Sited on the west side of Main Street, the Francis W. Cowles House is surrounded by mature trees with hedges bordering the east side of the lot. It is one of many residential buildings located in the center of Main Street associated with Miss Porter's School.
This building displays characteristics of the Greek Revival and Italianate styles. Its colonnaded porch with a wide entablature are characteristics of the Greek Revival style. However, its hip roof and exposed rafter ends are often found on Italianate-style buildings. Other decorative features are the full-length windows on the first floor. Perhaps most unusual is the building's T-shaped form, a typical feature of the Italian Villa.

**DESCRIPTION (Continued)**

**18 ARCHITECT**

**BUILDER**

**IS HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE**

Although the early history of the land at this site is unclear, it is known that it was part of Col. Martin Cowles' estate. Sometime prior to 1844, Col. Cowles (1774-1844) deeded this land to his son Francis W. Cowles (1810-1868), who probably built this house within the same year, as his father's will (1844) (FPR 10:490) states "except the house where Francis W. Cowles now occupies". Francis married Mary Lewis Root (1812-1896), daughter of Major Timothy and Celestia (Lewis) Root. After Francis' death, the estate passed to his wife (FPR 13:436) and upon her death in 1898, their only surviving daughter Grace Fessenden Cowles (1844-1915) gained title to the property. Grace married Erastus Gay (1843-1912), the son of William and Ruth Maulida (Holmes) Gay. He was a merchant, state representative from 1883-5, state senator, 1897, town treasurer, and justice of the peace. In 1901 the Gays willed the property to Robert P. Keep, headmaster of Miss Porter's School. It remains part of Miss Porter's School today.

The Francis W. Cowles House is architecturally and historically significant due to its good state of preservation and association with the Cowles and Gay families.

**SOURCES**


**PHOTOGRAPHER** Alex Paredes

**DATE** 5/85

**VIEW** W

**NEGATIVE ON FILE** 13:26A

**NAME** Ruth A. Bedrosian

**DATE** 2/86

**ORGANIZATION** Greater Middletown Preservation Trust

**ADDRESS** 27 Washington Street, Middletown, CT

**THREATS TO BUILDING OR SITE**

- None known
- Highways
- Vandalism
- Developers
- Other

- Renewal
- Private
- Deterioration
- Zoning
- Explanation
OWNER'S NAME: PORTER'S SCHOOL, MISS

ADDRESS: 48 Main Street

DATE BUILT: ca. 1835 FOR: Francis Winthrop Cowles

ARCHITECT
MASTER-BUILDER

FORMER OWNERS: Miss Porter's School from Est. Elizabeth V. Keep, Trustee, by will, 3/15/1919, Vol. 74, p. 336; E.V. Keep from Erastus & Grace F. Gay 8/1/1901, Vol. 71, p. 511; in the deed from Erastus Gay & Grace F. Gay to Robert P. Keep & Wallace Allis, Trustees, under the will of Sarah Porter, the land was described as bounded e. on highway, Main St., n. on land of E. Gay s. on land of Sarah Porter & w. on New Road, & known as the Francis W. Cowles place (It was deeded to Grace F. Gay June 14, 1898, Vol. 74 p. 33) 8/6/1901, Vol. 71, p. 511, same as E.V. Keep; Grace F. Gay from the Est. of her mother, Mary L.R. Cowles, by will, 3/7/1896, Vol.Prob Rec. 22, p. 545 & by Executor's Deed 6/20/1898, Vol. 74, p. 33; Mary L.R. Cowles from her husband, Francis W. Cowles, by will 3/16/1868, Prob. Rec. Vol. 13, p. 436; the land was given to Francis W. Cowles by his father, Col. Martin Cowles. He married Mary Root, 1835. The original Robert Porter homestead stood about here & was later moved across the street.

REFERENCES: "Farmington, Conn., 1906", p. 191
"Baker & Tilden Atlas, 1869", p. 33 - 'Mrs. F.W. Cowles'.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Francis W. Cowles, son of Col. Martin Cowles, was born 1810, married Mary Root 1835, died 1868.
This house is pictured on page 191 of the Farmington Book as the Francis Cowles place -- known as "The Brick House". It was already the property of Miss Porter's School at that time. It is shown on Baker and Tilden's 1869 Atlas as "Mrs. F. W. Cowles".

