

## ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

### Colonial c. 1725 – 1790

There are few structures in Topsham's historic districts that date to the Colonial era. This is due, in part, to the fact that there was less development in this area compared to the southern part of the state. And, quite simply, very few structures from this era survive anywhere in Maine.

The Colonial structures that endure in Topsham are examples of a one-and-a-half story building sub-type commonly referred to as a cape. [It is worth noting that the term "Cape Cod Cape" did not come into use until the 1920s and 1930s when builders were looking back to earlier architectural styles and building forms for inspiration and popularized the cape building form.] Almost all early capes in Maine are wood frame construction with a gable roof. One of the most notable features of an early cape is the large brick center chimney.

A center chimney that is painted white with a black cap indicates one of two things: 1) an early cape that was updated during the Colonial Revival era or 2) the building may be an early twentieth century cape. Capes from the Colonial era typically did not have painted chimneys. In some regions of the country, chimneys may have been coated with plaster, but they were not painted.

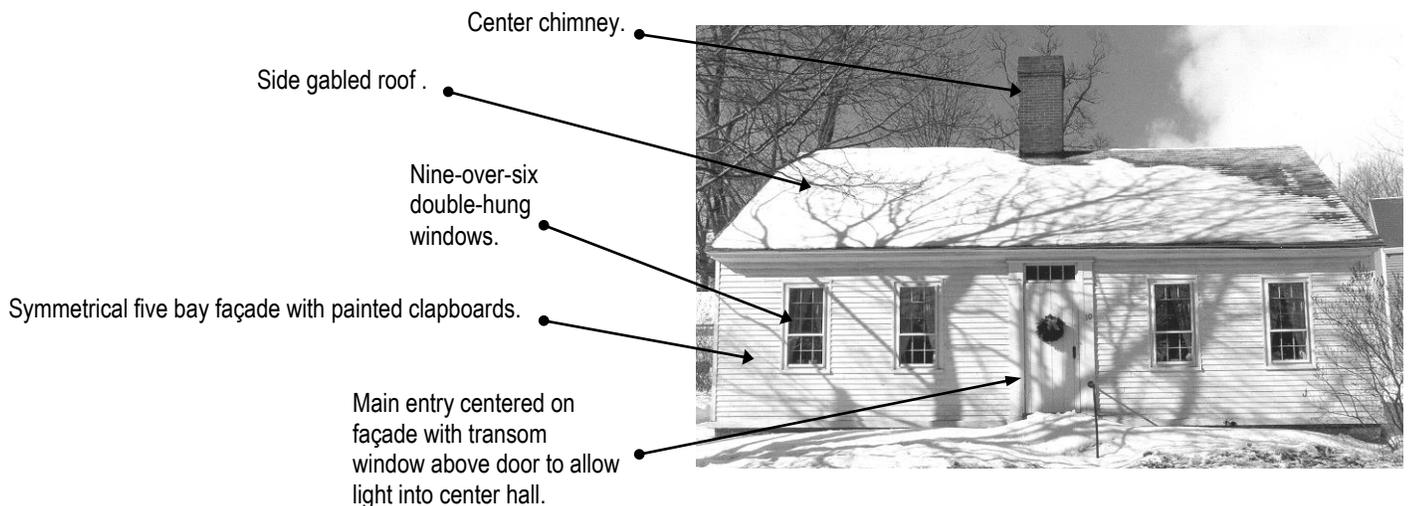
In Topsham, the predominant foundation material is granite and the exterior is clad with wood clapboards. It is not uncommon to see wood clapboards on the front elevation with wood shingles on the sides. Most capes originally had a wood shingle roof.

The primary facade is usually a symmetrical three or five-bay configuration: a door centered on the façade with windows evenly spaced on either side. The entrance sometimes has a small rectangular window above the door with several small square panes. Simple pilasters sometimes flank the door. Window openings are much smaller compared to those of later styles. Capes typically have double-hung windows with nine-over-six or eight-over-eight sash. Early double-hung sash did not have a pulley or weight system and the upper sash was fixed. The lower sash was held open at various points with a wood peg inserted into holes. On rare occasions, these early sash configurations survive. Capes often have a rear or side ell connecting the main house to a barn. Frequently, dormers have been added at a later date to provide more light and air to the second story.

Evidence suggests that the exterior of many rural Colonial houses were often unpainted while high style houses may have had contrasting colors on the trim such as orange or blue.

### Colonial: Defining Features

---



## Federal Style c. 1790 – 1820

Topsham has a remarkably intact collection of Federal style buildings. This reflects the prosperity Topsham and surrounding coastal communities were experiencing at the turn of the nineteenth century. Although some properties have been altered through the years, there are several that retain a significant portion of their original external features.

