The Samuel Steele House sits back off the east side of Main Street, between the William Nevins House and Dr. Chauncey Brown House, on a small well-maintained lawn. The encompassing neighborhood contains a variety of historic dwellings dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Large pines border the house to the rear and a paved driveway runs along the south elevation.
Originally oriented ridge-to-street, the Samuel Steele House was moved to its present site around 1843. The five-bay facade, which now faces south, exhibits a steeply pitched gable roof and a large framed overhang or "jetty", a common characteristic of early New England architecture. The four vertical posts of the second-story extend below the front girts and have been carved, although it is unknown whether pendants ever existed. Note the decorative carved brackets set behind the exposed post ends. A hewn overhang is found in the gable ends between the second and attic stories. The massive center chimney has been replaced by a smaller offcenter brick chimney. Twelve-over-twelve sash are found throughout the house. The original entry door, which would have occupied the central bay on the first floor, has been replaced by a window. The present entry door is located on the west elevation and is accessible through a small, gable-roofed porch. A two-tiered, shed-roof porch (see cont. pg.)

The Samuel Steele House, which may have been standing as early as 1655, is one of the oldest remaining dwellings in Farmington. A recorded deed dated February, 1655, lists Samuel Steele's real estate which included this parcel. Containing between one and two acres, the deed records "on which his dwelling standeth be the same [land] he bought of Thomas Judd, Jr." (FLR 2:74-75). This lot was bordered on the west by a highway, south by Thomas Judd, Jr., east by Steele's own land and to the north by John North. Another recorded deed dated March 19, 1663, again lists this property with a "tanimant" (tenement) standing thereon belonging to Samuel Steele (FLR 2:100). In 1681 a third recorded deed attributes this property with "dwelling House" to Steele (FLR 1:88). Born in England in 1626/7, Samuel was the son of John and Rachel (Talcott) Steele. His father John was an original settler of Cambridge, Massachusetts, Hartford, and Farmington. The elder Steele served as Farmington's first town clerk from 1646 to 1665. Samuel, who was about twenty years old when the family settled in Farmington, was considered one of the town's original settlers. He served as deputy to the General Assembly in 1668-9, 1672, 1677, and was a lieutenant of the Farmington Trainband. Samuel was married to Mary Boosey (1635-1702) and they had eight children. In 1685 when Steele died, he was residing with his eldest son James in Wethersfield. Steele's will stipulated that his sons, James and Ebenezer, were to inherit the housing and lands in Wethersfield and Farmington - "one the whole in Wethersfield, the other the whole in Farmington - James taking his choice" (Manwaring 1:365). Ebenezer, the youngest son, was given the property in Farmington, which included this house. In 1705 he married Sarah Hart and they raised two daughters: Mary and Sarah. (see cont. pg.)

