

Greek revival house
Choate house at
232 Dennis Street, c1853

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The Choate House at 232 Dennis Street is a rare example of a single-story, square-planned Greek revival style house with a hipped roof. Built in 1853 by William Sheldon, it was sold the following year to Nathan and Louise Choate, whose decedents lived in this house for more than sixty years. Within the last fifty years, the home received an addition on its north side that allowed it to function as both a residence and as a business—first as a real estate office and then as a photography studio. The home is currently owned by Matthew and Tiffany Francisco, who use the original structure as their home and the addition as their photography studio.

Adrian is in some ways a quintessentially Greek Revival town, whose name was chosen by Sarah Deane Comstock, the wife of Addison J. Comstock, to honor the Greek-loving Roman Emperor Hadrian, whose name was often spelled in the early nineteenth century without an “H.” Comstock had purchased the land that would grow into the city of Adrian with money that he and his father had earned from the construction of the Erie Canal. He encouraged his settlement to become the center of trade by establishing a lumber and grist mill in the town and platting out a town center. One of the town’s earliest settlers was Elias Dennis, who in 1826 purchased the government land on which the Choate House would be built and for whom Dennis Street is named.

The town had grown quickly and was well established by the time the Choate House was built in 1853. Adrian's population grew quickly in the 1830's and in many buildings were put up such as mills, banks, tanneries, a distillery, hotels, and warehouses. Dr. E. Conant Winter offered dry goods at Adrian's first store, which he built in 1826 at the corner of Maumee and Winter (Lindquist, p. 4). The first jewelry store opened in 1835 (Lindquist, 9). Three religious groups were formed in the early 1830s (the Methodists 1830, Baptists 1831 and the Presbyterians in 1832), and it was the Baptists who built the first church, in 1836, which still stands on Broad Street (Lindquist, 4).

Adrian's growth in the 1830s and 1840s was largely due to its becoming a transportation hub. After 1836, the growth of Adrian was in large part due to the first railroad in the Old Northwest Territory, which linked Toledo and Adrian. The railroad carried many settlers westward and connected Adrian to the markets to the east. Many people moved to Adrian to build and maintain the railroad and to service the needs of the surrounding agricultural communities. Then, in 1848, Adrian grew even more prosperous when local businessmen constructed the Adrian and Bean Creek Plank Road, which ran northwest out of the city to the old Chicago Road (now called U.S. 12). The plank road brought "long lines of farmers taking their wagons full of grain to market in Adrian" (Lindquist, 10). Among these farmers were, apparently, the Choates, who owned more than 100 acres of land on two sides of what is today called Plank Road, which divides Rome and Dover Townships.

Greek Revival was the predominant style of architecture in America during the era in which the Choate house was built. This period spans from approximately 1825 to 1850 (Howe) or 1860 (McAlester, p. 179). Most of the surviving examples in Adrian were built between about 1840 and 1855. The style was so named because of Americans' fascination with Greek history and culture in the 1820's (Barr). Americans were recently in war with Britain in the War of 1812 and understood the meaning of independence. In the 1820s, the Greeks were fighting for their independence from Muslim Turks (Barr). The style was further popularized by the publication of Greek Revival carpenter guides and

pattern books, which began to appear in the early 1830s. According to Virginia and Lee McAlester's book, *A Field guide to American Houses*, Greek Revival style homes can be found in states that saw population growth between 1820 and 1860, including: New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Virginia, Massachusetts, Indiana, Missouri, Tennessee, Alabama, Wisconsin, Georgia, Mississippi, Michigan, Texas, Kentucky, and Louisiana (p.182).

Architectural historians generally agree that homes in the Greek Revival style are recognizable because they include forms and decorations that are reminiscent of ancient Greek temples. They are typically painted white to resemble marble, have rectilinear forms (without arches), symmetrical façades, and broad horizontal frieze boards below the eaves. Often these frieze boards are pierced by small windows (resembling "metopes" in Doric temples) that allow light and air into the attic level. These windows were often filled with panels scroll-cut into patterns resembling volutes or acanthus leaves.

Greek Revival style homes exhibit tremendous variation in form and detail. Field guides to American housing styles, including those by Lester Walker and Virginia and Lee McAlester, tend to emphasize regional variations within the style. Walker, for example, has identified a popular "Midwestern Farmhouse" style: the two-story central block house, with porticoes and pediment and one-and-one-half story wings" (111). Indeed, in Adrian the Governor Croswell House (1843), the Tabor House (1847), and the Chaloner House (1852) conform to this type. Yet, Greek Revival houses in Adrian seem to be even more various than these guides would suggest, depending on the wealth of the home owner. The fanciest of Greek Revival home in Adrian is the Kimball-Fee House (1845) which, like the Hathaway House (1851) in Blissfield, are two stories tall, rectangular and have a doorway placed symmetrically below a large pedimental portico supported by classical columns.

More modest Greek Revival style homes are one- or one-and-a-half stories tall and can be either rectangular or square in plan. Their porticoes are often scaled down and limited to decoration around the door, including rectilinear side lights and a transom window that sometimes include carvings derived from

popular pattern books. Columns on these modest homes are often left off entirely or scaled down to fit neatly around the door. Moreover, the frieze board on more modest examples often does not wrap completely around the house, but breaks along the shorter, gable end to allow the placement of larger windows on the second level. At all socio-economic levels, examples can be found that are built with either clapboard or brick.



