

# Putnam Hill Walking Tour



A Publication of the Trust for Architectural Easements

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## Putnam Hill, Greenwich, Conn.

Listed in the National Register of Historic Places on Aug. 24, 1979, the Putnam Hill historic district is small but coherent, with just over a dozen houses and churches from the late-17th, 18th, 19th and early-20th centuries.

Greenwich began in the 1640s as a manor under the protection of the Dutch at New Amsterdam. In the 1650s, the Dutch ceded their Connecticut land holdings – including Greenwich – to the colony of New Haven. The Connecticut Legislature formally declared Greenwich an independent town in 1665.

The main thoroughfare of Putnam Hill is U.S. Route 1 – also known as East Putnam Avenue in Greenwich. Cutting through the historic district on the east-west axis, Route 1 is an historic remnant of the famous Boston Post Road that was the primary land route between New York City and Boston in the late-17th, 18th and early-19th centuries.



181 E. Putnam Ave.

Putnam Hill played a small part in the Revolutionary War. Gen. Israel Putnam (c. 1718-1790) narrowly escaped the British on Feb. 26, 1776, by leaping over the hill's steep precipice on horseback during a high-speed chase. When the redcoats declined to follow him down the slope, Putnam went on to warn nearby residents of the British presence on the hill, according to local lore.

The hill and street below it (Route 1) were named after Putnam, as was a nearby house at 243 E. Putnam Ave., where Putnam might have stayed the night before his escape. Construction on the red-shingled Putnam Cottage began around 1690. The house's central chimney and small windows are typical heat-saving characteristics of colonial New England homes.

In the 18th century, Putnam Cottage served as a tavern and meeting location for the Freemasons, as well as a one-time lunch-stop for Gen. George Washington and his officers. Today, the house is operated as an historic house museum by the Daughters of the American Revolution.



243 E. Putnam Ave.

The Trust for Architectural Easements is a leading force in the preservation of architectural heritage in the United States. The Trust protects more than 800 historic properties in Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maryland, Virginia, Illinois, and California.

The Trust promotes voluntary preservation through easement donations and education about historic preservation and architectural history. The Trust publishes the following newsletters:

Architectural Ambler  
Preservation by Prevention  
Reduce, Reuse, Rehab

To receive them by email, please visit our website at [www.architecturaltrust.org](http://www.architecturaltrust.org).

We welcome feedback and look forward to incorporating new ideas into upcoming issues. To send us comments or suggestions, please email [ambler@architecturaltrust.org](mailto:ambler@architecturaltrust.org).

After the railroad came to Greenwich in 1848, the town developed from a quiet farming village into a leafy suburb of New York City. Many of





271 E. Putnam Ave.



42 Old Church Road

Putnam Hill's historic houses were constructed during the second half of the 19th century, and they illustrate different architectural styles popular during the Victorian era.

A few houses east of Putnam Cottage is the Zittell House, at 271 E. Putnam Ave. Completed in 1869 in the French Second Empire style (characterized by the Mansard roof and semi-arched windows), the Zittell House was partially renovated about a century ago in the Colonial Revival style. The columned porch and the fan and side lights framing the entrance door date to that "modernization" effort.

To the north of the Zittell House is the Dr. Darius Mead House at 42 Old Church Road. Completed in 1797, the house was remodeled in 1840 and again in 1870. The French Second Empire-style Mansard roof belies the house's 18th-century beginnings.

Back on East Putnam Avenue and across the street from Putnam Cottage is Christ Church Greenwich, at 250 E. Putnam Ave., designed in 1909 in the English Gothic Revival style, and built with local granite blocks. The church's square, asymmetrical tower is reminiscent of late Romanesque churches in England. The two windows at the front of the nave are signed by Louis Comfort Tiffany.

Next-door, at 216 E. Putnam Ave., is the Italianate-influenced Tomes-Higgins House, constructed in 1861 to the designs of Calvert Vaux (1824-1895), a co-designer (with Frederick Law Olmsted) of New York City's Central Park. Vaux included an illustration of the house in his book "Villas and Cottages," published in 1867, calling it a "Wooden Villa with a Curved Roof."

