

## History

# These homes are rich in history



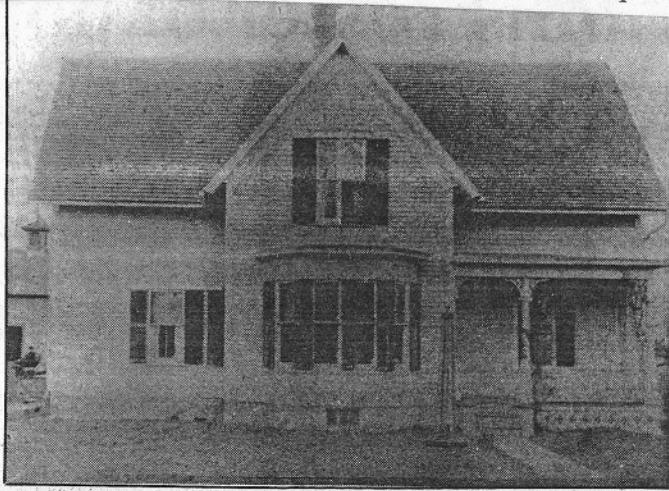
Tom Beardsley

Today's the big day — the opening of the two-day Victorian Willimantic Home Tour and Symposium, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, the Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association and the Windham Textile and History Museum.

From 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. on both days, 10 Willimantic hill district houses are opening their doors to visitors. Today and Sunday I'll be giving a tour of Windham Mills, and this afternoon be signing copies of "Willimantic Industry and Community" — a reprint of my 1993 book — at the Kramer Middle School. Sunday afternoon Tony Clark and I will be conducting a tour of the Willimantic Cemetery. There are many other events and tours over the two days, so plan your weekend accordingly.

Over the past month, we've looked at four of the houses included in the Symposium. To-

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ABOVE: 266 Walnut St. during the 19th century. RIGHT: This photo of 190 Jackson St. appeared in the 1894 Willimantic Journal Souvenir Edition.



day we'll briefly examine the histories of 190 Jackson St. and 266 Walnut St.

Little is known of John F. Hennesey, the builder of 190 Jackson St. Fortunately, Hennesey's success in town a century ago earned him a brief biography in the Willimantic Souvenir Journal of 1894. Hennesey was born in Jewett City of Irish parents. He trained as a carpenter and came to Willimantic to share in its post-Civil War building boom. In 1880 Hennesey purchased the grocery store of Charles Capen, located opposite the fairgrounds and known in 1894 as the Park Exchange Grocery. In 1890, he added the sale of ales, wines and liquor, and was the Willimantic agent for the D.G. Yuengling and Springfield Brewing Co. lagers, and John R. Alley ales. In 1892, Hennesey opened a carbonating and bottling plant in the Washburn block on Valley and North streets and intro-

duced an innovation — liquefied gas to charge the waters to produce a purer, more tasteful beverage.

Jackson Street, named for a local black farmer, Lyman Jackson, became the home of the city's growing Irish-American middle class during the 1880s. On August 3, 1887, *the Chronicle* reported that J.F. Hennesey had broken ground on the lot "recently bought by him off Eli Hewitt at the corner of Jackson and Prospect Streets." Being a carpenter, Hennesey built and designed his own house. But by 1900 Hennesey had declared bankruptcy, and disappeared from the city. The house was subsequently purchased by Timothy E. Sullivan, a saloon owner and later the owner of the city's Chevrolet agency. He died in 1951, and the house remained in the Sullivan family until the late 1970s when it was purchased by Christopher

Clark. The current owners, Jim and Mazie Frank, bought the house two years ago and recently completed the repainting of the exterior.

In 1880 Joseph Jones, a mason from Rhode Island, purchased a lot on the outskirts of town and built a charming country cottage. This was truly located in Willimantic's first suburb, before the building boom of the 1880s and 1890s, and the 20th century development of Eastern Connecticut State University brought the cottage into the city limits. Jones sold the house to Burlesons circa 1886, and the house remained in the family until it was purchased by Shirley Mustard in 1964.

A feature of the property is its two-story barn replete with cupola and three-horse stall with the horses' names still visible above each cubicle. The west end of the barn was em-

ployed as an outhouse. An interesting feature of the house is its all-day sunlight throughout the interior. The house at 266 Walnut St. is a perfect example of the Folk Victorian style. This gable front "folk" style was extremely popular in the mid-19th century, but as the northeast became connected by the railroads such houses were decorated with Victorian detailing. In the case of 266 Walnut with a spindle-work porch. The growth of railroads made heavy woodworking machinery available to all towns with a railroad and freight depot, and such machinery was widely used by Willimantic's lumber dealers, the Loomer and Kingsley lumberyard (later Willimantic Lumber) and the Lincoln and Boss Co. The railroads enabled such yards to also stock precut detailing from larger metropolitan centers, and to add Victorian trim to older American domestic architectural forms.