The Union Hotel sits at a prominent location at the intersection of Main Street and Mountain Road. To the north and south are other historic buildings that belong to Miss Porter’s School. Several of the school’s dormitories lie to the east.
This Greek Revival-style building features a five-bay facade and a hip roof. Its entry way with transom and sidelights is enhanced by a full-length open colonnade. Several of the windows display wrought iron balconies. Note the door with transom on the second floor of the front facade and six-over-six sash. Topping off the building's roof are several tall brick chimneys and a belvedere with a balustrade, more commonly found on buildings in coastal areas. An addition (date unknown) of two stories lies off the north elevations and a one-story addition (pre. 1906) exists on the south elevation.

In 1753 Colonel Isaac Cowles (1675-1756) acquired three acres with buildings from John Hart Jr. for 1500 pounds (FLR 6:202) and by the early 1800s his son, Timothy Cowles (1784-1858), inherited the property (FLR 10:145). Timothy was the second son of Issac and Lucina (Hooker Cowles. He became a wealthy merchant as well as a successful farmer. He attained the rank of major and was eventually elected to the State Legislature and Senate. Later he served as director of the Hartford Bank and as the first president of the Farmington Savings Bank. In 1809 he married Catherine Deming (1787-1859), the only child of Chauncey Deming, one of Farmington's wealthiest men. By 1831 he erected this brick hotel, known as the Union Hotel, to accommodate the many travelers passing through the town on the Farmington Canal (a project financed by his relatives). In 1833 he secured a mortgage from the State of Connecticut for $30,000 perhaps due to the apparent failure of the hotel business and the unfortunate canal enterprise (FLR 46:26). Meanwhile a tavern, operated by Noah L. Phelps, was located in the building until 1845. In 1850 Miss Porter's School rented it as a boarding house for her students and in 1860 the State of Connecticut released the mortgage made by Timothy Cowles (FLR 54:392). Next Raymond H. and Jeanette D. Seeley (granddaughter of the Cowles) received title to the property. They in turn sold it for $8,000 to Sarah Porter in 1866 (FLR 60:356). Porter was the daughter of the Rev. Noah Porter, pastor of the First Church of Christ Congregational from 1806-66. Born in 1813 she attended a ladies' school in 1832 an soon taught school in Springfield, Buffalo, and Philadelphia. She assumed the position of headmistress in 1842 when she organized Miss Porter's School. She used this building as the principle building at the school, giving it its common name "Main". (see cont. pg.)

After her death, her successor, Elizabeth J. Keep, sold the property to Miss Porter's School, Inc. (FLR 74:336). It remains part of that institution today.

Both architecturally and historically significant, the Union Hotel is in a good state of preservation. It is an excellent example of early nineteenth-century commercial architecture and remains one of a few of this type remaining in the village.
OWNER'S NAME: PORTER'S SCHOOL, MISS

ADDRESS: 60 Main Street

DATE BUILT: ca 1830 FOR: Major Timothy Cowles

ARCHITECT

MASTER-BUILDER

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ORIGINAL OWNERS: Miss Porter's School from the estate of Elizabeth V. Keep by will, as trustee, 3/15/1919, Vol. 74, p. 336: Keep E.V. from the Estate of Sarah Porter, by will. Sarah Porter from Raymond H. & Jennette (Cowles) Seeley, Trustees of the Estate of Timothy Cowles, being "3 1/2 acres and buildings being the place occupied by her as a boarding school." 4/19/1866, Vol. (Miss Porter had occupied the building since 1850, as a school) Cowles, Timothy from the estate of his father, Col. Isaac Cowles with as old house which Isaac Cowles had bought from John Hart, Jr., for 1500 pounds; "near the middle of said town three acres with a dwellinghouse and all buildings; bounded East on Town Street, West on the River, North on land of Robert Porter and South on land of Ebenezer Lee" April 18, 1753, Vol. 6, p. 202. (over)

REFERENCES:
"Farmington, Conn., 1906" p 190
"Cowles Genealogy " p. 258
Baker & Tilden Atlas 1869"p33"Miss S. Porter Young Ladies Boarding School
The present building of stone and brick was built by Major Timothy Cowles in anticipation of trade when the Farmington Canal was completed. On October 30, 1833, Vol. 47, p. 26, he and his wife, Catherine (Deming) Cowles mortgaged all their extensive holdings, including this building, then known as "Union Hotel" and their home, to the Treasurer of the State of Connecticut, for $30,000. The State Treasurer quit-claimed the property to Catherine Cowles in 1854.

The flag stone around "Main" was brought on special flat cars from a quarry in Pennsylvania by John Deming.
The building which stands on this site is pictured in the Farmington Book on page 15, photo No. 22, and on page 190, and also shows to the left in the top photo on page 93. Formerly the Union Hotel, it is now the administration building of Miss Porter's School and is known as "Main". It appears that the photo on page 93 is later than the one on page 190, as the former includes the small auxiliary building at the left (not shown on page 190), which at the present houses the office of the Headmaster, Mr. Richard Davis. The Baker and Tilden Atlas of 1869 shows this main building as "Miss S. Porter Young Ladies Boarding School".

Mrs. Hurlburt on page xviii of "Town Clerks" shows the property on this site to have belonged successively to Thomas Upson, John Andrews, Joseph Kellogg (who built a house on it) and John Lee.

