

This digitized version of Tom Beardsley's article is made possible by The Willimantic Public Library. All Tom's articles and much more Willimantic history can be accessed at the library. We are grateful to the copyright owner, "The Chronicle" for permission to reproduce this article. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

# All the history that's fit to print

Newspaper files are an informative source of local and national history, and are often called first draft of history. Several major newspapers have been published in Willimantic since 1847. However, several small newspapers, including the Windham Register, Windham



Tom  
Beardsley

Advertiser and Windham Political Visitant, were published in Windham Center between 1817 and 1820.

They provide a fascinating insight to the town's local economy before Perry Richmond built the first cotton mill on the Willimantic River in 1822.

The Windham Register appeared in 1817. It was published weekly by Samuel Webb and cost subscribers two cents per copy. He advertised for a post rider to distribute 300 copies of the paper through northern Windham County.

In the first issue, Connecticut Gov. John Cotton Smith declared that April 4, 1817, would be observed as a day of humiliation, fasting and prayer, and that all servile labor and vain recreation would be forbidden by law on that day. Windham farmer and merchant Francis Barrows, however, was less concerned with spiritual affairs. He asked for the quarter of a sheep stolen from his barn to be returned immediately. If not, he would expose the boulder in the newspaper.

Barrows also reminded readers that he paid the best prices for sheepskins and calfskins.

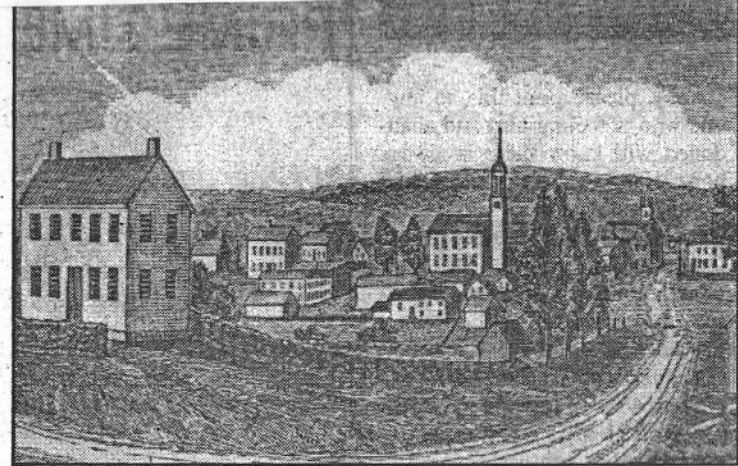
The agrarian nature of Windham in 1817 is revealed in the papers' ads.

George Abbe offered a 30-acre plot of land for sale. It was located 2 miles east of the

Windham courthouse, was under good improvement, was well fenced with a sturdy stonewall, and contained the best mowing in Windham.

Abner Follet, who owned land adjacent to the Frog Pond, announced a public auction of his late parents' house and farm, and that the starting bid would be \$600. Also, local merchants Dyer and Howes declared that they had just received a fresh supply of garden seeds and Vermont green field peas from the Quakers.

Windham's agrarian economy was supported by an emerging industrial system. On Sept. 2, 1817, Charles Smith and Jesse Spafford reminded their customers that their clothier's mill on the Pigeon Swamp Brook was ready to receive cloth to dress, and all work would be done promptly and neatly. Two months later, William Page announced that he had received a large quantity of cotton yarn, and advertised for those with looms at home to weave cloth, and that he would pay them in cotton yarn. Reflecting the growth of mulber-



John W. Barber's 1837 engraving of Windham Center looking from Zion's Hill.

ry bush planting and home silk production in the region, John Gilbert of Mansfield and Solomon Gilbert of Coventry appealed for course, well-made, uncolored sewing silk, which they would pay for in one-third cash and two-thirds goods. Page and the Gilberts were not the only ones who received payment in kind.

In November 1817, Jonathan Jennings received a shipment from New York City which he was offering for sale in his store, that included an assortment of silks, calicoes, cambric muslins, shirts, men's and women's silk gloves, ribbons, red white green and yellow flannels, vestings, cloths, worsted stockings, silk and cotton handkerchiefs, mourning and other shawls, and ladies' half handkerchiefs. Customers could also obtain groceries, glassware, crockery and hardware. Jennings announced that all items would be sold for cash or weaved cloth, and that most kinds of produce would be taken in payment. Farming, manufacturing and trading did not take up all the time, however, as

hunting and fishing were popular past times.

John Burgess declared that he was arranging a hunting match, and urged all interested parties to gather on Windham Green on Christmas Day morning in 1818, where he planned to release two wild deer into the forest.

Participants had to pay an entry fee, and cash prices were offered for those returning with the deer carcasses. In January 1819, Nathaniel Canada announced that he was appealing to the general Assembly for an order to remove all the dams along the Natchaug River in Chaplin, Mansfield and Windham so farmers would again be able to catch fish in the great quantities known in the previous century. John Bass of the Scotland parish of Windham was interested in a different sport.

He offered a reward for anyone who captured his indentured servant, a 16-year-old runaway Indian boy named Benjamin Farnum. Bass warned readers that it was against state law to harbor runaways.