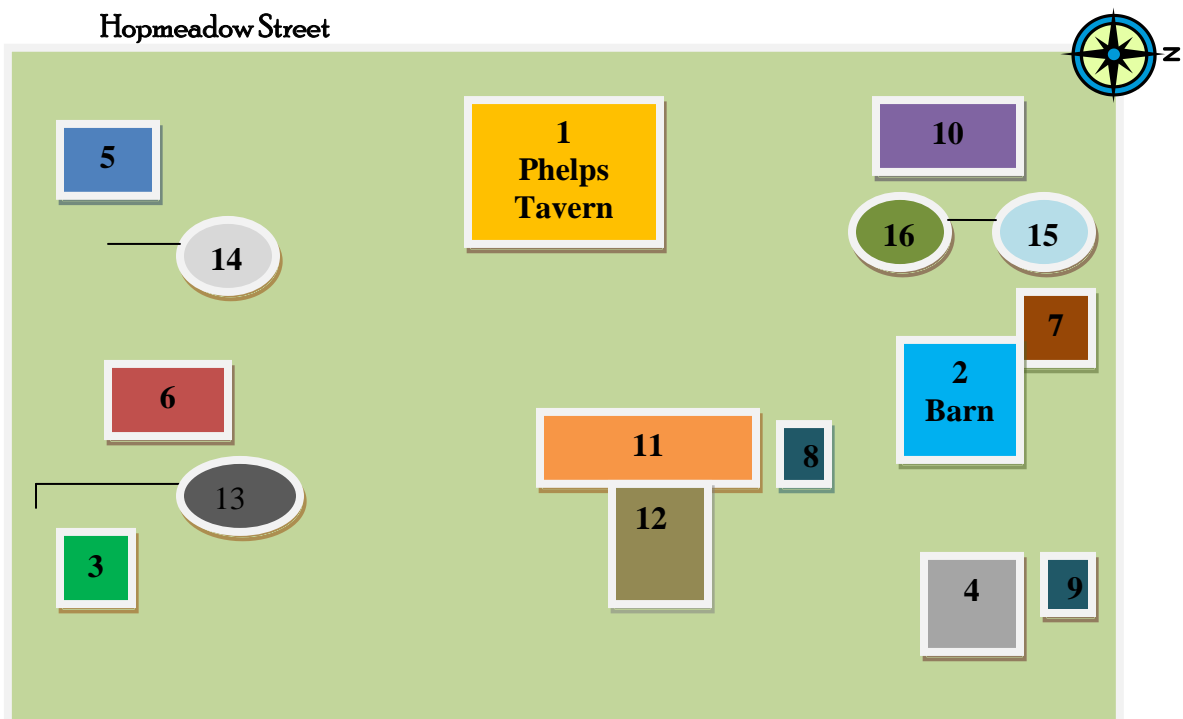


Simsbury History Society PHELPS TAVERN MUSEUM

Our Buildings Self-Guiding Tour

Established in 1911, the Simsbury Historical Society has had a permanent home in the center of Simsbury since 1962, when it received the Phelps tavern and barn. The two acre site now includes more than one dozen historic and modern buildings and structures.



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| <p>← Phelps Lane</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Phelps Tavern 2 Phelps Barn 3 Probate Court 4 Carriage House 5 School House 6 Hendrick Cottage 7 Ice House 8-9 Ensign-Bickford Guard Booths | <p>Parking Lot</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 Meeting House 11 Ensign-Bickford Exhibit 12 Ellsworth Visitors Center 13 Barn Foundation Walls 14 Bell 15 Pillory and Stocks 16 Well Cover |
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ORIGINAL BUILDINGS

1 Phelps Tavern

The Phelps house and tavern was owned by five generations of the Phelps family for nearly two hundred years. The building served as family home, canal hotel, lodge meeting site, entertainment hall, and local tavern. From 1786 until 1849, three generations of fathers and sons, and one widow, served as tavern-keepers.

Built for Elisha Phelps in 1771, the house may include part of an earlier “dwelling” constructed by 1761. The building was a family residence until Noah Phelps, Elisha Phelps’ brother, acquired the first tavern license in 1786. Charlotte Phelps ran the tavern after the death of her husband, Noah A. Phelps, in 1817. Her son Jeffery Phelps purchased the property in 1820 and ran the tavern until 1849 when he closed the business, slow since the closing of the canal in 1847, to devote himself to agriculture and other interests. The building was remodeled in 1879 and 1915 by resident family members, and remained a family home until it was acquired by the Simsbury Historical Society in 1962.

2 Phelps Barn

This multi-purpose barn was built in the late 1890s to keep the carriages and matched horses owned by the Phelps family. There are two box stalls and a harness room on the left and space for the carriages on the right. The hayloft overhead was probably used for storage in addition to hay. The rear addition with bark-covered rafters was built by the Historical Society in the 1960s to house the 19th century peddler’s wagon used by Lucius Bigelow. The wood floor, stairs to the hayloft and hayloft opening are also modern additions.

RELOCATED TO SITE

3 Probate Court

Probate Courts hear matters dealing with estates, adoptions, guardianships and name changes. This brick building was constructed in 1876 with support from Jeffrey O. Phelps II (1820-1899), a former probate judge. Located at 7 Wilcox Street and relocated in 1998, it is a typical and charming Victorian pattern book design. Since 2009, the building has served as the headquarters for the Simsbury Land Trust.

