Located close to the south side of Railroad Avenue, the James Cowles Rental House #1 is surrounded by similar workers' housing of the same vintage. The Farmington River lies directly to the north and woodlands abut the property to the south.
This modest three-bay, ridge-to-street, nineteenth-century vernacular-style dwelling was built about 1855. Original six-over-six sash remain and a modern door hood protects a simple entry door. A diminutive brick chimney rises from the center of the house. A single-story, shed-roofed ell has been incorporated on the south elevation.

Wealthy merchant James Cowles (1795-1858) built this small house and five similar rental dwellings along the south side of Battle Row (now Railroad Avenue) around 1855. A native of Farmington, Cowles and his brother Augustus owned and operated a store and warehouse along the Unionville Canal and were involved in a number of early Unionville industries. James Cowles was largely responsible for the development of water power in Unionville. In 1828 the Cowles brothers and Joshua Youngs were granted permission to erect a raceway "across the roads running from the Litchfield Road to Perry's Bridge." Cowles was a charter member of the Farmington River Water Power Company, which leased water power to local mills, including wool, cotton, iron, clock, paper, and knife manufacturers. Between 1850 and 1856, he erected a dam, reservoir, and feeder canals, which further encouraged manufacturing in Unionville. Upon Cowles' death in 1858, the majority of his estate including the "six houses and lots west of the depot in Unionville" was willed to his son James Lewis Cowles (b. 1844) (FLR 11:269). Engaged in farming, the younger Cowles was also involved in the development of Unionville's water power. In 1869 he enlarged the canals and gates which provided power to many of the village's industries. Cowles continued to own this dwelling and probably rented it to local factory workers. In 1895 Franklin A. Chamberlin (1849-1916), a native of Rochester, New York, bought the house and the two dwellings to the east (FLR 71:270). Employed as a papermaker and later as a coal dealer, Chamberlin was married to Cornelia (SEE CONTINUATION SHEET)

F. Baldwin, a native of Watertown, Connecticut. The house remained in the Chamberlin family until 1918, when John Clancy purchased the property and neighboring dwellings (FLR 80:23).

Although undistinguished architecturally, this dwelling is historically significant as one of Unionville's earliest rental homes and for its association with the Cowles family, who were instrumental in the development of Unionville as a manufacturing center.