Facing south onto Main Street, the Cowles, Norton, and Bidwell House sits on a small rectangular lot adorned with shrubs and small gardens. A large pine tree shades the front of the lot. The surrounding neighborhood contains other historic dwellings dating from the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries.
This unique and well-preserved brownstone, Greek Revival-style house was erected around 1835. Capped with a ridge-to-street gable roof, the five-bay facade exhibits a central two-tier, open porch with classical columns and modest stick balustrade. The porch is a later addition. The central doorway features a recessed paneled door flanked by sidelights. The twelve-over-twelve first-floor sash and the twelve-over-eight second-floor sash are enhanced by smooth brownstone sills and lintels. The windows also exhibit louvered shutters. A wide entablature is displayed below the eaves on the facade and rear elevation. Twin interior brick chimneys indicate a central-hall floor plan. The side elevations display a raking cornice with slight cornice returns and a geometrically designed rectangular window in the gable end. A recessed corner door with brownstone lintel is found on the east elevation. A 1½ story ell extends from the rear elevation.

There is some conflict surrounding the construction date of this dwelling. Some local historians claim the house was erected in 1830, while others, including Samuel Pepper in his history of Unionville state the house was built in 1840. A definite construction date cannot be determined through the land records. The first mention of this house in a deed occurs in 1840 when brothers James and Augustus Cowles sold William Griswold a small lot of land "99½ feet north of the stone house" (FLR 45:324). It is apparent that the first owners of the building were James and Augustus Cowles, John T. Norton, and Abner Bidwell, although it is not exactly clear who is responsible for the erection of the house. These four men were charter members of the Farmington River Water Power Company which was organized in 1831 with a capital of $200,000. Thomas and Joshua Youngs were also early members of the firm, but left soon after the company was established. Early leases were made in the name of Cowles, Norton, and Bidwell. The firm was responsible for erecting a dam and canal in 1831-32 at a cost of $9000 and then they leased the water power to a number of Unionville's growing industries. The 1853 and 1855 Woodford Maps of Unionville attribute this house to Cowles, Norton, and Bidwell. Tradition asserts that Herman Orton, a native of Vermont, was an early resident of this house. He was a partner in the clockmaking firm of Williams, Orton, and Preston. Shortly after John T. Norton left the firm, Abner Bidwell on November 11, 1858, sold James Cowles all his right in the business, including the water power, raceway leases and related buildings (FLR 54:317). On that same day, Cowles quit-claimed to Bidwell his right to the "stone

Sources:
house" (FLR 54:318). Abner Bidwell (1785-1880) was born in West Hartford to Jacob and Mary Bidwell. He came to Farmington as a young man with his wife Sylvia (1790-1817) and purchased land in Farmington center as well as Unionville. He owned 10 Main Street in Farmington from 1829 until 1880. Bidwell, a wealthy businessman and merchant, served as librarian of the Farmington Library Company from 1840-1853. He and his wife raised three children; George D., Jane E., and Julia Ann. In 1887 Bidwell willed the "stone house" to his granddaughter, Jane B. Stocking, the daughter of Julia Ann (Bidwell) and Thomas R. Stocking (FPR 16:100). The Sinnott family owned the house between 1894 and 1902 (FLR 68:698 and 69:610). The "stone house" passed through a number of owners in the early twentieth century until Harold Carrington Risley purchased the house in 1919 (FPR 80:56). A native of Unionville, Risley (1892-1972) was the son of Levi D. and Ann Maria (Blakesley) Risley. He remained a bachelor all his life and worked as an accountant. The present owners acquired the house in 1974.

Relatively unaltered since its construction, the Cowles, Norton, and Bidwell House is architecturally significant as the only brownstone dwelling in Unionville and for its state of preservation. It stands as an outstanding example of the Greek Revival style in the village. The building is historically significant for its close association with Unionville's early industry.