Library records indicate that it was built in 1835 for Francis Winthrop Cowles. It appears from a letter written in 1840, that it may have taken several years to build. The letter mentioned was written by Julia Anne Cowles to her husband Thomas Cowles on March 9, 1840, and says "Frank moves into his new home this week. It is entirely finished, they are now making the front fence".

This site has a long history, having been occupied first by John Stanley in the 1650's, and perhaps even in the late 1640's. The name Stanley has been spelled "Standley" or "Standly", but for consistency the writer will use only the spelling "Stanley".

John Stanley's father was also John Stanley, baptized on December 28, 1603, the son of John Stanley and Susan Lancock of Ashford, Kent, England. The John Stanley who first came to Farmington was ten years of age when he arrived in America in 1634. His father and a younger brother died at sea on the way from England. The father's brothers, Timothy and Thomas, had accompanied John on the voyage, and upon arrival Thomas took the child John and Timothy took John's sister Ruth, bringing them up as their own children. Both brothers were "men of worth and enterprise in the new land and taught young John the rigors and rewards of building his home in a new country".

Captain John, as he was soon known, born in 1624, was married on December 5, 1645, to Sarah, daughter of Thomas Scott. Thomas Scott was an original proprietor in Hartford and was one of the committee appointed to view Tunxis Sepus (Farmington) in 1639, and he was given some land here in the lower meadow. He never lived here but gave his land to John Stanley. He died in 1643.

The Stanleys had three children:

John, born in 1647, became a doctor, Timothy, born in 1653, and Isaac, born in 1660.

They lived in 1651 on Town Path or Main Street, next north of Robert Porter, whose wife Mary was also a daughter of Thomas Scott, and was Sarah Stanley's sister.

The Stanleys moved to a house on the north side of Mountain Road, about where the driveway now leads into the houses at 11 and 13 Mountain Road. Mrs. Stanley died in June 1661, and Mr. Stanley later married Sarah Fletcher, daughter of John Fletcher of Milford.

Having obtained land on the east side of High Street from Isaac Moore (who had married John's sister Ruth) John now, about 1665, built a house on this land, the house which is now the Farmington Museum, and lived there with his family and his second wife.

December 15, 1971
John Stanley was deputy to the general court 1659-1696, and a soldier in the Indian war of 1676. His daughter Mary, by his second wife, was married in the High Street house, to John Hooker, and they occupied and owned the house at 24 Main Street, which presently bears John Hooker's name on a plaque on the southeast corner of the house. John Stanley died in 1706.

Note -- almost all of the preceding information regarding the Stanley family was obtained from Mrs. Hurlburt's "Town Clerks", pages, 33, 372 and 373.

John Stanley's son Dr. John Stanley, became heir to the house on Main Street, and it eventually came into the possession of Col. Martin Cowles of 41 Main Street, who gave it to his son Francis in 1835, the year in which he married. His bride was Mary Lewis Root, born in 1812, the daughter of Major Timothy Root and Celestia Lewis. Her Root ancestry to this point was, briefly, as follows:

John Root, 1608-1684, Badby, England
  m. Mary Kilbourn, 1619-1687, Wood Ditton, England
  came to America on "Increase" in 1635

Stephen Root
  m. Sarah Wadsworth

Timothy Root 1681-1713
  m. Margaret Seymour

Lt. Timothy Root 1713-1746
  m. Mary Hart

Capt. Timothy Root 1740-1815
  m. Mary Langdon

Major Timothy Root 1780-1824
  m. Celestia Lewis.

Mention of Francis W. Cowles in the history of Farmington is brief, although his photo appears on page 84 of the Farmington Book. Julius Gay mentions Francis Winthrop Cowles on page 81, together with his brother John Edward Cowles, in these brief words: "They spent their lives as well-to-do farmers in the village."

