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10 ALBUM, Chronicle, Saturday, July 20, 2002

— HISTORY —

A pleasant spot for a campground to locate

Part two of two

The Willimantic Methodist Campground Association was formed in 1860 and chose one of the most pleasant locations in the region to develop its meeting grounds. Growth was initially slow, but an Evangelical revival following the horrors of the Civil War led to the Willimantic campground's expansion, and during the 1870s and 1880s small Victorian cottages began to slowly replace each society's tent.

The 1883 annual meeting, due to be held from Aug. 13 until 21 was eagerly awaited, and grounds manager Charles. A. Gould was congratulated on the campground's neat and inviting appearance.

There had been complaints in recent years about poor sanitary measures, but all were assured that Gould had attended to the problems.

The boarding house was under the management of Henry Hall, the editor of the Willimantic Journal, and it was hoped that unsavory characters would stay away from it this year.

There was a large demand for cottages to rent, and several new cottages had been built during the previous year. The most striking belonged to the Niantic Society on the grounds of their old building.

The Niantic members looked over all the other buildings on the ground and combined all their pleasant architectural details into Niantic's new structure.

It was two stories high, with a large room on the first floor for society meetings and preaching in rainy weather.

The old building was moved to the rear, and used as a kitchen and dining room. The Rev. S.O. Benton of New London had built a 'pretty cottage' on Hayden Avenue, and the Moodus Society tore down the old frame, which was covered by a tent, and replaced it with a two-story building with sleeping rooms in the second story.



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The Danielsonville Society followed suit and also replaced its canvas structure.

Because of problems experienced in previous years in finding suitable stable accommodation, the association built a large stable and carriage sheds adjacent to the grounds, which proved to be a great convenience, as visitors

were not charged outrageous rates to stable their horses and store carriages.

The week's first prayer meeting took place in the Plainfield Tent, and it was reported that there was "very good gathering at the cottage city" the best for many years, and that every train passing up the New London Northern line

stopped the camp station railroad station.

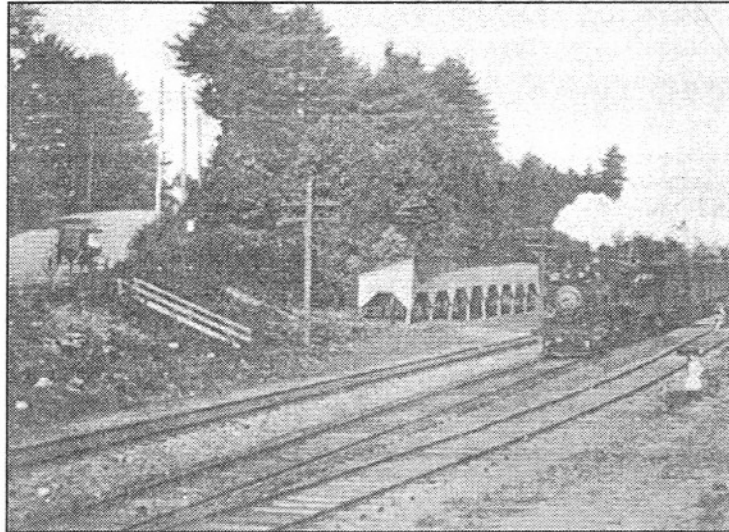
Furthermore visitors and guests also had the use of a newly organized grocery store and post office provided by William White and A. P. Smith of North Windham.

The following year was even a greater success. Sunday was the biggest day on the grounds, and the attendance was estimated at 5,000 people.

Association treasurer Huber Clark read the annual report and revealed that the receipts for the year 1883-84 had been \$4,182.92, with expenses at \$4,009.83. The total indebtedness of the association stood at \$537.

The officers elected for the ensuing year were for president, the Rev. I.W. Blood of Norwich; secretary, the Rev. W. Ellis; treasurer, Huber Clark; executive committee Edwin Hall, the Rev. D.L. Brown, and H.L. Wilson.

The association grew stronger and attendances increased but not without problems. The column will take a look at the campgrounds during the 1890s, in a few months time.



The Willimantic Methodist Camp railroad depot, circa 1908.