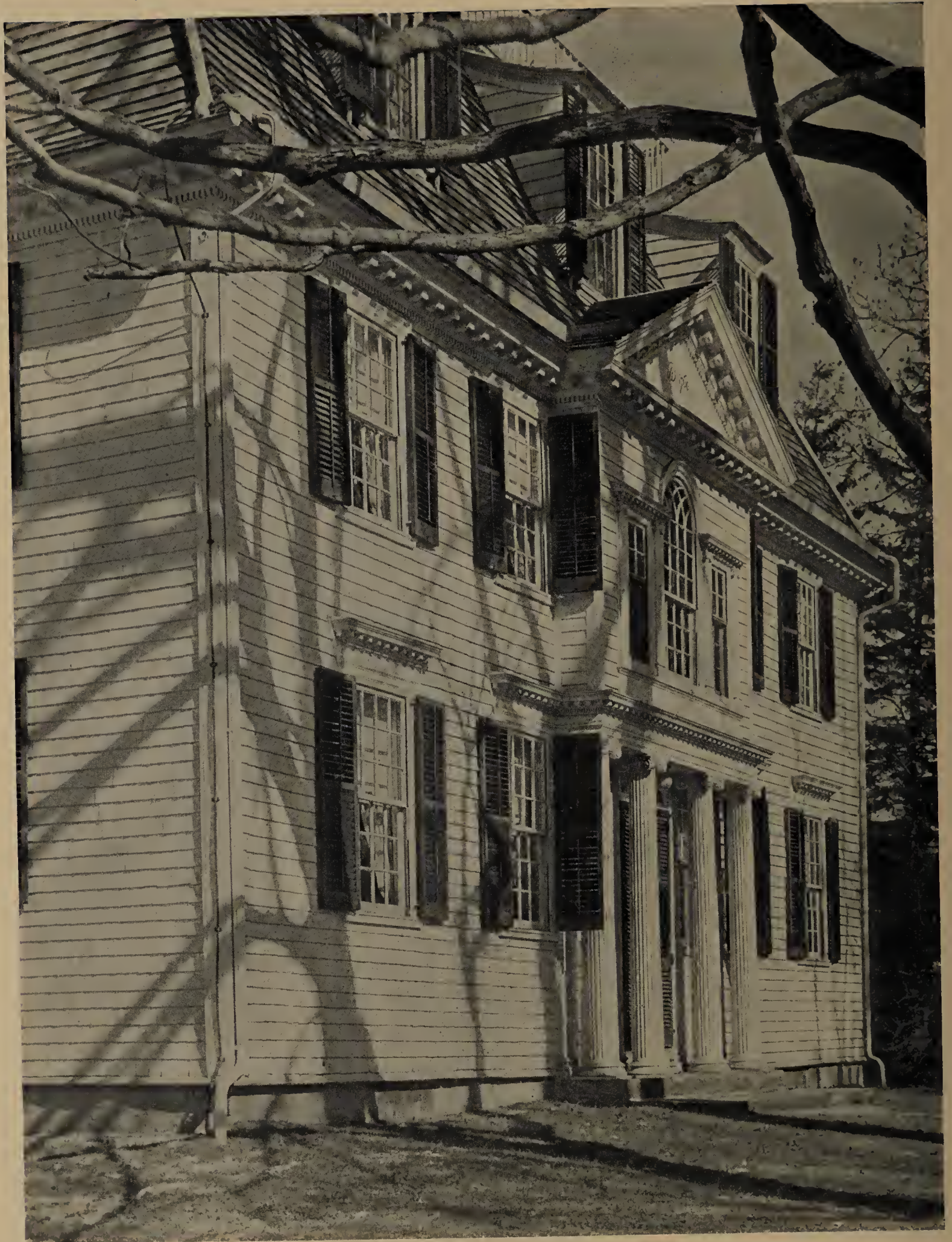


An Architectural
MONOGRAPH *on*
the **STAGE COACH ROAD**
from **HARTFORD**
to **LITCHFIELD**



