## The Southampton Press

August 24, 2006

## A Stroll Through Gilded Age

## By Sylvie Bigar

"Are you here for the tour?" asks the elegant gentleman. It's a gorgeous Sunday morning in August, and as parishioners assemble in front of the First Presbyterian Church in South ampton, a group gathers across the street in front of the former



Hildreth House on South Main Street. DANA SHAW

Rogers Memorial Library, ready to embark on the penultimate Historic Walking Tour of summer 2006. Led by architect William Sclight and organized by the Southampton Historical Museum, the tour is a hit, as more than 30 strollers follow Mr. Sclight as he navigates deftly through the past and the present, bringing to life Southampton's Gilded Age.

Standing proud at the core of this historical area, the old marker reads: "Jobs Lane Opened in 1664." The early settlers were already concerned about over-development, as proven in the document that set the rules for the community. But in the century that followed, America grew exponentially and so did Southampton.

Industrialization brought the railroad, and with it, the summer residents. By the early 1880s the village had become one of the most fashionable resort communities on the Eastern Seaboard. This unique historical evolution led to a unique architectural style: American architecture was born.

The original site of the Rogers Memorial Library, built by architect R. H. Robertson (1895), stands as one of the best examples of the High Victorian Queen Anne style. With its earth tones, slate roof and conical tower, it speaks of 19th Century elegance, and it's easy to picture Southamptonites with umbrellas and topcoats strolling along Jobs Lane as they bring books back to their beloved library.

Across the intersection, Mr. Sclight points out the spare all-wood Gothic Revival First Presbyterian Church, built in 1843, the third structure used for worship on this site. A witness to the frugality of the early settlers, it is the oldest Presbyterian congregation in New York State.

The Pierson House—also known as Fairfield Porter's house—at 49 South Main Street dates back to 1840 and is a fabulous example of the original Greek revival country cottage. The details of this structure tug at memory, in part because it appears in numerous paintings by its famous owner, artist Fairfield Porter. Down the road at 65

South Main Street, the tour stops at "The Rogers Daughters' House" a 1900 shingle building with Greek and Colonial elements, originally built for the daughters of Captain Albert Rogers, whose own mansion is now the Southampton Historical Museum. Mr. Sclight explains how the wrap-around porches served not only as pleasant outdoor rooms to sit in and greet the neighbors, but also brought shade to the first floor and, by convection, fresh air to the whole building: air-conditioning 19th century style.

My personal favorite house of the tour sits at 75 South Main Street: The Hildreth House, built around 1885, is a marvelous high Victorian Queen Anne structure with evidence of Stick style. It is still owned by the same family, and what a treat it was to see them leaving their cozy porch to welcome visitors. Owner Leigh Hildreth Berglund has matched the paint scheme to what it was during the Gilded Age; a palette of browns, reds, and ochre.

Mr. Berglund's stepdaughter recalls that "when they were painting the house, my father stood next to it saying: 'No, a little more red, a little more brown' until he thought it was just right."

The current owners of the brick Gaylord Thomas House, at 143 South Main Street allowed visitors inside to see the most intricate plaster tracery ceiling. The Victorian style was present in every nuance and detail and it was wonderful to add an interior to the tour's trip through time.

Architect and curious participants kept going, way past the one-hour allotted to the tour. There was so much to see and so much to learn.

"You know what's wonderful about these tours," said one history buff, "you get to see things you would never see otherwise. One hears that the Hamptons are all about new money and glamour, but in fact, we live in a historical town with roots as deep as our country's."