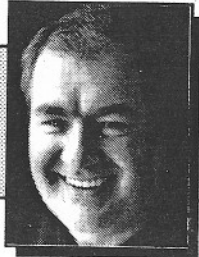


History

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Former school site now provides parking



Tom
Beardsley

Sixth in a series

After the opening of the new trade school, the city fathers had to decide what to do with the old facility on Bank Street.

There were suggestions in the early 1960s that the 19th-century silk mill be used to house the new circuit court. The town's Veteran's and Patriotic societies were particularly keen on this, because the city intended to house the circuit court in the GAR rooms in city hall.

Republican committeemen suggested that the city offices be moved to the old trade school building, and the circuit court could be placed in the vacant offices. But the Democrats countered that the old mill would be too expensive to repair and convert, and it would be too inconvenient for all if the town and city offices were separated.

The Willimantic Chamber of Commerce appointed a five-man lawyer committee to seek suitable locations for the then

new circuit court. The mill was subsequently demolished in the late 1960s, and the location acts as a convenient parking lot for downtown.

Windham Tech's director John Clark was planning for further expansion in the school's programs and activities in the early 1960s. He retired in 1962, but laid the groundwork to expand academic, cultural and athletic programs. It was Clark's successors, John Valk (1962-64) and Alfred Dorosz (1964-75) who oversaw the expansion. A quick look at the school's 1962-63 handbook reveals how times have changed. Students had to follow a conservative dress code — shirts had to be tucked in at all times. Pants had to be cleaned and pressed, shoes cleaned and polished, student clean shaven with sideburns no lower than eye level, with hair cut and combed in a "conventional manner." During the 1960s, these clean shaven students could become involved in a series of new programs as the school expanded, including auto body repair, tool and die and dental assisting.

In 1963, the school developed new athletic facilities, and in February 1964 the state board of education approved plans for a \$631,400 addition to the school's buildings, and the



The past directors of the trade school in Windham posed with the then directors in this 1975 photo. Back row, from left, Lewis Randall, assistant director, and Felix Grzych, director. Front row, John Valk, director from 1962-64, J.D. Clark, director from 1946 to 1962 and Alfred Dorosz, director from 1964-75.

funds were subsequently released by the State Bonding Commission for main wing and west wing additions. In February 1969 the state allocated a further \$746,000 to expand the school's cafeteria, gymnasium, auto shop and lecture hall on the west wing. Also included was a major appliance repair shop. The latest additions were completed by fall 1973.

Windham Tech's skilled students have been involved in many community projects over the years. In 1981, they

worked on the renovation of Perception House, the drug and alcohol program facility located on Valley Street. Brand Rex donated the wire, and Windham Tech students, under the supervision of Ben Peters, rewired the building and installed smoke detectors, fire alarms, emergency lighting. Of these numerous projects conducted over the years, the Windham Regional Vocational-Technical School's Wurlitzer organ program is one of the most interesting.

Ell Parizeau, an instructor at the school, died in October 1965. His family requested that instead of flowers, donations be sent to the school to purchase an organ. This instituted an organ fund in 1969.

To be continued

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