

— HISTORY —

# A firehouse is built on the hill: Hilltop Hose Co. No. 3

*Part one of three*

Among the Willimantic Hill district's fine Victorian houses is a building of quite unique design. It was built and designed in 1897 by a local architect, Wilton C. Little, as the headquarters of the Willimantic Fire Department's Hilltop Hose Co. No. 3, the city's newest fire company.

However, like all new buildings erected in the city, there was tremendous resistance to its construction.

By the mid-1890s, the residents of houses on Summit, Prospect, North, Church, Chestnut streets, and the rapidly developing Lewiston Avenue were becoming concerned about the Willimantic Fire Department's ability in getting fire fighting equipment up the Hill from its firehouses at Bank Street and Jackson Street.

Previous attempts at getting a firehouse built on the Hill were defeated, but in early April 1897 a fierce brush fire raged for several hours on a vacant lot on Lewiston Avenue. This fire led to a new petition being handed to the city council's fire department committee.

It was organized by Arthur Benner and requested that the city build a firehouse on the Hill to be manned by an auxiliary force of 10 men.



Tom Beardsley

The city of Willimantic's fire department committee met on April 5, 1897, and asked Willimantic Fire Chief Charles E. Leonard for his opinion.

He said that it was a long way up the Hill to get to the Lewiston Street fire, and that they had strategically left a firehouse up there because of the difficulty that the firemen had in dragging the fire wagon and hose up the steep inclines.

Albert Benner addressed the committee and suggested that the city should build a temporary 10-by-12-foot hose house at a cost of about \$75, particularly after J. A. Conant, the owner of an empty lot on northeast corner of Prospect

and Chestnut Streets had given his permission to build it there until he decided to develop the lot. Leonard then informed the committee that a new 400-foot house would cost 57 cents a foot.

The councilmen didn't like the idea, and asked Benner where he thought the money was coming from for such a project.

There was only \$30 remaining in the year's fire department appropriation. Councilmen Jordan and Andrew believed that the \$300 to be expended on a new firehouse would be better spent on horses to pull the fire wagons Leonard agreed.

It looked as if the proposition to build a new hose house on the Hill would be squashed, even though it was established that the city's contingent appropriation could be used to fund the new building and hose.

Charles N. Daniels then addressed the committee. He lived on Summit Street and was

naturally interested in getting the hose house built. Daniels was a leading figure in town, a political heavyweight.

He was chairman of Windham's Republican town committee, and a member of the Republican State Central Committee from the 17th district. Furthermore Daniels had



William P. Jordan, first captain of the Hilltop Hose Co.

been treasurer of the city of Willimantic, treasurer of the city water fund, burgess of the borough, and the chief engineer of the Willimantic Fire Department from 1895 until 1890.

Daniels told the committee that, "this is a matter entitled to your serious consideration. Our property on the Hill can burn down before the fire department we are paying to support can reach us. We are entitled to more protection than we are getting.

"We are moving for ourselves in this matter and do not wish to antagonize the interests of any other portion of the city. I have found in my experience that help is most needed during the very early moments of the fire."

Daniels intervention was important. The city aldermen, although still reluctant to spend any money, now began to reconsider.

*Continued next week.*

## Stopped in your tracks by vision

By ROSEMARY McKITTRICK

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