The children of Francis Cowles were:

Alice Celestia Cowles 1836-
Louisa Catherine Cowles 1840-
Grace Fessenden Cowles 1844-1915
Martin Cowles 1847-
Mary Root Cowles 1850-1871

Alice Celestia was in 1864 married to Alexis Wynnns Harriott, 1835-1916, of Salt Cay, Turks Island, West Indies, a salt manufacturer as was his father. He was consular agent 1862-1888, and moved to Grand Turk later. They had five children, an interesting family, and visits and correspondence between this family and the Farmington relatives were common.

December 15, 1971
Louisa Catherine was married in 1867 to Edward Hall of New York, born in Brattleboro, Vermont, his mother a Fessenden. In 1896 he was in business in Philadelphia, living in Camden, New Jersey. Their children were William Fessenden Hall, born 1868, and Alice Cowles Hall, born 1870.

Grace Fessenden Cowles was married to Erastus Gay of Farmington, son of William Gay and Ruth Holmes of 24 Main Street. When first married the Erastus Gays lived at 16 Main Street. Later, in 1872, Mr. Gay built a house next north of the house of his wife's parents. That house, still standing and known as 44 Main Street, was the home of Mr. and Mrs Erastus Gay for the rest of their lives.

Martin Cowles was married in 1885 to Cynthia Ball Keyes of Unionville, daughter of David A. Keyes and Julia Gridley. No children were born of this marriage and Mrs. Cowles died within a few years. In 1890 Martin Cowles married Mary Esther Manwaring of East Lyme. Mr. Cowles was always in the manufacturing industry. In 1886 he was secretary and superintendent of Knapp and Cowles, Bridgeport, in 1892 was president and treasurer of Phoenix Coach Lamp Company, New Haven, and in 1895 superintendent of Bridgeport Tubing. They had a daughter born in 1887 and Martin Warren Cowles was born in 1894. He was an MIT graduate in sanitary engineering, served in the engineers in World War I, and was in Springfield, Illinois in 1919.

Francis Winthrop Cowles died in 1868 and his widow inherited the property at 48 Main Street. How long she occupied the house and continued living in Farmington is not known, but letters now in the Village Library, written in May 1889 and April 1894, indicate that she was then living with her daughter Louisa and family, in Camden, New Jersey. Mrs. Cowles died in 1898 and her daughter Grace Gay became the next owner.

Occupants of the property from 1868 until 1901 are not known. Quite possibly it was temporarily occupied by various family members, but it also appears possible that it may have been rented to Miss Porter for use as a dormitory. In 1901 the Gays, Erastus and Grace, sold it to Mrs. Robert Porter Keep, for that use. Mr. Keep was at that time the nominal head of Miss Porter's School, and was in the process of assuming control, his wife assisting in the administration.

In 1919 the title was passed by the estate of Mrs. Robert Porter Keep, to Miss Porter's School, the present owner.

The Bulletin of Miss Porter's School, Winter 1972, states the following:

"Mr. and Mrs. Hiram B. Carey III (Ted and Sharon) are new house directors in Brick. Ted is a Yale graduate who taught history in West Hartford before serving three years in the Navy. He is now a first-year law student at the University of Connecticut. Sharon was graduated from Skidmore College and has taught English in New Haven and Hartford public schools. Both their daughters, Shannon 3 and Rebecca 1, are delighted with so many teenage 'sisters' ".

Ted is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Hiram B. Carey, Jr., of Mountain Spring Road. His wife is the former Sharon Fitzgerald.

March 4, 1973
The following data had not yet been noted when the final three paragraphs of the previous page were written.

Mrs. Justus Paul, who had been house mother for four years at Brick, retired in June 1971.

Brick House directors starting September 1971 were Christopher Darwin and his wife, the former Catherine Axton.

Mr. Darwin had been born in an English boys' school where his father was headmaster. Christopher is a fourth generation teacher. He is a graduate of Cambridge University and has done Ph. D. research in speech perception. Mrs. Darwin was a graduate of Sutton High School 1965, Sutton, Surrey, England, then of Girton College and Cambridge University, a major in education.

March 31, 1973