

— HISTORY —

# New homes represent two phases in history

*Part three of four*

On June 1 and 2, the Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association conducts its fourth annual house tour. The Civil War period house at 171 High St. and the classic Victorian house at 190 North St., featured on the tour for the first time, represent two distinct phases in Willimantic's rich history.

Before the Civil War, urban development in Willimantic was limited to the river valley. High Street was the first road laid out to the north in the 1840s by thread manufacturer Robert Hooper (1816-1906).

Hooper and his close friend, Rhode Islander Thomas Spencer Sr. (1799-1890), a cotton and patent medicine manufacturer, laid out the second street northwards in 1850. It was originally named Hooper's Lane, but later renamed North Street, and Spencer built a house in 1851.

Thomas Spencer Sr. was born into a prominent Rhode Island family. His grandmother was a sister of Gen. Nathaniel Greene of Revolutionary period fame. Spencer became involved in the nascent cotton industry and

helped to build mills at Sterling, Plainfield and Norwich before arriving in Willimantic in 1847, to work with local thread pioneers Robert and John Hooper.

He built up a considerable fortune in the borough, and along with Hooper was a founder of the Willimantic Spiritualist Church on Bank Street. When he died in 1890, 91-year-old Spencer was Willimantic's oldest resident.

Spencer's son, Thomas Spencer Jr., was born at Greene, R.I., in 1823. He followed his father to Willimantic, and subsequently met Mary Ann Perkins, the daughter of wealthy Mansfield farmer and landowner Apolos Perkins, who owned much land on the northern border of the borough of Willimantic.

Spencer worked as a cabinet-maker, and at the outbreak of the Civil War he enlisted in Company H of the 18th Connecticut



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Volunteer Infantry. The front-gabled folk house, which became 117 High St., was one of the first houses to be built on the hill. It was constructed while Sgt. Thomas Spencer was away at war, with Spencer's wife Mary supervising the building.

After the war the Spencers sold tracts of surrounding land for building lots for the rapidly developing High Street. Thomas Spencer died at his High Street home on the afternoon of June 19, 1893, and was buried with full military honors in the Willimantic Cemetery. Civil War veterans rode on horseback to accompany the coffin from High Street to the Willimantic Cemetery.

The second house featured this week, 190 North St., represents the post-bellum development of Willimantic's Hill district.

Local industrialist Edwin Buck owned considerable tracts of land on the eastern side of the hill district, and sold them off for building lots in the 1880s. In 1890 he built a fine Victorian mansion at 190 North St. just south of Prospect, as a rental property. After Buck's death in 1905, the house was purchased by a local

hardware dealer Fred Jordan.

Fred Jordan was born in Lebanon in 1865, and spent early years on the family farm. He attended the private Natchaug High School in Willimantic, and taught for two years in Lebanon schools, before attending a business college in Newark, N.J.

Jordan came to Willimantic in 1886 as clerk in the Carpenter and Fowler Hardware Store and went into partnership with Arthur B. Carpenter in 1889 after Amos Fowler retired. When Carpenter died, Jordan's brother William P. Jordan left the Wilson Drug Co. and formed a new partnership.

The Jordan brothers purchased the Tilden Block in 1906 and formed the Jordan Hardware Co. Fire destroyed the block in 1916, but was rebuilt the following year. Jordan became president of the Jordan Auto Co., the Willimantic Trust Co. and the Rockville-Willimantic Light Co. and the Atlantic Coast Hardware Co.

Fred Jordan was also a trustee of the Connecticut State Hospital, vice president of the Windham Silk Co., a prominent Mason, a member of the Chamber of Commerce, the Odd Fellows, and

a staunch congregationalist.

The funeral was held at 190 North St. on Dec. 9, 1925, and Jordan was buried in the New Willimantic Cemetery. Jordan's widow Nettie lived in the house until her death in 1941.

From 1943 until 1955, it was the home of insurance agent John P. Mahoney and his wife, and from 1956 it was the home of Nicholas Nahas, a teacher at Barbour Junior High School in Hartford.



*Fred D. Jordan, who lived at 190 North St. from 1905 until his death in 1925.*

A picture caption in the May 18, Album incorrectly identified the building. It is the former silk mill built by Joseph Conant that later became the Shaboo Club.

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