

Old Town Hall  
Southbury, Connecticut

*Purpose*

The purpose of this report is to present the original paint colors on the exterior of Southbury's Old Town Hall. The colors are matched to Sherwin William paints from their "Preservation Palette," a selection of colors from their c 1870 archive of America's first commercially made canned paints. That the original colors on the Old Town Hall were so well matched by the historic Sherwin Williams colors provides further confirmation of the Sherwin Williams archivist's choice of which of the old paints to re-produce for today's restoration market.

The building was used for 100 years as the Town Hall, was threatened with demolition, and is now a repository and exhibition space for historical materials associated with Southbury. As an historical museum/exhibit building, it could be painted in its original exterior colors at some point and thereby become a museum artifact itself. Exterior alterations have been few and relatively unobtrusive as the building is viewed from the road in front. (The main sash have been replaced. The side stair has been added for code compliance, but could easily be removed leaving the original elevation intact.)

For almost 100 years (1874 to 1963) the first floor of the building did indeed house the town's offices. In the 1970's work on the building was done. Sash was replaced in 1972. The intent at that time was to use the building as a museum of Southbury's history, and indeed, according to a communication received from John Dwyer, since 1963 "exhibits of local historical interest" have been on display in the Old Town Hall. At present, the Southbury Historical Society, Inc., "uses the building and its vault to house and safeguard its expanding collection--memorabilia, documents, photographs, manuscripts, art, clothing, tools, artifacts, and so forth, of lasting interest and relevance to the historical development of Western Connecticut..."

*Method*

The methodology of this paint study is standard in the field of historic paint analysis at the basic level. The building itself and historic documents (few) showing the building in photographs and other visual representations were studied. Samples were taken from all architectural features which remain from the date of construction (1873-74). The samples were brought to a small laboratory, mounted on glass slides, and examined through a Nikon SNE-10 stereozoom binocular microscope at magnification ranging from 40x to 200x. The original paint layers were revealed by use of a scalpel and then exposed to UV light for 48 hours in order to reverse the yellowing or darkening of the linseed oil base. It did not appear that these paints contained any tinting, pigments which would be bleached out by the concentrated exposure to UV light.

The historic colors were then matched to commercial paints under the microscope, using a two-armed fiber optics light source with a daylight blue filter place on the microscope objective. Small chips were cut from the commercial paint cards and held next to the area of original paint on the slide, same gloss and same size held at the same angle to the light. While such a matching procedure is not as precise as one done with a spectrophotometer, i.e., it cannot be written in a strictly numerical notation with values for each color wave length, it does provide reasonably

accurate and reliable usable information in an efficient manner. (Even with the spectrophotometric reading, some human eye must translate from a wavelength graph to a visual single color, and then to a commercial paint.)

### *Historic Photograph*

An historic photograph of the Old Town Hall, no date but clearly early, shows that the trim was darker than the clapboards. There is the strong suggestion that the trim may have been of two different colors along the gable rake. The photograph, however, has one puzzle: the sash seem to be very light or almost white. Could the photograph have been taken before the sash received their final first finish paint? Or, could the dark green found on the sash have been applied only after the white weathered thin, or even disappeared in many places?

One of the other clear indications in the photograph is that the front door had its panels picked out in a lighter color than the stiles and rails.

With no further documentary information or views of the building, the rest of the paint information came from samples taken from various areas on the building itself.

### *Sampling*

Access was provided by extension ladders, with assistance from John Dwyer. Each architectural element determined to be original to the building, based on the old photograph, on numbers of paint layers present, and on nails pulled, was examined with a 10x hand lens and a 24x field microscope. Small samples (approximately 1 square centimeter or less) were put into labeled coin envelopes and taken to the laboratory for closer examination under a large microscope. The original finish paint layer was exposed for color matching purposes.

