

## — HISTORY —

## Schiller's Sewing Circle building has long, rich history in the city

*Part two of two*

The Main Street building occupied by the Schiller's Sewing Circle has a long and rich history. It was built in 1825, and it had housed a number of significant residents and businesses before Samuel Amidon purchased it in 1884. Amidon was born in Sturbridge, Mass. on July 22, 1844, and raised on a farm in Ashford.

At the end of the Civil War, he took advantage of business opportunities in the southern states. Arriving in Kentucky at the end of 1865 when the state was still under martial law, Amidon worked for a newspaper distributor in Columbus, Ky.

Sam Amidon made a small fortune selling agricultural implements to sharecroppers, and became a classic example of a northern "carpetbagger." He came back north and in 1872, purchased a grocery store in the village of Quinebaug in Thompson. Amidon arrived in Willimantic in 1884 and purchased the old Savings Institute

building from George Harrington, which had once served as the Windham Manufacturing Co. store.

Amidon went into partnership with Willimantic grocer Charles Dimmick, and in 1889 the partners purchased another large grocery store. The transaction being reported in the *Chronicle*: "The transfer of a large mercantile business has just taken place in the sale by Julius Pinney of his grocery store and meat market in the Willimantic Linen Company's store to S.E. Amidon and Charles H. Dimmick, proprietors of the Windham Company's store." Amidon referred to the building which today is occupied by the Windham History and Textile Museum as his "downtown store," and the Schiller building of today was his "uptown store."



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From 1892 until 1895, 1088 Main St. housed Arnold Holden's dry goods store. Arnold Holden (1854-1912) was born in Eastford and spent his youth there. He operated a livery stable in Brockton, Mass., for many years before arriving in Willimantic in the 1880s. He operated the store at 1088 for almost four years, then purchased a farm on South Street, just over the city line in Lebanon, and also formed a real estate business that operated from the old building at the corner of Main and Railroad Streets. He was an ardent Democrat and was a selectman that fought for the building of the new town hall in 1896.

The country was hit by a severe economic recession in 1894, and 1088 Main St. had no tenants until 1906 when Nathan Peck opened a grocery store. The Windham Manufacturing Co. went into liquidation in 1910, and was absorbed by the Quidnick-Windham Manufacturing Co. In that year the building was sold to Max

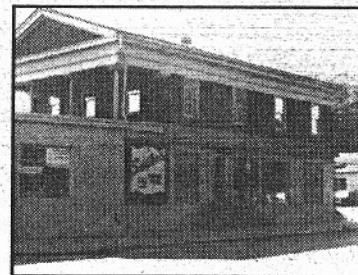
and Louis Brettschneider. Max Brettschneider (1888-1969) moved on to a grocery store at 113 Main St. and Louis Brettschneider (1887-1935) continued in the building until he moved to New York in 1919.

The grocery store was taken over Adelard Monast (1865-1955), and operated by him until 1927. Monast was born in St. Mathias, Quebec, and arrived in Willimantic in 1892. He was better known for operating the barbershops in the Hotel Hooker and Nathan Hale Hotel. It was noted in his obituary that Monast "possessed a radiant personality and was beloved by all who knew him."

The Quidnick-Windham Manufacturing Co. went into liquidation in November 1926. A year later, it sold 1088 Main St. to Napoleon and Olivina Bacon. Between 1927 and 1956 the building housed a grocery store, a tavern and offices for the Sussman Coal and Oil Co.

For more than a generation, Willimantic's oldest building was known as the home of

Harry's Supermarket. Herman Brettschneider (1895-1973) was born in Brooklyn, N.Y. He retired in 1969, having run the store for 35 years. He had arrived in Willimantic in 1927 and was the proprietor of Capitol Lunch at 873 Main St. He died in the Windham Community Memorial Hospital in November, 1973. Since approximately 1975, the historic building has been home of Schiller's Sewing Circle. If you look closely at the building's eastern end, you can see where the ornate Greek Revival pillars were once located.



1088 Main St., the city's oldest structure on that street as it looked in 1978.

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