

Dr. Mason's Hospital was one of three serving Willimantic residents



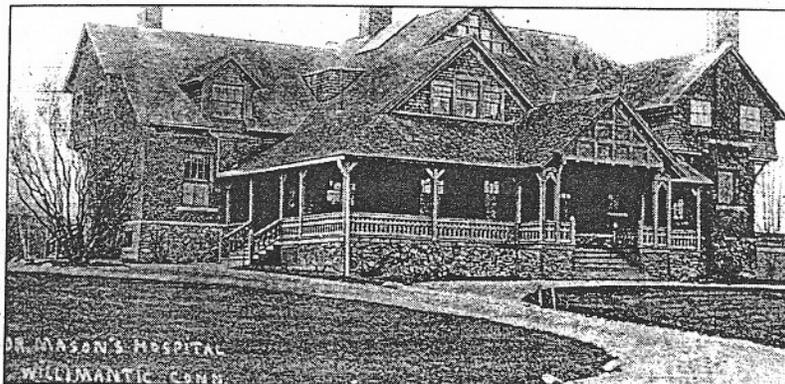
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Beardsley

Remember Dr. Mason's hospital? It was the big house which stood on the hill in the Oaks, on Fairview Avenue. A generation of Coventry and Willimantic residents were brought into the world by Dr. Louis Irving Mason (1865-1930). His father, Irving Mason, was born in Coventry, but Louis was born in Hartford on Nov. 3, 1865. His mother, Mary was also a Hartford native, born there in 1843.

Louis Mason was educated at Hartford Public High School, Columbia University and the Columbia Medical School. He practiced medicine in New York City's St. Luke's Hospital for 10 years as a surgeon and the chief of out-practice.

In 1903, he came to his father's hometown, Coventry, and practiced medicine there until 1909. His Coventry practice was highly successful, but Mason saw the need to expand, particularly after the death of Willimantic's leading medical practitioner, Thomas Morton Hills (1839-1909), a town doctor since 1866. Hills had built a hospital and residence



This photograph of Dr. Mason's Hospital was taken about 1909 before a three-story extension was added.

on North Street in 1886, which was pulled down in 1974.

Mason moved into the rambling eclectic, Elizabethan mansion in Willimantic built in 1881 by William Eliot Barrows. President of the Willimantic Linen Company's president, Barrows had built this mansion from left-over materials used in the construction of the vast Mill No. 4 (which burned down around a year ago). Barrows left Willimantic in 1883, but he used his home in Willimantic as a summer residence until his death in 1901.

Louis Mason organized surgeries in the Fairview Avenue building, and in

1911 a three-story extension was added which housed operating rooms, kitchens and convalescent rooms, transforming the old Barrows mansion into a modern hospital which, along with St. Joseph's Hospital and the Hills Hospital on North Street — now administered by Hills' daughter, Dr. Laura Heath Hills — served the growing community of Willimantic in the years before Windham Community Memorial Hospital was formed in the 1930s.

Dr. Mason was appointed as Windham's medical examiner shortly after his arrival in town. He went to Europe during World War I, where he

was commissioned as a Lieutenant-Colonel, and given charge of a field hospital.

He returned to Windham in 1920, and reopened his hospital in the Oaks. It was badly damaged by a fire in September 1924, and Mason was appointed as a surgeon at the 42-bed St. Joseph's Hospital on Jackson Street. But he continued to taking private patients at his Fairview Avenue hospital, after repairs were made to the fire-damaged building.

In September 1930, Mason was working in his laboratory and accidentally inhaled bromide fumes. He died a week later after contracting pneumonia. His funeral was considered to be one of the grandest held in Windham for many years, and was attended by physicians from across the state.

His wife, Mary Mason, continued to live in the house until her death in December 1939 at age 68. The old house was then purchased by the Spector family. In the 1950s, it served as the base for an open-air summer theater, performed by the Fairview players. The old mansion and hospital was eventually pulled down in the late 1970 — I think. Anyone know the exact year?

Tom Beardsley, a free-lance public historian, was the scholar-in-residence and co-director of the Windham Textile and History Museum from 1990 to 1995.

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