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'General' Lloyd Baldwin was 'man who built Willimantic'

One of the most valuable resources of Willimantic history is a series of weekly articles published in the Willimantic Journal in 1895-96, entitled "Willimantic Before 1850," wherein the author takes readers on a tour of each street, describing every early building and mill. He also provided valuable historic information on the people who helped to develop the village, then the borough of Willimantic. The writer knew what he was talking about. He built many of those mills and buildings, and was widely known as the "man who built Willimantic."

"General" Lloyd Baldwin is a forgotten figure today, but he was one of Willimantic's civic giants and a passionate advocate for his adopted town. Baldwin was born in Norwich in 1810, a direct descendant of John Baldwin, one of the original 35 settlers of Norwich in 1635. Baldwin's father, Eliphalet Baldwin Jr. (1787-1819), was a well known manufacturer of carriages in Norwich.

In 1826, Baldwin was apprenticed to a Mansfield carpenter. His first major job brought him to the nearby Tingleyville section of Willimantic in 1828 to build a cotton mill for the Windham Manufacturing Co. The Windham Manufacturing Co. was founded by



Tom Beardsley

Arunah Tingley of Providence in 1823 — a name preserved in a Willimantic street. In 1828, Tingley expanded his cotton-weaving undertaking by constructing a mill from Willimantic gneiss mined from the bed of the Willimantic River. Tingley's east mill measured 118 by 46 feet. It stood to the west of Bridge Street and was demolished in the early 1960s, and was last utilized by the Electro-Motive Co.

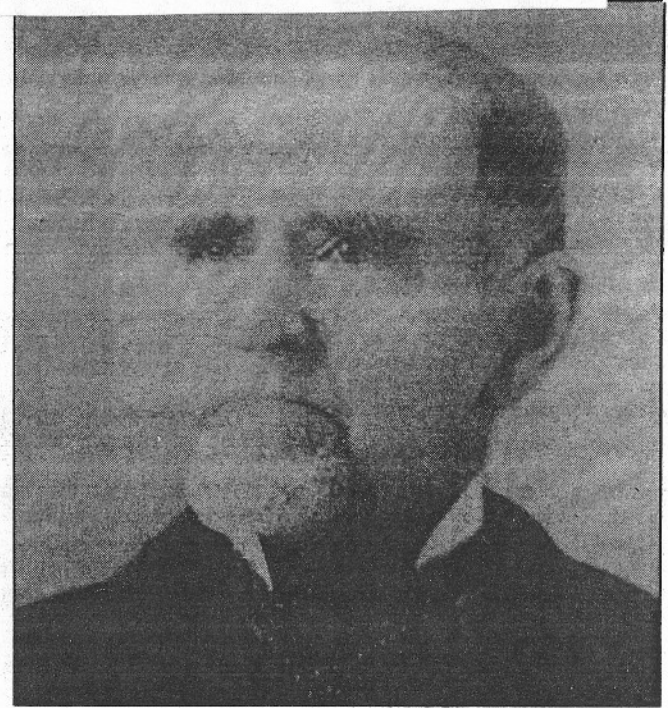
Lloyd Baldwin's abilities were soon recognized, and in 1831 he went into business as a contractor and builder. Willimantic was growing rapidly, and Baldwin was hired to build its churches, factories, mills and private dwellings. In 1845 he was lured by the Welles Co. to build a large cotton mill on the Willimantic River in the section of the borough known as Sodom. The company quickly ensured the name of the locality was changed to Wellesville. Baldwin also built

their millhouses, which still stand at the junctions of Ash Street, Route 6 and Route 14. The Welles mill had a distinctive mansard roof. It became the Willimantic Linen Co.'s Mill No. 3 in 1877, and was demolished by their successors, American Thread, in 1929.

Baldwin also built the borough's first public building, the Franklin Hall, in 1844. He built new mills for Smithville Cotton Co. in 1846 and 1848. These structures stood on the eastern side of Bridge Street, and were demolished in 1939. In 1862, Baldwin built the Grosvenordale Co.'s first cotton mill at Masonville in Thompson. He also built churches in Danielson, Bozrah, Westchester, West Granby, Haddam, West Suffield, South Coventry and Norwich, and railroad stations at Andover, Bolton, Vernon and Manchester.

Baldwin was a staunch Jacksonian Democrat. He represented Windham in the General Assembly, was warden of the borough, and Willimantic's postmaster in 1843. He was also a founder of the Willimantic Savings Institute in 1842.

Baldwin's title was a relic of the old state militia, where he was a general of the fifth brigade from Windham and Tolland counties. His proudest



Lloyd Baldwin was one of the most important figures in Willimantic's early history.

moment came in 1842 when he acted as ex-President Andrew Jackson's personal escort during a visit to Norwich.

Baldwin was first married in 1833 to Lora Sessions of Mansfield, an aunt of General Eugene Stowell Boss, the long-serving agent of the American Thread Co. She died in 1864, and two years later Baldwin married Ellen Parmele of Guilford, but the couple had separated by the time of Baldwin's death in April, 1896, shortly after his 86th birthday. On

April 20, he acted as a pall bearer for an old friend, 91-year-old Elisha G. Hammond. The strain proved to be too much and Baldwin died the following morning.

Fortunately, the "General" had just completed his historical record of pre-1850 Willimantic. The last of the series appeared just two weeks before his death. The *Willimantic Chronicle* reported that, "A grand old man, the city's most interesting figure, has passed away."