

— HISTORY —

Greek Revival building is oldest surviving one on Main Street

Part one of two.

The building located at 1088 Main St., the home of the Schiller Sewing Circle Co., is the oldest surviving structure on Main Street. A brief history of the building provides a window to view the lives of some of Willimantic's most significant individuals.

John Watson built the classic Greek Revival building in 1825. It once had four fluted columns and a characteristic temple-like portico, and served as the Windham Manufacturing Co.'s store and offices. Watson, the company's founder, gave his name to the street directly across the road from the building. It was later home to Arunah and Hartford Tingley, the cotton company's Rhode Island-based owners, who gave their name to Tingley Street. The historic building also provided home and offices for subsequent company agents, John Tracy, Moses Page and Thomas Chandler.

John Tracy (1812-1874) took over the running of the Windham Manufacturing Co. in 1840, and was disturbed that his workers were drinking away their wages. He encouraged them to save a section of their weekly payment, and on May 30, 1842, Tracy and a group of

local businessmen formed the Willimantic Savings Institute, locating its offices on the second floor of the building in a corner of the company's store.

The first meeting took place there on June 18, 1842. The banking equipment was described as "modest," consisting of two ordinary commercial safes, one with a combination lock for cash and securities, the other with a lock and key for their books. Nevertheless, the formation of the Savings Institute marked the shift of economic power away from Windham Center, where the Windham Bank had been operating since 1832, to the growing borough of Willimantic. The bank operated in the building for more than a generation. By the late 1860s it was evident that larger premises were needed, and in 1869 construction began of a new bank building on Main Street, which has been the home of the Savings Institute since 1870.

From July 1874 until May,



Tom Beardsley

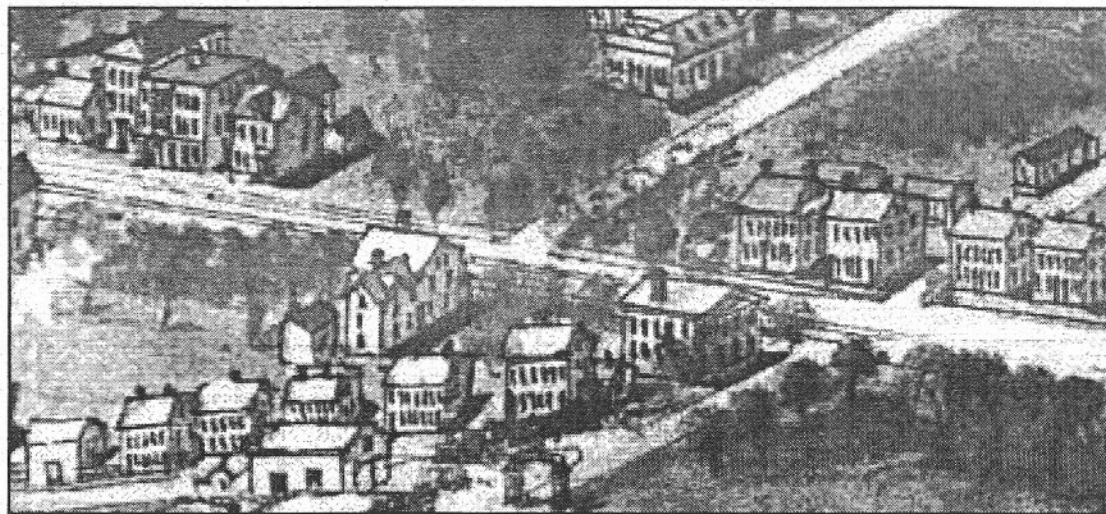
1884 the old Windham Co. store housed the grocery store of George M. Harrington (1849-1921). Harrington was a significant figure in Willimantic history. He was born in Killingly, the son of a wealthy farmer, and worked in dry goods stores in Danielson and Taftville. In May 1871, Harrington opened his own store at Versailles, and shortly afterwards was appointed as assistant foreman of the Sprague general store at Providence.

Harrington arrived in

Willimantic in 1874 and purchased the Windham Manufacturing Co.'s store, and successfully ran it for the next nine years, before leaving to establish a grocery business with George E. Stiles. The firm of Stiles and Harrington became the largest grocery store in the city. Harrington was described as an "ardent Republican" and became active in both Windham and Willimantic politics. He served as the burgess of the borough of Willimantic in 1880, and became its warden in 1883.

In 1893 Harrington became the city of Willimantic's first mayor, and he also represented Windham in the state legislature in 1884. In 1896 Harrington was elected state senator for the district. He died at his home, 196 Church St., on Feb. 26, 1921.

In 1884, when Harrington sold the store, it was still being referred to as the "old bank building." The building's subsequent owner, Samuel E. Amidon had had a colorful life, before settling in Willimantic.



The Old Windham Co. store building in an 1909 aerial view.

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