

Collins Park – National Register



EXCERPT FROM THE COLLINS HOUSE NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION

Collinsville was incorporated under the general law as a village in 1850. The first president of the Board of Trustees was Daniel Dove Collins in whose house the first meeting of the Board of Trustees was held when it was located six blocks east of its present location on Lot 6 Block 1 of Collinsville Original Town (The northeast corner of Main and Center).

Daniel Dove Collins was born in Bangor, Maine. At an early age he moved to Portland, Maine, where he served as an apprentice under a building contractor. During the financial crash of 1837, he moved to Chicago. The church he attended in Chicago was in need of a building in which to conduct its services. The congregation owned a parcel of land across from what is now the downtown store of Marshall Field at State and Randolph Streets. D. D. Collins agreed to build them the church for an unspecified amount of money. When the church building was complete, the congregation did not have the money to pay Collins for his services. They offered him several adjoining lots in lieu of cash settlement. Looking around, D. D. saw nothing but low, marshy land. So he thanked them, donated his services and moved on to Collinsville. (*"The Life Story of Daniel Dove Collins,"* by Daisy Collins Biel: an unpublished manuscript)

In 1843, in Collinsville, he met and married Elizabeth M. Anderson. Shortly thereafter he built the house at Main and Center Streets where they lived until 1849. A later owner moved it to 621 West Main when business began to expand in downtown Collinsville. The exact date of the move is unknown but probably around 1892. Then it was recently moved to its present location.

In 1853, Collins became an Associate Judge in Madison County and for the rest of his life was referred to as "Judge." By 1882, he was president of the Collinsville School Board and later served as county Highway Commissioner from that office's inception until his death in 1892 at which time his son became the Commissioner.

According to Virginia and Lee McAlester in their book, "***A Field Guide to American Houses,***" a full-façade five-bay cottage is rare in Illinois. The Collin's house has round Roman Doric columns that have the requisite base, which make them Roman instead of the baseless Greek Doric. All the windows in the house were twelve pane, most have the original upper six pane construction with the lower window replaced by one pane, probably caused by slamming and breaking over this past 150 years. The door enframingent is a plain lintel entablature with a full transom light with three sidelights. The door is single and the entire surround is simple with no elaboration of the enframingent. Each of these characteristics is typical of the five bay, full façade Greek revival style.

Any examination of the Collins house's Greek revival style, however, must necessarily include the architectural development of St. Louis, Missouri, which is just a scant 10 miles distance from Collinsville. St. Louis architecture was abreast, if not ahead, of the trends on the East Coast of the United States ("***Greek Revival Architecture In America***" by Talbot Hamlin). Both the Chouteau House (1830) and the Russell House (1842) would have had their influence on D. D Collins who in a horse and buggy could have been in St. Louis proper in less than two hours. There he also would have seen the St. Louis Cathedral (1834) and the St. Louis Courthouse (1826), famous examples of Greek revival architecture and the most popular style of the 1830s and 1840s. Influential architects of the time in St. Louis who were designing in the Greek revival style were Gabriel Paul and the firm of Morton and Laveille (Hamlin). As a builder of houses, Collins surely knew their work and undoubtedly admired it since the house he built for himself is in the style, albeit simpler, than that which they were constructing in the more affluent areas of St. Louis.

The Daniel Dove Collins house is the only building of its type in Collinsville. There is an imposing Greek revival Masonic Temple, which is a two-and-one half story brick structure with full height concrete columns across its full façade. It was built in 1924 and would have had no influence on D. D. Collins and his five-bay, full-façade recessed porch, Greek revival cottage.

There is a local story relating to the construction materials used in the Collins house that has the ring of truth. In 1844 the Mississippi flooded the entirety of the Great American Bottom from Alton to Chester and all the way to the ancient bluffs of the river far to the east. An intrepid paddle wheel steamer attempted to take its Collinsville bound cargo through the flooded bottom to the Collinsville location on the bluff. The steamer ran aground on one of the Indian Mounds just west of Collinsville, and, as the waters of the flood retreated, the steamer was left stranded high and dry nine miles from the Mississippi River. After it sat for two years, the boat was dismantled and some of its timbers used in the construction of the Collins house. There is evidence that this is true: some of the beams in the house have mortises and peg holes where none belong. They are reminders of the timbers' use in some other construction, mostly likely that unfortunate steamer.