HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY
BUILDING AND STRUCTURES

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION
59 SOUTH PROSPECT STREET, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106
(203) 566-3005

1. BUILDING NAME (Common) (Historic) South District School House

2. TOWN CITY
   Farmington

3. STREET AND NUMBER (land or location)
   220 Main Street

4. OWNER(S)
   Burke, Virginia C. and Morrisey, June C.

5. USE (Present)
   School house

6. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC
   EXTERIOR VISIBLE FROM PUBLIC ROAD: Yes No
   INTERIOR ACCESSIBLE: Yes No
   IF YES EXPLAIN during business hours

7. STYLE OF BUILDING
   Early nineteenth-century schoolhouse.

8. MATERIAL(S) (Indicate use or location when appropriate)
   □ Clapboard
   □ Asbestos Siding
   X Brick
   □ Fieldstone
   □ Wood Shingle
   □ Asphalt Siding
   □ Fieldstone
   □ Board & Batten
   □ Stucco
   □ Cobblestone
   □ Aluminum Siding
   □ Concrete
   □ Cobblestone
   □ Other (Specify)

9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM
   □ Wood frame
   □ Post and beam
   □ Balloon
   □ Other (Specify)
   □ Load bearing masonry
   □ Structural iron or steel

10. ROOF (Type)
    □ Gable
    □ Flat
    □ Mansard
    □ Monitor
    □ Sawtooth
    □ Gambrel
    □ Shed
    □ Hip
    □ Round
    □ Other (Specify)

11. NUMBER OF STORIES
    1½
    APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS
    34 x 22

12. CONDITION (Structural)
    □ Excellent
    □ Good
    □ Fair
    □ Deteriorated
    □ Excellent
    □ Good
    □ Fair
    □ Deteriorated

13. INTEGRITY (Historic) WHEN
    □ On original site
    □ Moved
    □ Yes
    □ No

14. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS OR LANDSCAPE FEATURES
    □ Barn
    □ Shed
    □ Garage
    □ Other landscape features or buildings (Specify)
    □ Carriage house
    □ Shop
    □ Garden
    □ Parking lot

15. SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT
    □ Open land
    □ Woodland
    □ Residential
    □ Scattered buildings visible from site

16. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS
    Situated along the west side of Main Street in the southern portion of Farmington Village, the South District School House is bordered on all sides by modern commercial and residential development. A number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century farmhouses are still visible from the site.

SOVER
Built in 1829 this four-bay, well-preserved building is capped by a ridge-to-street gable roof with wide overhanging eaves. The brick is used in the common bond pattern and the six over-six sash are accentuated by smooth stone sills and lintels made of headers. The entry door is modern as are the louvered shutters.

The South District Schoolhouse was built in 1829 on land owned by Alfred and Edbert Cowles. In October of that year, the Cowles brothers sold that school district the 16 3/4 rods of land on which the brick schoolhouse stands (FLR 44:196). The school district received an additional 15 rods of land from Egbert in 1861 (FLR 59:81). The school house was used until the turn-of-the-century, when a new, larger school (Center School) was erected in the center of the village. Many of the children who attended the small district schools were transferred to Center School. In 1905 the Center School District sold the property to Theodate Pope (FLR 76:13). Miss Pope, who is known as one of the first women architects, remodeled the school into a dwelling. It became the home of Rueben Lewis and his family. Mr. Lewis was employed at the "The Lodge", a vacation retreat for underprivileged city girls, who were employed in the garment industry. It is also said Mr. Lewis worked as a porter for the railroad. In 1928 Mrs. Agnes K. Curtin of #184 Main Street purchased the "South school house property" (FLR 82:386). Sometime during the 1930's, the Lewis family moved and the building was converted to an antique shop. The Farmington Valley Forge and a nursery school were located here for several years. Today the building houses an attorney's office.

The South District House is architecturally notable for its degree of preservation and remains a good example of an early nineteenth-century, brick school house. The building is also historically significant for its association with Farmington's educational development.

Sources:
200 Main Street
The Old South District School House.

This is pictured on page 36 of the Farmington Book and stands just south of the entrance to Post Office Square on Main Street.

For early owners of this property, see the account of 206 Main Street. These early owners probably were:

Thomas Upson,
Andrew Warner, and
Dr. Daniel Porter.

This school house is said to have been built in 1829 to replace an earlier frame building on this same site. The following excerpt from Julius Gay's discourse of January 5, 1892 on "Schools and Schoolmasters" would indicate that the earlier building was probably erected around January of 1756. Mr. Gay's statement reads, speaking of an old schoolhouse at Meeting House Square:

"This house was in use until May 1756, when the Society voted to sell the schoolhouse in the meeting house yard to the highest bidder. Five months before this they had voted to build two houses sixteen feet square, or as much larger as the committee should judge needful, one at the north end of the town and one at the south end."

An article in the Hartford Times of August 17, 1938, reads in part as follows, which would apply to the present school house:

"Lewis C. Root of Farmington received his early education in the South School and among his schoolmates were the late Thomas Cowles, Jr., and his brother the late Admiral William Sheffield Cowles. At that time the late Miss Emily Cowles was teacher."

Note: One Emily Cowles who could have been this teacher, was Emily Dickinson Cowles of what is now 400 Main Street, born in 1847, who later married James Willard Moore. She was the daughter of James Woodruff Cowles of "The Maples", pictured on page 105 of the Farmington Book.

This school house probably continued in use until around 1900 or so, when the Center School was built near the site of the present Noah Wallace School. Many of the outlying district schools were abandoned at this time and children were brought to Center School in wagons.