Sources:
Ebenezer was prominent in the Litchfield Land Survey. He died in 1722 and left the buildings and home lot to his eldest daughter Mary (Manwaring 2:436). In 1725 Mary (1706-1789) married weaver Thomas Smith, the son of Samuel Smith. They raised three children: Steel, Samuel, and Mary. Thomas and Mary sold their eldest son, Steel the dwelling house in 1757, reserving life use and improvement (FLR 11:362). Steel sold the property in 1764 to his younger brother, Samuel, and his brother-in-law Isaac Gleason, the husband of his sister, Mary (FLR 14:262). Isaac Gleason (1735-1812), a soldier in the Revolutionary War, took full title to the house in 1773 (FLR 19:418). He and his wife Mary (1740-1808) raised four children: Polly, Sally, Ebenezer, and Chauncey. In 1799 Isaac sold half of the homestead to his eldest son, Ebenezer (FLR 33:267). Ebenezer died around 1810 and his portion of the property was willed to his widow Prudence and their six surviving children. In 1811 Isaac and his widowed daughter-in-law made a formal division of the property; Isaac received the north half of the house, and Ebenezer's heirs received the south portion (FLR 36:536). Upon Isaac's death in 1812, his "north" portion of the homestead was distributed to his youngest son Chauncey (FPR 7:11). In 1817 Chauncey sold his half of the house and west part of the barn to Gad Cowles (FLR 40:57). The heirs of Ebenezer Gleason sold the south half of the "old house" and east half of the barn to William S. Nevins in 1829 for $1200 (FLR 44:269). Shortly thereafter Nevins erected a new house (21 Main Street). The north half of the house was sold by Cowles to Dr. Chauncey Brown in 1843 (FLR 48:376). In March of 1843 Brown and Nevins officially divided the lot on which the "old house" stood. Nevins took the north half of the lot on which his house stood and Brown took the south half. It appears that Dr. Brown took full title of the "old house" and moved it to the rear of the lot when he built his new house (25 Main Street) later in the year. The Steele House was converted to a barn in which local farmers stored their hay. In 1861 Ira Bowen foreclosed on the property (FLR 57:182). Emeline (Deming) Porter, the wife of Thomas L. Porter, acquired the property in 1862 (FLR 58:346). Mr. Porter served as town clerk from 1879-1895. In 1897 Sarah A. Higley took title through a foreclosure and immediately sold the buildings to Bridget Maxwell (FLR 73:29, 71:304). The Balazy family, who purchased the property in 1920, restored the Steele House to a residence.

Standing as one of a few remaining examples of Post-Medieval architecture in Farmington, the Samuel Steele House could possibly be the oldest dwelling in town. Its long association with the Steele, Smith, and Gleason families gives the property added historical significance.

17. cont. has been added to the east elevation. For further in-depth research, this building is discussed in detail in Isham and Brown, Early Connecticut Houses, (Dover Publications, 1965).
BALAZY, STANISLAWA "Gleason House" 1950

OWNER'S NAME: BALAZY, STANISLAWA

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ADDRESS: 23 Main Street

DATE BUILT: ca. 1655

FOR: Samuel Steele

ARCHITECT

MASTER-BUILDER

FORMER OWNERS:
S. Balazy from Bridget MaxweU 8/24/1920, Vol. 80, p. 191; B. Maxwell from Sarah A. Higley 6/16/1897, Vol. 71, p. 304; S.A. Higley from Thomas L. & Emeline D. Porter 6/22/1897, Vol. 73, p. 35; E.D. Porter from Ira Bowen 3/4/1862, Vol. 58, p. 346; I. Bowen from Dr. Chauncey Brown by foreclosure 11/6/1861, Vol. 57, p. 182; Dr. C. Brown from Gad Cowles "one half part of the dwelling house being the northerly half & west part of the barn" the same as set to Ebenezer Gleason 10/17/1811, Vol. 36, p. 536, 3/25/1843, Vol. 48, p. 376; Gad Cowles from Chauncey Gleason "one piece of land on the main street with one half part of the dwelling house being the northerly part, & the west half of the barn, being two acres & the same that was set to my father Isaac Gleason by deed of partition betwixt him & the heirs of Ebenezer L. Gleason dead." 2/22/1817, Vol. 40, p. 57; C. Gleason from his father Isaac by will, "the entire homestead after the life use by Prudence Gleason, widow of my dead son

REFERENCES:
"Old Connecticut Houses", Isham and Brown
"Baker & Tilden Atlas, 1869", p. 33 - 'T.L. Porter', the house being then a barn on the property.

