

Dr. Richard Eells

Quincy Abolitionist

When Dr. Richard Eells died on October 4, 1846, at the age of 46, "on a trip back East," he closed the chapters of a life with more than its share of triumphs and tragedies. His death occurred twenty years to the day after he married Jane Bestor, daughter of his instructor in medicine, in Simsbury, Connecticut. They were the parents of two daughters who died by the year 1834. Dr. and Mrs. Eells and their two young daughters are buried in the Hop Meadow Cemetery in Simsbury.

After locating in Quincy in 1833, Eells established his medical practice and by 1835 was in partnership with Dr. Nichols in a building advertised as "four doors east of the Quincy House" on Maine Street. He taught medical classes at Dr. Nelson's famous Mission Institute and bought and sold real estate. He became a trustee of the Congregational Church and a leading abolitionist of his day. He held important offices in local and state anti-slavery groups and is credited with helping several hundred slaves escape through the Underground Railroad.

On the night of August 21, 1842, a slave named Charley knocked at his door, dripping wet from his swim across the Mississippi. Eells rushed him and some dry clothes into his buggy and headed for the Mission Institute, a "safe house." Near 24th and Maine they were spotted by the slave owner's posse and Charley made a run for it, but was caught the next day.

Eells was arrested as Charley's wet clothes were found in the buggy. Because of Mrs. Eells' illness, the case did not come up until April 1843 before Circuit Court Judge Stephen A. Douglas, who fined him \$400 for harboring a slave. An appeal to the Illinois Supreme Court in February 1844 failed. In mid-April 1845 he went to the West Indies for his health, but subsequently returned to Quincy and only a few weeks before his death sold a lot out on Maine Street near the Mission Institute.

Finally, in December 1853 his case was appealed by his executor and famous lawyers Salmon P. Chase and William Seward to the United States Supreme Court where the case lost again. This is one of the only two cases from Quincy to have been heard by the U. S. Supreme Court.



The Future

The Friend's goal is to finish any necessary restoration, interpret the site and open it for public viewing. An historic architect is guiding our restoration work. The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency in Springfield is interested and is being kept informed.

FDREH

The Friends of the Dr. Richard Eells House was formed in May 1990 as an Illinois non-profit corporation after a series of informal committee meetings. It was recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt not-for-profit organization as of March 1992.

On May 20, 1991, the group entered into a lease with an option to buy the historic property. The property was purchased on June 18, 1992, from the Klene Trust for \$43,250.

In June 1991, the FDREH, with assistance from the Gardner Museum of Architecture and Design, launched its first fund drive with a \$150,000 goal. Thirty-five Founders responded with over that amount - each contributing from \$500 to \$10,000 plus.

Starting in 1994, the FDREH has established a restoration fund, the income from which can be used for operating costs, but the principal may be spent on restoration only. Major grants received from the CFM Foundation and the Quincy Foundation have helped produce almost \$400,000. Fund-raising is ongoing. It will take a few hundred thousand dollars to complete the restoration and furnishing.

An in-depth and professionally prepared Historic Structures Report, along with evaluations and recommendations from experts in the fields of architectural preservation and Illinois history, are guiding the organization as research continues on the Dr. Richard Eells House and its builder. Major restoration work is well under way and now at the stage of decorating and furnishing.

**Tour groups are welcome and at no charge,
all year around. For reservations, please call
(217) 222-1799**

**FDREH
P.O. Box 628, Quincy, IL 62306**