

Real Estate

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The property at 72 Willow St. is on the market for \$3,350,000.

Contributed photos

Colonial reflects 'American Dream' evolution

By Meg Barone

Noted author, economist and historical authority James Truslow Adams coined the term "The American Dream" in his 1931 book, "The Epic of America." He defined it as, "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement"

The current owners of the antique colonial house at 72 Willow St. in the Southport section of Fairfield have been living their American Dream within the home's attractive walls and grounds for 15 years. And appropriately so, for Adams once owned this house and wrote some of his works there.

Every room, alcove, nook and cranny of this landmark house is like a page out of a history book that spans four centuries.

According to the Historic Buildings of Connecticut website, the house was built in 1796 by Paul King Sheffield (1764-1845), who "engaged in privateering during the Revolutionary War with his father and brother in an armed vessel they equipped and sailed themselves." After the war Sheffield moved to Fairfield, married Mabel Thorp, the daughter of Capt. Walter Thorp, and became a shipmaster and ship-owner.

The Paul Sheffield House, as it is known, was the childhood home of his son Joseph Earl Sheffield (1793-1863), who became a wealthy railroad magnate and philanthropist. "Sheffield gave Yale University a

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An addition to the historic house includes the kitchen, which has a conservatory skylight and center island.



The library features a marble fireplace.



The family room.

ABOUT THIS HOUSE

TYPE: Antique Colonial, Federal Italianate style

ADDRESS: 72 Willow St.

PRICE: \$3,350,000

NUMBER OF ROOMS: 12

FEATURES: water community; easy walk to the water; Southport Village, train station and Pequot Library; restored historic house in Southport Historic District; 0.60-acre level property; corner lot; barn/two-car garage; temperature-controlled wine cellar; generator; conservatory skylight; library; large wrap-around covered porch; seven fireplaces; partially finished walk-up attic; bluestone patio; landscaped grounds; some window treatments; stone foundation; new gas heater; five bedrooms, five full and one half baths.

SCHOOLS: Mill Hill Elementary, Roger Ludlow Middle, Fairfield Ludlowe High

ASSESSMENT: \$1,680,910

TAX RATE: 24.79 mills

TAXES: \$41,070

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building and a \$100,000 endowment for its scientific department, which was renamed the Sheffield Scientific School in his honor," the website said.

His Feb. 12, 1882, obituary in the New York Times estimates his contributions to Yale College "at no less than \$250,000."

The mid-19th century saw modifications made to the Federal-style house adding Italianate features. It was in the 20th century that Adams purchased the house.

An April 12, 1934, article in a newspaper called the Times Star announced Adams' move to Southport. The current owners said Adams often wrote in the sitting room of the second-floor master bedroom suite.

The article said Adams served on the editorial council of the Yale Review with Gov. Wilbur Cross and that he "conferred with President (Franklin Delano) Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull on his observations as a resident of England."

Another website said he was appointed to the Paris Peace Conference as part of the American delegation during World War I.

The current owners have appreciated and respected the historical integrity of the house while outfitting it for the lifestyle of the 21st-century family.

They constructed an addition on the back of the house to expand the gourmet kitchen, which they gave a conservatory skylight with nautical-inspired lighting above the center island, a wet bar, wine refrigerator, high-end appliances and Costa Emeralda sea-foam, green-colored maple counters that resemble the waters of Southport Harbor just a block away. They also added a climate-controlled wine

cellar and arranged two other rooms in the basement for wine storage. Together, the three spaces provide room for at least 3,000 bottles.

The 4,377-square-foot house sits on a level parcel of just over half an acre. The fenced corner lot is attractively landscaped with perennial gardens, stone paths to a secret garden and a large bluestone terrace with a fieldstone sitting wall.

A barn houses two vehicle bays and an unfinished room upstairs that could serve as an art studio or home office.

A welcoming wide, covered veranda provides the front entrance to the house and wraps around one side. The front door is flanked by decorative wrought iron structures that cover the sidelights. Despite the age of the house the ceilings are tall, the rooms are large and the landings are wide.

The word "gracious" does not begin to describe the size of the great hall, which is large enough to serve as a formal living room in most houses today. It has paneling on the lower walls, hand-stenciled upper walls and its own fireplace — the first of seven attractive fireplaces, each with a different decorative mantel.

A Nov. 30, 1996, handwritten letter from Adams' wife Kathryn to the director of the City Art Museum of St. Louis offers detailed information about each of five mantels and one simple fireplace "made from Doylestown brick from Pennsylvania."

The seventh fireplace was added by the current owners when they enlarged the kitchen and den.

Most of the fireplaces are connected to one central chimney and they feature a special opening to sweep ash, which travels down a chute to the basement for easy disposal.

The actual living room is cavernous yet warm with



A view of the historic house at 72 Willow St., at the corner of Old South Road.

bay/bow windows, ceiling with multiple milled beams and fireplace. The current owner says being in the living room reminds him of being on a boat.

On the second floor the master bedroom suite has a large bath with two separate vanities, soaking tub, shower and a hidden linen closet. Two of the four bedrooms on this floor have fireplaces.

The walk-up attic is partially finished and contains rooms that have flexible use and three cedar closets.

For more information or to set up an appointment to see the house, contact Timothy Smith of William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty at 203-259-5944.



A stone patio behind the house.