Thomas Upson is mentioned on pages 374-75 of "Town Clerks" in these words:

"Thomas Upson was one of the earliest settlers and proprietors in Farmington. He married in Hartford on January 23, 1646/7, Elizabeth Fuller who was his second wife. He died July 19, 1655 and his widow married Edmund Scott, the first of a long line of the Scott family in Farmington. Thomas Upson's homelot and dwelling house was on the west side of Main Street extending to the Farmington River, and it embraced most of the portion of the Porter School just south of the main building. The north half of the Upson home lot was sold to Thomas Newell --- later John Lee purchased the entire homestead when he married Mary, daughter of Deacon Stephen Hart."

John Andrews is mentioned in "Town Clerks" on page 356, but only as owner of land farther north, about at Porter Road. Joseph Kellogg is only mentioned, on page 365, as having been the cousin of Nathaniel Kellogg.

John Lee is mentioned at some length on page 367. A portion of this account is given below:

"John Lee, Sr., lived on the west side of the Main Street, known as Town Path, on land he bought of Thomas Newell and Nathaniel Kellogg, recorded in his own name January 10, 1653, thus becoming a proprietor and early settler. He married in 1658 Mary, second daughter of Deacon Stephen Hart, and lived about where the Main House of the Porter School now stands, having seven acres of land, extending to the river, with orchards and gardens...... His daughter Mary aided her father in teaching Indian children and keeping the older Indians obedient to the rules laid down by the colonists for their conduct in the town.

"John Lee's first child, John, was born 1659. John Lee joined the Farmington church 1660, he died 1690. His widow married Jedediah Strong of Northampton, Mass., Jan. 5, 1692, as his third wife. Her daughter Tabitha Lee married Jedediah's son, Preserved Strong, Oct. 23, 1701." Mary (Hart) Lee Strong was killed in 1710 when her horse fell with her in South Hadley.

January 9, 1972
Two descendants of the first John Lee lived from 1902 until their deaths in 1919 and 1920 respectively, in the house now known as 31 Main Street. They were Charles Northam Lee and his wife, the former Harriet Welles Lee. They were both of the eighth generation of Lees, starting with John Lee as the first generation. They were of the branches of the family which had settled and lived principally in New Britain. See more regarding them in the account of 31 Main Street.

Another descendant of the New Britain branch of the Lee family is James Spencer Lee, presently of Essex, Connecticut, and Florida, but formerly for many years a resident of West Hartford. His family also is written up in the account of 31 Main Street, where he visited as a boy.

The writer tried to bring into the Farmington Lee family Mr. John G. Lee of Old Mountain Road, but he says he is of an entirely different Lee family, one of Virginia. Mr. Lee's wife is the former Miss Percy Maxim, daughter of Hiram Maxim of "The Silencer". Both Mr. and Mrs. John Lee are very active in Farmington's civic and social life.

Seth Lee, a descendant of the Farmington John Lee, was the operator of a tavern, an inn, which stood on the site of this main building of the Porter School. He is mentioned on page 88 of Mrs. Hurlburt's "Town Clerks" as having been in September 1775 a member of a committee set up to look into violations of rules laid down by the Association of the Continental Congress. On page 95 he is noted as having been the owner of an inn "standing where the main house of the Porter School stands". On page 112 it is noted that on December 12, 1791, he was appointed "key keeper", with two other citizens.

Mrs. Hurlburt, after long and tedious investigation and research into old records, work which took her some years, has determined that General George Washington spent a night in Farmington, the night of September 22, 1780, and while he did not sleep in Seth Lee's Inn, there was a connection, as she notes:

"As it so happened, Deacon Seth Lee did indeed have the privilege of entertaining Washington, Lafayette, their escort and aides, for he furnished 'stores' to a considerable extent for which he was paid 185 lbs 8 shillings. He (Seth Lee) lived in the old house, the frame of which is still standing just to the rear of the Main House at Miss Porter's School. The house was built early in the 18th century, about 1732, by John Lee, claimed by all the Lees herabouts. The house was, many years ago, entirely remade into a music and recreation hall for the Porter 'ice cream concerts' and here many famous musicians performed for the young ladies at the school and invited villagers, in an enviable evening of music. The house was moved back early in the expected career of the Farmington Canal, in order to build a hotel suitable for the expected canal trade, which however did not materialize."

Robert Smith, comptroller of Miss Porter's School, says of this building: "It is what is known to us as the 'Kate Lewis Gym'."

March 4, 1973
The old Seth Lee house, moved to make way for the site of the Union Hotel, then became the hotel stable, for guests' horses, and also for relays of stagecoach horses. For a while after taking possession of "Main", Miss Porter had this building used as a laundry, her stable then being up to the north of Mountain Road, to the rear of 49 Main Street approximately. A map showing the buildings of Miss Porter's School, made up in October 1959, shows this building as "Old Gymnasium". A new and much larger gym was built in the early 1960's.

The proximity of the "Kate Lewis Gym" to "Main" is shown below.

March 31, 1973
Some of the property must have been sold by the Lees prior to 1753 however, as the land on which the hotel was later built, is said to have been purchased by Capt. Isaac Cowles from John Hart on April 18, 1753. The south boundary of that purchase is given as the property of Ebenzer Lee. Possibly the Lee Inn stood on that portion of the Lee property. In that case it would have been just south of the site of the hotel building.

Captain Isaac Cowles, 1675-1756, was of the third generation of the Cowles family, his father having been Samuel Cowles, and Samuel's father was John Colwes, the Settler.