The Choate House is a modest one-story Greek Revival home with an unusual square plan and a pyramidal hipped roof. Otherwise, its decoration is typical of homes found in Adrian. A broad, plain frieze runs under the eaves and is pierced by three, symmetrically placed windows along the façade and two along each side. The home is painted white to resemble marble. The Choate house is constructed from brick and has a simple entablature with two slender Doric columns.

I got a chance to sit down with the current owner and learn about the home that they live in. Mathew and Tiffany Francisco bought the home in 2000 from the Bovee estate because they loved the style in which it was built and loved the other historical homes the surrounded there new home. Not only were they in love with the home's exterior but also with the architectural treasures that were inside. The Francisco's love the tall ceilings and the large living room as well as the attic that had would provide them with enough space for themselves and their two young daughters. The home also has a wing on the north side that was added several years before the Francisco moved in. The wing was built as an office. Then, when Ms. Bovee occupied the home, she used it for a photography studio, which is how the Francisco's also use the space. Mathew and Tiffany are photographers, and they were delighted that they were able to run their business from their home, an arrangement that allowed them to work while continuing to raise their family.

Most of the home's current living space is on the first level. When you first enter the home, the girls' bedroom is to the left. To the right is the large living room that the Francisco fell in love with. The room has a fireplace that they would like to reopen once their girls are older. The windows in the living room are tall and allow a lot of natural light into the home. While standing in the living room, the master bedroom is to the left; it also has tall windows. To the right of the room is the family bathroom, which can only be entered from the master bedroom. Back into the living you can enter the kitchen. In the kitchen, to the left, are two doors: one leading to the attic and the other to the basement.

The attic is unfinished and as big as the main level—but without the tall ceilings. Natural light is provided through the frieze windows. The Francisco's have future plans to turn this wide open space into the two girl's bedrooms and an office. The attic's structure is in plain view and not all covered up. One of the support beams is fully visible, and from the beams (here as well as in the basement), you can tell that the home was constructed with mortises and tenons.

There is evidence in the basement that several changes to the home have been made to the home over the years. While one fireplace clean out is on the same side of the house as the living room fireplace above, another one is on the opposite wall of the basement, leading me to think that there was a fireplace in the master bedroom. There are also concrete bricks that seem to have been used to fill in what could have been an entrance to the cellar from outside—even though there is no visual evidence of such a change from the outside of the home.

The entrance to the home's addition is through a door in the kitchen that originally would have led outside. Now it leads to a small photography studio, a laundry space and a second bathroom. Since the studio was added to the home, it encloses part of the original home's brick exterior wall and two tall windows. The new construction includes two large picture windows and an entrance door, which allows customers to enter without walking through the family's living place. It is a small studio but well suited for taking portraits.

Some information about the home's history can be found at the Lenawee County Historical Museum through their collection of Sanborn Insurance Maps, the Adrian city directories, and the home's Abstract title. The earliest Sanborn Insurance Maps that I could find were dated July 1902. On page 13, the Greek Revival Choate House appears, showing where the house sits on Dennis Street in relationship with the other home and buildings around it at that time. After looking at the map and standing in front of the home, it is obvious that there have been a lot of changes to the northern end of Dennis Street in the last 100 years. Compared to then, today there are several new homes; and city hall and the firehouse both have new locations.

Adrian's city directories, like phone books, contain names and street addresses and small ads for services like shoe repair, photography, gun shops and other businesses in Adrian. In the 1865-6 Chapman City Directory, I found the name of the home's first owner, which appears as: "Choate Nathan, res 3 Dennis st" then under Nathan's name this entry appears "Choate, Wm. K. farmer, res 3 Dennis st." With those two names I looked up birth and death records and I believe that Nathan is related in some way to Wm.K. The death record from Nathan states that he passed away in 1874 in Adrian city and was "well known in Lenawee County especially by the older residents of this village." William K. Choate (also spelled Choat) died 26 March 1892, and owned more than 100 acres of farm land on two sides of Plank Road, which divides Rome and Dover Townships.

The Abstract of title had been given to the Museum by Ms. Bovee, and lists all of its previous owners. The home was built by William Sheldon in 1853 then sold to Nathan and Louise Choate in 1854. The Choate family owned the home until 1920's. The Choate's bought the home for \$2,200. The home went through several different owners, but mostly the Choate children maintained the home. The abstract names Nathan, William, Louise, and Anna Choate. One of the owners of the home was a real state agent named Roy Darnell, who owned the home with his wife until 1972, when he sold it to Arda Bovee for \$26,000. The home was not big enough for Darnell to run his business so he added the

wing that is on the right side of the home. I ran into Arda Bovee's son at the Museum and he was willing to share a little information. On the other hand, I was unable to get his name. He shared that his mother had raised her children in the country and the power company offered her money for her home. She did not want to move, but knew that the city would be a better place for her photography business. Mrs. Bovee ran her photography business from the home on Dennis Street for 26 years until the Francisco's bought the home in 2000.

This home on 232 Dennis Street is a rare example of the Greek revival style, and is still in great condition thanks to the care it has received from previous owners. The interior of the home has changed over the years and a wing has been added recently to provide its owners all the space they need. I bet that William Sheldon, the home's builder, would be happy to see that in 2004 the home that his hand built is still standing.

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