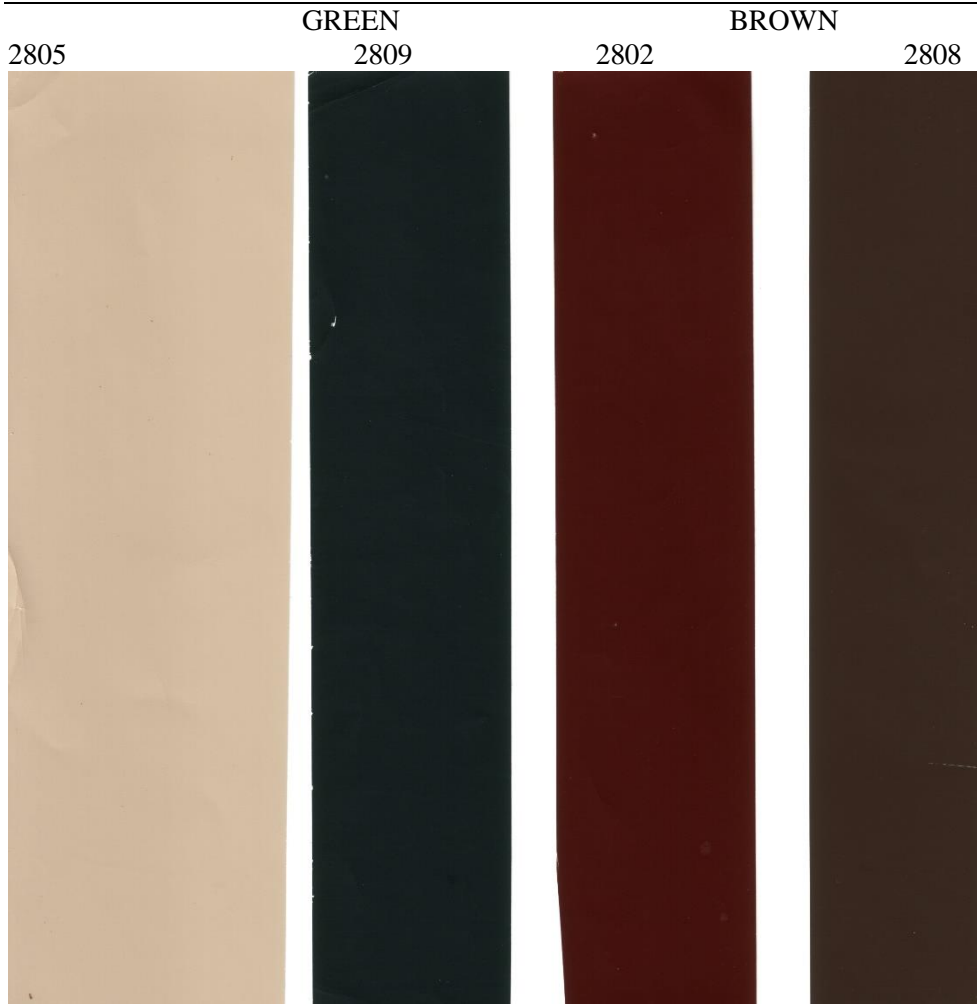
Access to the bold moulding on the raking edge of the roof gable at the front of the building was not possible, but that same moulding continues along the eaves of the building, and it was possible to climb by ladder up to the roof of the side stairway and then get good samples from sheltered locations where all layers remained in tact.