(OVER)
Former Owners, cont.:  

Ebenezer 11/7/1812, Vol. 7, P.R. p. 111. Abstract of Agreement of Distribution between Isaac Gleason & Prudence Gleason, widow of Ebenezer Gleason & Guardian of Wm., Mary, Isaac, Sally & Charlotte Gleason, minors, Samuel Cowles, guardian to Geo. Gleason, minor, & Elijah Lewis & Jonathan Cowles, appointed by the Probate Court to assist said Guardians; Isaac & Ebenezer were owners as tenants in common of land & bldgs. bounded w. on highway, s. on heirs of Sam'l. Smith, e. same, n. on land of Curtis, Thomson & Whitman, in part by each - the land with the dwellinghouse, barn, store & other bldgs. to the widow & minors, they to have one-half of the land, one-half of the house, the south half, one-half of the dore yard, one-half of the well, the said Isaac to have the remainder (see sheet in manuscript bk.); Ebenezer Gleason from his father Isaac, one-half of land & bldgs. 3/3/1800, Vol. 33, p. 267; I. Gleason from Steel Smith 3 acres, 3 rods, house, & barn, w. on Town St., n. on James Judd 3/12/1764, Vol. 14, p. 262; S. Smith from father & mother, Thomas & Mary (Steel) Smith for love & affection, 3 acres with dwellinghouse & weaver's shop where said Steel now dwells 6/3/1757, Vol. 11, p. 362; reserving use of ½ of the house; Mary Steel, later wife of Thomas Smith, from her father Ebenezer Steel by will, ½ the home lot & bldgs., the other ½ to his daughter Sarah. Sarah d. unmarried & her ½ went to Mary (Steel) Smith according to the will of their father. Ebenezer Steel from his father Lieut. Samuel Steel by will, "James & Ebenezer taking one the land in Wethersfield, the other the land in Farmington, James to take his choice", Aug. 14, 1685, Manwaring Vol. 1, p. 365 (Ebenezer's will proved 11/5/1722, Manwaring Vol. 2, p. 436); James, who had taken their father Samuel to live with him in Wethersfield, took his father's lands in Wethersfield & Ebenezer took the Farmington lands. These lands included this so-called Gleason House & the house on High St., now the Farmington Museum. Sam'l Steel had this land with a dwellinghouse recorded to him in 1655 as follows: "Samuell Steele one parcel on which his dwellinghouse standeth, yards, gardens which he bought of Thomas Judd, Jr., being one & ½ acres bounded n. on land of John North, s. on land of Matthew Woodruff, e. on land of Sam'l Steele & w. on the town highway, Vol. 2, p. 75, & p. 100, 1655 & recorded again Vol. 1, p. 88, 8/11/1681. Dr. Chauncey Brown moved the old house between March & Mary 1843.
This house is pictured on page 90 of the Farmington Book as "The Old Gleason House". It is located to the rear of the area between the two houses at 21 and 25 Main Street, and it can be seen at the right edge of the lower photo on that same page, the photo of B. C. Maxwell’s residence at 25 Main Street. It does not show in Baker and Tilden's 1869 Atlas, perhaps being in use as a barn at that time.

It was written up by Elmer D. Keith in 1942 for the Colonial Dames Society, and he calls it the "Woodruff-Gleason House".

The Woodruff Genealogy, quite recently published, perhaps as late as 1963, shows a photo of this house in the front of the book, and it is shown as the early home of Matthew Woodruff, first of the Woodruff family to settle in Farmington.

The above two references to it as the Woodruff house do not seem justified, as Mrs. Hurlburt, who has studied these matters extensively, has never mentioned it as such. She wrote an article on the house, published in the Farmington Valley Herald of August 21, 1952, and she does not mention the name of Woodruff at all, in connection with this house.

Mrs. Hurlburt does say of Matthew Woodruff, on page 377 of "Town Clerks", the following:

"Matthew Woodruff lived on Main Street, or Town Path, opposite the home of William Judd, which would place the house about where the George M. Williams house (31 Main Street) now stands. Woodruff owned three acres with the usual barns and orchards. He bought part of the land from John Warner, Sr., and part from Thomas Upson. In 1665 when the land was recorded, John Steele Sr., and Samuel Steele owned land back of Woodruff, William Adams owned the next house lot south, and Samuel Steele lived next north on land bought from Thomas Judd".