With Text by
PETER AUGUSTUS PINDAR

Prepared for Publication by
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New York



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THE SHELDON TAVERN, LITCHFIELD, CONNECTICUT
*Built in 1760 by Elisha Sheldon for a residence but used as an Inn by his son Samuel until 1780.
Also known as the Gould House until 1871*

The WHITE PINE SERIES of ARCHITECTURAL MONOGRAPHS

A BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION
SUGGESTING THE ARCHITECTURAL USES OF WHITE PINE
AND ITS AVAILABILITY TODAY AS A
STRUCTURAL WOOD

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OCTOBER 1923

NO. 5

The Stage Coach Road From Hartford to Litchfield

By PETER AUGUSTUS PINDAR

"Peter Augustus Pindar" is a nom de plume familiar to the readers of "The White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs" as the author of "The Boston Post Road." The New England architect of more than local fame still wishes to remain unknown as a writer.—EDITOR'S NOTE

PHOTOGRAPHS by the Author

HARTFORD was the first settlement in Connecticut, an outpost of the Massachusetts colony planted to keep off the Dutch of New Amsterdam who claimed the fertile valley of the Connecticut River for their own. Established in 1636 at a most excellent point near the head of navigation on the river, and in the center of the most fertile part of the state, Hartford early became a little metropolis, from which roads were thrown out to the farming country around it; and as the early settlements grew and became in themselves little centers, Stage Coach lines were established to accommodate the growing travel.

Of these subordinate centers Litchfield was one, although just why the town should have had even local importance, is hard to say. The site of Litchfield is a lovely one, but it is on top of a rather high and steep hill, and the

surrounding country is so rough and broken that it could never have been a very productive farming region. Nor were there other industries which could cause growth; there were excellent deposits of iron ore some twenty miles away, and splendid water power at Falls Village on the Housatonic River, near the Massachusetts State line, but though these were discovered and used early in the Eighteenth Century, neither Salisbury nor Falls Village have ever grown very much, while Litchfield was not only a town large by Colonial standards but a very wealthy little place.

So of the early stage lines, out of Hartford, one ran to Litchfield over the level valley to Farmington, a beautiful old town settled in 1640. The road crosses the Farmington River and continues up the fertile river valley to Unionville, where the road



Litchfield Stage Coach under Shed
OLD TAVERN (NOW COLONIAL MUSEUM), DANBURY

crossed the river again, and ascended a steep ravine to Burlington. Then came a long stretch of road along the bottom of a narrow rough valley to Harwinton and East Litchfield, where the Naugatuck River was crossed, and the four mile steep climb to Litchfield was begun.

The exact date at which this line was established is not known, but it was certainly before 1755, and the line still ran in 1870, when the railroad killed horse-drawn competition, and the old stages were

Most of the old stage coach roads, or post roads—they were both—have long since been improved beyond recognition, for generally speaking, the towns of importance a century ago are the towns of importance today; but this old road from Litchfield as far as Unionville remains as it was, and were it possible, some old gentleman who left the Phelps Tavern in Litchfield at six o'clock in the morning, Standard time (it is a misdemeanor to use Daylight Saving time in Connecticut) on August 19,



THE JOHNSON HOUSE, FARMINGTON, CONNECTICUT
Built in 1690

sold off. They must have built these stages well, for tradition says that some of them were sent to Deadwood, Montana, and that the Deadwood coach which Buffalo Bill used to dramatize was one of them, brought across the continent. Nor was this the only hard usage they withstood, for until the trolley ran to Farmington, the girls of Miss Porter's school were met in Hartford by one of them. This particular coach is still extant and was under a shed of the late Mr. Ives' Colonial Museum at Danbury, as recently as September of this year, when it was to be sold at auction.

1823 he would have found few changes had he travelled with Mr. Whitehead and myself on the same day in 1923. Even the road cannot have been much improved, although he might have been somewhat surprised at the new fangled vehicle (our automobile) in which he found himself travelling.

