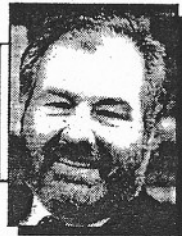


# Civic pride spurred erection of Hayden building

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I recently stated that the old Surplus Center building on Main Street was being developed by Fleet Bank. Wrong. It is, of course, being developed by the Savings Institute.

In an attempt to make good for my faux pas, the next three articles are dedicated to the Savings Institute, and the fine work the bank and its architects have done in preserving one of the most historic buildings in Willimantic.

The Hayden Block was built in 1879 by Whiting Hayden. Born at Warwick, Mass., in 1808, Hayden had a varied career before being appointed superintendent of a cotton mill in East Greenwich, R.I. in 1839. By 1843, thanks to wise land speculation in Illinois and Rhode Island, Hayden had amassed a fortune.

Later that year, James and Amos Smith of Providence, R.I., hired Hayden to manage a Willimantic cotton mill (Smithville Co.) they had purchased. Three years later, Hayden took



Whiting Hayden earned his fortune in land speculation and the operation of cotton mills.

tion in 1870 — Willimantic's first all-brick building.

In 1876, Hayden sold his holdings in over the mills on Bridge Street. He also invested in the recently established Willimantic Savings Institute, founded in 1842 by cotton mill owner, John Tracy (Windham Co.), to encourage his workers to save their money, instead of squandering it on liquor.

The bank was originally located in the building today occupied by Larry Schiller, but moved to its current loca-

the Smithville Co., and became involved in real estate and politics. He represented Windham in the state Senate. Hayden was frustrated that Willimantic, northeastern Connecticut's largest city, was not the political seat of Windham county. Windham Center held that privilege from 1727 until 1819, when an act in the Connecticut General Assembly transferred the seat to Brooklyn.

Hayden became determined that the county seat and Superior Court should return to the town of Windham, but Willimantic borough had grown so quickly that it did not possess a suitable town hall or courtroom to hold a Superior Court.

The city fathers were renting the "music room," on the second floor in the Willimantic Savings Institute's building for local court cases and town meetings.

In February 1879, Willimantic's selectmen voted to provide a new town building to hold a jail and a courthouse. Windham sent a deputation to Hartford to complain about the "great inconveniences" caused by the holding of the Superior Court in Brooklyn.

Six weeks later Whiting Hayden presented plans to the selectmen for a large brick and marble building to house shops, town offices and a court

house on the vacant lot east of the Willimantic Savings Institute's building.

Hayden offered to build it at his own expense if the town paid \$800 a year rent, on a 10-year lease, for the court and offices. This was agreed, and ground for the Hayden Block was broken in April 1879.

The town's decision to locate in Hayden's building caused much controversy.

Numerous letters appeared in the town's newspapers, the *Journal* and the *Chronicle*, for and against the new town hall — similar to the keen debate over the building of Windham's new middle school in 1994.

In June 1879, Hayden reduced the rent to \$400 a year. The town and the building's critics agreed and the delayed construction work resumed. Willimantic came to a standstill on Aug. 20, 1879, when two massive iron vaults and an immense water tank arrived at the railroad station, and were hauled up Main Street to Hayden's building.

The only complaints regarding the Hayden Block came from young boys, who could no longer view the colorful circus posters pasted on the Willimantic Savings Institute's east wall — now rapidly disappearing from sight.