

This digitized version of Tom Beardsley's article is made possible by The Willimantic Public Library. All Tom's articles and much more Willimantic history can be accessed at the library. We are grateful to the copyright owner, "The Chronicle" for permission to reproduce this article. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

## Lincolns nearly loaned their name to Willimantic

SEPT 5, 1996



Tom Beardsley

Writing in 1919, Melvin Eugene Lincoln, a successful Willimantic businessman, recalled his youth in North Windham. In the 1850s, there was an attempt to rename it "Lincolnvillle" because of the Lincolns' social and economic dominance. There were close ties between North Windham and Chaplin during his school days. Hiram Snow and Joseph Backus, Chaplin's most outspoken characters, often debated the merits of the Civil War in the North Windham schoolhouse with the Lincolns.

Melvin's father, Loren Lincoln, was born in North Windham in 1820, and worked in the village's saw, grist and fulling mills. He came to Willimantic in the 1850s and operated the grist mill on Water Street, adjacent to the Willimantic River in the area consumed in 1864 by the Willimantic Linen Company's giant Mill Number Two. In 1872, Loren opened a grocery business in the Turner Block, today the site of the Liberty Bank. He later became involved in the lucrative business of lum-

ber and coal by purchasing the businesses of Silas Loomer, George Elliot and Whiting Hayden, paving the way for his son, Melvin, who followed him to Willimantic in 1870.

Long-time residents will recall Lincoln Square in Willimantic, the area at the old junction of Union Street and Main Street. It was named for John C. Lincoln, another North Windham native, who, in 1874, organized the Lincoln furniture company in a large 4-story building at the junction. John's brother, Allen Lincoln (1817-1882), arrived in Willimantic, after business ventures in Ohio, in 1859, and operated successful grocery businesses. In the years following the Civil War, he opened up Valley, Temple and Center streets in the area known today as the major parcel.

Melvin Eugene Lincoln was born in North Windham in 1849. He started his working life as a schoolmaster in Chaplin, then moved to Willimantic, aged 20, at the time the borough was developing into the major industrial, transport and urban center of eastern Connecticut. He worked in the retail grocery business. In 1873, thanks to his father's investments, he became involved in the lumber and coal trade. Both commodities were in demand during Willimantic's building and industrial boom of the 1870s and 1880s.

In 1882, M.E. Lincoln went into partnership with Charles Boss. The Lincoln and Boss lumber and coal company dominated the city's economy until the late 1920s. Its chief rival was the Hyde Kingsley coal and lumber company of the 1880s, which became the G.K. Nason lumber and coal company of the 1890s, and since the early 1900s, the Willimantic lumber and coal company.

The Lincoln and Boss yard occupied half the block bounded by Meadow Street to the south, Valley Street to the north, Bank Street to the west, and North Street to the east. The lumber sheds were located on the site occupied today by the Willimantic Food Coop, and adjacent to the old Willimantic Journal building. The coal bins were loaded from Bank Street. The company also had a large yard, adjacent to the Willimantic railroad depot. The yard's lumber sheds were only recently demolished, and could be clearly seen when crossing the footbridge. This yard was supervised by Melvin's father, Loren, until shortly before his death in 1905 at age 85.

The business success of the Lincoln and Boss company, enabled Melvin Lincoln to become involved in numerous community-benefiting movements.