By 1905 at least, the schoolhouse was no longer used for its original purpose, and it was purchased by Miss Theodate Pope to provide a home for Reuben Lewis and his wife Lucy and their family. He was working at that time at "The Lodge", now known as 185 Main Street. The Lodge was operated by a group comprised of Miss Porter's graduates, to provide a vacation home and a recreation resort for working girls of the big city garment industry areas.

June 28, 1972
Reuben Lewis was the son of Richard Lewis, who is pictured on page 130 of the Farmington Book in front of his home at 13 Colton Street, and alone on page 194. He has been said by some to have been a railroad porter. His employment at the Lodge is said by some to have been as chef, and by others to have been the groundsman. His wife worked also. Lucy Lewis had been married before, to Dixon, by whom she had two sons. One of these sons was married and lived on Tunxis Street. His son is James Dixon, who has worked all his life on the Wadsworth farm, and still does. All Farmington residents know him and have seen him many times, making his daily run from the cow barn behind the Wadsworth houses down to the South Meadows and return.

Reuben and Lucy Lewis were both good people, careful in the rearing of their children, and Reuben was a deacon in the Episcopal Church. A non-smoker, he was very distressed when a new minister who smoked came to Farmington as his pastor. The Lewises had thirteen children and the late William Wollenberg could name them in the exact order of their birth: Lucy, Ralph, Jennie, Mildred, Clarence, William, Fred, Barney, Jerry, John, Doris and Margaret. Passers by the little old schoolhouse usually saw heads peeping out of every window as they went by. They were good students at school and for several years every class had a Lewis child in it. They never walked to and from school, always ran. They made many friends of their classmates in Farmington, and some of them still pay annual calls in Farmington, although they are now quite widely scattered. See photo of "Little Richard", the fifth child, on page 149 of the Farmington Book.

At one time the Lewises allowed a gypsy family to camp in their yard, complete with a hand organ and a performing bear. This did bother the neighbors, some of whom were quite nervous until the gypsies left.

This house was sold in 1928, by the then Mrs. John Wallace Riddle, to Agnes Keller Curtin, wife of John J. Curtin. The Curtins were then living just north of here at 184 Main Street, and had been since 1919. One member of the Curtin family thinks that the Lewises continued in residence here until perhaps 1930.

Just what use was made of the building from the time it was vacated by the Lewises until 1938 is not known by this writer, but some time prior to August 1938 it was leased to Mrs. Pearl Cowles Pond, to be used by her as an antique shop. It is said that she offered Mr. Curtin a generous sum if he would sell it, but he preferred keeping it in the family. She only occupied it a year or so.

Mrs. Pond was a descendant of the Cowles and Hart families of Farmington, and Samuel Cowles, her third Cowles ancestor in Farmington, probably built the house which became the core of the present house standing at 2 Colton Street. Her ancestry in the Cowles and Hart and Pond families will be found in the account of 2 Colton Street, as well as more information on herself and her husband and their family.

June 28, 1972
Dorothea Pond introduces her mother as follows: "My mother was Pearl Hart Cowles. Her mother, Louise Hart Cowles, had had three other children, two of whom had died in infancy. The third was Ruby Louise, a maiden lady, who operated gift shops in New Haven and Madison, Connecticut. My mother owned a home on the College Highway in Plainville, and there operated a tearoom called "The Old Milestone". She had the antique and gift shop in Farmington for a time, was an importer for several years and had many customers in the Farmington and Hartford areas, whose homes she visited and gave showings of her goods."

After her occupancy of this building, which was written up in the Hartford Times of August 17, 1938, information on later tenants is quite sketchy, and the following comments are more in the nature of notes, and not complete information.

Hugh Feeney rented the building for a time, and operated what he called "The Farmington Valley Forge". He had previously been employed by the West Hartford Ornamental Iron Works. He left here for a while and it was operated by a man named Collins, then Mr. Feeney returned, but rented it to a Charles Murphy, also of West Hartford. He was succeeded by a Mr. Nargeson, who was the last to operate the shop.

Mrs. Morrissey and Mrs. Burke then took on its renovation and restoration, worked hard and with good results, and around 1964 rented it to Jaqueline Dupuis, and it again became a school, but this time a nursery school. She operated it six years, principally it seemed as a day care center for children of working mothers.

In March 1971 it was rented to Robert Day, and it is now known as "The Learning Place".

Robert Day is vice-principal of RHAM High School of Hebron, Connecticut. He had been director of the now defunct East Hartford "Discovery Center". The "Learning Place" was opened to replace the East Hartford facility which had closed due to lack of funds, and is financed by Mr. Day himself. Mr. Day has transformed the building from what he called "one big room, all white". He did much of the work and decorating himself, after carpenters had carried out the structural changes. His teachers in 1971 were Miss Gale Fedora and Mrs. Rosanne Kapsia. Teaching methods combine elements of several other programs, but curriculum and teaching style have been developed by Mr. Day and his two teachers. "We use Montessori materials and some Piaget philosophy, but not the same approach". Mr. Day says the Learning Place describes itself as a progressive environment where a child's curiosity is constructively channeled by planned and free play.

Articles published on September 26, 1971, and May 6, 1972, in the Hartford Courant, tell more of the story of "The Learning Place".

According to the writer's notes, this property was inherited by June Curtin Morrissey from her grandfather, George Keller, in 1946. Mr. Keller had taken title from his daughter Agnes Keller Curtin, in the year 1939.

June 28, 1972