This particular house is mentioned by Mrs. Hurlburt on page 374 of "Town Clerks", as follows:

"It is considered extremely likely that the Gleason house, so-called, now back of Mrs. Balazy's house on Main Street, is the original (William) Smith house. Isham and Brown have dated it as an excellent example of the 17th century overhang and estimated that it was built about 1660. (William Smith died in 1669). The house has been moved from its original site and at one time was used as a barn, later remodeled into a house. Mary Smith, a descendant of William, married Isaac Gleason. She inherited the land and her brothers Samuel and Thomas, the house, from the estate of their brother William. Samuel purchased the land, built a new house now occupied by William A. Hitchcock (27 Main Street), and converted the old Gleason or Smith house into a barn".

The writer offers the following list of owners as being the best he can do regarding this house.

March 27, 1973
Samuel Steele, said to have built this house in 1655 or earlier, as it was recorded by him in that year, was the son of John Steele, the Settler. Mrs. Hurlburt says on page 3 of "Town Clerks", that -- "It is generally conceded by historians through the years, that John Steele was one of the group who 'viewed' Tunxis Sepus from the top of the mountain in 1639".

John Steele came to Farmington as a settler, in 1645 or very soon after, and he became the first Town Clerk of Farmington. His home was on Town Path, now Main Street, about where now stands the former Richard Gay house, at 22 Main Street.

Of Samuel Steele, Mrs. Hurlburt states the following in "Town Clerks" on page 372:

"Samuel Steele, who removed to Wethersfield in 1685, was the only living son of John Steele at the time of his father's death in 1665, another son, John, having died in 1653. Under the terms of his father's will, Samuel Steele had confirmed to him the house and tenement given him at the time of his marriage to Mary Boosey. Samuel was also given a silver bowl with three stamps on it and an S, one half of his father's books, his gold scales and weights. He lived on the east side of the (Main Street) Town Path about where E. I. Taylor now lives (15 Main Street) and with his father owned a larger tract of land back of his home extending toward High Street and fronting on most of the northern half of that street".

Most of the following information is taken from Mrs. Hurlburt's article which had appeared in the Farmington Valley Herald of August 21, 1952. It is not usually quoted in her same words but the facts are the same.

Samuel Steele died in Wethersfield at the home of his son James. His son Ebenezer lived in Farmington on the family homestead. Samuel, at his death, gave his sons the right to divide his property as they chose. James took all the Wethersfield property and Ebenezer all the Farmington property. This included the house and the land described in the preceding paragraph. Ebenezer had already owned the house and property at 37 High Street, now the Farmington Museum, having purchased it from John Stanley.

Ebenezer's daughter Mary, who had in 1724 married Thomas Smith, inherited both these Farmington properties upon her father's death, as her sister Sarah had pre-deceased their father.

She sold the 37 High Street property to the Rev. Samuel Whitman, who purchased it for his son Elnathan.

The Main Street house, the old homestead, stayed in the Smith family until in 1811.

Thomas and Mary Smith had three children; Steel, Samuel & Mary.

March 27, 1973

600
Thomas and Mary Smith had lived in the Stanley house on High Street from the time of their marriage in 1724, until they sold it in 1735 to Rev. Samuel Whitman.

Mary Smith, daughter of Thomas and Mary, was married on October 18, 1759, to Isaac Gleason. It was their daughter Polly Gleason who married the Solomon Cowles for whom the house at 154 Main Street, now the Wilmarth Lewis house, was built.

Steel Smith wished to settle in Vermont, so upon the death of Thomas Smith he sold his interest in the old homestead to his brother Samuel and his brother-in-law Isaac Gleason.

The two, Samuel Smith and Isaac Gleason, then built the house which is now the Stedman house, known as 27 Main Street.

