collins, james, house

farmington

501 farmington avenue

collins, julia m.; hurley, nellie t. and prejs, florence

residence

accessibility to public: yes

style of building

queen anne

construction date

1893

material

- clapboard
- brick
- asphalt siding
- fieldstone
- board & batten
- stucco
- cobblestone
- aluminum siding
- concrete
- cut stone

structural system

- wood frame
- balloon
- load bearing masonry
- structural iron or steel

roof type

- gable
- shed
-adin

number of stories

2½

condition

- excellent
- good
- fair
- deteriorated

integrity

- on original site
- moved

related outbuildings or landscape features

- barn
- shed
- garage
- carriage house

surrounding environment

- open land
- residential

interrelationship

- commercial
- industrial
- rural

the james collins house faces north onto farmington avenue near its intersection with south road. the rural character of the area has been considerably altered by past construction on i-84 and the route 4/ farmington avenue connector. this section of the east farms district is currently undergoing substantial commercial development.
Built in 1893, the James Collins House is "L"-shaped in plan and exhibits Queen Anne-style decorative detail. The eastern gable-to-street wing features a two-bay facade with large overhanging eaves and a small square window in the gable end. The east elevation displays a small cross gable peak with a similar gable window. The two-and-one-half story western wing is oriented ridge-to-street and is enhanced by a partially enclosed wraparound porch which originally displayed a turned balustrade, turned posts, and spindlework frieze. A large, wood-framed barn on a fieldstone foundation sits to the east of the house; it has a decorative cupola.

James Collins built this house in 1893 replacing an earlier dwelling which stood on the site. In 1892 he purchased the Bernard McGee Homestead (built 1858) from the estate of Michael Long (FLR 70:318) and tore it down to make way for the present dwelling (Prentice 40-1). Born in County Cork, Ireland, Collins (1869-1933) was the son of Timothy and Nellie (Donaghue) Collins. For many years he worked as a caretaker for the Metropolitan District Water Department and operated a small farm at home. Collins was married to the former Mary Shea (1870-1912) and they raised three children: Timothy, James, Jr., and Julia. Upon Mrs. Collins death, Mrs. John Hurley and her three children came to live here to keep house for Mr. Collins. The house remains in the Collins family.

Although the original architectural features of the house have been obscured by modern alterations, it stands as one of the few remaining historic dwellings in the East Farms District. It derives added historical significance for its association with the Collins family and the area's agricultural past.

Sources:
This house is pictured at upper right on page 137 of the Farmington Book, as the residence of James Collins. James was the brother of the Timothy Collins who lived farther west on Farmington Avenue, in the house pictured on page 136. Baker and Tilden's Atlas of 1869 shows the James Collins property as "B. McGee". Barney McGee's old house here was torn down by James Collins so that he could build the present one, in about 1893. An apple orchard seems formerly to have stood on the south part of this land, extending from the former Arthur S. Baily house at 537 Farmington Avenue, to South Road.

James M. Collins, 1869-1933, son of Timothy Collins and Ellen Donahue, and his son James M. Collins, Jr. (always called Bob) following him, farmed this place up until World War II when James, Jr., was called into service. All stock was then sold, ten cows, some horses and some pigs.

The farm formerly consisted of all land east to the western edge of Professional Park, including the site of the Robert Morris factory, and north to include part of the quarry, later the Town of Farmington disposal area. Some land west of Professional Park and north of Robert Morris is still under Collins ownership.

The part of the quarry land which had been included was sold to Mr. Cook around 1913 or 1914. Mr. Cook, of the Plainville Cooks, sold out to Balf and moved to Swampscott, Massachusetts. Balf operated the quarry, shipping most of the rock to Hartford by trolley. He later sold to McGurk, and then the Town of Farmington bought it around the early 1940's, when it soon became the town disposal area. Closed now, another disposal area was opened off Meadow Road in the spring of 1972.

Besides farming, which was not done very extensively, James M. Collins, Sr., worked for the Water Department for some 40 odd years, first for the City of Hartford, then for the Metropolitan District, being in on the building of all of the West Hartford reservoirs at the east edge of Farmington. He was stationed at Reservoir No. 1 in West Hartford, and was assistant to William L. Johnson, Chief Engineer. Bob worked some 35 years for them also, first at Reservoir No. 1, but later transferred to No. 6, Avon Mountain, West Hartford, where he was caretaker from 1936 until his retirement in 1960.

The wife of James M. Collins, Sr., was Mary J. Shea, born in 1870, and she died here in 1912. The widowed Mrs. John Hurley, who had lived at 47 Main Street, rear, where her husband worked for Henry Martin Cowles, then came up here with her three children and kept house for the Collins family, her husband having died in 1911.


Nelly Theresa Hurley, who has always worked for London and Lancashire Insurance Company, altho they merged with the Royal-Globe Insurance Companies of Trinity Street in 1962, resides here with the Collins family, with whom she grew up.

September 7, 1973
OWNER'S NAME: COLLINS, JAMES

ADDRESS: 501 Farmington Avenue

DATE BUILT: 1896 FOR: James Collins, Sr.
1900-addition

ARCHITECT: F.F. Hurlburt; addition (present kitchen, etc.) by Nelson O. Keyes


REFERENCES: "Farmington, Conn., 1906" p. 137