Adirondack Architectural Heritage (AARCH) is the regional, nonprofit historic preservation organization for the Adirondack Park. This tour is one of over fifty events AARCH is offering in our 2009 program schedule. Further information is available by contacting AARCH at 518-834-9328 or by visiting our website at www.aarch.org.

Permanent settlement in Westport by European colonists began after the end of the French and Indian War (1763). In 1764 William Gilliland was granted 2,300 acres, land including present-day Westport, which he named “Bessboro” after his daughter. Major Hezekiah Barber was the first permanent settler in Westport (1784) on land along Lake Champlain off the Camp Dudley Road. The village was originally called “Northwest Bay”, and it became a major settlement because of the availability of waterpower and its suitability as a port. In 1800 Charles Hatch and John Halstead established a commercial wharf. With the opening of the Champlain Canal in 1823 an era of growth and prosperity began based on development and export of the natural resources and products of the surrounding area. In 1876 the Delaware & Hudson railroad reached Westport. This additional transportation link contributed to the resort development of Westport. Alice Lee bought the former Halstead Tavern in 1887, and expanded it into a grand hotel called the Westport Inn. The oldest continuously operating boys camp in the country, Camp Dudley, established in 1885, relocated to Westport in 1891. In 1881 the Essex County Fairgrounds made Westport its permanent location. From 1906 to 1924 Westport was the homeport of the steamboat Ticonderoga, which traveled the lake between Plattsburgh, Burlington, and other ports.

The 1960’s were a critical period for Westport as it was for many nearby communities. The opening of the Adirondack Northway enabled even better transportation to and from Westport, contributing both to growth of seasonal homes and to decline of the village’s retail role. Many traditional economic activities, such as dairy farming and mining (in nearby Town of Moriah), went into decline. The demolition of the functionally obsolete, but beloved, Westport Inn in 1966 symbolized this critical turning point in Westport’s history. However, demonstrating the cyclical nature of things, the Westport Inn’s site has been reborn as Ballard Park. The old D & H depot now serves as an Amtrak station, home for the popular and highly regarded Depot Theater, and an art gallery. The Fairgrounds is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, its main exhibit building, Floral Hall gloriously restored, and a new wave of farmers are establishing themselves in the area – part of a new wave in agriculture based on the interest in locally grown foods, organic foods, and the concept of Community Supported Agriculture.
The United Church of Christ occupies this simple timber frame building that was built in 1837 as the home of the First Congregational and Presbyterian Society. The church originally stood across the Boquet River to the west, but during the winter of 1865-66 it was moved across the ice to its current location. As with the store down the road, this building shows the transition into the Greek Revival style. Though restrained, there are some stylistic elements present, such as the return on the cornice line, and the flat entablature and transom lights over the doors, that identify Greek Revival and Federal influence. As with many buildings in Wadhams, some late 19th century alterations have been made. In this case, the replacement windows featuring numerous small panes surrounding a larger one, indicate the Queen Anne period.

The prevalence of Greek Revival architecture in Wadhams indicates a period of prosperity during the early to mid-19th century, which led to increased population and construction. This house is one of several along Main Street that exhibit the vernacular interpretation of the style, incorporating basic elements such as the side hall plan and cornice returns on the gable. High style details that would identify the house with a professional builder, however, are missing. This indicates the house was built by local labor, most likely for middle class occupants. The porch was a later addition, and the windows are replacements.

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