

History

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Take a tour, learn the history of 196 Church St.



Tom
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During the weekend of May 15-16, the Chamber of Commerce Inc., the Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association and the Windham Textile and History Museum are sponsoring the Victorian Willimantic home tour and symposium.

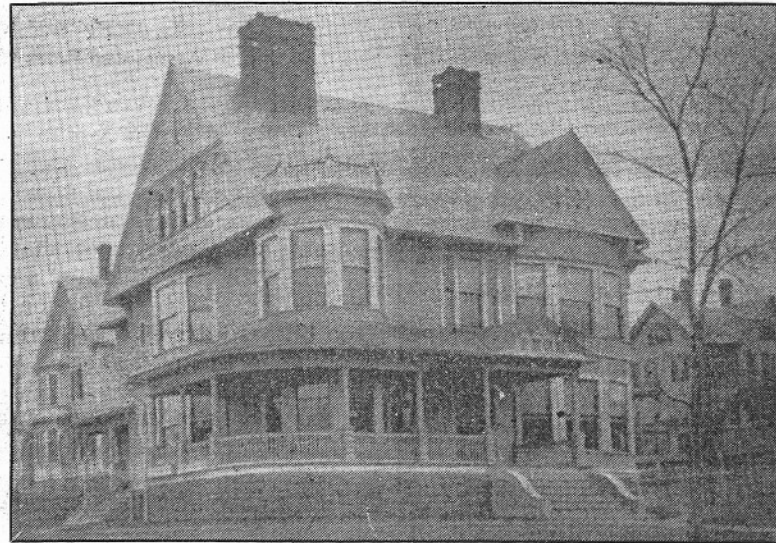
From 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. on both days, 10 Willimantic hill district houses are opening their doors for visitors. To whet the appetite we'll be looking at the history of five of those houses, starting today with 196 Church St.

The striking Queen Anne-style structure located at 196 Church St. was built in 1891 for a local drugstore owner. Frank Milton Wilson was born in Mansfield in 1849 of "good old New England stock." His Mansfield antecedents had included the Metcalfs, Jewetts and Badgers. Wilson's father, Milton, was descended from a Scottish family credited with establishing the art of paper manufacturing in the early American Republic.

After attending schools in Mansfield and Coventry, Wil-

son entered Rockville High School in 1863. After graduation he started work as a clerk in a Rockville drug store. Frank Wilson arrived in Willimantic in 1868 to take a position in Dr. Fred Roger's drugstore. In 1878 Wilson formed a partnership with John L. Leonard and purchased Willimantic's oldest drugstore from W.C. Fuller, established in 1829. In 1884, Wilson hired 21-year-old William Peter Jordan as a clerk. After Leonard's retirement in 1890, Jordan became a partner. In 1898, W.P. Jordan and his brother, Frank Dwight Jordan, formed the well-known hardware and sporting goods store business known to generations in Willimantic as Jordan brothers. Wilson's Main Street drugstore manufactured its own extracts, essences and pharmaceutical preparations, and also sold "toilet, nursery and sick room articles."

In 1886, Wilson served as president of the Connecticut Pharmaceutical Association, and became widely known for his extensive civic activities in Willimantic. He was chairman of the Windham school board, vice president of the Willimantic Building and Loan Association and the Willimantic Board of Trade. He was also first selectman of Windham in 1892-93. Wilson was elected to the Connecticut General Assembly in 1895 where he served on the



Frank Milton's house at 196 Church St., seen here in 1894, is virtually identical today, save for the disappearance of the decoration above the second story bay window and a minor change to the decorative steps up to the porch entry and front door.

Committee on Cities and Boroughs. He died on May 1, 1900 at his Church Street home. Wilson was playing in the hall on the second floor with his children when he was stricken by a fatal heart attack.

Frank Wilson had spared no expense in building his remarkable house on Church Street. In 1894 it was fondly described as "An ornament to the neighborhood." In 1889 Wilson had hired one of Connecticut's leading architects, Charles T. Beardsley of Bridgeport, to design and supervise its construction. A well-known local builder, Jere-

miah Sullivan, built the house, and the locally-based William Vanderman Co. installed its sophisticated plumbing system. The basement was constructed from Longmeadow stone, the exterior woodwork was constructed of cypress wood.

A striking feature of this house is its double roof. Its hollow spaces were packed with "mineral wool" to act as insulation. The interior was furnished with quartered oak and cypress. The first floor contained a reception hall, staircase hall, parlor, library, din-

ing room, den, kitchen, pantries, a gun room and a closet for fishing tackle. The second and third floor contained sleeping and dressing rooms. The bathroom contained a "solid porcelain slop sink" and a footbath. All the washbowls were made from red Tennessee marble. The house was heated by hot water, and fitted with electric bells and speaking tubes. The current owner of this outstanding house, Gordon MacDonald, is inviting you to examine it on May 15 and 16 between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. Don't miss it.

During the weekend, I'll be conducting tours of Windham Mills and the Willimantic Cemetery. Thanks to Bob Gillard and Kevin Tubridy, my 1993 book, "Willimantic Industry and Community" is being reprinted and I'll be signing copies from 1-3 p.m. on May 15 at the former Kramer Middle School. Bev York will be conducting a 90-minute walking tour of Main Street and Justin Holbrook will lead an outdoor architectural tour of other fine houses on the hill, focusing upon the area's Queen Anne-style houses. There will also be horse drawn carriage and wagon rides of the hill district. Further details and a program of the weekend's events are available from Lynn Duval at 456-4476.