

History

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214 Church St. was the home of many local figures

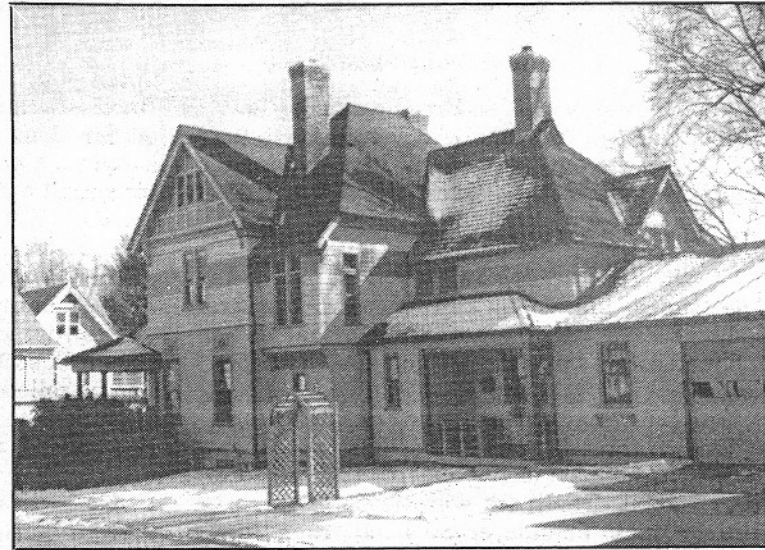


Tom
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Just two weeks to go until the Victorian Willimantic Home Tour and Symposium on May 15-16. From 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. on both days, 10 Willimantic hill district houses are opening their doors for visitors. This week we're heading up Church Street to look at one of the Victorian houses opening their doors to visitors, Ron and Nancy Ouillette's fine home at 214 Church St.

On April 26, 1882, the *Willimantic Chronicle* reported that Frank Fletcher Webb was having a foundation dug for a new house at the corner of Church and Summit streets. Webb was born in Scotland in 1852 and graduated from Windham High School in 1869.

His "comfortable circumstances" after the death of his parents enabled him to purchase a Main Street clothing store with Jerome Baldwin. In 1879 Webb became a director of the Windham National Bank, and in 1886 he retired from his clothing business and entered the world of



A modern-day view of the fine Queen Anne house located on the southwest junction of Church and Prospect streets, looking southeast from Prospect Street.

finance full time with the Willimantic Savings Institute, where he was appointed secretary, treasurer and vice president.

Webb was active in raising funds to launch the Windham Silk Co. in 1901 in the vacant North Street mills of J. D. Chaffee's defunct Natchaug Silk Co. By 1905, the Webb's profitable mills were employing 125 workers on 135 looms, producing high quality dress silk. Webb died of a heart attack in St. Joseph Hospital on March 8, 1912.

In 1891, suffering from ill health, Webb moved out to Windham Center and sold his fine house on Church Street to another prominent local figure, Charles L. Boss (1852-1928) of the Lincoln and Boss Lumber and Coal Co. Boss was born in Willimantic and entered employment with the Willimantic Linen Co. in 1868 as an office boy. He rose to chief clerk and paymaster, but left the mills in 1882 to go into partnership with Eugene Lincoln. Boss and Lincoln's company became involved in the explosion of house building in Willimantic

in the 1880s and 1890s, supplying lumber and masons' materials for many of the fine houses on the hill. Boss was prominent in the local Republican party and Masonic lodges. He was a Burgess of the borough and a member of the Chamber of Commerce. Boss sold the house at 214 Church St. to Dr. Frederick Wilcox in 1915.

Frederick Wilcox was born in Pomfret in 1860. He was educated at Putnam High School and the Woodstock Academy. Upon graduating, Wilcox became an English teacher in a private school in Mystic, but moved on to New York City to study medicine at New York Homeopathic Medical College and Flower Hospital. After receiving his medical degree in 1884, he briefly practiced in Rochester, N.H., and taught as an assistant professor of medicine at Boston University.

In April 1889, Wilcox relocated to Willimantic. When Willimantic was incorporated as a city in 1893, Wilcox was appointed its first city health officer, and in 1898 he became the health officer for the town of Windham. Dr. Wilcox was a member of the surgical staff at St. Joseph's Hospital in Willimantic, and a lecturer of anatomy in the hospital's nursing

school.

Wilcox was passionately interested in the welfare and progress of his adopted city, and became an active member of the Willimantic Chamber of Commerce and the Willimantic Board of Education. In 1903, Wilcox was appointed as one of the original trustees of Norwich's Hospital for the Insane, and served in that post until 1916. Wilcox was twice married, first in 1884 to Etta White of Putnam. After her death, he married Catherine L. Rouse of Mansfield. At the time of his death in August 1934, Wilcox was a member of the medical staff at the newly built Windham Community Memorial Hospital. He had also been a past medical examiner for the town and was affiliated with the Connecticut State Health association.

Note the similarities in construction between 214 Church St. and the Windham Textile and History Museum building, constructed five years earlier in 1877. The style is a combination of Queen Anne and Stick. Note the variable roof lines, the ornate woodwork in the gables and patterned, towering brick chimneys. The garden of 214 Church has one of the largest Copper Beech Trees in New England.