Across the street, at 181 E. Putnam Ave., is an impressive Greek Revival house first constructed elsewhere around 1840, and moved here at some time before 1879. The house's unusual shape – a two-storied Doric portico recessed below an attic story with windows – may have come about during a remodeling project in the 1860s. Architectural historians think that the house's original roof was probably hipped.

Around the corner, at 23 Maple Ave., is the Dr. Hyde House (c.1906), an amalgamation of three different architectural styles. The stone walls and double-bay corner window with leaded glass suggest the Tudor Revival style, while the orange clay roof tiles and stucco walls are Spanish Colonial Revival elements. The stone porte-cochere – with its nearly-flat, cantilevered roof – calls to mind the contemporary Prairie Style houses of Frank Lloyd Wright.



250 E. Putnam Ave.



216 E. Putnam Ave.





23 Maple Ave.



48 Maple Ave.

The Solomon Mead House, at 48 Maple Ave., was designed as an Italianate-style villa for a wealthy real estate developer and farmer in 1858. Random-cut masonry walls with alternating beige and gray corner quoins give the home a rustic look, as do the large, slightly round-arched windows and rear observatory tower, all of which are evocative of old Italian farmhouses. The formal entranceway dates to a 1920s renovation.

At the western end of the Putnam Hill historic district is the Second Congregational Church, at 139 E. Putnam Ave. Designed in 1856 by New York architect Leopold Eidlitz (1823-1908), the church is pure Victorian Gothic, albeit watered-down by the somber gray of its granite blocks.

The church's asymmetrical design – with lofty lancet windows, mismatched towers (one pointed and one squat), and pink-and-tan-patterned slate roof – suggest the architecture of British Victorian architect A.W.N. Pugin (1812-1852), whose designs for Gothic Revival English parish churches and the British Houses of Parliament were widely published in the 19th century.

Nowadays, one needn't jump over precipices on horseback to visit Putnam Hill. From Interstate Highway 95 in Connecticut, take Exit 5 to East Putnam Avenue, and head west for two and a half miles. Look out for the red Putnam Cottage on the right, and from there, begin your exploration of Putnam Hill.

#### For more information on Putnam Hill:

The Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich: [http://www.hstg.org/component/option,com\\_frontpage/Itemid,1/](http://www.hstg.org/component/option,com_frontpage/Itemid,1/)

A brief history of Greenwich: [http://www.ctgenweb.org/county/cofairfield/pages/greenwich/greenwich\\_hstry.htm](http://www.ctgenweb.org/county/cofairfield/pages/greenwich/greenwich_hstry.htm)

Putnam's Cottage: <http://www.putnamcottage.org/>

To learn more about donating a historic preservation easement to the Trust, visit the Trust's website at [www.architecturaltrust.org](http://www.architecturaltrust.org), or contact the Trust at 888-831-2107, or at [info@architecturaltrust.org](mailto:info@architecturaltrust.org). To suggest a historic district for a future issue of the Architectural Ambler, please visit [www.architecturaltrust.org](http://www.architecturaltrust.org), or send an email to [ambler@architecturaltrust.org](mailto:ambler@architecturaltrust.org).

#### About the Editor

Laura L. Thornton is the Trust's Director of Education. A graduate of Wellesley College, Laura began working with the Trust in 2004 after receiving a Master of Architectural History from the University of Virginia. As Director of Education, she visits schools to teach about the built environment, and leads tours and workshops about architecture and historic preservation. She is also the editor of the *Columns* newsletter.

#### About the Trust

The Trust for Architectural Easements is one of the largest preservation easement holding organizations in the United States. The Trust protects more than 800 historic properties and is dedicated to preserving historic neighborhoods by raising awareness about the need for historic preservation, and the resources and programs available to aid in the preservation and protection of America's historic architecture. For more information about the Trust, the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive Program, or to meet with a local Trust representative, please call us or send an email to [info@architecturaltrust.org](mailto:info@architecturaltrust.org).



139 E. Putnam Ave.

