

— HISTORY —

# William D. Grant: a blue-blooded Yankee

One of Willimantic's finest Victorian mansions stands at 291 Prospect St., at the northwest junction of Prospect and High streets. William Denison Grant (1860-1943) built this outstanding structure in 1895. But who actually was the owner and builder of Willimantic's famous "Grant House?"

William Denison Grant's ancestors were blue-blooded Yankees. They could trace their American line back to Matthew Grant (1601-1681), who had arrived in Boston from England in 1630. Grant's descendants were extensive land owners in Stonington by the end of the 1600s. Shortly after the Revolution, William D. Grant's great grandfather, Miner Grant (1756-1828), left the ancestral estates at Stonington after purchasing farmlands in Ashford.

William D. Grant was born and educated in Ashford, and like many young men of his class and position, spent a noblesse oblige

period teaching in local schools. However, in 1880 William's father, Elisha Denison Grant, keen to see his son enter into a profitable business, purchased a share in



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Bugbee's Willimantic-based flour and grain dealership, on the proviso that his son would become a junior partner.

The Bugbee and Grant Co. grew from strength to strength, thanks to Willimantic's position at the center of the Southern New England railroad network, and its proximity to northeastern Connecticut's farmlands.

William D. Grant's partner was also a native of Ashford.

Edwin Bugbee (1825-1913), like his young partner, had taught in local schools at Ashford.

Bugbee then headed to Boston in 1845, where he invested in the shoe industry. He went out West to Illinois in 1857, and taking advantage of the stock, property and banking crash of that year, made highly profitable land investments.

Bugbee returned to Windham County after the Civil War, and looking for further business opportunities, he established a grain and lumber dealership in Willimantic in 1868.

Twelve years later he went into partnership with the son of his old friend from Ashford, Elisha Denison Grant.

Edwin Bugbee retired in 1888, and William D. Grant took full control of the lucrative company.

Grant's increasing wealth enabled him not only to build a fine home on Prospect Street in 1895, but also to focus on local politics. He became increasingly involved with the Republican Party, becoming a city alderman

in 1898 and mayor in 1899. Grant was particularly interested in building a trolley car line at Willimantic, and in alliance with other local businessmen, he organized the Willimantic Traction Co. in 1901.

Other than his business and transportation interests, Grant was a longtime member of Windham's Board of Education, a director of the Windham National Bank, a member of the Chamber of Commerce, and a generous philanthropist who supported local charities and the Windham almshouse.

He died in his Prospect Street home on April 15, 1943, at age 83.

Being a member of an old Yankee, aristocratic family, he did not exactly fit the Horatio Alger stereotype of rags-to-riches success. Nevertheless, Grant invested much of his significant fortune into the civic development of his adopted city.



William D. Grant, from a 1930's photograph.

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