

A Proposed House in Watertown, Connecticut

Report on the Thesis

Submitted in partial requirement for the
Degree of Bachelor of Architecture by
Hazel Weld

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

May 24, 1933

Program - A Proposed House in Watertown, Connecticut

A great many New England towns have so definite a character that it is difficult to conceive of a radically modern building being composed agreeably with the surroundings. Yet, in spite of the charming qualities of colonial architecture some prospective builders might like to profit by the development in recent times of modern construction and modern planning. The problem in general is to coordinate this character and planning in a pleasing and constructive way and in detail is to design a house in Watertown, Connecticut.

There are other problems to be solved in the course of the work. The house is for a family of five in which the children are grown, spending most of the time away. However, at times there are likely to be more than a few guests at once, so that the house must be especially planned to take care of two people and servants all the time with an occasional overflow of others.

Particularly there must be a good relation between site, garden, and house. The site is an old farm on the edge of a small town. It is proposed to buy this

farm with two other families. Though the other two houses, which will follow this one somewhat in character, are not to be designed at present, the grounds for the three will be laid out together. They must be planned to give a certain amount of open area common to all three and sufficient private gardens and kitchen-yard space.

The proposed house and garage will cost approximately \$25,000.

May 24, 1933

Dear Sir,

In accordance with the requirements for graduation in Course IV, I herewith submit a thesis, the subject of which is "A Proposed House in Watertown, Connecticut".

Respectfully submitted,



Dean William Emerson
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A Proposed House in Watertown, Connecticut

Except perhaps in rare instances an individual is more interesting than a mob. For this reason, one of the most engaging problems in architecture is a house, because if it is a proper solution it must be not only suitably arranged with due regard to facilities for health and comfort, to privacy, and to protection for private life - life of the individual and the family and their work - and for entertaining, but it must also express the owners' character, taste, and individuality in such a way that in time it will become not a house, but a home to him and to his friends. This means the study of a human being and his interests as well as the study of plans and elevations and details. There are so many possible good arrangements of living, sleeping, and service elements in a house, that the final positions are usually dictated by the orientation and contour of the site and, more than by that, by the owners' habits and tastes.

The site for the house, which is the subject of this thesis, is located in Watertown, Connecticut, a town near Litchfield and with the same dignified, yet homely atmosphere of old white frame and brick houses,

village greens and clean, white, steepled churches, and picket fences. However, it is developing as a residential suburb of Waterbury, and, though essentially New England in atmosphere, there are dissimilar elements entering. There is the Taft School, a part that is simple and honest though old English by Goodhue and a part that is the mere flamboyant "collegiate Gothic" by James Gamble Rogers. There is one small church by Goodhue, and another is on the way by Cram. There are some new houses treated in the Colonial manner (see the appendix, the Lilly house and the Judson house, which are good character, even though they hark back to the past). Then there are houses like Mr. Killorin's which have changed old details into something a bit odd and disjointed and like Miss Killorin's house which takes its half-timbered construction and detail from another period that has nothing to do with the character of the town or the present time. On the whole, however, it is a town quite conscious of its architecture.

The people from whom the house is planned are a master in the school and his wife, who have grown-up children away from home. They want to buy a part of a farm with two other families, although the others are not thinking of building yet. The lay-out of the houses, driveways, common lawns and more private gardens is to be

laid out now. The farm is 800 feet by 1200 feet, and is on the edge of the town. There is a long driveway on the lot now and a worthless old house and barn with excavation only under the barn.

Since it is away from the center of town the clients want the house fireproof. They also want to consider the advantages of modern construction and planning, still keeping in mind the character of the town and of the old family furniture they own, which ranges from early Colonial pine and maple to simple and solid Duncan Phyfe and early Empire, without using any superfluous copying of detail. They want to have the advantages of decks and still keep away from a flat roof construction that might be disturbing if one considers the character of the town and the nearness of the site to other houses. In other words, the masses and details must be simple and modern, yet not stylized, and must still always harmonize with the spirit of the town.

The character of the town, the site, and the characteristics of the family have all been taken into account in the handling of the problem. The better houses in the immediate neighborhood are brick, and brick is a good facing for a fireproof house, besides having a good homelike character for a house. It certainly ties in with the community better than concrete or

stucco would. There are ample decks, yet the mass of the house with its pitched roofs is not disturbing as seen in relation to adjacent houses. One of the advantages of architecture of the present time is the use of big window area, which is concentrated to give the same usable wall space that we find in older buildings. In this particular case, rather than use the stylized long horizontal windows with great sheets of glass, rows of casement windows have been used to keep a conservative character and yet give the modern area of light. Details have been kept as simple as possible, the general masses, the pattern of the windows, the metal window sills, frames, and muntins, the brick facing, lead-coated copper roof, concrete slab cantilevers sheltering the doors, and the brick flower boxes all counting as integral decoration. In the simplicity of the house, it should be in keeping with the town, its only differences being accounted for as progressive and not as retrogressive to Colonial or English style.

