

D.D. Collins House

Chester Knitting Company

NOW YOU SEE IT - THE NEIGHBORING SITE

becomes new location of the Chester Knitting Mill . . .

Picture It:

Circa 1892, the D.D. Collins House was moved from its original location on the corner of Main and Center Streets (a/k/a today's business district where Bert's Chuck Wagon now resides) to 621 West Main Street.

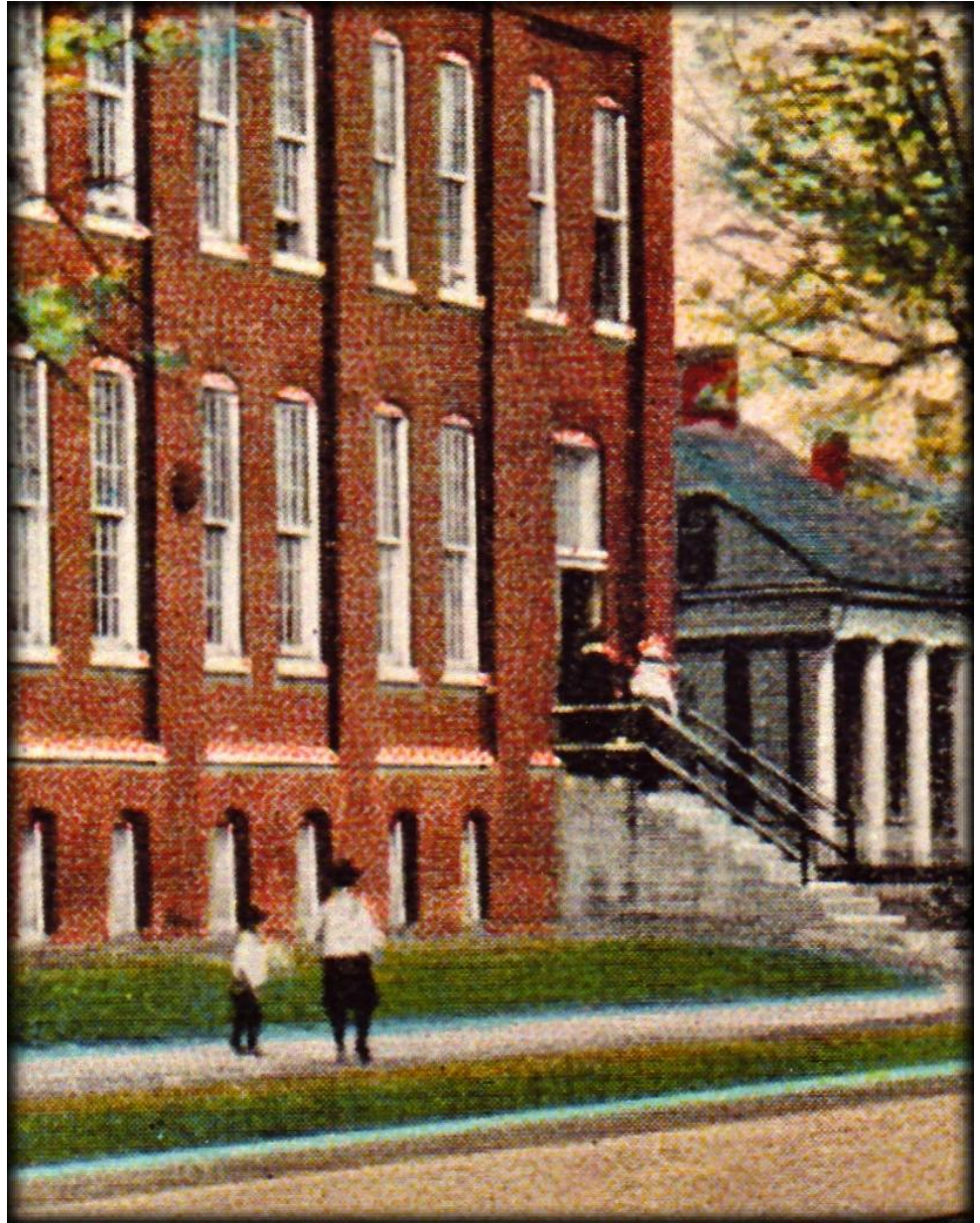
In 1911 investors were looking for a location for a new business to be known as the Chester Knitting Mill. They liked the property immediately to the west of the Collins House and arranged to purchase two lots for the construction of their building. By 1913 the construction of their building was completed and the mill was opened. Look carefully at the right side of the postcard to see the columns of the Collins House.

