Standing on a slightly elevated site, the Charles and Harriet Thompson House faces west onto Main Street. Located in the heart of the Miss Porter's School's campus, the Thompson House is surrounded by other architecturally significant buildings dating from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. These buildings are encompassed in the Farmington historic district and National Register district.
This dwelling was built in 1841 for Miss Harriet Cowles at the time of her marriage to Charles Thompson. The house was built on land owned by Cowles' brother James, which he inherited from their father's estate (FPR 9:228). Harriet Cowles Thompson (1808-1874) was the youngest daughter of Elijah and Elizabeth Cowles. Her husband, Charles (1788-1854) was a merchant from New York and Fayetteville, North Carolina. In 1843 Mr. Thompson received full title to the house (FLR 48:377). His wife, in 1845, became sole owner of the property through two quit-claim deeds (FLR 45:441, 50:100). Charles Thompson drowned in 1854 while attempting to cross the Farmington River. Mrs. Thompson remained here until her death in 1874 and willed the house to her nephew, James L. Cowles, son of James. In 1876 the younger Cowles sold the property to his cousin, Edmund B. Cowles, who lived in the house at 41 Main Street. The house remained in the Cowles family until 1889, when Miss Sarah Porter purchased it (FLR 68:427). Since that time, the building has been used as a dormitory.

This well-preserved building is significant for its long association with the Cowles family, leading Farmington citizens, and for its architectural contribution to village's historic district.

OWNER'S NAME: PORTER'S SCHOOL, MISS

DATE BUILT: ca 1840 FOR: James Cowles

ARCHITECT

MASTER-BUILDER

FORMER OWNERS: Miss Porter's School from Estate of Sarah Porter by will. Porter, Sarah from James L. Cowles and Martha Lancaster Cowles for $6000, 8/1/1889, Vol. 68, p. 427: being 1 1/4 acres with buildings, north & east on John E. Cowles, south on Mrs. John S. Rice, west on Main Street, being 380 feet in depth and 123.3 wide front & 124.9 feet rear. Cowles, Martha L. from Edmund B. Cowles, same description except east on Parsonage Ass'n., 'being the homestead of the late Mrs. Harriet E. Thompson, also all the furniture in the house conveyed with the land and buildings.' Cowles, Edmund B. from James L. Cowles, land, buildings and the furniture in the dwellinghouse and 1 & 1/4 acre left to the said grantor by Harriet E. Thompson by will, 8/10/1876, Vol. 65, p. 218: Cowles, James L. from Harriet (over)

REFERENCES:

"Farmington, Conn., 1906" p. 191
Cowles Genealogy p. 133: Baker & Tilden Atlas 1869 p. 33
(Mrs. Charles Thompson)

OWNER AS OF: 1950
PORTER'S SCHOOL, MISS (LATHROP)

PHOTO NO.

FOLDER NO.
E. (Cowles) Thompson by will "my library, house lot, house and barn and everything contained therein" dated 8/19/1874, recorded 12/30/1874 in P.R. Vol. 15, p. 231:

Thompson, Harriet E. from James Cowles (her brother) same description except 'south on the south line of said lot which is to be in a line with the red fence on the north side of said James & Augustus Cowles garden, 6/4/1847, Vol. 50, p. 100: Cowles, James from Charles Thompson, d. h. & barn, 4/4/1843, Vol. 45, p. 441, a quit claim deed: Thompson, Charles from James Cowles, same description, a warranty deed, 3/31/1843, Vol. 48, p. 377:

Cowles, James from his father Elijah Jr., by inheritance with an old house.

Harriet E. Cowles, sister of James, married Charles Thompson 1841.
49 Main Street

Main Street in the Village — Miss Porter's School
This house is pictured in the Farmington Book on page 191 as the "Thompson House". It was already at that time owned by Miss Porter's School. It is shown on Baker and Tilden's 1869 Atlas as "Mrs. Chas. Thompson".

It was built in 1840 by James Cowles. The original owner of this land may have been Thomas Orton of whom Mrs. Hurlburt states the following on page 369 of Town Clerks: "Deacon Thomas Orton settled first in Windsor, being there in 1649. His land in Farmington in 1656 was on the east side of Main Street, just north of Robert Porter's land as it extended across the street from his home, making the Orton Homestead about where Robert Porter Keep now lives". Mr. Keep's house at the time she wrote the above, was #47 Main Street, third house north of Mountain Road. No statement has been made as to who settled on the land between #47 and Mountain Road, so perhaps Mr. Orton's land extended that far.

