

History

175 Summit St.: A fine Victorian house

Part three of three

Charlie and Hattie Hill purchased 175 Summit St. from the Bartlett estate in 1926.

Charles Hill was a significant figure in the 20th century history of Willimantic. Hill was born in Warwick, R.I., in 1888. His parents moved to the area in 1905 to care for his father's elderly parents, who were living in Mansfield. Seventeen year old Hill left his job with the Providence Telephone Co. and accompanied his parents to Willimantic.

Hill's father, Wallace, was born in Mansfield, and when he returned to the area Wallace Hill was hired by American Thread to manage the company's boarding house for women, known as the "Elms Hotel."

Hugh Murray, a "canny Scotsman" and a friend of the Hill family recommended Charlie Hill to American Thread. Murray was the builder, in 1894, of the largest department store in town, now occupied by Hurleys. Murray's friend, Eugene Boss, the agent at American Thread, hired Hill as a junior clerk for \$7 a week.

Hill quickly advanced to superintendent of finishing at American Thread. He was also assistant agent at the mill, and the company's production manager. He retired in 1956, after 51 years with the company. Hill was the



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last of the original trustees of the Windham Community Memorial Hospital, and a director and vice president of The Savings Institute.

He served as a member of the city of Willimantic Board of Finance for 36 years, retiring after 25 years as its chairman in 1968. He also served on the building committees of the Natchaug School addition and the new Willimantic Library.

Hill was vice president of the Eastern Connecticut Boy Scout Council, and was awarded the Boy Scouts of American Silver Beaver Award for his efforts in aiding the scouting program. He was a 50-year member of the YMCA, and was vice president for 15 years. Hill was also charter and honorary life member of the Willimantic Rotary Club and its first secretary.

Charlie Hill was a director of United Way, and chairman of the Hungarian Relief Committee Freedom Fighters in 1956, and was state trustee for the Ameri-



The house at 175 Summit St. is a fine example of Willimantic's 19th century architecture.

can Cancer Society. Hill was the president of the Chamber of Commerce in 1923, when it was decided to build a new hotel in the city to replace the aging Hotel Hooker. Hill became an active fund-raiser for the Nathan Hale Hotel, which was built in 1926.

He was also a keen sportsman, being president of the American Thread Athletic Association and a vice president of the Veterans Baseball Players Association of

America. Hill was active in the development of American Thread's Recreation Park in 1915, from the old Willimantic Fairgrounds.

Charlie Hill was active in voluntary associations. He was an Elk, and was on the building committee of the Elks Lodge on Pleasant Street in 1923. He was also an active Mason, and a U.S. Navy veteran of World War I.

Hill married Hattie A. Hall in 1922. She died in 1979. After

Charlie Hill died in 1984, Ronald E. Owen and Catina Caban-Owen purchased 175 Summit St. They completely remodeled the building in 1992-93, precisely 100 years after the house was built.

John A. McDonald (1857-1904), the founder of *the Willimantic Chronicle*, had built the fine Victorian House at 175 Summit St. as a guest and rental property in 1892.

The northeast corner of Summit and North was one of the prime locations in the city by 1890, particularly after the silk industry magnate Dwight Chaffee built his house on the opposite corner of North and Summit. Furthermore, Summit Street was extended from the junction of Church Street to Jackson Street in the summer of 1892, making the location even more desirable.

McDonald was one of the city's leading citizens, and it was often the custom to build guest premises to entertain guests and business associates.

After being sold by the Bartlett estate in 1919, the house had only four owners in the subsequent 82 years.

Jim and Laurie St. Martin are only the fifth owners of this 109-year-old house, an outstanding example of Willimantic's 19th century Victorian architecture.

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