Isaac however, gave up his claim to the new house to Samuel Smith, and Samuel gave up his interest in the old Steele house to Isaac Gleason. This was in 1769, and was the first time the house was out of possession of Steeles, or their descendants, although of course Isaac Gleason's wife was still a descendant.

The old house was now owned however by Isaac Gleason, and he and his son Ebenezer are said to have had some sort of business operation on the property. Isaac Gleason was appointed a Sealer of Weights, on December 12, 1791. It was perhaps his son David who was appointed Lister, at the same meeting. Eunice and Nancy Gleason, both of whose names appeared on Hospital Rock, put there in the 1790's, were probably his daughters.

Ebenezer Gleason died around 1810 and his widow Prudence inherited 1/3 of his half of the property (the other half still belonging to his father). Prudence however was made guardian of the other 2/3 of her husband's half, to take care of her children's interests. She soon married again, this time to Isaac Chapman of East Haddam.

Chauncey Gleason, Isaac's son, inherited his father's half, and perhaps in some manner had obtained the other half. Chauncey sold to Gad Cowles, probably in 1811, or very shortly before, and this time it was entirely out of the Steele family.

Gad Cowles sold in 1811 to Dr. Chauncey Brown. It was owned by Dr. Brown for many years, and it was probably he who began the use of it as a barn, having the house at 25 Main Street as his residence.

It was taken by foreclosure by Ira Bowen in 1861, and sold immediately by him to Emeline Deming Porter, wife of Thomas L. Porter, Town Clerk from 1879 to 1895. The Porters also had financial difficulties and Sarah A. Higley took title in 1897, financed it is thought, by Miss Sarah Porter. In that same year it was sold to Bridget Maxwell, and in 1920 to Stanilawa Balazy, mother of the present owner, Stacia Balazy.

March 27, 1973
The Gleason House, Dating Back To 1655
Is Granddaddy Of All Farmington Homes

Without a doubt, the granddaddy of all Farmington houses is the Gleason House, so-called, entitled to this distinction not only because of its age, but because of its descendants—each a shining example of its own particular period, as a descendant should be.

Built at least by 1655 by Samuel Steele and recorded by him in that year, it is now the mecca of architects and antiquarians.

The famous Isham and Brown, who wrote about old Connecticut houses and were interested only in houses, but not in who built or owned or lived in them, stated that this house was built between 1650 and 1660.

The land records revealed the existence of this house in 1655 when Samuel Steele declared it to be his property.

Standing originally facing the highway, about in front of its present location, we can well reconstruct the interior. A large central chimney, with a front porch and probably but not certainly, a stairway in front of the chimney.

A room on each side and no ell, it had the distinguished features of the framed overhang. But instead of carved drops or pendants, as in the present Farmington Museum, the cornerposts extended through the plate and are finished with beveled corners.

Brackets, at the upper corners are also a feature of this earlier house, not seen on the three other framed overhang houses in Farmington.

So the house stood for about 175 years and from it went out children who loved and built as fine houses of their own period as this house was in its time.

As with many of the old houses in Farmington, members of the family from one generation to another, had interest in it and this often became complicated.

For those interested in the Steele family, and they are legion, Samuel was the son of John, the settler here. When Samuel died at the home of his son, James, in Wethersfield he gave his two sons, James, and Ebenezer who lived in this homestead on Main Street in Farmington, the right to divide his lands as they chose.

James took all the lands belonging to his father in Wethersfield and Ebenezer all the lands and houses in Farmington, these including the old homestead on Main Street and the house on High Street, or Back Lane, as it was then known, which is now the Museum and which Ebenezer had purchased from John Stanley.

Here we have a kinship between these two old houses for Ebenezer's daughter Mary who married Thomas Smith in 1724 inherited through her own right and the death of her sister Sarah both of these houses.

She sold the High Street house in 1735 to the Rev. Samuel Whiting, but the Main Street homestead remained in the family until 1811.