After some issues with how the knitting mill was conducting and managing the business, the business closed in 1923. The building was then sold to the Crown Millinery Co. That company operated for a period of time, and was then sold to Forest City Manufacturing, which sold to the Martha Manning Co., which eventually sold to Bridal Originals, and finally the building was converted into Main Street Apartments prior to being demolished.



It's interesting to look at the architectural details of the original building, which clearly shows the 12 over 12 windows with the masonry forming eyebrow arches over each window. No doubt the building could be quite hot in the summertime heat; perhaps that is why the building was built with so many windows. Look carefully to see that some of the windows appear to be open.

Also interesting to note in the photo is the clothing and hats worn by the passers-by as well as the people standing on the stoop at the entry into the building.



Now you don't...

Eventually the apartment building was in such rough shape, it was torn down; and what is seen in this photo is the rubble from the demolition.



In an effort to preserve a piece of Collinsville's history, the Collinsville Historic Preservation Commission asked that several pallets of bricks be saved; and so they were. Many of the saved bricks have been used in the landscaping at both the present location of the Collins House and at Collins Park.



Salvaged bricks from the demolition were used for landscaping around the D.D. Collins House and incorporated into the sidewalks.

Who remembers the microwave tower at the phone company?

It can be seen in the photo to the right of the second chimney. In recent years, the tower was disassembled and removed from the phone company's site on West Clay Street, but it is forever remembered in this photo.



There is one funny story regarding the tower that must be shared:

On a dark and cloudy, windy, stormy day, Bob Herr, funeral director and prior owner of Herr Funeral Homes, walked outdoors at the funeral home to watch the weather. The framework for the microwave tower was in the process of being constructed, but was not quite completed - the fittings still had not been tightened and secured; but it was in the construction phase. When Bob looked over at the tower, he noticed the tower was swaying and rocking to and fro in the fierce wind. It was obvious the tower was going to fall - the question was, how soon? Bob's good friend Pat Gauen, who worked as a reporter at the Collinsville Herald and Post Dispatch, just happened to be driving by when Bob stopped him, told him to get out of his car and grab his camera from the seat of the car - the tower was going to fall, and Pat was going to be able to capture the event because he was in the right place at the right time. Pat grabbed the camera and as quickly as he could, he started shooting. He took photos and more photos, and was capturing history in the making.

Click. Click. Click. *It was just a matter of time before the big crash.*

Click. Click. Click. *And then it happened. Click. Click. Click.*

Lo and behold, as the high winds blew the tower came tumbling down. Bob and Pat were so excited to have captured the event on film. YES! They did it. They not only watched history in the making, they would surely make front page news.

*Now here's the problem: in the 1980s, there were no cell phones - the simplicity of using a cell phone camera did not exist. Camera lenses had to be adjusted to bring things into focus; and camera lenses had to be **UN**covered in order to capture the image.*

You guessed it. Pat may have snapped photos as quickly as he could snap, but the lens remained covered. The story of the microwave tower falling did make front page news, but - fade to a black screen - not with Pat's pix.

Whether or not the boys discovered the covered lens fiasco before the tower hit the ground is unknown to this day. Those of us who know Pat and Bob are still too busy laughing at the image of the funeral director and reporter trying to capture the collapse at “just the right angle.”

The story of the day the microwave tower blew over will always be a favorite tale to share.

The history of the Chester Knitting Mill and businesses to follow was researched from Collinsville, A Pictorial History by Lucille M. Stehman.

Photo courtesy of Lois W. Metzger.