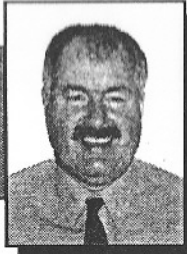


History

The saga of South Windham's finest home



Tom Beardsley

Part Two of Two

Elisha Harlow Holmes Jr., or "Harlow" (1844-1915), was born in South Windham and educated at the Highland Military Academy at Worcester, Mass. He entered his father's plaster mill and assisted him in various enterprises. Shortly after the Civil War, Harlow built a store adjacent to the railroad. He sold it to George H. Backus in 1880.

Harlow represented Windham in the General Assembly in 1876. He continued to operate the plaster mill after his father's death, but closed it in 1889 to concentrate on his new venture in Willimantic, the Willimantic Machine Co., formed with George Stiles and Charles Leonard, to build silk spinning machinery. Harlow was also a director and treasurer of Willimantic's Dime Savings Banks, and was involved in its



A 1910 view of South Windham reveals the fine elm trees planted by the Holmes family. The Holmes house, hidden by trees, is at right.

controversial closure in 1895 when a fellow director embezzled thousands of dollars to finance the ailing Natchaug Silk Co.

Harlow invested in the Radial Thread Buff Co. in South Windham. Buffs were wire wheels employed for polishing silver and bronze, and were used by platers, cutlers and manufacturers. Har-

low also continued the family tradition, and maintained and planted the picturesque elm trees that once graced South Windham's streets.

Harlow was a Democrat, a member of the school board in Willimantic, town assessor, a

selectman, a board of relief member and a notary public.

A 1901 biography of Harlow declared, "Much of the commercial prosperity of both South Windham and Willimantic is directly due to the influence and example of this successful man."

He died in the family house at 8 p.m. on April 18, 1915, two days after suffering a heart attack. He was 70 years old. He had been a senior warden at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Windham Center, and a member of the Willimantic Board of Trade.

His obituary noted that Holmes was "of a most pleasurable disposition, reliable in his business dealings and his death is a great loss."

The funeral was held at the Holmes house at 2 p.m. on April 20, 1915, and Harlow was buried in the Windham Center Cemetery.

Harlow and his wife Sarah had four children, Richard Johnson (1869-1921), Alice Lydia (1872-1909), Grace Sarah (1874-1953) and Florence Jane (1885-1976). Richard was in the U.S. Navy for many years. Grace was married in 1900 to George F. Stiles (1873-

1956).

Alice married into the Abbe family, and she and her husband caused controversy in the village when it was discovered that they were selling contraceptive devices by mail order from the attic of the old South Windham Post Office, at a time when contraceptives were illegal. The Abbes had one child, Sarah Holmes Abbe.

Florence married Willard Fitch and relocated to New York City, but was widowed after Fitch's suicide. They had one daughter, Florence Holmes Fitch Osborn (1910-85), who was an expert contract bridge player. For many years Florence wrote a bridge column in the New York Times Herald Tribune, as "Mrs. Osborn."

South Windham's finest house remained in the Holmes family until 1954, when it was purchased by Thelma Dollof, a "supervising leader" at the Willimantic State College, and Levi Dollof moved in in 1954.

The house then cost \$9,000, and the mortgage repayments were \$72 a month. It should be included in the next Victorian home tour.

Japanese woodblock prints came by accident

By ROSEMARY McKITTRICK

Special to the Chronicle

It seems a printer in Paris had been given several thousand years of the common Japanese per-

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believe in accidents. the artistic community in Paris. snow scenes, seascapes, song-