He would have regretted to find at the bottom of the steep hill on East Street a half mile from the tavern, where we cross the brook, that the old mill has been burned down and has not been rebuilt, but he should have been pleased to see that the oldest house in Litchfield was being restored.



Overhang embellished by "drop" ornament

THE WHITMAN HOUSE, FARMINGTON CONNECTICUT



Doorway and overhang



THE RICHARDS HOUSE, LITCHFIELD, CONNECTICUT

Built about 1730. Restorations soon to be made

I doubt if he would have known how old it was, for it was standing in his great-grandfather's time, and his great-great-grandfather died in 1730. He would have probably been glad that if the old door didn't suit, and Mis' Richards had to hire one of these new-fangled architects to make her a new one, that she picked on young Mr. Woolsey, one of the old Yale family, you know. But the new door is so in keeping with the old house that he probably wouldn't have noticed the change.

Across the road he would have recognized Echo Farm with its tiny porch and Palladian window and would have felt no comment necessary; it looks just the same as it always did; and from Echo Farm to East Litchfield he would have found only one new house, although in the small plain farmsteads along the road he would have found Zuccas and Bodanskis working the fields which used to belong to Demmings and Fosters.

He might have wondered at the new concrete bridge and the railroad tracks at East Litchfield had we let him see them, but by our agreeable

conversation, we would have diverted his mind until we had crossed the new state road up the Naugatuck Valley, and had turned up what looks like the yard of the corner farm house into the road to Harwinton; and as we climbed the long mile to the Tavern at the cross road to Torrington, he would have seen no change at all, for there is no house or relic of a house in that mile.

He (having come from 1823) would have wanted to stop for a little refreshment at the tavern, but it has long since been closed, and is now very rusty and down at heel; and then we would have driven another two miles along a narrow tree shaded soggy road until we came to what was in his day the newest house in Harwinton, the Wilson house on which the paint had but dried in 1833. The man who built the Wilson house wasn't any of your back woods builders! He knew a thing or two about this new Greek architecture Asher Benjamin had written a book about, and he got some of the best of it into this house, even if Mr. Wilson did insist on the recessed side porch so fashionable in Har-



ECHO FARM, LITCHFIELD, CONNECTICUT

Built about 1737

winton but on this porch he used what was called the "column in antis" motive with two story columns two feet in diameter. These so obstructed the porch that an irreverent generation has taken them out and stored them in the barn.

Harwinton would have seemed very familiar to our passenger, for while he would have noticed some "new" houses built around 1830 (in the biggest and best of which Henry Hornbostel lives) he would have been glad to see the old Academy behind the Messenger house, and would probably have regretted as we did that the cupola has been taken off and a tin roof substituted for the ancient shingles. But the Messenger house, once the home of the family of the first settlers in Harwinton, is in perfect condition, probably because it is owned by a gentleman who lives in what our passenger knew as Fort Duquesne.

The old fellow would have told us some interesting things about Harwinton; how it was settled in 1686 partly by people from Hartford, and partly by people from Windsor; and how those two towns

quarrelled so over the new settlement that it finally set up for itself on the 11th of May in 1733, choosing as its name the combination Har-win-ton from Hart-ford-town, and Wind-sor-town. But he could have told us what his father had very likely *not* told him, of how many hogsheads of cider and barrels of rum were drunk when they "raised" the church.

If he had been told what we were doing he would have been sorry not to see us stop and photograph the church which is one of the most delightful of the old New England Meeting houses with a steeple, in what Mr. Hornbostel called the Chippendale style, which may be, that too, for all I know, although it is almost a literal copy of another church on the Litchfield-Hartford road, the one at Farmington. The old Town Hall, which must have been new in his day has unfortunately been destroyed and replaced by a brick building which Mr. Hornbostel, the architect, has thoughtfully designed following the motive of the old one and set upon the original stone foundation.

