

Historic Homes: Architectural Styles and Characteristics

The Wilbraham Historical Commission hosted *Historic Homes: Architectural Styles and Characteristics* in the Brooks Room at the Wilbraham Public Library on Saturday afternoon March 21. Linda G. Levister, a Springfield educator at the Springfield High School of Science and Technology presented a program from the Puritan Influence Era in 1600 to present day house designs. Levister also provided some interesting examples of 'Colonial Speak.'

In the 18th century, toddlers wore a padded protective cap with jingle bells while learning to walk. The bells would signal the toddler's location at all times and the cap protected the child from falls. It was believed that too many falls would soften the brain and turn it to pudding- hence the name: "Pudding Cap."

"Minding your P's and Q's" comes from the early colonial tavern days when the Sealer of Weights and Measures would visit the establishment's proprietor to ensure that patrons were actually getting a Pint when they ordered a beer and that a quart measure was actually a Quart. "Putting a collar on it" meant to add an additional 2-finger measure to top off a drink.

"By Hook or Crook": This phrase is taken from early colonial times when clearing away a dead wood tree required a long- handled hook. Early settlers would remove a tree for firewood by hooking it and dragging it off the land.

The Mill River was so called because it was the site of nine mills in full production, delivering goods and textiles into our communities and providing employment for hundreds of people. The Agawam Plantation- now simply called Agawam once housed 40 families and 300 'Amerindians'-native American Indians, along and near the rich fertile riverbeds of the Connecticut River.

"Architectural styles through the ages tells us who are as a people," said Levister. The Puritans settled here from England where they were told how large the footprint of their house could be and how many windows were allowed. They continued the tradition here in New England by taxing the homestead owner for the size and number of each window and requiring that taxes be paid according to the size of the footprint of the house. Early on in their new settlements, Puritans boarded up windows to avoid paying taxes and sometimes designed the second story of their home to jut out a bit over the first story to gain a little more room, without paying extra tax, since they were only charged on the first floor footprint.

During the Early Colonial period in America (1620-1750) houses were built with thatched roofs. While this increased the likelihood of fire in the dry season, winter snow on a thatched roof provided warm insulation for a cozy dwelling. The Georgian period homes (1625-1780) were designed with strict symmetry. Spacious and comfortable, the design reflected the growing ambitions of a young America. Georgian homes were designed in square symmetrical shape with a single paneled front door at the center with a decorative crown over the door. Following British style, there were five windows across the front and paired chimneys at either end of the roof. Georgian homes are

characterized by nine or 12 windowpanes in each window sash and dentil molding along the eaves.

Federal style homes, 1690- 1800, resemble Georgian, but are more delicate and formal. Many Federal-style homes have an arched Palladian window on the second story above the front door and the front door usually has sidelights and a semicircular fanlight. Builders began to add swags, garlands, elliptical windows, and other decorative details to rectangular Georgian houses as their millwork ability increased.

Greek Revival homes were popular from 1820-1875. Architects favored the style for political reasons: the War of 1812 cast England in an unfavorable light; and public sentiment favored the Greeks in their war for independence in the 1820s. These picturesque structures are marked by "Gothic" windows with distinctive pointed arches; exposed framing timbers; and steep, vaulted roofs with cross-gables. Extravagant features include towers and verandas. Ornate wooden detailing was generously applied to gables, windows, and door trim. The influence of English romanticism and the mass production of elaborate wooden millwork after the Industrial Revolution fueled the construction of Gothic Revival homes.

by Joan Paris