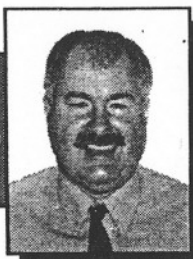


History

The visit: bracing air and a handshake



Tom
Beardsley

Part four of four

The presidential parade was met by constant cheering as it traveled down Main Street from the Bridge Street crossing. When President Roosevelt's carriage approached Lincoln Square it stopped at the junction

of Main and Church Street. Willimantic Mayor Barrows stood up and addressed the crowds. "Ladies and Gentlemen, I take great pleasure in introducing to you, the Honorable Theodore Roosevelt, the president of the United States of America." The accompanying buglers and drummers sounded a presidential salute, and Roosevelt stood and addressed the crowd.

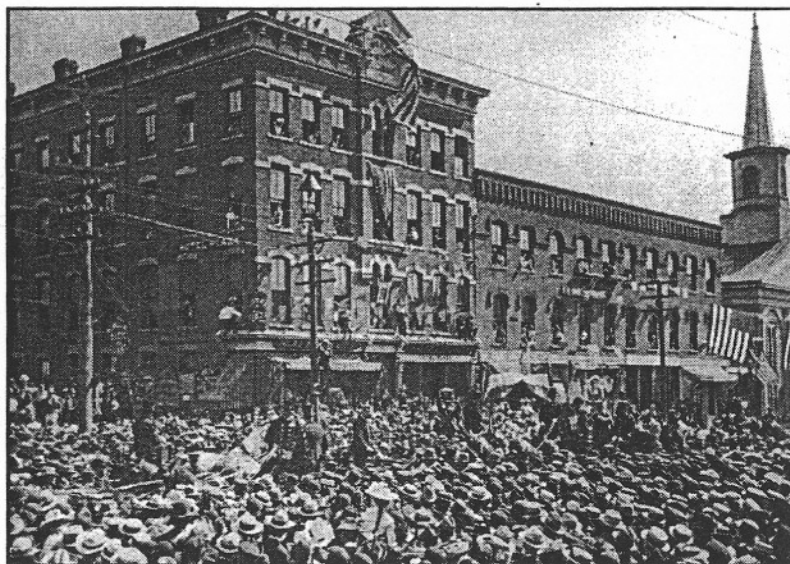
Roosevelt opened his address by stating that he was greatly enjoying passing through Willimantic's beautiful streets, and he was delighted to be meeting his fellow citizens. Virtually every sentence spoken by

Roosevelt was met by resounding cheers. He stressed that all problems facing America should be met by "character, common sense and honest." The speech lasted 10 minutes, and at its conclusion the president's carriage was driven down Railroad Street to Willimantic's Union Station.

Just before Roosevelt climbed onto the waiting train, he was introduced to Willimantic's Capt. James Cochrane, who had served under Roosevelt at Tampa, Fla., during the Cuban expedition. Roosevelt asked Cochrane if he could find his ex-Rough Rider, Billy Jackson, but unfortunately Jackson could not be found.

When he entered his car, the president received the Rev. Florimond DeBruycker, the pastor of St. Josephs Church, who greeted the president on behalf of the 5,000 Catholics he had worked for since his arrival in Willimantic after the Civil War. De Bruycker spoke to the president in Celtic and French. Roosevelt said that he understood the Irish lan-

guage, but had little knowledge of the French language. The president's train left for Providence at 9:35 a.m. He stood on the rear platform of the carriage and vigorously waved his hat at the crowds in the railroad yards as the train pulled out of the station. It was estimated that



Almost 10,000 people crowded the streets of Willimantic the day President Roosevelt came to town. A veteran reporter who covered the president said the visit to Willimantic provided "bracing air" of that day in August, 1902.

some 10,000 people had packed Willimantic's streets to see the president.

All the national newspapers were full of the details of Teddy Roosevelt's visit to the Thread City. Many carried photographs of the president making his speech,

and in the local newspapers it was noted that many local men, Frank Fenton, Mayor Barrows, Policeman Hastings and carriage driver Merrill Jones, were now known across the nation.

A Boston newspaper became confused, and stated that the photographs of Roosevelt in Willimantic were taken in Providence. Charles Cottrell of the Associated Press always traveled with the president, and he commented on the wonderful, "bracing air" in the city, and how pleasant it was compared to Washington D. C. and New York City.

The only alarming incident, according to the Chronicle's coverage of the visit, was that the editor of the Willimantic Journal, James Fiske, shook the president's hand for far too long, and the president would probably wear his arm in a sling when next visiting Willimantic.

More historic articles and photograph galleries can be accessed on the Chronicle sponsored website, threadcity.com Log on now and join our mailing list and be the first to access the latest historic photographs and articles.

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