Following is the lineage, including Major Timothy who inherited the property and built the hotel:

#16 Capt. Isaac Cowles 1675-1756, married 1716 Elizabeth Smith,

#116 Capt. Solomon Cowles, 1719-1793, married 1742 Martha Seymour,

#297 Lt. Col. Isaac Cowles 1756-1837, married 1781 Lucina Hooker,


No record seems to mention just when Timothy Cowles obtained title to the property, although it did descend to him, and probably through the line of succession mentioned above.

It is believed that the hotel building was constructed near or in the year 1830. Major and Mrs. Cowles borrowed thirty thousand dollars in 1833 from the State of Connecticut, secured by a mortgage on this building and also on their home at 87 Main Street, the loan perhaps being to raise funds for payment of the cost of the hotel.

Julius Gay mentions the concept of the hotel on page 14 of the Farmington Book: "and past the brick schoolhouse of Miss Porter, built by Major Cowles as a hotel to accomodate the vast concourse of travelers about to come to the village by the Farmington Canal."

It was described on page 138 of the Farmington Book in these words: "a new hotel.... of dimensions commensurate with the coming prosperity, arose and was fondly deemed the most magnificent structure of all the region round. A young man writing home an account of his travels through the principal towns in New England in 1832 could find no higher praise for the architectural wonders he saw, than that they surpassed even the Union Hotel of Farmington."

January 9, 1972
Noah L. Phelps operated a tavern in this building and in connection with the hotel for some years. We know that the tavern was open in 1832, as Mrs. Hurlburt says "Horace Cowles, Frederick J. Stanley and Seth J. North were a committee which met October 13, 1832, at the tavern of Noah Phelps, now the main house of the Porter School". In 1845 Mr. Phelps made a promise not to sell wines or spiritous liquors to any resident of the town. On January 12, 1846, he was refused a license to sell such beverages. Mr. Phelps lived at 122 Main Street from 1835, possibly until his death in 1861, but apparently had business reverses around 1847. The house was taken over at that time by creditors and later released to his wife. Mrs. Phelps was the former Harriet Morgan, daughter of Bunker Hill veteran Capt. William Avery Morgan of Groton.

Burpee in his History of Connecticut says: "The intent to use the building erected by Major Cowles as a hotel in the canal period collapsed with the failure of the canal itself". It is believed that the hotel never was much of a success, even during the height of the operation of the canal, and that it never produced much revenue. The canal failed in 1845 and the situation was worse after that, as the railroad did not even pass through the village, and the traffic which it generated was beneficial to Unionville, not Farmington, although many Farmington property owners were investors in Unionville factories and thus benefitted financially.

By the year 1850 it is stated that Miss Porter was using the hotel building for her school and for her boarding students.

The property had become the property of Major Timothy Cowles' wife Catherine D. Cowles at his death in 1858, and later the property of her granddaughter Jennette Cowles Seeley after the death of Mrs. Cowles. Jennette's own mother, Mrs. Seeley, had died in 1854.

Miss Sarah Porter purchased the hotel property on April 19, 1866, after having used it since 1850. Title passed to Elizabeth V. Keep in 1901, and to Miss Porter's School itself, in 1919.

Sarah Porter was the daughter of the Rev. Mr. Noah Porter, pastor here from 1806 to 1866, whose ancestry will be found in the account of his family home at 116 Main Street, where Sarah Porter was born. Born in 1813, she was from the first an apt scholar, avid for knowledge. She was one of the few, if not the only, girl to attend Deacon Simeon Hart's Academy, and by the time she was sixteen she was his assistant. In 1832 she was attending in New Haven the young ladies' school of Dr. E. A. Andrews, lexicographer and distinguished Latin scholar. She lived at that time with the family of Yale professor Goodrich. This was her only schooling away from home. After this she taught in Springfield and Buffalo, and is said to have managed for a time a girls' boarding school in Philadelphia.

Her own school is sometimes said to have started in 1842 although 1843 is the recognized date, and was begun in an upper-floor room of what was known as "the old stone store" building on the site of the present parsonage at 96 Main Street. Fellow tenants were Thomas Cowles of 148 Main Street and John Hooker of 50 High Street and later 44 Mountain Road. Both were attorneys. She started with only local girls but soon began accepting outsiders, renting rooms for them from families along Main Street.

January 9, 1972
Queen Victoria to Mark Twain: "Where do you come from, Mr. Clemens?"
Mr. Clemens (Mark Twain): "Nine miles from Farmington, madam."

Hartford is, of course, nine miles from Farmington, but the Queen might have heard less about the Charter Oak and the Hartford Wits than about Miss Porter's School, where so many American debutantes at court had learned to curtsey. Since 1843 Miss Porter's alumnae have simply said, "I went to Farmington."

Curtseys have never been more than a small part of the curriculum there, however. For fifty-seven years Miss Sarah Porter, a sister of Noah Porter, Jr., eleventh president of Yale, worked for the unique ideal of the Educated Woman. To get her own education she had battered at the doors of the Hartford Academy for Boys till it admitted her, and then, rejected by Yale, she had lived and studied in the home of a Yale professor. She could, and did when necessary, teach every course in her school.

Though girls seldom went on to college in the mid-nineteenth century, Miss Porter loathed the term, "finishing school," and allowed no formal "commencement" exercises. Not until 1944, when it had become a college preparatory school of the strictest academic standards, did Miss Porter's ever hold a graduation ceremony.