### *Color History*

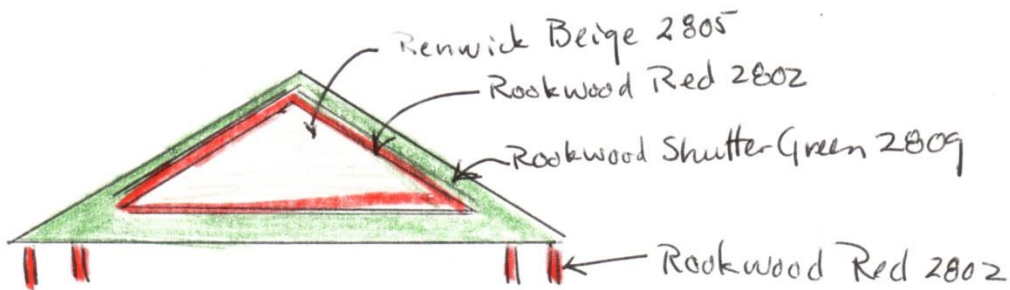
The Old Town Hall originally had clapboards painted a soft beige color with trim elements picked out in dark green and deep red and dark brown. Subsequently, the exterior color schedules were reduced to only a trim and a body color--for three different repainting jobs, bluish or greenish grays on the clapboards and off-white, ivory, or cream on the trim. The two-three paint schemes more recent appear to be exclusively white--off-whites and chalky whites. While the original palette included several different colors, placed to draw attention to such details as the small double brackets at the comers of the main front entry, later colors were limited to a body (clapboard) color and a trim (everything else) color, and finally to a single color.

The Town Hall functions ceased as of 1963, and it is not surprising that the building's most recent two paint treatments reflect the prevalent whites and offwhites. During the 1950's and 1960's, white was felt to be a "real New England" color for churches and other public buildings. Within the past twenty years, however, the Victorian palette has been rediscovered and has become popular. Because both the variety of colors and the placement of the colors greatly enhanced the architectural detail and design of Victorian buildings, original colors of that period have found favor with those who celebrate the history of their Victorian buildings. This old Town Hall has an original colorful past, suggestive of optimism and up-to-the minute stylishness.





