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TWO OF CITY'S FINEST HOMES ON THE VICTORIAN HOUSE TOUR

Part four of four

Two of Willimantic's finest houses are featured in this year's Victorian House tour, which commences today and tomorrow at 11 a.m., and continues until 4 p.m. The outstanding Queen Anne-style home at 125 Windham Road was built for John Manning Hall (1841-1905) in 1883, and the fine Second Empire house at 384 Pleasant St. was built in 1872 for

Silas F. Loomer (1824-99). However, only the fine gardens at the rear of the Pleasant Street house are open to the public on this occasion.

Judge John Manning's Hall grandfather, Dixon Hall, was a cotton pioneer in Sterling, and his father, Horace, was the agent for the Windham Manufacturing Co. mills on Bridge Street. John M. Hall was born in Willimantic on October 16, 1841, and educated at

the Fitch Academy at South Windham, the Williston Seminary at East Hampton, Mass., Yale University and the Columbia Law School.

He represented Windham in the state senate, and in 1882 was speaker of the house. In 1889 Hall chaired the State Judiciary Committee and from 1888 to 1893 was a judge on the state Superior Court. He also held numerous positions in Willimantic borough government.

In 1882 John M. Hall purchased a tract of land from one of the Willimantic Linen Co. on South Main Street, and built what is probably Willimantic's most impressive Victorian mansion. Local inhabitants were not happy with the street's name however, and in 1908 South Main Street became Windham Road, so the house is today located at 125 Windham Road.

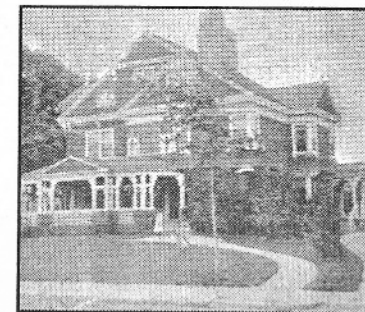
Hall, renown for his integrity, left Willimantic for New Haven in 1899 when appointed president of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Co. by J. Pierrepont Morgan, in an attempt to cleanse the company's scandalous reputation. Hall retired in 1903 through ill health, and died shortly afterwards. Windham historian Allen Lincoln believed that the railroad job had surely killed one of "Windham's most distinguished sons." In 1870 John Manning Hall had married Julia Loomer the daughter of one of Willimantic's leading citizens, Silas F. Loomer, and this provides a link with the Pleasant Street property.

Denis Shea (1844-1930) purchased Hall's magnificent mansion in 1907. Shea was probably Willimantic's best-known Irishman. He came to the borough in 1854, and had a distinguished

career in the U.S. Navy during the Civil War. He was on the gunboat Cincinnati, which was sunk at the siege of Vicksburg. He then served on the U.S.S. Sabine, North Carolina, Clara Dolsen, and Lexington.

After the war he built a saloon and bottling works on Union

(Victorian, Page 12)



Judge John Manning Hall's house at 125 Windham Road pictured in 1894.

(Continued from Page 10)

Street, purchased the European Block hotel and became vice president of the Vanderman Heating Co. He died in the Hall mansion in January 1930, and his funeral was held from the house, followed by a high mass at St. Joseph's Church. His coffin was draped in the Stars and Stripes, and the pallbearers were all leading Irish-Americans in the city.

In 1868 John Manning Hall's father Horace Hall had purchased 15 acres of land, "on the old turnpike road from Windham to Columbia" from the James D. Hosmer estate, and developed a market garden. There is constant reference in the deeds to the property's spring and springhouse.

A bird's eye view of Willimantic drawn in 1882 from the top of Hosmer Mountain depicts extensive orchards at this location. This attractive plot of land, and the springs, still exist behind the fine house at 384 Pleasant St., and will be open for viewing today and tomorrow. The Second Empire-style house, which boasts a fine

mansard roof, was built by Dwight Potter in 1872, and was sold to Loomer in July, 1873. Loomer sold the property in 1883 to Charles Little, the borough's leading shoe retailer. Little sold it to Elizur Reed, of the Reed and Ticknor building company, in 1902 for \$3,000, and in 1919 Daniel Tucker, a salesman, bought it from the Reed estate.

The first owner of the house on Pleasant Street, Silas Loomer was born in Columbia, and after the Civil War made a fortune in Willimantic by providing lumber for telegraph poles and railroad ties from his family's large tracts of forest in Columbia.

In 1879 he built the Loomer Opera House, the finest theater in eastern Connecticut, on the northwest corner of Main and North Streets. It seated 1,100 people, and was renown for its large stage and excellent acoustics. It was however expensive to heat and maintain, and because of the death of vaudeville it was pulled down in 1940 and replaced with a Woolworth's store.