Modern Farmingtonians say that the spirit of Thomas Jefferson walks no more palpably at the University of Virginia than does Miss Porter's tiny, indomitable ghost in Farmington.

Thousands of motorists have seen the school without knowing it. From the red brick administration building of the school mid-way down Main Street, every building you see on both sides of the street, except the pillared home of retired Headmaster Robert Porter Keep, a great-nephew of Miss Porter, belongs to the school corporation. Not one building bears a sign that says so. "With 225 girls in our care," says the present headmaster, Hollis French, "we don't encourage loitering by tourists whose interest may not be academic."

"Miss Porter's saved our Main Street for us," says the town, not only because the school inherited and bought the many stately houses, but because Miss Porter herself, by a great heave of her personality, pushed the New Haven railroad line over to a back street, and later deflected the trolley cars likewise.

The handsome man in uniform at the corner near the administration building is George E. Miller, for thirty years a special school officer as well as town policeman. "I'm on my second generation of girls and my third headmaster," he says proudly. "I've got quite a reputation at Yale—chased so many Yale men away from the girls, they say. Now fathers bringing daughters here stop and tell me I chased them away from the girls' mothers. All nonsense—never chased anybody."

Even without loitering you may see them on the street, and you will know them by their cardigan sweaters buttoned in the back—don't ask me or anybody why!—their pleated skirts, saddle shoes and polo coats—and on rainy days by donkeys' battered straw hats, often with felt donkey's ears protruding from the crowns. Hats must be worn in bad weather, and even Miss Porter's is not fast enough on its feet to rule out all the crazy headgear the girls can devise. Every girl wears a string of pearls and even though her name may be Firestone or Pullman or Vanderbilt, the pearls are fake. No valuable jewelry is allowed. And even the plainest clothes are limited in numbers; when an heiress arrived from the Southwest with sixty sweaters, her housemother mailed fifty-odd back home.
Deacon Simeon Hart and attorney John Hooker were the leaders in raising money for the establishment of the "Female Seminary of Farmington" to be under her operation, and Deacon Simeon is said to have contributed one thousand dollars himself. A building was built on Mountain Road in 1848 on land donated by John Hooker and she began holding classes here. She is said to have started using the hotel building in 1850, but she probably continued using the seminary building also, as it was designated by Baker and Tilden in 1869 as "Miss Porter's School house". This building still stands, although enlarged and remodeled, at number 9 Mountain Road, now called the Science Building.

In 1864 John Hooker had sold to the Parsonage Association his father's old home at 50 High Street, plus the land west of that, on Mountain Road, but reserving the Seminary land for use by the school. Later the Parsonage Association sold the site to the Seminary Association, from whom Miss Porter bought both the schoolhouse and the land in April of 1885.

Miss Porter's School grew and thrived. A few comments by students are given below.

A letter written by one of her students on May 12, 1860, states that "we rise at half past five, have prayers at quarter past six, breakfast immediately after, and walk from breakfast to eight A. M."

In 1863 a girl mentioned in a letter -- "at dessert she (Miss Porter) frequently read aloud to us the news from Washington. Many of the girls have relatives in the war".

Grace Bowen, a student from 1865 to 1867, traveled from Woodstock to Hartford by train, and from there to Farmington by stagecoach. She said that Mary Keep was the only other passenger on the stage. Mary Keep was the daughter of the Rev. John Robinson Keep (living then in West Hartford), and the sister of Robert Porter Keep who took charge of Miss Porter's School in 1903.

Miss Porter in the early 1890's gave the following advice in a letter to a new teacher, Annie G. Webb: "Take the train from New York to New Haven. Do not wait in the station there, the air is foul, but board the Canal Line train immediately. It will be waiting. At Farmington station you will be met with a carriage".

Gertrude Cowles, later Mrs. William Roy Shelton, a Porter School girl in the mid 1890's, mentioned the following: "The girls gave a Shakespearian play on the lawn, and then after that we were all invited to a supper back of the main house, then we saw the planting of the ivy. They didn't have a regular graduation. It was what you might call a society school. It was before they came out into society. Now it is a college preparatory. I had Alice Thaw and Nancy Carnegie in my class. I studied with Robert Brandegge. He brought stuffed birds to school as models, and the life model was one of the small Lewis children". One of the life models might have been "Little Richard", whose photo appears on page 149 of the Farmington Book, a Lewis child.
As Miss Porter's School grew the girls were quartered in some private residences along Main Street, the first being Dr. Wheeler's home directly across the street from the main building. This became known as "Colony", as it was the first offshoot from the mother country, "Main", which has always been the center of school life.

One house which housed a considerable number of students but was never purchased, was the present home of Mrs. Austin D. Barney at 11 Mountain Spring Road. The Norton family had lived here, but the family had dwindled in size. Adeline T. Ricker of the class of 1878, wrote on May 19, 1944, from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and stated that she and 15 other girls roomed in that house. She was among the last, as the house was rented in summer of 1876 to the Jones family who occupied it fully until 1890 when it was sold to the Barney family.

Miss Porter's School grew steadily in reputation and prestige and attendance here became a highly desirable asset to young ladies. Miss Porter taught personally, but her chief teaching was neither of the arts nor the sciences, but was aimed toward making the students aware of ways in which they could make their lives useful to society. Most of them were of the upper strata, and she wished them to realize and make use of their wealth and knowledge for the betterment of the world and its people. That the school prepared them for their proper place in social life and its graces was incidental, as was that some might be prepared for college life. To Miss Porter the important item was that each girl develop an interest in mankind in general, and become a whole person who could work for the good of all people.