PEDIMENT BRACKETS



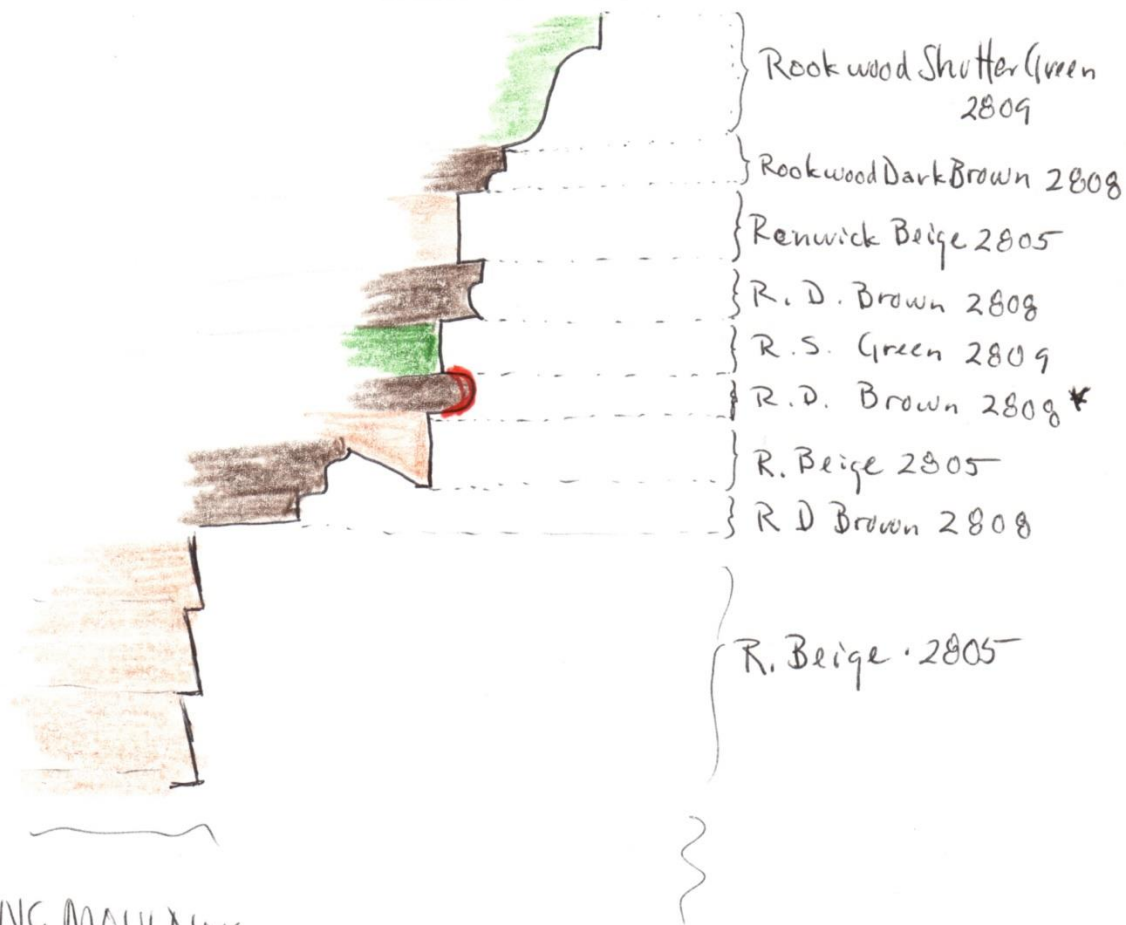
VESTIBULE

OUTER TRIM 2809 · green  
 ceiling 2805 · tan  
 walls  
 MOULDING 2809 · green

DOOR  
 (conjectural)  
 little evidence

OUTER STILES + RAILS 2802 · red  
 PANELS 2805 · tan

CORNICE  
 (at eaves)



FRONT RAKING MOULDING



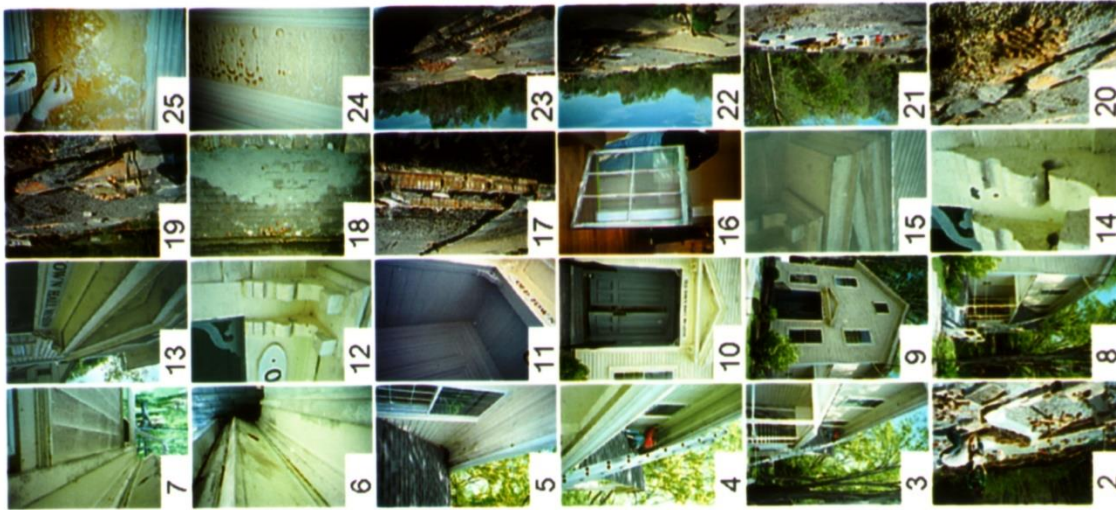
RS Green · 2809

[ \* Second coat = Rookwood Red · 2802 ]



Notes:

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Painting key, proposed 2015 by JD.

Best attempt at actual representation of report. Colors used are not accurate tint, only key representative.  
Actual on-site evidence may be observed and be used to modify exact placement and transition points.