The Federal style houses in Topsham are wood frame construction with a rectangular or block form. Typically, they are two or three stories with a wood clapboard exterior, a side-gabled roof and a granite or brick foundation. In some cases the clapboards are laid flush only on the front elevation to give the impression of smooth masonry.

The arrangement of windows and doors on the front façade is balanced and symmetrical, one of the hallmarks of the Federal style. A house may have anywhere from two to five chimneys, usually an interior chimney at either end of the main block of the house. In some high-style houses, it is not unusual to see two pairs of chimneys at either end of the house.

One of the primary defining features of a Federal style house is the main entrance. The front door is usually centered on the primary façade with a semi-circular or elliptical fanlight window over it. The door is flanked by sidelights that typically have elegant lead tracery. Topsham has several examples where the fanlight over the door is a wooden fanlight.

The door is often accentuated with simple pilasters and a broken triangular pediment or a flat arch that echoes the form of the fanlight. In some houses, the entry pediment is carried forward to create an entrance portico. The portico may be rectangular or elliptical and is often supported by groupings of slender, Doric columns. This use of classical elements (columns, arches) is typical of the Federal period.

Many rural Federal style houses may have been left unpainted. Other colors used during this time period were browns, grays and natural or stone colors.



A typical Federal entry with fanlight over the door and sidelights. Note the intricate tracery work. The aluminum storm door is a twentieth century feature.



Federal entry with portico. Note the delicately fluted Doric columns.

Windows are double-hung and evenly spaced across the front façade, which is usually five bays. Window configurations include the following: six-over-nine; twelve-over-twelve; eight-over-twelve; and six-over-six. There are examples of all of these window configurations throughout Topsham's districts. Windows are an important defining characteristic of a Federal house because they establish a balanced rhythm and pattern across the façade. The overall size of windows in a Federal house is another important feature. Windows often get smaller as they go up the façade. For example, the first floor windows might be large paned nine-over-six sashes and the top floor might be a three-over-three sash. This stylistic feature was used to enhance the feeling of height of the building.

The multi-pane sash is also a key defining feature. Typically, the windows on a Federal style house have thinner muntins compared to earlier styles. Wood, louvered shutters are another prevalent feature of Federal style houses. There are several ornamental window forms that were used as decorative elements in Federal houses including semi-circular windows; Palladian windows; and three-sectioned windows.

The cornice, window and door surrounds are other areas to look for the intricate, finely proportioned and small-scale detail that is characteristic of the Federal period. Several houses in Topsham have very elaborate but delicate detailing along the cornice.

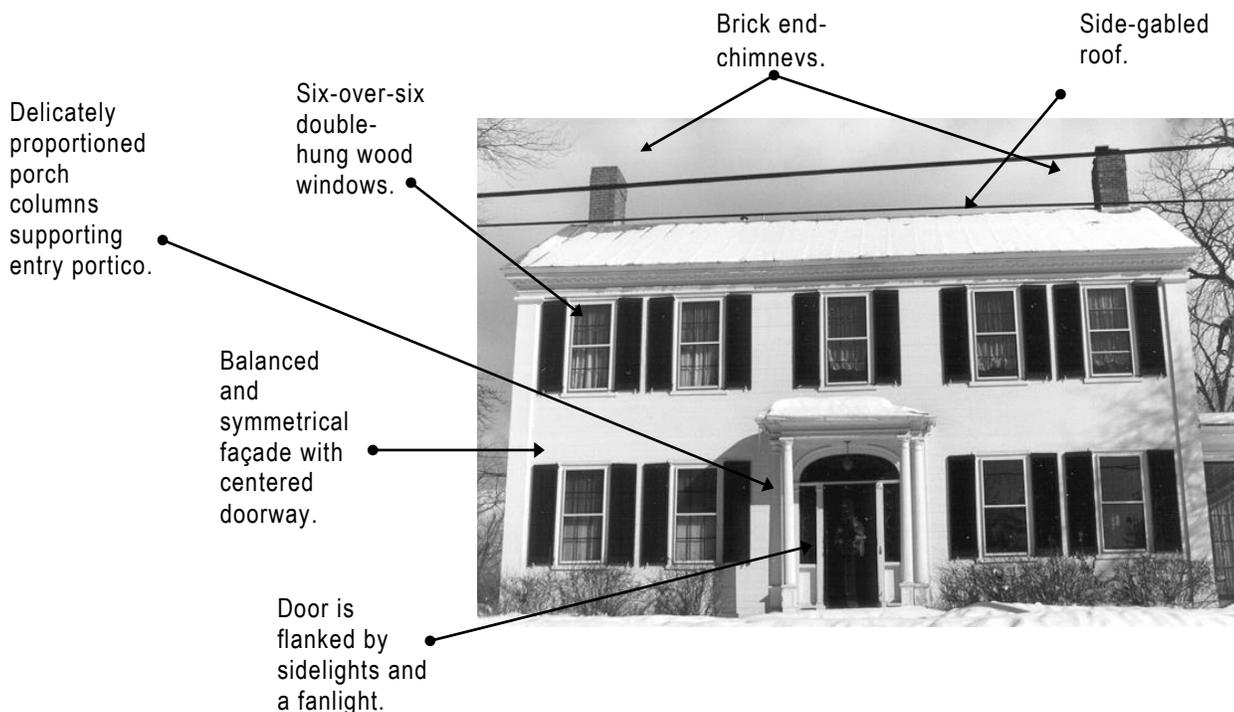


Three-part windows are often located above the main entry in a Federal style house.