It has been stated that James and Augustus Cowles inherited from their father Elijah the homestead which had been his, where "New Place" now stands, and that the brothers lived there together. Elijah Cowles died in 1826, and his son James built this house at #49 in 1840. It would appear from this that the two brothers had divided the property by this time, Augustus keeping the south lot, with the old Whitman house on it, while James built on the north half.

James Cowles, 1795-1858, was the son of Elijah Cowles, 1755-1826, and Elizabeth Cowles, Elijah's distant cousin, who was the daughter of James Cowles and Abigail Hooker of "The Maples" on south Main Street, see photo, page 105. James Cowles was married in 1838 to Jane E. Lewis, born 1818, daughter of Reed Lewis of Waterford and Northumberland, New York. She was the sister of Mary D. Lewis who had married a cousin of James, Elijah Cowles, son of Gad.

There is a photo of James Cowles on page 84 of the Farmington Book. On page 79 Julius Gay mentions him in connection with John T. Norton, and on page 81 writes of James Cowles as follows:

"Mr. James Cowles, son of Elijah Cowles, head of the noted firm of Elijah Cowles and Co., himself one of the wealthiest men of the village, lived at the corner of Main and New Britain Streets. His store was the brick building opposite. In the latter part of his life he moved into the house built by Gen. George Cowles and devoted himself to the development of his large holding of real estate in Unionville, especially of the waterpower. He was a successful business man, conservative, caring little for theories, and of great practical common sense".

The store mentioned in the above paragraph was owned jointly by him and his brother Augustus, who carried on several operations under the name of "J. and A. Cowles". This store building presently houses the library of Miss Porter's School. The brothers built a dam and feeder canal in Unionville, furnishing power for several enterprises, and also built a warehouse near the canal. Several operations however, were carried out by James Cowles alone.

December 4, 1971
Mr. and Mrs. James Cowles had four children. James Lewis Cowles, born in 1843, will be discussed in connection with the Gen. George Cowles house at 130 Main Street, where he lived most of his life. Adrian R. Cowles, born in 1847, lived only to the age of nine. Marian Douglass Cowles, born in 1846, was married in Farmington in 1867 to Felix Wyatt who was born in Richmond, Virginia in 1829, but at the time of their marriage was a planter in Georgia. Ella Elizabeth Cowles, born in 1850, married George Gibson of Richmond, Virginia. Their daughter, Ella E. Gibson, married P. V. Cardozo and was in 1928 living in Richmond.

This house was deeded in 1847 to Harriet Cowles Thompson, born in 1808, a sister of James, who had in 1841 married Charles Thompson, born in 1788, a merchant of Fayetteville, North Carolina, and New York City. They lived in this house, but he was drowned in 1854 attempting to ford the Farmington River.

Charles Thompson's widow lived here until her death in 1874 after which title passed to her nephew James Lewis Cowles, son of James. He probably never occupied the house as he had already lived for some years at 130 Main Street.

Edmund Butler Cowles, 1833-1893, purchased the property from James L. Cowles two years later, in 1876. Edmund was the son of Colonel Martin Cowles of 41 Main Street and his wife Harriet Welles.

The next holder of the title was Martha Lancaster Cowles, born 1846, wife, or widow, of Edmund C. Cowles, born 1828, the son of John Cowles of the James City, Virginia, line of the family, and Susan G. Dunn. Edmund C. Cowles and Martha Lancaster had two sons, Forest born 1873 and John Edmund, born 1877. They were living later in Horse Cave and Smith's Cove respectively, in Kentucky.

Mrs. George Gibson, see first paragraph of this page, the daughter of James Cowles, she being of Richmond, Virginia, died in New York City in 1886.

Sarah Porter purchased this house from James L. and Martha L. Cowles in 1889, and it has been a girls' dormitory since that time. Previously called "Thompson" (see opening paragraph), it is now called "Lathrop", named for a beloved teacher and house mother.

June 1970 residents were Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Skey and their eight-month old son. Mr. Skey was a U-Conn law student at the time, and Mrs. Skey was Physical Education teacher at Miss Porter's School. As a faculty couple they act as house parents, in place of the former house mothers. Gerald Skey also coaches the varsity basketball team.

December 4, 1971.

The following appears in the Winter 1972 Bulletin of Miss Porter's School, regarding a present house director: "Miss Maurine Hellner is a graduate of St. John's College, Annapolis and received her M. A. T. from the University of Virginia. She taught in the Virginia and Maryland suburbs of Washington, D. C., for two years and is a member of MPS mathematics department".

March 4, 1973