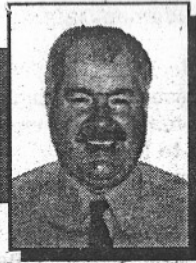


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History

Windham rebuilds high school after fire



Tom
Beardsley

Part Five of Five

The fiery 1913 destruction of the grand high school building stunned the whole town. A massive community effort was put into motion to resolve the problems, and to overcome the tragedy. A special town meeting convened to discuss the building of a new school. Maybe the fine architectural lines of the old school had not suited everyone. An editorial in *the Chronicle* begged the town not to erect a "fancy building." "Let it contain the latest improvements in every way but dispense with the frills." And if possible, it asked, "why not integrate the foundations of the old school into the new?"

On May 6, 1913, after much lengthy and heated discussion, the town appropriated \$150,000

for the erection of a new high school building, and made provision for \$75,000 worth of bonds from the insurance money. Many thought \$150,000 was far too much, and there was much support to rebuild the school on the remaining foundations, which would probably cost less than \$90,000.

A school building committee was formed that consisted of George F. Taylor, R.F. Mitchell, W.D. Grant, A.L. Gelinis and M. Eugene Lincoln. Work started immediately on the new building, and the new design called for a modern, "functional" structure that would accommodate 600 students, a figure sufficient until 1930. It was completed in a year, and the first classes were held there in September 1914. The whole third floor was given over laboratories, as the new school would focus upon the teaching of scientific principles. The new basement gymnasium compensated "in measure for the lack of an outdoor playground."

The school was further enlarged in 1932 by the erection of an eastern wing that included



People standing on Prospect Street on the morning of April 28, 1913, stare in disbelief at the smoldering ruins of the 16-year-old Windham High School.

a new library. This lifted the school's capacity to 925. This renovation cost \$94,000, and also remodeled the gymnasium into a cafeteria. In 1948, another \$100,000 was expended to build the new Case gymnasium and a

pool. The gym was named for Principal Egbert Case, who had served in that post for 38 years, from 1910-1948.

In 1952, a plan was submitted to build a new school that would make Willimantic the regional

center for high school education. This was defeated, but the plan to build a new school was resurrected a decade later, but this was heavily defeated in a town referendum in June 1962. The crowding in the high school led to the withdrawal of Chaplin, Hampton and Scotland students with the building of the Parish Hill High School in 1968.

In 1967, the overcrowded conditions at the Prospect Street school led to a town referendum to build a new high school on a 40.4-acre tract on High Street. This passed by a 1709-547 vote, and construction of the new \$5.17 million Windham High School went ahead. It was planned to hold 1,400 students. The move took place in 1969, and the old Windham High School became the Kramer Middle School. The old Prospect Street high school was again the scene of a passionate fight in 1994, similar to that of 1896-97, when a new middle school was proposed for Quarry Street.

Nothing is built in Willimantic without a fight.