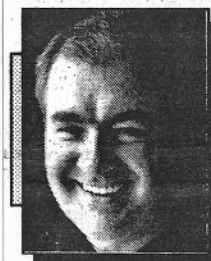


Feb. 27, 1999

History

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Circle magazine sang Willi's praise



Tom Beardsley

the impact of World War II on the community. The war had brought "new faces, new industries and new problems." The 1945 president of the local Chamber of Commerce, Albert Smith, told Rolley that, "our hats are off to the past, but our coats are off to the future."

Smith pointed to the city's facilities, all ripe for expansion, a modern hotel, hospitals and schools, good roads and efficient bus and train service in all directions, plus one of the best airports in New England. He did not forget Willimantic's Grade A recreational facilities, clean drinking water, and plans for a larger teacher's college, a new high school gym, new homes, and vacant factory space waiting to be filled by returning veterans and displaced war workers.

Mayor Russell Hinman was the next to be interviewed. Hinman explained that, "Not since the turn-of-the-century has Willimantic's fortune seemed so fraught with hope for economic expansion through local educational influences and industrial development."

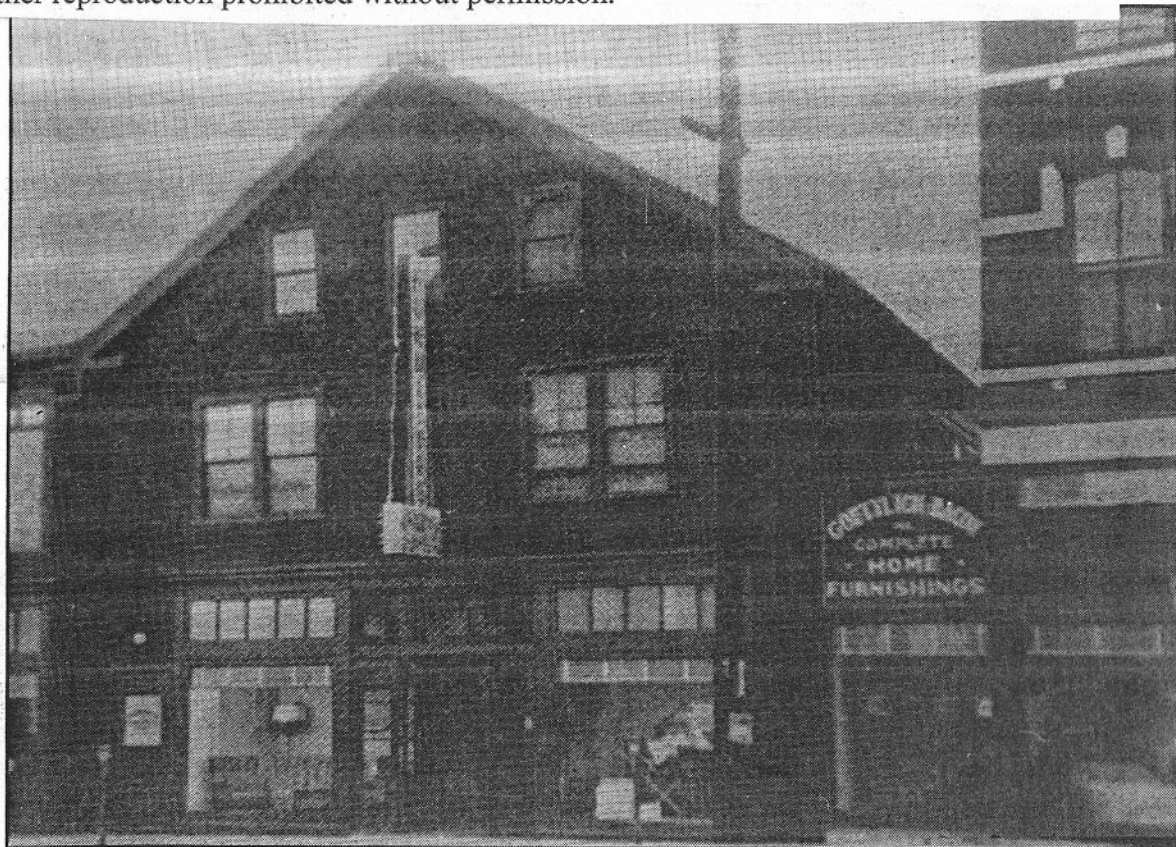
Hinman claimed that Willimantic would prosper by the continuing expansion of the University of Connecticut. Also Windham Airport was to be expanded to 280 acres, containing three 150-foot-wide run-

William Rolley, a writer for the magazine Connecticut Circle, visited Willimantic in 1945 and wrote an anchor article on the history of the city, for the December issue. It featured the people and industries of the expanding, and booming postwar Connecticut city of Willimantic.

Rolley asserted that no towering personalities had ever been spawned by the city, because the community's leading men had always been the agents for the city's various manufacturing corporations. But, "Willimantic did not have a monotonous business and social life as one might think, because real democracy, intense, earnest and intelligent is characteristic of this flourishing valley."

This interesting view of "bland" Willimantic is followed by the assertion that the city was the educational center of eastern Connecticut, because of its State Normal School and the trade school.

The author commented on



Contributed photo

The Goettlich-Bacon Furniture Co. was demolished in Willimantic's 1974 redevelopment.

ways, each 10,000 feet in length. Willimantic's police were now all supplied with modern, two-way radios. Russell Hinman was also proud of Willimantic's "beautiful, modern Windham Community Hospital, lovely churches, up-to-date YMCA, three theaters, its numerous restaurants and its famous hotel." A walk around the center of town will impress on anyone the progressiveness of the local merchants.

Rolley concluded his piece on the history and current state of Willimantic, by stating that it was a city, "surrounded by a green and verdant valley, surrounded by pleasant, wooded countryside, and within easy reach of two fine lakes, Lake Wangumbaug (Coventry) and Lake Columbia."

The author also pointed out that Willimantic's newly formed Municipal Recreation commission had mapped out a year-long program for, "two su-

pervised playgrounds, two charming swimming pools, one deep, one shallow, outdoor basketball courts." Also, in 1945, the Willimantic County Club, a semi-public organization, offered an attractive well-tended golf course as well as tennis courts.

Rolley closed his article by commenting upon the friendliness and neighborliness of the locals. "Willimantic folk are easy to meet and pleasant to know."