Several properties in Topsham have wooden fanlights.

**Federal: Defining Features**



## Greek Revival c. 1820 – 1860

Topsham also has many superb examples of the Greek Revival style. When Maine achieved statehood in 1820, Greek Revival was achieving great popularity in the country and quickly became the predominant choice for all building types in Maine including civic and religious buildings, retail blocks, and residences – from the most modest farmhouse to the grandest mansion. The Greek Revival buildings dominated the architectural scene from 1835 – 1850. The popularity of the style wound down with the beginning of the Civil War in the 1860s. The inspiration for this style was the Grecian temple.

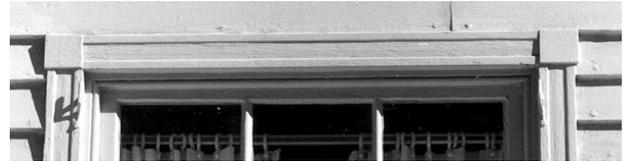


One of the many Greek Revival structures in Topsham.

The examples in Topsham are frame construction with wood clapboard exterior and a low-pitched gable roof. A great number of the houses in Topsham are oriented with the gable end facing the street. The triangular pediment in the gable end, which rests on a wide entablature, distinguishes a Greek Revival house. The corners of the building are finished with wide pilasters, or corner boards. The pilasters may be simple boards, or paneled, and may be repeated across the front façade to suggest a temple colonnade. Typically, there is an ell extending off the side or rear of the main building.

As in any building, windows are significant features. Greek Revival windows are similar to the Federal style in that they are typically wood double-hung sash with six-over-six panes. In late Greek Revival buildings, the windows may be two-over-two. Overall, Greek Revival windows are larger with bolder muntins. Larger pane sizes were possible due to technological developments in the manufacture of glass. Some Greek Revival houses have triple-hung windows particularly on the first floor in the parlor.

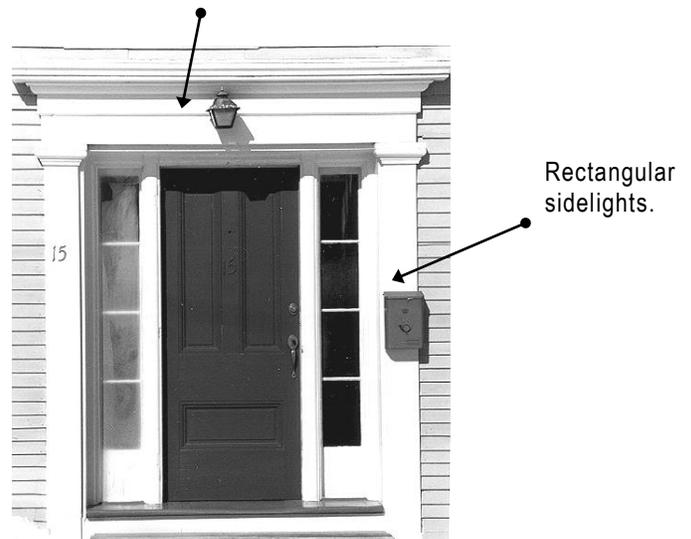
There are several houses in Topsham that retain their original triple-hung windows. Windows often have a bold rectangular lintel. There are some houses with triangular pediments over the windows which echo the door surrounds. In Topsham, there are a number of properties that have a large elliptical fanlight set in the gable end, another Greek Revival element.



The simple corner blocks and crisp lines of this window surround are characteristic of a vernacular Greek Revival house.

Entrances of Greek Revival houses typically have a bold door surround with a narrow band of rectangular windows on the top and sides of the door. There are a few examples that have a recessed entry marked with bold columns. The columns are often capped with Ionic or Doric capitals. An important difference between Federal and Greek Revival is the change in the location of the entrance, which moved from the side gable elevation to the gable end of the house. Also, a Greek Revival entrance is not always centered on the façade.

Wide entablature with simple yet bold proportions.



A typical Greek Revival entry.

Variations on the Greek Revival form are well represented in Topsham. For example, one of the properties in the National Register district has a one-story attached porch that extends across the front façade and wraps around either side. There are not many examples of this type. The cornice details, corner pilasters and triangular pediments clearly illustrate the influence of Grecian temples.

