

November 29, 1997

## 74 Windham Street. Part One

The Santucci house at 74 Windham Street can be seen in this interesting view from June 1905. The Willimantic Colts are playing Manchester on Windham field. Note the Normal School building. The Santucci house is located just to the left of the grandstand. This photograph determined that the house was built before 1907.



Willimantic's hill district boasts many fine houses. Mostly built between 1870 and 1920 by the city's social and economic elite, each of these fine houses has an interesting story to tell. The house which stands at the junction of Valley Street and Windham Street, number 74 Windham Street, has a rich history. It is currently occupied by Leo and Teri Santucci, who

believed that their fine house was built in 1907. But a photograph of a June, 1905 baseball game between Willimantic and Manchester on Windham Field (Memorial Park) clearly shows Number 74 Windham Street behind the grandstand. Further investigations revealed that the house was built in 1894. This is the first of a four part series which will examine the interesting history of a Willimantic house, number 74 Windham Street.

In June, 1892, the selectmen voted to extend Windham Street northwards from Valley, thus opening up a number of desirable new lots opposite the new Willimantic Normal School. On April 13, 1894, a Mrs. Mary B. Clark purchased one of these building lot from Hugh Clark Murray, the founder and proprietor of the Boston Store, better known today as Hurleys. The following month, the Willimantic Chronicle reported that Mrs. Clark had "bought a building lot at the corner of Valley and Windham Streets, and contracted with Jeremiah O'Sullivan to erect a dwelling house thereon." O'Sullivan was a well known builder in town, who would soon be involved in building the new town hall. On August 17, 1894, the Willimantic Chronicle reported that "Michael Sullivan is laying a very fine substantial granite wall around the fine new home of Mrs. Clark at the corner of Valley and Windham Streets with stone furnished by the W. Y. Flint Granite Company of Munson." But who was Mary B. Clark? It was unusual in those days for a woman to have the financial capacity to build a new house in one of the most desirable parts of the growing city. Investigations in probate records, census reports and property deeds by local genealogist and researcher, Tony Clark (no relation), has uncovered somewhat of a Victorian melodrama.

Mrs. Mary Bidwell Clark was a member of prominent local families, the Bidwells and Winchesters. Mary Bidwell Winchester was born in Coventry, Connecticut in 1844, the daughter of Loring Winchester (1799-1886) and Amelia (Bidwell) Winchester (1810-

1886). Loring Winchester's younger brother, Harvey Winchester (1801-1884) was a founder of the Smith and Winchester Company in South Windham. The Winchesters were a leading farming family in Canterbury shortly after the Revolution. Loring received "a very good education" in Canterbury, and later worked as a dealer and trader in the West. He returned to Connecticut and was employed in his brother's manufactory in South Windham as a machinist.

The Smith and Winchester Company of South Windham was formed in 1837 after the collapse of the Spafford and Phelps Company. George Spafford and James Phelps were American pioneers in the mechanical production of paper manufacturing. They adapted and modified an English paper making machine called a Foudrinier, and built a manufactory four miles south of Willimantic in 1830, powered by the waters of the Pigeon Swamp brook. This factory led to the development of South Windham village. Charles Smith and Harvey Winchester, (Loring's younger brother) took over the operation, and South Windham became the center of newsprint manufacture in New England. Smith & Winchester paper was also used by the Federal treasury for U. S. banknotes. The Company also developed sophisticated paper cutting machines, and machines for manufacturing all types of paper bags. They continued operating in South Windham until the early 1970s. The factory buildings, and the private residences of Guilford Smith (Charles' son) and Harvey Winchester, still dominate the village of South Windham.

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