



HISTORY of THE COLLINS COMPANY AND COLLINSVILLE

In 1826, two brothers, Samuel Watkinson Collins (age 24) and David Collins (age 21) along with their wealthy cousin, William Wells, purchased the old Humphrey gristmill along the Farmington River in South Canton with the intention to produce high-quality ground axes. The Collins Company line of products would grow over the years to include not only axes, but also machetes, hatchets adzes, brush hooks, picks, shovels, knives, swords, bayonets and plows, making them the world's leading manufacturer of edge tools.

Sam Collins adopted a paternalistic attitude toward his employees and provided low cost housing for his employees – renting one side of a duplex house to them for \$25.00 per year. After determining that most of the employees were Congregationalists, The Collins Company paid for the construction of the Collinsville Congregationalist Church, and when the church suffered a devastating fire in 1857, the Company and Sam Collins himself donated most of the money to build the new church which still stands on South Street. The Company also built a hotel, now converted to condominiums, and many retail stores and houses. In 1926, it was noted that the Company owned as many as 190 homes in Collinsville. Many of the duplexes built in 1832 for the employees and their families still stand today. Mr. Collins, a confirmed teetotaler, forbade the drinking of alcohol by his employees and within the village of Collinsville. In fact, he went so far as to purchase the old Case Tavern near the river, not only to raise the dam and pond, but also to discourage gambling and drinking among his employees.

Sam Collins was instrumental in bringing mail delivery to South Canton and in 1828, the post office was renamed Collinsville, because most of the mail was addressed to The Collins Company. In his Memorandums, Mr. Collins reflected on the naming of Collinsville, stating that it was not his suggestion and that he would have preferred “Collinsford” instead, because “it was a good Saxon name.” Sam Collins also enticed the railroad to come through the property by giving a right-of-way, donating land for a freight depot as well as \$3,000 in cash. The railroad line has recently been replaced by a walking/biking trail which connects adjoining towns as part of the Farmington River “Rails to Trails” project. The new trail runs past the old freight depot on the property, which now houses The Crown & Hammer Pub frequented by locals, as well as by antique-shoppers and exercise enthusiasts.

From 1832–1849, The Collins Company profited from the mechanical and engineering skills of Mr. Elisha King Root, who designed many of the machines and processes to shave and grind axe heads. In 1849, Colonel Sam Colt lured Mr. Root away, with a sizeable salary of \$5,000 per year, to a productive career at Colt Patent Firearms Manufacturing. Mr. Root designed the Colt Armory and went on to serve as President of the company after Sam Colt's death in 1862.

The Collins line of machetes was so popular in Central and South America that they were referred to as a “*Collins*” and 90% of the machetes sold in these countries were made by The Collins Company. The company operated several manufacturing facilities in Guatemala, Mexico, Columbia and Brazil. Collins bayonets were used during the Civil War, axes and picks and other tools made their way to the California Gold Rush, Admiral Peary brought numerous Collins products on his trek to the North Pole, and Collins tools were used almost exclusively for the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The Collins Company manufactured shovels, picks, axes and machetes for World War I and over 1 million machetes were purchased by the U.S. Military for World War II. The Canton Historical Museum has many examples of Collins tools on display. Go to www.cantonmuseum.org for more information.

In 1876, to commemorate their 50th anniversary, The Collins Company introduced the “Legitimus” logo featuring an arm with a blacksmith's hammer coming out of a crown. This symbol was stamped on many of Collins' products and labels. The Collins Company initiated legal action against manufacturers in Germany and England, when they tried to capitalize on the Collins name and sell products bearing that name. Collins products are a favorite of some tool collectors and a number of axes, machetes and swords can be found for sale on eBay.com every day. Forged snow guards of the arm/hammer/crown trademark still grace the roof of the former Collins Executive Office located on the corner of Front and Main Street.



The Collins Company not only built dams on the Farmington River but also built a large reservoir at Otis in Western Massachusetts and used the water power to manufacture their products. They placed factory buildings strategically along The Farmington River, as well as over and along canals and raceways within the Complex. In the 1860's, electric generators were installed and The Collins Company took full advantage of the existing water power and water rights to power their production process.

After 140 years, The Collins Company closed its doors in 1966, partly due to a devastating flood in 1955 and partly due to a changing technology - most notably, the chainsaw. Mann Edge Tool Company of Lewistown, Pennsylvania continues to manufacture axes and other tools under the Collins name. The Stanley Works of New Britain, Connecticut purchased the machete business in 1966 and operated the Central and South American plants until very recently.

In 1967, Thomas M. Perry, a renowned physicist and resident of Canton since 1946, purchased the former manufacturing plant, main office building and miscellaneous real estate holdings that The Collins Company retained in the area. He formed “The Collinsville Company” and moved his business, The T. M. Perry Company, into the complex. He leased space to small promising businesses by providing incubator space at reasonable rates. After Mr. Perry’s death in 1987, his wife, Barbara Perry, continued to run The Collinsville Company and to lease space to small businesses, antique retailers, artists, consultants, and light industrial users.

In June of 2002, James “Rusty” Tilney purchased the property from Mrs. Perry and formed @**COLLINSVILLE LLC** with the purpose of updating and renovating the buildings to encourage new office, retail and restaurant tenants as well as retain many of the existing tenants. Although the present economy has slowed the process, Phase I of the redevelopment will introduce much needed upgrades to the buildings while retaining its quaint historical charm. The back portion of the property will be developed separately for new condominiums along the river. The property has been rezoned to Industrial Heritage Zone, allowing a variety of uses, essentially creating “a village within a village.”

The center of Collinsville has retained its small town, turn-of-the-century appeal. The village is home to LaSalle’s Market, Yoga Center of Collinsville, Antiques on the Farmington, The Crown & Hammer Pub, Collinsville Canoe & Kayak, Francesca’s, The Canton Historical Museum, Carol & Company Jewelers, Blumen Laden, Downright Music and Art, The Village Sweet Shoppe, America the Beautiful Country Store, and a host of other business and retail establishments. The ability to walk to Canton Town Hall and the Collinsville Post Office is an added amenity to those who work and/or live in Collinsville.

The area has a very active and talented artist community, adding to the flavor of this unique area. The artists organize a Halloween Parade each year, which draws thousands of children and adults. Other artist-sponsored events are planned for the upcoming year – check out Collinsville ARTS Initiative website at: www.collinsville-arts.org for more information. The local merchants organize “Christmas in Collinsville” the second weekend of December each year, which includes horse-drawn carriage rides, a Champagne walk, luminaries, carolers, Santa Claus and a Puppet Show. www.visitcollinsville.com. Canton and Collinsville is happily anticipating the next generation of inhabitants of the former Collins Company and we hope that you will become part of its rich history! For more information about leasing opportunities in the factory call 860-693-9591.