

June 20, 1998

## Park Springs Has Enjoyed a Long and Unique History (Part One of Three)

### Park Springs.



From the mid nineteenth century onwards, the plot of land on the western side of upper Jackson Street, at the border with Mansfield, was a small farm and market garden owned by Calvin Robinson. Its fertility derived from the fact that this area was constantly watered by the numerous springs on Chestnut Hill, which fed into a small pond, and then ran into the Natchaug River.

Albert S. Whittemore (1834-91) purchased the Robinson farm in 1869, to provide fruit and vegetables for his catering and restaurant businesses. Whittemore was the owner of the Brainard House Hotel, Willimantic's oldest and largest hostelry. It was built in the early 1850s to take advantage of Willimantic's emerging status as an important New England railroad town, and stood on the corner of Main and Church Street. This ramshackle wooden structure was demolished in 1892 to make way for the H. C. Murray building, which now houses the Hurley's menswear store. The Whittemore family arrived in Willimantic from Thompson, Connecticut, when Albert's father, David Whittemore (1808-94) came to work in Willimantic's textile mills. Albert Whittemore became a borough burgess, and was also a real estate dealer. His obituary described him as a very successful businessman who left a very "handsome estate." Just before his death, Whittemore sold the 30-acre Jackson Street farm to Julius Pinney and James Griffin Martin. They were active in local government, and were well aware of Willimantic's growth potential. Julius Pinney arrived in Willimantic in 1885 to take over as manager of the Willimantic Linen Company's store -- which today houses the Windham Textile and History Museum. He had previously managed the Cheney Company's store in nearby Manchester. Pinney was the eastern Connecticut agent for the Welsbach Incandescent Gas Lamps -- a popular form of domestic lighting. Martin (1832-1906) was from an old Chaplin family, and upon retiring from his farm there moved to Willimantic and took up a political career, representing Windham in the legislature, and becoming a Willimantic borough burgess.

Pinney and Martin organized the Whittemore Park Housing Development, and laid out several streets and avenues upon 22 acres of the land purchased from Albert Whittemore. However, not all of the proposed thoroughfares were built, except for Ashland Street, Anthony Street, Whittemore Street and a new northwest section of North Street, providing Willimantic with one of its first suburbs. The partners donated about eight acres of the old Whittemore farm to the city of Willimantic as a park, if it

maintained the "watering tub and pipe on Jackson Street." Willimantic's well-known nineteenth century medical practitioner, Dr. Thomas Morton Hills personally took up that job. He was passionate about the purity of drinking water. As a boy, Frank Ereshena often stopped at the watering tub and spring to refresh his horse on his from Mansfield, to sell fruit and vegetables in Willimantic, grown on his father's Mansfield farm.

In 1898 the Willimantic aldermen agreed to spend \$200 a year for five years to develop Whittemore, and to lay and maintain a 340 foot long, 50 foot wide road from Jackson street to the Whittemore Park housing development. That's why Willimantic today has its very own "Park Avenue" which connects Whittemore Road to Jackson Street. Older residents still refer to Whittemore Park, but it was more commonly known as Park Springs.

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