She did believe in the appreciation of the arts, and in regard to music she brought Karl Klauser to the school, not only to be a teacher, but to bring concerts and musicians of note to Farmington. Born in St. Petersburg, later living in Leipsic and Hamburg, he came to Farmington in 1855 after five years in New York. He brought Theodore Thomas, Anton Rubenstein, Dr. von Bulow, Dr. von Inten and many others, and Farmington's concerts became well known and well respected for their quality. Von Bulow, stated Adeline Ricker, asked Miss Porter for a private room to "think over" his program -- he made no notes on it.

As her contribution to the art of painting she brought Robert Bolling Brandegee in 1880, and he stayed for something over twenty years.

As for religious matters, she had learned much from her father and her brother, and she passed this along freely to the girls.

She tried to give them the foundation for a well rounded life and she was usually successful. The students have usually appreciated this and many of the girls have had mothers here, and often grandmothers, and some are fourth generation girls.

January 9, 1972.
The Reverend Mr. Quincy Blakely was the Congregational Minister of Farmington from 1905 until 1937, and Mr. Blakeley's wife, the former Mary Twitchell, had quite a close relationship with Mrs. Keep during twelve of the years of Mrs. Keep's term as the head of Miss Porter's School.

In 1954, nine years after her husband's death, Mrs. Blakely wrote and published a small pamphlet entitled "Thirty-two Years of Farmington from the Parsonage". In it she wrote of Mrs. Keep, and it seems quite worthwhile to quote from her work, since she was a contemporary and had occasion to know Mrs. Keep quite well. She says:

"Miss Porter's School was one of the pioneer schools in giving advanced education to 'young ladies'. Girls of that early date were beginning to leave their retired life of needlepoint and knitting and become part of the real world. The school was in one family a hundred years and a catalogue of its pupils show how nationwide had been its influence.

"The Porter School, founded by Miss Sarah Porter, daughter of Dr. Noah Porter, minister of the old church for 60 years and sister of President Porter of Yale, has given Farmington worldwide fame. Mrs. Elizabeth Hale Keep was the head of Miss Porter's School when we came to Farmington. This quotation from a New York paper at the time of her death was a fitting tribute: 'Elizabeth Keep was a beautiful and stately woman, a dominant feature of a singularly attractive New England village. She exercised a deep and permanent influence on the fundamentals of character-building in Miss Porter's School and thus strengthened the distinctive qualities which Farmington girls have shown wherever they have gone'.

"The school and the church have always had a close relationship and none knew better than the Parson how deep was Mrs. Keep's interest in the whole village, old as well as young. The school itself seemed an all absorbing and colossal task, but Mrs. Keep was always interested to know of the village activities and needs and how she might be of help. Many a note came to the parsonage with a check enclosed and the message that it must be time for another helping hand for someone. She had a weekly domestic science class for her girls and the following night a duplicate class for the village girls. She established a kindergarten for the children. Her first thought was for the children of her employees but soon it came to be for all the village, as many children as could be accommodated. She built a most attractive kindergarten cottage and secured a remarkable teacher and the school has become a vital part of the village life. Soon after her death, in 1917, the kindergarten was incorporated and has been carried on as a memorial to Mrs. Keep by graduates of the school who were there during her regime. There is still a very close relationship between the girls of Miss Porter's School today and the kindergarten.

"Friendship was one of Mrs. Keep's marked characteristics -- a kind of friendship that was an inspiration -- it brought out the best in those who knew and loved her".

March 4, 1973
Miss Porter became a strong influence in Farmington. It is believed that it was she who kept the railroad from following the line of the old canal through the village, and the Historic District as it is called, or Farmington Center, probably owes much of its present appearance to the fact that the railroad did not pass through here. The trolley line did not come through Main Street either, it was kept below, on Garden Street, as far as Meadow Road, but its effect would not have been very great in any case as the Plainville branch operated only for a few years.

Miss Porter also improved the appearance of the north end of Main Street by buying up two elderly houses which stood just north of the present Norwegian Gift Shop at 11 Main Street, and getting them out of the way so that the little village green could occupy that space, as it does now. One of these old houses was the old house of Nathaniel Olmstead, goldsmith and clockmaker, which now stands at 7 Watervile Road.

She and her successors in the administration of her school have also done much to preserve the colonial appearance of the houses on Main Street, by maintaining them so well and by making all additions that were necessary, without changing the facades, thus keeping up the original appearances.

At the time of Miss Porter's death in February 1900, there was some confusion as to who would succeed her as the actual head of the school. Mrs. Dow had been acting as principal for several years. Dr. Robert Porter Keep, Miss Porter's nephew, had been named, together with Senator Wallace S. Allis, to be co-trustees and in joint control of her estate and also of school policies. Dr. Keep appears to have had no wish to take direct charge, he being the principal of Norwich Free Academy at the time, but he and his wife did come to Farmington to take over, as Mrs. Dow left in 1903.

The Bulletin of Miss Porter's School, Summer 1968, makes the following statement regarding Mrs. Dow:

"Upon the death of her husband and family, Mrs. Mary Elizabeth (Dunning) Dow, one of Miss Porter's former pupils, returned to assist Miss Porter. By 1884 she had advanced to the position of Assistant Principal, and soon the school became known as Miss Porter's and Mrs. Dow's School. When Miss Porter died in 1900, Mrs. Dow continued as principal of the school until 1903 when she left Farmington to found Briarcliff, now a four-year college. During her last three years, Mrs. Dow shared the responsibility of Miss Porter's School with Dr. and Mrs. Robert Porter Keep, Sr."