Mary and Thomas Smith had a daughter, Mary, who married Isaac Gleason in 1739. She had a daughter, Polly, and when Polly married Solomon Cowles, later Major General Cowles, one of the finest houses for many a mile about was built for them.

It was just after the Revolutionary War, in 1784, when materials were again available. Unfortunately, although many conjectures have been made, no one knows either the architect or the builder of the house, now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Wilmarth S. Lewis, but it has long been an example of exquisite art of its day—unlike any other house with the possible exception of Old-Gate.

The detail of its mouldings, doorways and panelling has been photographed and measured by numerous architects and pictured by authorities.

Thirteen children were born to Polly and Solomon Cowles and one of them, George, the eldest, later also a Major General, was of the next generation from the old Gleason house to have an outstanding example of the newest in house built for him, for when he married Abigail Deming in 1803, the house built for him by his father, and furnished by her father, was ready for them to move.

(Continued on Page 7)
Gleason House

(Continued from Page 1)

into. It is now the home of Mrs. Henry Sage.

But before this, the old ancestor of them all was seeing lean years. No one wanted the old house. A new house, to be built by the now famous architect and builder, Judah Woodruff would only satisfy the Smith and Gleason families.

In 1764 Steel Smith, who was filled with longing to go on to the great open spaces of Vermont, sold to his brother Samuel and his brother-in-law Isaac Gleason the old homestead of three acres, house, and barn.

Samuel Smith and Isaac Gleason built the house now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. T. W. Stedman Jr., and Isaac quit claiming his interest in 1773, in exchange for the interest of Samuel in the old house.

The old Gleason house now owned by him and his son Ebenezer with his family was the scene of some kind of business, as there was a store and other buildings on the land.

Ebenezer died about 1810 and his widow, inheriting one-third of his half, was made guardian of the two-thirds of the half inherited by his five children.

An agreement with her father-in-law was entered into whereby the house, barn, store, and other buildings were divided carefully for the benefit of each owner, even the fireplace having its portions set aside for the use of each.

This was for life use only, however, and Prudence soon married again to Isaac Chapman of East Haddam and Chauncey Gleason inherited the property, of which his father Isaac had been owner, and sold it with half the dwelling house to Gad Cowles.

Various family portions were finally settled with Mr. Cowles as the owner, but not until the house had been carefully divided as to dore yard, store, barn, use of well, cellar and rights of passage through the house and the use of the old fireplace until a new one could be built.

Gad Cowles, who lived in a fine new house on Main Street was only interested in the old house as a business venture and sold it to Dr. Chauncey Brown. Dr. Brown owned the place from 1811 to 1861 when it went by foreclosure to Ira Bowen.

These were hard years for the old house. The war was making money scarce, mortgages were foreclosed, and Ira Bowen immediately sold to Emeline Deming Porter, who had inherited some money from her first husband.

Mr. Porter was town clerk and during their residence there they adopted the daughter of an East Hartford resident who was lost in the Civil War.

But ill fortune pursued the old house and the Porters also lost it. Sarah Higley took it over, soon selling it to Bridget Maxwell who owned it from 1897 until 1920 when it was rescued by Stanislaus Balazy.

During the years according to the records, it became so worn with age and lack of care it was utterly discarded as a dwelling-house and in 1843 William L. Nivins who purchased the new house, now the home of Mrs. Balazy, also purchased the "south half of the old house and land on which the half of the house stood before the house was moved by Dr. Brown, also the half of the door yard between the house as it stood before the house was removed, to the road."

It was now a lowly stable, although as the farmers filled the upper floor with hay, they must often have looked with pride and satisfaction at the huge hand-hewn oak beams, Fastened with great wooden pegs, and felt sure that the barn would stand for many a year.

Mrs. Balazy, born in a foreign country, with half an eye for the income, and part in pride of owning Farmington's oldest house, has, with her sons, made the house comfortable and secure, without changing the exterior, which tells those who will stop to look, the long, thrilling story of the ups and downs of three hundred years.