{Continued on page eleven}



Doorway Detail
THE BROWN INN, BURLINGTON, CONNECTICUT



Doorway Detail
THE RICHARDS HOUSE, LITCHFIELD, CONNECTICUT



DOORWAY OF THE MESSENGER HOUSE
Built in 1783



DOORWAY AT HARWINTON, CONNECTICUT
Built in 1780



WILSON HOUSE, HARWINTON, CONNECTICUT
Built in 1833



OLD HARWINTON ACADEMY, HARWINTON, CONNECTICUT
Built in 1783

But if he had inquired at any of the houses after the families of his old friends, and found them gone, he would probably not have been much surprised, for in 1820 there were only five families among the seventeen hundred and eighteen inhabitants, who had lived for twenty years in their original houses. These Harwinton people always were a restless lot.

By that time the old fellow would have been

day the luncheon stop of the stages. In this plain little building five generations of Abijah Catlins kept tavern, and among the guests included General Washington and General Lafayette as well as many of the ancient Litchfield worthies. The stage route must have been much frequented, and the inn popular, for the second or third Abijah built himself a big comfortable house across the road from the inn, and spared no expense to make it



THE MESSENGER HOUSE, HARWINTON, CONNECTICUT
Built in 1783

thirsty, missing his morning toddy at the Torrington Corner Inn, and without letting us stop at the Birge house or the Stone house, (so called because the lintels and sills are of stone, although the house itself was of brick with a wooden cornice and an entrancing old elliptical headed fan light and side light on the doorway) he would have hurried us up the hill to the old inn built in 1745 by one of the Abijah Catlins, and which was in my friend's

the finest house in Harwinton, finer even than the Messenger house in the green. But our passenger has joined us a little too late, for only last year the last of Catlins sold the house to some foreigners from Torrington! The Catlin Homestead now owned by the Clevelands is really about as representative a piece of Connecticut architecture as one could wish for. It has all the motives which are distinctly of Connecticut origin, including a de-

lightful palladin window above the door and sidelights like those in the Kingsberry house at Litchfield and the Cows house at Farmington, although the treatment of them is flatter, the pilasters taking the place of columns in the lower border and even the balustrades being sawn boards instead of turned. The side porch has the two story free standing order within a recess, of which the examples in Woodbury and Litchfield have been already illus-

sign and furnishings, a thing which we do not always have the luck to find.

The five miles from Harwinton to Burlington would have shown our passenger nothing either old or new except a couple of pleasant old farmhouses, built about the time of his last trip; and we would have set him down in Burlington at the Brown Inn, facing the green with its small pathetic monument to the town's dead in the World