Dr. Keep was the son of Rebecca Ann Porter (Miss Sarah Porter's sister) and John Robinson Keep, first minister of the Congregational church in Unionville. Dr. Keep's wife was the former Elizabeth Vashti Hale of New Jersey, and was his second wife. Dr. Keep died on June 3, 1904, after having gotten together a rather distinguished faculty, and his widow then took full charge of the school.

January 11, 1972
"Mrs. Keep was a very astute business woman, and during her years many physical changes were made. Electricity, plumbing, and central heat were installed in the buildings, many of which were enlarged. 'Humphrey' (63 Main Street), which was named after the family which had owned it and which had been rented by Miss Porter, came into permanent possession of the school. The only house which is not one of the original Main Street houses, 'New Place' (53 Main Street), was built by Mrs. Keep. The greenhouse (88 Garden Street) and lovely gardens were added to the school during Mrs. Keep's time as well.

"Though to some of the girls Mrs. Keep was 'awe-inspiring', she had a delightful, spontaneous and unfailing sense of humor. She awakened in her girls a love for beauty and grace. They were taught self-discipline, good judgement and a deep sense of responsibility. In an atmosphere of tradition and intellectual challenge, they were shown behavior patterns which, as one ancient said, proved of value during their entire lives.

"Mrs. Keep conceived the idea of a kindergarten for the children of the school's employees in 1912. It was the only school of its kind in the village, and as its popularity increased, the kindergarten moved from its first quarters in Miss Adgate's building (50 Main Street) to the small house Mrs. Keep built on Garden Street (now known as 117 Garden St.). From its earliest beginnings, the kindergarten filled a need of the townspeople in Farmington and proved not only a great pleasure to Mrs. Keep, but also provided and opportunity for the girls to serve the community".

Mrs. Keep lived during her residence in Farmington in the house which she had built at 53 Main Street, which also housed many of the school girls.

Again quoting from the school bulletin of 1968, the next term of principalship, 1917 to 1943, is described as follows:

"Mrs. Keep's sudden death in the spring of 1917 brought Robert Porter Keep, II, Head of the German Department at Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, and his wife, Rose Anne Day Keep, to Farmington to be Principals of the school.

"Mrs. Keep brought to her position as coprincipal a genuine love of young people and often said; 'The students are the only children Mr. Keep and I ever had'. She honored them as individuals, and wisely taught them to live together in unity.

"Mr. Keep instilled in the girls a love of learning, and a highly developed sense of responsibility. His quiet sense of humor, integrity, and keen interest in every girl and teacher fostered a climate in which teaching and learning flourished. It is interesting to quote from the school catalogue of 1938 the scholastic requirements of the school: 'A diploma is awarded to girls who have completed with credit the equivalent of two years of work, more advanced than the usual subjects of a four-year high school or college preparatory course. Proficiency in art and music are recognized at this time in the determination of a pupil's eligibility for a diploma'.

January 11, 1972
"The Keeps, aware of the increasing demands on the young women, re-established the college preparatory program after a lapse of twenty years. Under Mr. Keep, the athletic facilities were greatly enlarged with the construction of new tennis courts, playing fields, a riding ring, and a play barn. During war years the farm which had supplied milk and vegetables to the school since its founding became in ceasingly important.

"Mr. and Mrs. Keep served the school as principals until the centennial in 1943 when, under Mr. Keep's direction, the school was incorporated as a non-profit institution. He continued as a member of the Board of Trustees until his death in 1967, one and one-half years after the death of Mrs. Keep."

The Keeps occupied during their residency here, which covered a half-century from 1917 until 1967, the large house at 47 Main Street, which they acquired from Mrs. William Shelton, the former Gertrude Cowles, in 1927. From the time they came here in 1917, until remodeling of #47 was finished in 1929, they lived where the former Mrs. Keep had lived, in "New Place", at 53 Main Street. After #47 had been re-modeled and renovated and they made it their residence, they called it "Next Door" and it was known as that for years.

Mr. Keep had made extensive plans for the incorporation of the school, to form it into a non-profit corporation, and his plans came to fruition in May of 1943. A Board of Trustees was formed at that time, and election of officers was held the next month. The board was made up of the following:

Lucius F. Robinson, Jr., President
Robert Porter Keep, Treasurer
Ward L. Johnson, Secretary
Mrs. Robert Lee Hale, formerly Dorothea Keep 1901-04
Mrs. Edward G. Janeway, " Elinor White 1921-24
Wilmarth S. Lewis
Rev. Palfrey Perkins, DD
George H. Richards

Mrs. Austin D. Barney, the former Katharine Derr, 1915-18, was an alumnae advisor.

Ward L. Johnson, noted above as secretary of the Board of Trustees, had been selected by Mr. Keep to be the new head of the school, and Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were designated as Headmaster and Headmistress respectively. Mr. Johnson had been headmaster of the Lawrence School in Hewlett, Long Island. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were assigned to the house at 66 Main Street and this house has been from that time the home of headmasters of the school and their families.

Mr. Johnson expanded the college preparatory program to meet demands occasioned by the increasing importance of careers for women, and by the early 1950's the scholastic standing of Miss Porter's School was among those of the best schools in the country. A more adequate library was supplied by the use of the Adgate building, more male teachers were added and the science building at 9 Mountain Road was remodeled to provide better facilities.

