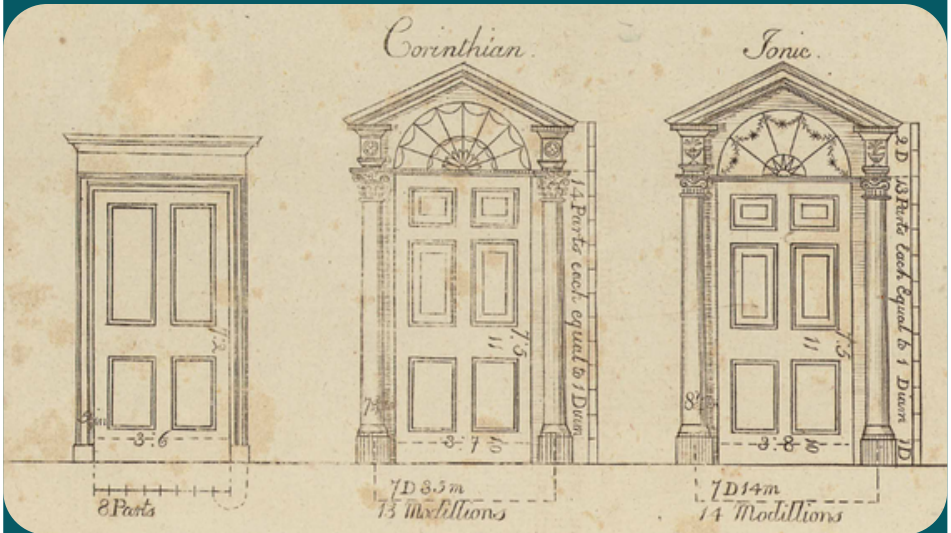


The First Mechanic of New England

**THE ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY
OF ASHER BENJAMIN**

DRAFT PROGRAM 8/2023

October 7, 2023
Phelps-Hatheway House & Garden



Connecticut
Landmarks

9:00 am	Registration & Coffee
9:30 am	<i>The Books of Asher Benjamin</i> • William Ranauro
10:15 am	<i>Sources of Inspiration: Architectural Treatises and Builder's Guides in the Era Before Benjamin</i> • Eric Gradoia
11:00 am	<i>Country Houses for a New Republic: Asher Benjamin & the Origins of American Architecture</i> • William Hosley
12:00 pm	Lunch & Tours of the Phelps-Hatheway House
1:30 pm	<i>Benjamin Before Boston</i> • Jack Quinan
2:15 pm	<i>Asher Benjamin's Boston Career: 1803 to 1845</i> • Joe Cornish
3:00 pm	<i>Constructing Race: Architecture and Racial Identity in the Atlantic World</i> • Brian Whetstone
4:00 pm	Closing Remarks

Benjamin Before Boston • Jack Quinan

In Asher Benjamin's ten-year venture from Suffield, Connecticut, to Windsor, Vermont, he designed and constructed ten buildings, most of them houses. In this presentation four of the buildings -- the Leavitt-Hovey, Coleman-Hollister, and Fullerton houses, and the Old South Meetinghouse -- will be critically examined in the light of existing archival resources, the writings by and about Benjamin, and my own experience of them, with particular attention to the consistencies of formal inspiration and certain idiosyncrasies of proportion despite the command of the orders presented in Benjamin's published books.

Asher Benjamin's Boston Career: 1803 to 1845 • Joe Cornish

Asher Benjamin arrived in Boston in 1803 when the city was experiencing a building boom in the years following the Revolutionary War. Benjamin credits Charles Bulfinch for bringing good taste in architecture to Boston through his design of many fine buildings, and cites the four double-houses he designed at 17-24 Franklin Place as the "first impulse of good taste" in this region of the country. This talk will focus on the buildings designed by Benjamin in Boston, where he owned and operated a paint and building supply store, and was elected a Boston Alder in 1823 and 1824. The evolution of Benjamin's style from the classicism of the Federal style to the Greek Revival style will be explored through the buildings he designed in Boston, and the designs illustrated in his pattern books.

Constructing Race: Architecture and Racial Identity in the Atlantic World • Brian Whetstone

Drawing from a large cache of newly discovered archival materials, this paper explores connections between racial subjectivity, Federal-style architecture, and the works of Asher Benjamin. This paper situates Phelps Farm, the nineteenth-century Hadley, Massachusetts farmstead of lawyer, merchant, and farmer Charles Porter Phelps, as a key site where ideas about race, architectural style, and labor commingled and where Phelps instrumentalized the built environment to inform his own racial subjectivity. Phelps drew from Benjamin's published patterns to design and enlarge the farmhouse; rather than solely examine the structure as an example of Benjamin's work, close consideration instead reveals that Benjamin's Federal-style designs retained purchase for Phelps because of their ability to transparently indicate racial and moral character. Focusing on the farmhouse Phelps first constructed in 1816 and elaborated through a significant 1822 addition and 1825 construction of a working ell, this paper argues that the emergence, promotion, and adoption of the Federal style as a rational embodiment of national ideals by figures like Phelps intertwined with the formation of modern ideologies of race.

The Books of Asher Benjamin • William Ranauro

Asher Benjamin is rightly remembered as the architect of elegant Federal and Greek Revival style houses, churches, and townhouses throughout New England. His many surviving buildings are a reminder of his talent as an architect in the half century following the American Revolution. Less discussed, however, is Benjamin's role as the author of architectural guidebooks. Intended primarily to aid rural builders and carpenters, Benjamin's seven published books helped insure the spread of his designs throughout New England and beyond. Perhaps the most notable result was a revolutionary church design that became the prototype for the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Asher Benjamin's designs can be found in places as far away as Ohio and Mississippi because of his work as an author of architectural guidebooks.

Sources of Inspiration: Architectural Treatise and Builder's Guides in the Era Before Benjamin • Eric Gradoia

In the century before Asher Benjamin published *The Country Builder's Assistant* (1797), architectural treatise played a significant role in the education and abilities of eighteenth century gentleman architects, builders, and artisans. This talk will explore how and why these publications were so important to those involved in the profession of design and construction, both overseas and in the colonies. Period examples of architecture and architectural elements directly inspired by these books will be looked at to illustrate how designs on paper became reality. Using select examples of architectural treatise and builder's guides available in the 18th century, the speaker will examine the subject matter contained in these books and explore the ways in which the content of these publications evolved through time, ultimately motivating the authoring of the first American pattern book.

Country Houses for a New Republic: Asher Benjamin & the Origins of American Architecture • William Hosley

After the Revolution, Connecticut's traditional joiners and mechanics advanced to the forefront in defining a distinctive new national architecture. The convergence of native building traditions, indigenous materials, and British design sources, combined with a need to create meaningful symbols appropriate to a new Republic, gave birth to architecture that was both worldly and nationally distinctive. The 250th anniversary of the birth of architect Asher Benjamin is an opportunity to take a closer look at the ways his work and legacy – together with his predecessors and contemporaries Isaac Fitch, William Sprats, John Leffingwell, Thomas Hayden, Asher Lavius Fillmore & David Hoadley – established Connecticut as an incubator of American architecture.