The site is on a hill with a remarkable view to the East and Southeast. The road runs from North to South, the driveway running West and Southwest up the hill. On either side of the driveway near the road are marshes which might be very well drained and cleaned out when some of the excavation for one of the houses is being done and made into small ponds. A small amount of planting of

irises and water lilies and willows would be done from time to time around the ponds. The ponds might be very close to the drive, one draining into the other through a wide culvert, and this would make the driveway with its nut trees and elms on either side an effective spot. The fields on the sides would be left as they are except for occasional planting from the ponds up to the line of the houses. Here would be terraces, gardens, and lawns under the trees, and shrubbery about the driveways, which go back of the three houses leaving the front open to a pleasant stretch of grass with the view beyond. There is a level space for a tennis court, and a feature might be made of the excavation under the old barn by making it into a sunken garden, training vines and fruit trees against the walls, and using benches and planting around a small pool. All this planting and grading will be done in the springs and falls, building it up little by little.

The family has a certain influence on the design of the plan due to the fact that there are grown-up children who are away most of the time. This means that for the most part there are only the man and his wife and two servants, preferably man and wife, and that when there are guests there are a good many of them. As a solution to this a wing of the house upstairs with a bedroom, bath, dressing room, and sleeping porch may be completely shut

off from the heating system without making the house seem dull and empty. The back stairs are in this wing, but that is not disagreeable. As much as possible, open planning has been used for the living portions of the house to facilitate entertaining.

Perhaps the easiest way to explain the house is to take it floor by floor, and by room. The entrance is on the side the hill is on leaving the other side free for the view. The entrance hall has a coat closet in it, and a lavatory is in the stair hall. The latter is large and almost a part of the living and dining rooms. It opens straight through the house to give that open, country feeling of being able to walk in and out of a house from any side. The garden should be a part of the house and the house a part of the garden. In the east end of the hall there is a pool and a tiled floor for potted plants, making almost a conservatory between the dining room and the living room, and the inside and the outside. The living room opens to the right of either end of the hall with wide, low steps down to it. Hostesses like this effect for entertaining, and it gives a dais at one end for the piano. The mistress of the house is a musician, and here big piano requires the open planning to use up its full tone to its capacity. The finish of the room would take this into consideration with a ceiling of some material

especially prepared to help the acoustics, and polished wood, brick, plaster, and heavy curtains to vary the quality of the instrument. There will be simple built-in woodwork - mantels, shelves, window seats, -, all simple, squared wood, without moldings, modern, and yet old furniture will harmonize with it and stand out against it. The room has large windows to the view on the South and East and a window for the pleasant light from the West. The windows on the East open as French windows on a terrace which runs around the southern side with a shelter over it there, where it will not obstruct the view. A study opens on the left of the hall with West light for sun in the afternoon and North light at the left of a built-in desk and shelves. As far as possible proper orientation has been used to make pleasant rooms. In the study there will also be other built-in shelves, gun cases, and trophy cases all around the walls, making it a livable place for a man.

The dining room is on the left with light from the South, East and North with a little dining terrace on the North where it may be served from the pantry. There are built-in serving tables and plate shelves with glass screens on either side to give the hall light and set back in such a way as to make room for a telephone stand which is out of the way. The service on that floor includes a pantry,

kitchen planned with proper circulation of food and cross ventilation, a store room, broom closet, laundry chute, servants' living and dining room, bedroom, and bath for two servants. For the kitchen and pantry walls and ceilings is recommended panels of enameled metal and cupboard units of the same materials such as are used in big restaurants now. They can be arranged in any way that the owner likes and are much easier to clean than anything else. The floors should be linoleum set in a cement base against a coved baseboard to facilitate cleaning.

On the second floor the stair hall makes a sort of upstairs sitting room and opens out on a deck around the master's bedroom so that breakfast may be served there. That bedroom with a dressing room and bath is over part of the living room, with a deck over the rest, and has east and south light and the best view. There is another bedroom over the dining room and pantry which has a deck of its own. This bedroom could be used for a sewing room, for the bath room for it is nearer the bedroom over the study. There are also ample linen closets and a laundry chute. In the wing over the service there is a bedroom, and a dressing room-sleeping porch combination, which makes a sort of dormitory for guests, and one bath room for the wing. This means that ordinarily only three bed

rooms and two baths would be open, making a usable small house for two people and their servants.

