

June 13, 1998

### **Eleazer McCall Cushman (1819-1892) (Part Two of Two)**

Shortly after his return to Connecticut, Cushman was elected clerk and treasurer of the borough of Willimantic. This was probably in the recognition of the fact of his outstanding public service record in Washington DC, where he had helped to organize that city's Congregational Church and Howard University, as well as his work in the Federal Treasury Department. For many years Cushman, who was better known locally as McCall Cushman, lived in rooms in the old National Hotel, which stood on Main Street at the location of the Nathan Hale Hotel. He also worked as the town librarian, and took charge of his brother's Hartford-based furniture business, the Boston Furniture Company on Asylum Street. Cushman commuted there by rail each day from Willimantic. During this period McCall Cushman became involved in one of Connecticut's most notorious legal cases of the 19th century.

E. M. Cushman had managed the legal and financial affairs of Mrs. Eunice Heap, the widow of George Heap, a Willimantic merchant tailor. Mrs. Heap died and left Cushman her whole estate, worth around \$27,000 -- an enormous sum in 1889. Mrs. Heap's nephews and nieces contested the will on the grounds of their aunt's mental incapacity, and because of Cushman's undue influence. The first trial sustained the will, but an appeal to the State Supreme Court overturned the result. In the second trial the jury could not reach an agreement, so a third trial was necessary. But before the end of that trial, an agreement was reached where Cushman settled for \$12,000 and the Richmonds for \$15,000. The bitter trials took a terrible toll on Cushman's health. A few weeks before Eleazer McCall Cushman's death, the writer of his obituary in the Willimantic Journal had paid him a visit. "He had been looking over a collection of personal manuscript, relating to his career, when he remarked, 'I do not suppose these things are of any use to anyone but myself, but they may be useful to you, afterwards,' evidently having in mind that that he was breaking down and that he might soon be the occasion for an obituary like this."

Cushman's funeral took place in the Willimantic Congregational church on a freezing cold January morning in 1892, in the middle of a snowstorm, so few attended the service. Cushman's son, Frederick Demmon Cushman, a train dispatcher on New York City's elevated railroads, was one of the few mourners. Prayer was by the Rev. S. R. Free, and the reading of scripture by Rev. C.A. Dinsmore, followed by brief addresses by both clergymen. Mr. Dinsmore reviewed Cushman's life from the standpoint of character and usefulness. "He had been upright and useful, his central thought in life was the imminence of God. He was modest and unassuming, yet he had achieved much and his life was a success."

The interment was in Willimantic cemetery, the bearers being J. W. Webb, J. G. Martin, C. M. Palmer, C. E. Little, R. J. Truscott, Huber Clark, and S. W. Varney. Shortly after his death, Dr. Thomas Morton Hills, received a letter from the Rev. S. M. Newman, pastor

of Washington DC's Congregational church. Newman wrote that special mention of Mr. Cushman's death was made in the church's prayer meeting, and that many members remembered him with interest as connected with the early days of the organization.

Cushman's life, and his connections to wider developments in American history represents yet another example of the historically important individuals who originate from this section of Connecticut.