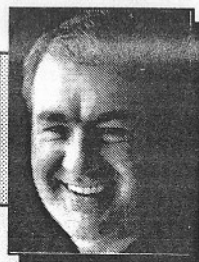


## History

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# Owning the Herald was a dangerous job for the Warners



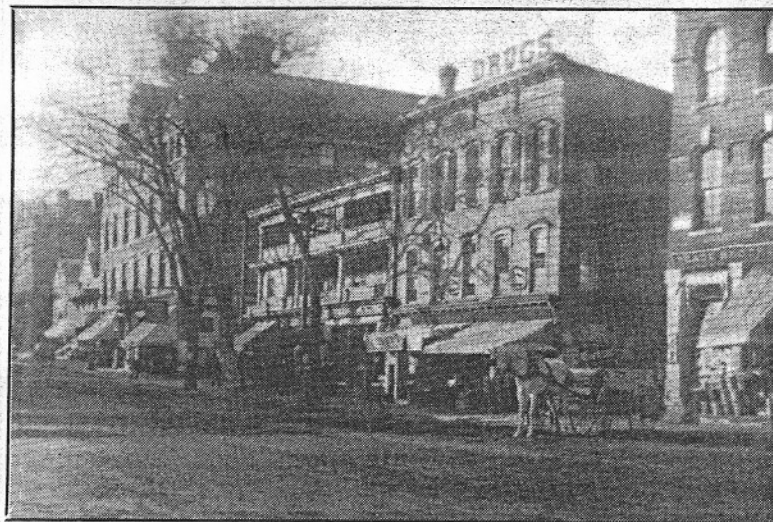
Tom Beardsley

### Part Two

Kate Collins-Warner and her husband Jim had commenced publication of a new Willimantic newspaper, the Sunday Herald, in 1897 — and managed to just about enrage everyone with their sensationalist coverage of local worthies.

The Warners lived at the corner of North and Spring streets in an house rented from Esther Dondero. One August morning in 1897, Kate was walking down North Street to the Herald's offices and two shabbily dressed men confronted her. One punched her in the face twice, knocking her unconscious, and the other threw a pail of coal tar over her. No trace of the men was ever found, but Kate believed one of her enemies had paid for the assault. Probably someone who had been "roasted" in the Willimantic Sunday Herald.

The Warners distributed their newspaper across Windham County, but officials



The north side of Main Street in Willimantic in 1897, the year the Willimantic Sunday Herald was first published by Kate and Jim Warner. The Warners were determined to expose civic corruption in the city.

in Putnam forbade James Warner from selling them at the Putnam Railroad Depot, so he took them to Danielson and continued sell them. Shortly afterwards, the New York World published an article about the controversial Kate Warner, "the mother of a large and interesting family. She is stout, carelessly dressed and her placid expression does not suggest a vigorous mind." Boycotted in Putnam and Willimantic, "abused on every side, she is the most prominent person in the countryside, but with dogged perseverance and

acid pen she keeps on stirring everything up, and there is no telling what next she may do in her warfare."

In September, James Warner, ignoring the warnings about selling his papers, was physically attacked at Putnam railroad station. He fled to the Chickering House but he was caught in the billiard room and beaten up. His assailants then poured the contents of the spittoon over him.

A couple of weeks later, the Warners' house was stoned in the middle of the night. James

Warner ran to the police station and brought Lt. Richmond and Officer Killourey to the scene, where they found cart tracks and a pile of stones. Kate Warner suspected the assailants were N.W. French or A.T. Walker. She convinced the police to measure the cart tracks, and that they would match the cart tracks left by French and Walker's carts. Capt. Hillhouse measured the tracks and found them to be five inches narrower than the tracks left by French and Walker's carts.

The Herald's controversial reporting continued, and the sales of the newspaper rose, but on Oct. 18, 1897, Jim and Kate Warner were arrested for libel in response to an article written about Herbert. H. Leonard, prosecuting agent for Windham County and a supernumerary policeman. The Warners had accused Leonard of receiving bribes from the city's rum sellers. No one would supply a bond, so the Warners remained in prison. Willimantic's saloons had closed on Sundays since the early 1880s, but Leonard was accused in the Herald of taking bribes from saloon owners to turn a blind eye to liquor sales in Willimantic on the Sabbath. The offending piece in the Herald was entitled, "Where Oh

Where Does Leonard Get His Dough." Kate's antiliquor stand can be understood in the light of the fact that she had divorced her first husband in 1891 for abusive and drunken behavior.

The subsequent, widely-reported Willimantic trial of the Warners revealed the extent of the city's saloons and the workings of local newspaper publishing a century ago. Kate Collins-Warner sent a sheet of Willimantic news to printer Robert Pyne in Hartford, where it was inserted into a pre-printed, generic newspaper. Willimantic's Adams Express received the "Willimantic Sunday Herald" on Friday evenings, and late Willimantic news was inserted into the paper by a small printing press located in the Herald's Willimantic second-floor office in the Franklin Block. Local businessmen advertised in the paper, and one Merrill Jones, paid his advertising fees by letting the Warners use a team of his horses and buggies. Daniel and James McCarthy, brothers ages 9 and 11, with John Lockwood and Lawrence Lavine, were paper boys, and sold the Herald on Willimantic's streets. They received 10 cents, and the boy who sold most papers at year end would receive a watch.