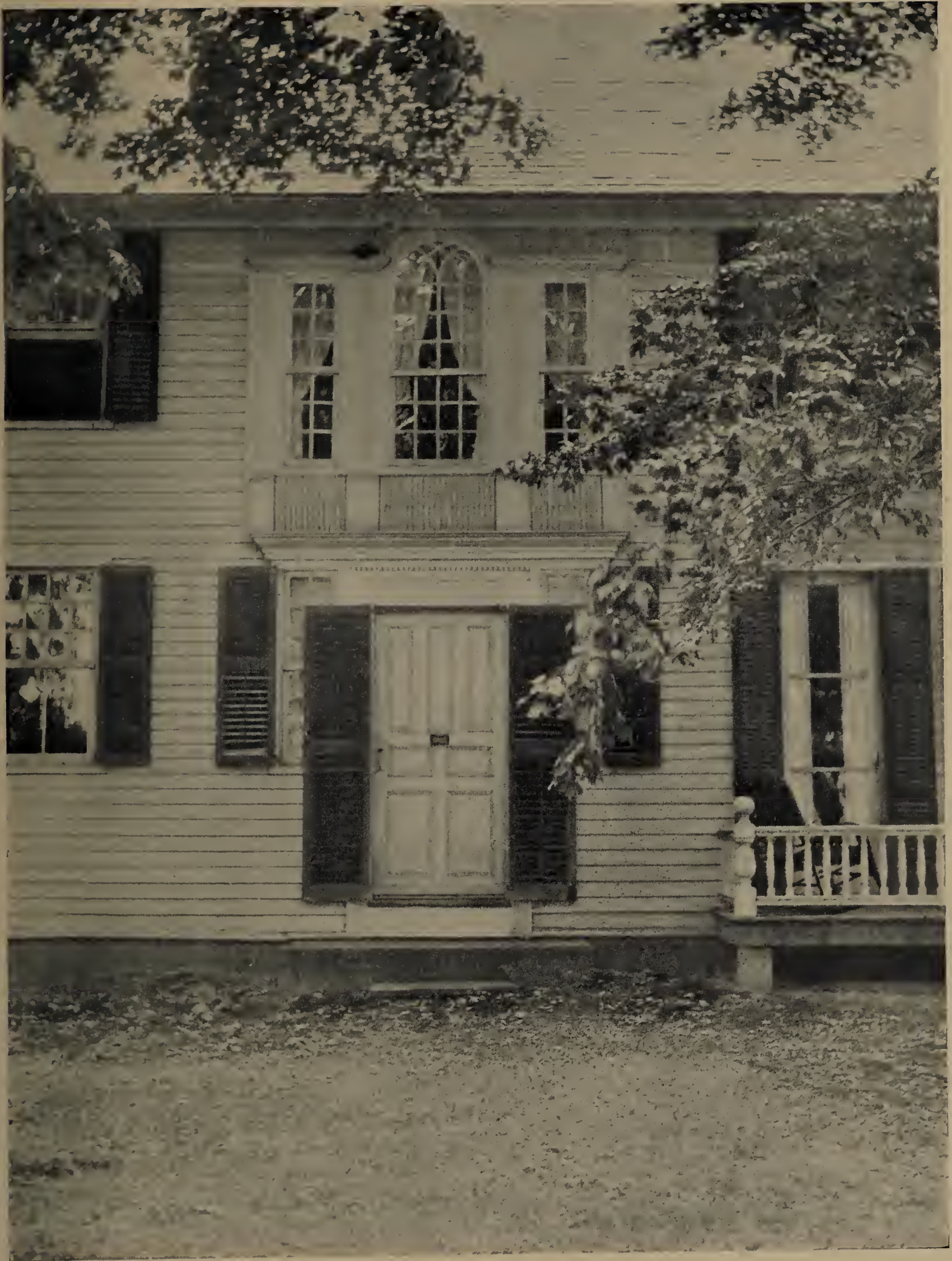
HOUSE AT HARWINTON CONNECTICUT

Built about 1810

trated in the *White Pine Monographs* and in the gable ends in the third story sort of baby palladin window lights the attic. The house is unfortunately on the south side of the road and shadowed by very heavy trees so that a successful photograph of it is almost impossible. It really is one of the most notable houses in New England and its pleasant owners appreciate this fact and are proposing to restore it to its original condition both in de-

War. Around the green he would have seen old friends, and no intruders; but he would have sighed to see them so forlorn, the lovely porch of the Inn shorn of its columns, and the houses grimy and unkempt except for one smart little house at the head of the green where the road to Winsted forks from the old stage coach road. And there in that little forgotten town we will leave him; for Bur-

[Continued on page sixteen]



THE ABIJAH CATLIN HOMESTEAD, HARWINTON, CONNECTICUT
Built in 1795. It has all the motives which are distinctly of Connecticut origin



THE ABIJAH CATLIN HOUSE, HARWINTON, CONNECTICUT
Built in 1795



POST ROAD INN, HARWINTON, CONNECTICUT
Built by one of the Abijah Catlins in 1745



CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, FARMINGTON, CONNECTICUT

The Church at Harwinton is almost a literal copy of this one



HOUSE AT THE HEAD OF THE GREEN, BURLINGTON, CONNECTICUT

lington was once great enough to be included in English Atlases which did not show busy Torrington or Winsted. It has not grown but fallen into de-

cay; while were we to take the old gentleman to Unionville his heart would break; it is full of knitting mills; and, dead as it is we like Burlington best.



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