In the basement there is a game room under the living room, with stairs from the front hall, a closet for skis, sleds, toboggans, a trunk room, a store room, wine cellar, and wood room, the last three convenient to the back stairs, and a laundry room and boiler room with the garage under the end of the wing. The laundry opens directly out into a yard at the same level, which opens off the driveway and acts as a service yard to the basement and has outside stairs running up to the back hall. An attempt was made to keep the service as concentrated as possible.

The attic under the two lower roofs is dead space for insulation. Under the higher roof there is some room for storage.

The construction is hollow tile, brick, and steel, the steel supports being spaced evenly on a schedule where possible. The floors are lightweight battle deck construction, and the basement concrete. The windows are as far as possible stock size in frames, although the muntins are changed. The heating recommended is a forced hot air system and humidifying system in combination with an oil furnace, the oil tank being in the driveway. The heating units would be placed in the

walls, and a thermostatic control system would make good use of the sun through the large windows. There are water mains in the road, but no gas or sewage pipes have run out that far. Stoves would have to be electric, and the sewage would be taken care of by a septic tank. As far as can be ascertained, the present cost would be about \$.45 per cubic foot, making the house cost about \$ 25,000.



VIEW FROM SITE
VIEW TOWARD SITE





THE LILLY HOUSE
THE JUDSON HOUSE.



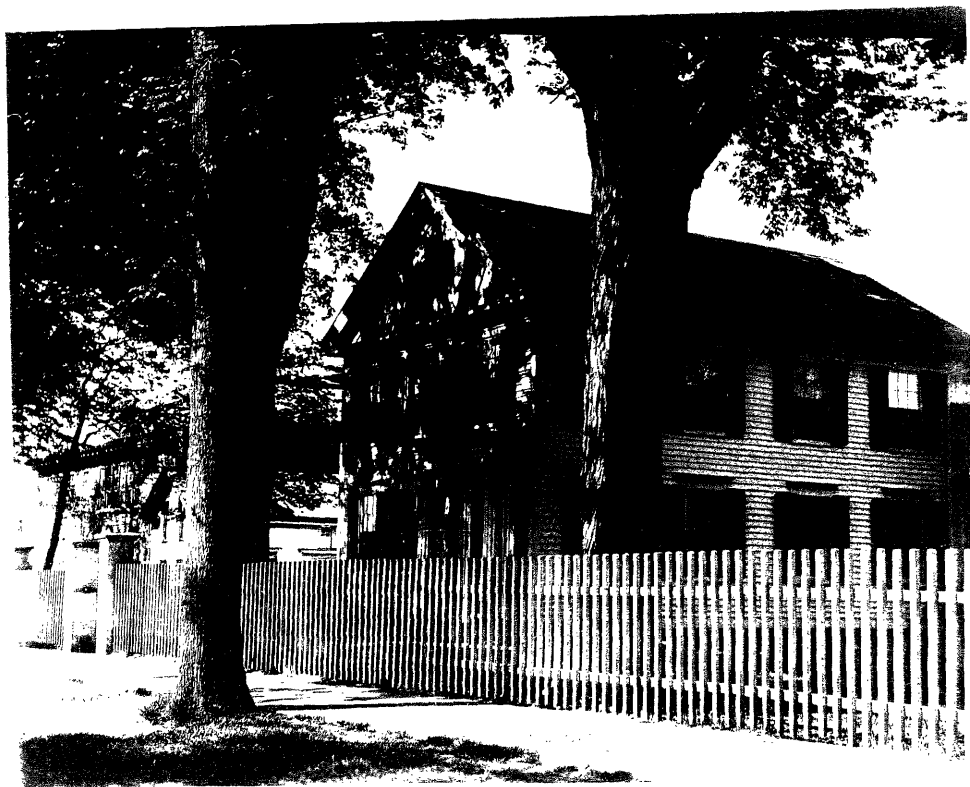


MISS KILLORIN'S HOUSE
MR. KILLORIN'S HOUSE





THE MACLEAN BUCKINGHAM HOUSE
THE LOVELAND HOUSE





THE CHARLES BUCKINGHAM HOUSE
THE CURTISS HOUSE





THE OLD LOVELAND HOUSE
THE SHERWOOD HOUSE





THE JACKSON HOUSE

THE OLDEST HOUSE IN WATERTOWN

