

— HISTORY —

# Hall family prominent owners of Chestnut Street home

The attractive prairie or four-square house, located on the northeastern corner of Prospect and Chestnut streets in Willimantic next to the old Hill Top Firehouse, is featured in the annual Victorian House Tour for the first time on June 1 and 2.

Prairie houses are considered to be one of the few indigenous American styles, emerging from the pioneering work of Frank Lloyd Wright and the Chicago School of Architecture. They were particularly popular in the period 1900-20, and the one at 101 Chestnut St. is a fine example of the style. Julius Deloraine Conant (1869-1952) who built the house in 1912, and its second occupant, F. Louis Hall (1873-1962), represent the area's rich textile manufacturing history.

J.D. Conant's great uncle Joseph Conant gave the family name to the Mansfield mill village of Conantville. He built a silk mill there in 1853, which was located at the north end of the East Brook Mall.

The Max Pollack Thread Co. occupied the mill in the early 20th

century, and in the 1970s it became the home of the Shaboo Club. Joseph Conant's nephew, John Ashbel Conant (1829-1918), was involved in numerous Mansfield silk companies, and in 1864 he went into partnership with Goodrich and James Holland who then owned and operated the Conantville mill.

The Hollands built a brick, steam-powered mill on Valley Street in Willimantic in 1865, and sent John Ashbel Conant, overseer in their Conantville mill, to take charge. The company founder, Goodrich Holland, died in 1870, and J. A. Conant became managing director and the virtual owner, operating the business for the Holland family until 1907.

John A. Conant's son, Julius, entered the Holland Silk Mills in 1883. After his father's death he became the head of the silk-



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throwing department, and remained in the post until the company relocated to Stroudsburg, Pa., in 1934. Conant had been a member of the Connecticut State Guard posted at the Pleasant Street Armory during World War I.

He was a talented musician and played in army bands, the Peerless Orchestra and the Elks Band, and was also a member of the local musicians union.

He had been the first foreman of the Hill Top Hose Co. and in 1912 Conant built the stylish foursquare house on the vacant lot next to the company's firehouse on Summit Street.

He sold it to F. Louis Hall in 1917. Conant obviously liked the prairie style and purchased a larger version of the style at 81 Chestnut Street. He died there on Nov. 17, 1952, age 83.

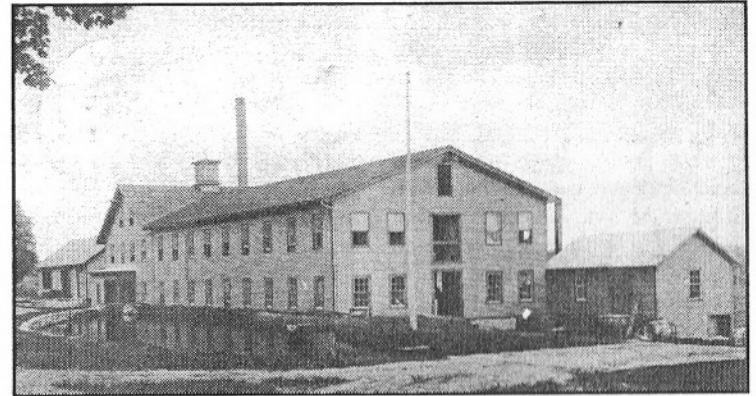
F. L. Hall was born in North Windham in 1873, the son of Edwin H. Hall, a cotton thread manufacturer in the village, and grandson of Gardiner Hall (1809-79), the American cotton thread pioneer.

Gardiner Hall was born in Mansfield in 1809, and relocated to Willimantic in 1827 to work for the Windham Manufacturing Co. He left Willimantic in 1848 to organize cotton mills at Willington.

He returned to Willimantic in 1857 to build and tool the Willimantic Linen Co. No. 1 Mill. Gardiner later sued the Linen Company for stealing his patent for thread spinning. His son, Edwin H. Hall (1848-1921) built a cotton mill at North

Windham in 1862 on the site where, in 1810, Taintor, Abbe and Badger had begun the manufacture of writing paper.

F. L. Hall worked with his father in the North Windham cotton mill, and after its closure he was employed as a factory inspector by the Connecticut Department of Labor. Afterwards he was the paymaster for the Connecticut Highway Department, until his retirement in 1932. Hall lived at 101 Chestnut St. until his death in 1962 at age 88.



The prairie house on Chestnut Street.

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