

1041 PITTSFORD-VICTOR ROAD

The prosperity of the early 19th century Genesee Country is evident in the Greek Revival farmhouse located at 1041 Pittsford-Victor Road. Built in 1822 on 150 acres of land, probably by Harskeline Collins, the house is a state of the art example of 19th century domestic architecture. As such, it was designated as a Perinton Historic Landmark in 1989.

The Collins family, formerly of Litchfield, Connecticut, moved to East Bloomfield in the late 18th century.

Cyprian Collins was a contractor who may well have worked on the Erie Canal, possibly on the Great Embankment. Land and census records indicate that he lived in East Bloomfield until his death in 1843. Although local custom ascribes the settlement of those 150 acres between Pittsford-Victor Road and Irondequoit Creek and the construction of the house to him, it seems likely that his son Harskeline built the house. The Perinton maps of 1852, 1858, and 1872 show the property belonging to an H. Collins, which could be Harskeline, his brother Hiram, or his brother Homer. All three are listed in the 1850 census for Perinton.

Harskeline Collins and his wife Martha and their four children were a farming family. Harskeline was active in the Whig party and attended the 1852 Whig national convention. The Collins family house, according to oral tradition, was a stop on the Underground Railroad, which came through Perinton on the way to Lake Ontario, Canada, and freedom. The Bushnell's Basin Cemetery has a number of Collins graves, including those of Harskeline, Martha, several of their children, and a number of other relatives.

While the first settlers in the area had built and lived in log cabins, the earliest frame houses were in the Federal or sometimes the Georgian style. By the 1820's, the new Greek Revival architectural style, deriving from the temple form of classical Greek architecture, began to appear in Western New York. The Collins house is an early and elegant example of that style. According to Stuart Bolger of the Genesee Country Museum, the house was a "forerunner of what in the quarter century to follow would develop into a recognizable regional expression." The house comprises a two-story main block, a one and one-half story wing, a one story kitchen ell, and a woodshed.

The main house has a full-return entablature, reminiscent of the Greek temple, and a front entrance with sidelights, a transom, and heavy pilasters. The paneled door and hardware are original. The details of the one and one-half story wing and the ell are consistent with the main block. All the windows are six over six with wooden louvered shutters.

The interior of the house is exceptional for its original features. The stairway and the major room divisions and openings are as they have always been, and much of the original trim remains. The early kitchen is still intact and serviceable. It features a wide fireplace and a built-in set kettle located in the space between the kitchen and the woodshed and is attached to the kitchen chimney system. The kitchen was used as a model for the restoration of the McKay House at Genesee Country Village.

Among the unusual aspects of the property are the summer kitchen and beehive oven, and several small dependency buildings, including a hip-roofed 3-hole privy and a brick smokehouse complete with hooks. There is also a bookcase in one of the upstairs rooms that opens into a back room or attic. Former owners, Mr. and Mrs. William Clutz, found evidence of pegs on the wall and bits of old wallpaper and paint which only serve to pique their curiosity about past events. The sound of rustling skirts in a back bedroom and the unmistakable smell of cigar smoke that occurs here and there add an aura of mystery (or



ghostliness) to what they describe as a wonderful and homey old house.

Since the turn of the 20th century, only four families have owned the house. The Henry and Soule families owned it until 1968; Arthur and Sue Stern owned it between 1968 and 1986, when it was purchased by the Clutz family. The house has benefited from careful preservation and loving care, and is, as Mrs. Clutz puts it, “very forgiving.” The open land, period fences, and century-old trees create a remarkable historic setting for this superb and irreplaceable example of early 19th century Greek Revival architecture.