Lighter paint colors such as pale yellow, gray and stone colors remained popular during the Greek Revival period.



One of the many examples of the Greek Revival style in Topsham.

### Greek Revival: Defining Features

---



Wide cornice board along edge of gable roof.

Gable end of house faces the street.

Triangular pediment and entablature.

Paneled corner pilasters.

Six-over-six wood double-hung windows.

Rectangular sidelights flanking the doorway. Pilasters and lintel surround entrance.

## Italianate c. 1840 – 1880

There are a few houses in Topsham that have architectural elements, which suggest the Italianate influence. One of the most significant examples of the style is the original Pejeboscot Mill building in the Great Mill Island Historic District.

Generally, a typical Italianate house is symmetrical in form. Brackets were used extensively in the Italianate form particularly at the roof edge, eaves, porches, towers and windows. Often brackets are grouped in pairs along the eaves of a house.

Windows are often tall and narrow and may be grouped in pairs. Sometimes windows have round or segmented tops. Bay windows are also common. Paneled corner pilasters topped with elaborately carved brackets are also common. In some instances, wood quoins (woodwork that is cut to resemble stone at the corners of a building) are used at the corners of a building. Paint colors were often earth tones with some contrast in color on the details.



Small details like these brackets supporting this window hood are evidence of the Italianate influence.

## Italianate: Defining Features

---



Paired wooden brackets.

Wooden quoins at the corner of the building.

Brackets along the porch eaves.

Bay window.

## Queen Anne c. 1880 – 1910

Topsham has several wonderful wood frame examples of the Queen Anne style. The Queen Anne style is a direct reflection of the Industrial Revolution. Decorative elements (like spindles, brackets, ornamental scrollwork, etc.) were mass-produced, thus making these decorative elements affordable for more households. Queen Anne houses usually have a complex roofline with a dominant gable end facing the street. A hallmark of this style is the irregular exterior form punctuated by bay windows, towers and porches. Also, typical of this style is the use of various materials on the exterior (shingles, half-timbering, clapboards) in order to give texture to the exterior walls. The peak of a gable is often the location of extensive ornamentation, such as half-timbering, several different shingle patterns and spindle work. Sometimes the ornamentation is also evident in the chimney brickwork or foundation.

Queen Anne style windows are typically multiple pane-over-one double hung windows. It is common to see in the upper sash a large pane of glass surrounded by smaller panes of colored glass. Another variation is the use of a narrow transom with decorative tracery over a large single pane. It is not uncommon to see paired porch columns.

The availability of factory mixed paints after the Civil War meant that a greater variety of colors were readily available. Thus, a wide range of colors began to be used on building exteriors. Architects and paint companies published guidelines on color theory and how to use color on a building.



A combination of shingle styles is characteristic of Queen Anne style houses that are shingled. Here two different shingle patterns are used on an outbuilding: fish scale (rounded end), and coursed (square ends).

## Queen Anne: Defining Features

---



Roof projections like dormers and towers are common features on Queen Anne style houses.

Bay windows and windows with a large center pane surrounded by smaller square panes of glass (often with colored glass) are common Queen Anne features.

Two-over-two wood double-hung windows.

Decorative corner brackets on porch columns.

Attached one-story porch. Various porch configurations are possible: full width of the building, partial width and wrap around.

## Colonial Revival c. 1880 – 1935

Since the majority of Topsham's historic district represents nineteenth century architecture, there are just a few examples from the Colonial Revival era in the present districts and a few additional examples beyond the present district boundaries. During the Colonial Revival era, architectural elements from earlier styles (particularly Colonial and Federal) were integrated into new buildings. There are several building sub-types or forms within the Colonial Revival style and one particular form is evident in Topsham: the four-square.

As its name suggests, one of the hallmarks of a four-square is its overall shape and form: a square plan with facades that are balanced and symmetrical. Four-squares are typically two-stories with a hipped roof, and double-hung windows with multi-panes in the upper sash and a single pane in the lower sash. Windows are typically grouped in pairs. Rectangular bay windows and a one-story attached porch or enclosed sunroom with a flat roof are other distinctive features of a four-square. The exterior is usually clad with wooden clapboards and/or wood shingles. A white exterior with dark colored shutters was the most popular color scheme for Colonial Revival houses.



Colonial Revival houses are typically wood clapboard or shingled. In some cases, both materials are used.

### Colonial Revival: Sub-type: Four Square Defining Features

---



Attached one-story sunroom or porch.

Hipped roof.

Six-over-one double-hung wood windows. Typically grouped in pairs.

Square floor plan with symmetrical façade.

Change in exterior wall surface treatment between the first and second story. Here, the first story is clapboard and the second is shingled. Flared shingles detail the transition over wood trim, which gives the effect of a belt course.