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Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were in charge of the school from 1943 until their retirement in 1954.

Next to be in charge were Mr. and Mrs. Hollis S. French. They came to the school in 1950, Mr. French to be business manager and a teacher of French. Mrs. French, as stated in the Bulletin "being of an active and vigorous nature, soon became the secretary of the Alumnae Association". In 1954 they were appointed by the trustees to succeed Mr. and Mrs. Johnson as Headmaster and Headmistress. To again quote from the Bulletin: "Coming to Farmington from St. Mark's School, the Frenches understood the importance of discipline and carried on in the way of their predecessors. They always expected the girls to live up to their own high standards of personal conduct. Mrs. French took a deep personal interest in the girls, counseling with a wisdom which was leavened by a fine sense of humor."

Changes were made in the curriculum to include East Asian History and study of the Russian language, to keep up with the awakening of interest in these areas. School life was enriched by lecture programs. Scholarship aid was increased and sabbatical travel abroad became available for the faculty. Residential buildings were improved and remodeled, new gymnasium and auditorium were built, the library was enlarged and additional houses were acquired. Students became more involved with extra-curricular activities with other schools, and took up some volunteer activities in the Newington Home for Crippled Children.

Mr. and Mrs. French lived their first four years here in Dorchester Cottage at 117 Main Street, moving to the Deming-Keep House at 66 Main Street when they took charge. They retired in 1966.

Richard W. Davis has been Headmaster since 1966. Mr. and Mrs. Davis came here from Buffalo, New York, where Mr. Davis had for seven years been Headmaster of Buffalo Seminary, a girls' day school. Mrs. Davis is the former Nancy Nynott, a graduate of Cornell with experience in teaching.

Under Mr. Davis, as stated in the Bulletin, "The curriculum has been enriched with the addition of the Senior Forum, seminars in philosophy, psychology and urban affairs, and a course in physics. Extra-curricular activities have been expanded to include tennis matches and dramatic productions with boys' schools. Music, always important at Farmington, is being expanded with the new Emily Brown Fritzinger Memorial Fund."

Mrs. Davis has aided the girls in extending their services to the Newington Home, adding tutoring at St. Michael's Church and joining the Peace Corps School Partnership Program. Students today have greater freedom, but they also face greater demands, and their horizons are being widened.

Mr. Davis says that in addition to providing motivation and direction for intellectual growth, "the primary goal should be the achievement of a balanced individual" with a "major concern for mental health, ethical values and spiritual growth". The Davises are trying to bring this goal within reach of their girls.

January 12, 1972
A resident in "Main", as stated in the Bulletin of Winter, 1972, is Miss Suzanne DeF. Wilsey, of Greenwich, Conn., who attended Vassar College and was graduated from Trinity College last June. A member of the English Department and house director in Main, here are her impressions:

"A lovely place, Farmington. The school is a warm and enveloping complex. The girls are of all shapes, sizes and emotional persuasions, bright and quick. I delight in the opportunity to teach the people, and not just the wedge of each girl marked 'student'."

March 31, 1973

One of the writer's Farmington pleasures was the almost daily walk from 191 Main Street to Main Street's north end, or at least to Mountain Road and Miss Porter's School. One of the rewards of the trip was his chance to visit a moment or so with the crossing guard at MPS, to properly orient himself with the day. He had to be careful however, if classes were changing or if the girls were gathering in the dining room, the guard could not be approached or diverted from his duties.

The three regulars known by the writer were George Worth, John Kruse and Kenneth Caddick. Hans Petersen served for a few weeks and identified for the writer the John G. Hawley house on South Road, already having been razed, a victim of I-291's ramp. Edward Becker of Red Oak Hill Road was a relief man occasionally.

George and the writer had special ties because of their mutual acquaintance with the city of Cali in the beautiful Cauca Valley of Colombia, South America. George had helped build a Collins machete factory there, and the writer had spent a whole afternoon and night there, in 1930. The writer could not take advantage of George's strong point, the stock market, but he did marvel at the number of girls whom George could call by their correct names! He still wonders how George can learn them so fast.

The writer misses too the residents whom he occasionally encountered on the trip, and with whom he could have a little chat. He has found that many Farmington people are unfamiliar with Main Street due to the fact that they always traverse it by car. He suggests that more people take the walk from Post Office Square to Farmington Avenue, it is only a mile and a quarter, and they will be surprised at what they can see!

September 23, 1974
Things Have Changed
At Miss Porter's

St. Petersburg Times, Sunday, April 29, 1973

By VIRGINIA LEE WARREN
New York Times Service

FARMINGTON, Conn. — The girls were served by waitresses at all meals and were not supposed to wash their own hair (a woman came in once a week to do that). Another woman came in twice a month to teach etiquette (never cross legs while seated). They were awakened by maids and could have breakfast in bed once a month (the first day of menstruation). And there was a good deal of stress on languages (especially French).

As for social life: the girls could not go away weekends, they were supposed to stay put, but each of them could have two male callers within a 3-month period — it could not be the same one twice — and then the couple was to spend most of the allotted time, from 2 to 4 on a Saturday afternoon, having chaperoned tea in the library. (With other couples, of course.)

WHERE DID these young, carefully guarded princesses hang out? In what remote and sheltered kingdom did they dwell?

Sheltered it was, indeed, but remote only in the sense of time. Geographically, it was Miss Porter's school here in Farmington.

