

— HISTORY —

Building a dam on the Shetucket River in Scotland

Part one of two

In early 1907, a team of surveyors began mapping out land on the Shetucket River at the border between Scotland and Windham. It soon leaked out that a dam was to be built at this point to generate electricity, and many rumors were afoot speculating how the electrical power would be used.

The favorite rumors concerned transport. People in Willimantic believed the power would be used to build a trolley line connection between Stafford and Willimantic.

Some time later a Providence newspaper announced that the power would be used on new electric engines to be employed on the New York, New Haven Railroad between Providence and Hartford.

It later emerged that the dam would be constructed to supply electricity for industrial and domestic use at Norwich, and for

the cotton mills at Baltic. In 1907 the Shetucket River at this point was no more than a narrow meandering stream, and the area was considered to be one of the prettiest spots in eastern Connecticut; but all that was to change within the next 18 months.

The Uncas Power Co. of Norwich was formed to combat what was considered to be high prices for electricity demanded by Norwich's municipal power plant. The company was made up of local stockholders, and it hired the Shaw Construction Co. of Providence to build a dam on the Shetucket at Scotland. The Shaw Co. quickly built a concrete pow-

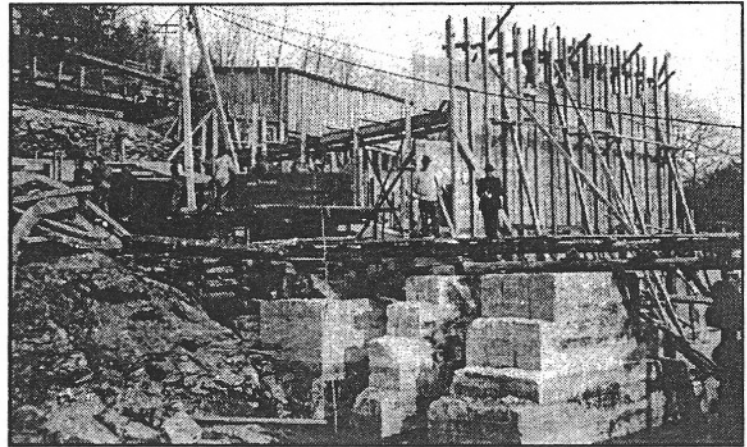


Tom Beardsley

erhouse, and believed that they would be building the dam on the Shetucket River's rock ledge. However, when excavation began, it was discovered that the river bed was nothing but sand and boulders at this point, and the Shaw Co. refused to continue without extra payment.

It was replaced in April 1908 by the Tucker and Vinton Construction Co. of New York. Philip H. Trout was superintendent of construction, and a majority of his 300-strong construction crew were recent Italian immigrants.

The Tucker and Vinton Co. paid out high wages to its workers to get the job completed on time, and this caused a mini-economic boom in the city of Willimantic, as most of the crew lodged in Willimantic, and caught the Hartford and Providence train to the worksite each day to nearby



The Scotland dam

Scotland.

The grocery stores in Willimantic did well, but the bars and saloons had even a better trade.

Furthermore, thousands of sightseers came from miles

around to the dam on weekdays and holidays to watch its progress, and many of those from beyond the region ended up touring the Thread and Rose cities.

Continued next week

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