

IF ONLY WALLS COULD SPEAK



What was your town like fifty, one hundred or even two hundred years ago? Without a doubt it has changed. The people who settled your community are now gone but in many cases the homes and barns they built, the stores where they traded, the schools where their children studied, the town halls where they gathered and the churches where they worshiped are still standing. If only their walls could speak, think of the stories they could tell.

But walls do talk, in a way. In order to understand what they can tell, you must learn to look, *really look*, at the shops and houses you pass every day. Examine the materials they are made of. Ask questions like “Why did people select this area to live?” or “What were these people like and what did they do?” These and other questions help make your town’s past clearer.

Towns are born, grow up and get old just like people do. In the process they change. The old center or main street may no longer be your community’s “downtown” area. A business may have opened that

attracted new people to your town and caused more housing to be built. Just as likely, the closing of a factory may have caused people to move away and leave old homes behind. Maybe these houses are being torn down to make way for newer buildings. Maybe they are being preserved and restored. Perhaps part of your town was destroyed by a flood or hurricane.

Every town, yours included, has transformed during *its* lifetime. It is up to you to find out what kind of changes occurred in your community and why. You can find stories the walls won’t tell you by looking at old photographs, maps and town records. Each bit of information is like a puzzle piece. As you fit more and more of them together you form a clearer picture of your town’s past.

Modern ranches, apartment complexes, stores and old houses all tell stories. The colors, landscaping and building designs each generation select represent the tastes of that time. What was in style in 1885 is not necessarily in style now just as our choices today may not be popular one hundred years from now.

The next time you are in town take time to look at the buildings. If the walls talk, be sure to listen.

Finding Clues to a Town’s History

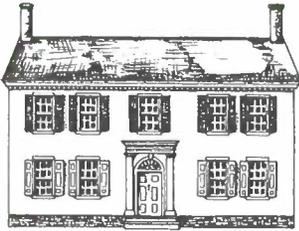
1. Make a map of your town’s center as it looks today. Then using old photographs and town histories try to make a map of your town’s center as it looked 100 years ago. Compare the two maps.
2. Find pictures of old buildings in town that are still standing. Has their use changed? Has their exterior been changed with new siding, different color paint, modern windows, added porches?
3. Go to a real estate agent and see what prices homes sell for today. Then check with your town clerk to find out what homes sold for 25 or 50 years ago.
4. Find out what businesses use to operate in your town by checking old business directories, newspaper advertisements, photographs and local histories. Do any of them still exist today? What new businesses have opened? Are there fewer or more today?
5. Take photographs or make drawings of the old buildings in your town. When were they built? What materials were used and where did they come from? Use the chart on the next page to determine what style they are.
6. Make a model of a building you like.
7. Work with a group of friends to make a walking tour of your town or a section of it.

A building's style helps us to guess its age. In cases where there are several structures of the same style located nearby each other it is possible to estimate the age of the neighborhood. Of course many homes and stores are a blend of several styles making dating

difficult.

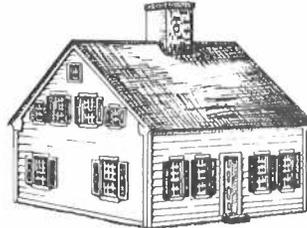
Following are descriptions and illustrations of Vermont's most popular architectural styles. The dates given represent the years these styles were most commonly built in Vermont.

FEDERAL 1780s - 1830s



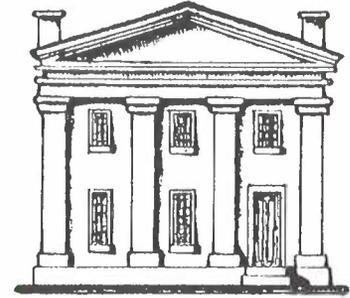
Formal and symmetrical; long side of the rectangular building usually had a central door often with a fan-shaped window over it; windows were often twelve over twelve panes.

CAPE COD (Local version of the Federal style)



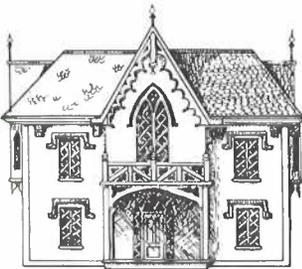
Probably the most common house built in Vermont; one-and-a-half stories; low pitched roof; clapboard or shingle siding; central chimney; windows were usually six over six panes.

GREEK REVIVAL 1830s - 1870s



Formal design imitating ancient Greek temples; common use of pillars; windows were usually six over six panes.

GOTHIC REVIVAL 1850s - 1860s



Pointed gables; steeply pitched roof; decorative woodwork underneath roof's eaves; arched windows often with small diamond-shaped panes or with four over four panes.

ITALIANATE 1870s - 1880s



Asymmetrical; flat or low pitched roofs; most prominent detail are the cornice brackets under the building's roof; cupulas; narrow double doors; first style to make use of porches; windows were usually two over two panes.

QUEEN ANNE 1880s - 1900s



Asymmetrical; combination of siding materials used to create variety; decorative porches, bay windows and towers; windows were often stained glass or used small colored panes to surround one large pane of clear glass.