4 Carriage House

Carriage houses were built to store horse-drawn pleasure vehicles such as carriages and sleighs, their equipment and accessories. This fancy carriage house was built around 1885 for Adelaide Eno Wilcox (1840-1914) probably during the remodeling of her family home, *Elmstead*, located at 880 Hopmeadow Street. It is an interesting combination of popular Shingle and Queen Anne architectural styles.

5 School House

This school house was originally located on Tariffville Road in what is now Bloomfield. It served students in an area of Simsbury then known as Scotland. Built about 1790 on an earlier foundation and modified in 1826, the Scotland North District School served Simsbury students until 1843 when the area was annexed to the Town of Bloomfield. The building served as a district school until 1933 when it was converted into a single family home. It was acquired by the Simsbury Historical Society and moved to its present location in 1970.

6 Hendrick Cottage

The exact age of this charming, gambrel-roofed house has not been determined, but it undoubtedly dates from the 1790s or earlier. Originally located at what is now 25 West Street, Simsbury, this center-chimney building remained in the Belden family from 1813 until 1958. It was probably built, or an existing structure much modified, in 1795 when Calvin Barber was contracted by John Poisson to build a chimney and stone foundation for his new "Dwelling House" in Simsbury. Hendrick Cottage is named for Fanny Josephine Pomeroy Hendrick (1862-1962), the last family member to occupy the building.

7 Ice House

Ice houses large and small were common sights in the 1800s; they stored big blocks of ice cut from rivers or lakes. This ice house was built in 1889 for Lemuel Ellsworth (1840-1917) who lived at 740 Hopmeadow Street here in Simsbury. This ice house held more than 40 tons of ice cut from a man-made pond on East Weatogue Street every winter.

8-9 Ensign-Bickford Guard Booths

These octagonal booths or stations were used at the Ensign-Bickford manufactory site in Simsbury. Because the company handles and produces explosives, strict security and safety measures are maintained. Anyone entering the site checked in with uniformed guards. Additionally, Ensign-Bickford employees were required to deposit their cigarettes and matches until after their work shift!

CONSTRUCTED ON SITE

10 Meeting House

This reproduction meeting house was built in 1970 to serve as the Simsbury Tercentenary Celebration headquarters. The design is based on a 17th century English-style reproduction built in 1935 to celebrate the State of Connecticut Tercentenary. Our reproduction includes several windows and the door of the 1935 structure. Early New England meetinghouses were used for religious services and town meetings. The first meeting house in Simsbury was built in 1683 on Hopmeadow Street and was located near the present center gate of Simsbury Cemetery.

11 Ensign-Bickford Exhibition

The Ensign-Bickford Company is responsible for the early manufacture and widespread use of the safety fuse in America. Developed in 1831 by Cornishman William Bickford, the *Miner's Safety Fuse* was introduced to Farmington Valley mining operations in 1836. Simsbury production began in 1837. Joseph Toy joined the company in 1839 and set up his own manufactory, Toy, Bickford & Company, along Hop Brook in 1851. After Toy's death in 1887, the company added the name of his son-in-law and successor Ralph Hart Ensign. This exhibition building was constructed in 1966 with native stone from the former Belden Mansion ice house, once located on West Street, to house the donated Ensign-Bickford Collection of early safety fuse manufacturing equipment.

12 Ellsworth Visitors Center

The Ellsworth Visitors Center serves as a year-round program space for the Historical Society and greater Simsbury community. Easily accessed from the lower parking area, it houses the Research Library and Archive, Museum Shop, and rest rooms. It was constructed through the generous support of the Ensign-Bickford Foundation in 1966 and named in honor of the local family.

ADDITIONAL STRUCTURES

13 Barn Foundation Walls

This stone foundation is all that remains of the five barns that once stood on this site. Built in 1881 for Jeffery O. Phelps II (1820-1899), the main cattle barn was 50 by 60 feet. It and the other four barns also contained farm tools, carts, wagons, hay, grain and corn. A hay fire broke out in the main barn on the evening of Saturday September 12, 1896. Fortunately the entire stock was in a nearby pasture; some of the farm tools were removed from the burning buildings but nearly everything was lost. Phelps rebuilt new barns several times on the old foundation. The last building, a one-story calving barn, was later used by the town as an indoor police firing range. It was purchased and removed by the Historical Society in 1998 in order to expose the original foundation walls.

14 Bell

This bell was cast in 1810 by J. Doolittle of Hartford, CT, for the second Hopmeadow District School. The school was built in 1799 near the present Simsbury Cemetery gate, moved in 1853 and 1891, and torn down in 1976.

15 Pillory and Stocks

Many early New England towns used pillories and stocks to punish unruly citizens. There is no evidence that Simsbury used either, but this fanciful addition to the site delights school children and visitors alike. This pillory and stocks were constructed as an Eagle Scout project in 1998 by Troop 76 of Simsbury.

16 Well Cover

Now protected by a modern wood cover, this well is one of two found on the original Phelps property. It probably served farm and dairy needs. The second well is a recent discovery and not included on this map. It is located behind the Phelps Tavern near the present office door. This well probably served household and Tavern needs.