And while the references to lessons in etiquette, being awakened by maids and not washing one's own hair sound as if they go back to the first few years after the institution's founding in 1843, they actually are in the memory of living alumnae — and some not-so-old alumnae at that.

The big changeover, from the epitome of the finishing school to strict college preparatory, came in the 1940's, and while all finishing schools have taken that leap (they still quiver whenever the word finishing is mentioned), Miss Porter's had to jump what was probably the farthest distance.

And the present headmaster, Richard W. Davis, a Ph.D from Yale, said recently in his home-like but somehow elegant office, "In the old days the girls didn't really graduate; they just sort of left." Davis came in 1966.

Mrs. Frederick A. O. Schwarz, who, when she was Mary Du Bois, was at Miss Porter's from 1926 to 1929, recalls that "the only ones who got diplomas were those who took courses equivalent to the first two years of college." Then, after some thought, she added, "Maybe it was the equivalent of only one year."

At any rate, most of the students did not go on to college in Mrs. Schwarz's time.

WELL, IT'S quite different now. Of the 73 girls to be graduated this June only two are not going right onto higher education; one of those intends to matriculate after a year on her own.

But this is only one facet of change. To visit Miss Porter's today is to become aware that almost everything is different.

One of the changes is that there are now day students, 37 out of a total enrollment of 266, and four more are to be taken in this fall although that will stretch capacity.

Fifteen per cent of the student body is on scholarship, in a few instances with all expenses paid. Tuition is $4,200 — this is one of the most expensive of the prep schools — but even that $4,200, according to Davis, does not cover the full cost. That, he says, is more than $6,000.

There are now black students, at the moment 10 (eight boarders, two day), and Davis, although he is not unaware that a few of the alumnae have emitted squawks over the ones who are here, plans to have more.

Alumnae from not too many years back recall that when they went into the town of Farmington they were not to speak to anyone who was not from the school. But now the 14- to 18-year-olds who make up the student body are all over the place.

THEN THERE are all the little changes, such as classes starting at 7:50 a.m. instead of a leisurely 9 o'clock.

Most of the girls at M.P.S., as Headmaster Davis likes to call it, still come from pretty much the same milieu. They are daughters of doctors, lawyers, Wall Streeters, business executives. About one-half are from the Eastern seaboard and may have been preceded by relatives.

Miss Porter's recently went back to placing more emphasis on the arts. And the school is having no trouble with enrollment. There are five applicants for every place and acceptances last year were almost double those of the previous year.
By Bill Ryan
Times Staff Writer

The Hartford Times Sunday Magazine • May 6, 1973

Drive down Main Street in Farmington, with giant trees acting almost as an arbor and time starts to slip away.

- You're back half a century, a century, two centuries, three centuries. Here is the history of a state and before that a colony — indeed a new land — preserved in homes that span all those three centuries, sitting up there mostly close to the street, separated sometimes by white picket fences or green hedges, individual pieces of history that make up one of the most lovely streets anywhere.

The "village" area of Farmington, with some of its white Colonial homes dating back to the mid-1660s — only two decades after this old, old town was incorporated — doesn't change much.

Even before the town created an Historical District in 1955, to officially preserve its most genteel section and protect it from commercial encroachment, the people of Farmington had been doing that for generations.

Only a slight widening of the street (also designated as Route 10 or the College Highway) and installation of a traffic light in front of Miss Porter's School — and of course cars on the street instead of horses and carriages — designate that this is Main Street, Farmington, in the 1970s instead of the 1870s.

When Miss Porter's School was founded, street lights were unknown. The automobile was unknown. The school's traditions are part of the tradition of the town, and in some ways, reflect each other.

The Rev. Noah Porter was a distinguished clergyman of the early part of the last century and he gave to the world three distinguished children. His son, also known as Noah, became the president of Yale University. Samuel was a pioneer in the education of deaf-mutes. And Sarah, the gentlewoman, founded a school.

That was in 1843 and the school was for the education and refinement of young ladies. Over the past century and a quarter some of the famous, and rich, families of this country have sent their daughters to Miss Porter's. Here went Jacqueline Bouvier who later became a President’s wife. Here went a young lady whose last name is Lindsay and whose father still is mayor of New York City.

The Lindsay girl's name, it is rumored, is Kathy. Miss Porter's School does not give out the names of its students — 270 at present — or its graduates.

But as Farmington has changed, in its slow, deliberate, well-thought-out manner, so too has Miss Porter's.

In the 1940s, it revamped its exclusive "finishing school" image to that of a college preparatory school. Over the past seven years, under Headmaster Richard W. Davis, many old restrictions have been loosened. Today the girls of Miss Porter's donate time to hospitals, may serve as tutors in other schools, or work in a nursery school staffed by faculty wives.

The school also bristles today at the suggestion that Miss Porter's is just for girls from the "right" families and also rich. Headmaster Davis says the school looks for girls with special interests. He also says that the school has rigorous academic requirements and must be "selective."

In any case, Miss Porter's School has been sending its graduates to Smith and Wellesley for many generations and will continue to do so. Of late it also sends some to Yale and Harvard, but the co-educationalization of these institutions does not mean that Miss Porter's is likely to admit male students some time soon. In fact, that is most unlikely.

Change has come to Miss Porter's and to Farmington but it has come slowly and neither the school nor the town seems to give much of a darn sometimes, how much change is outside. And the town dislikes anyone or anything — and this includes big brother governments, state or federal — from trying to pressure it.