

— HISTORY —

Union Street was a thriving thoroughfare in past

The photograph reproduced here was recently featured as Threadcity.com's picture of the week, and elicited much response on the site's discussion forum. It is a shot of Union Street looking in a northwesterly direction, and was taken in 1972, when it became known that these historic buildings were slated for demolition as part of Willimantic's upcoming urban redevelopment program.

who produced the celebrated "Boston Skirt." Hanover's building gave Temple Street its name. However, generations of residents referred to it as the Bacon building, because in the early 20th century it became the home of the Bacon brothers' grocery store.



Tom Beardsley

Allen Lincoln (1817-82) originally opened up this division of Willimantic for development at the outset of the Civil War, and the borough's new thoroughfare was patriotically named Union Street. Building commenced west of the Willimantic Baptist Church, and a junction was made northwards from the new thoroughfare in 1862 when George Hanover (1827-80) built his "Temple of Fashion." This stylish structure included an extensive dry goods store, a millinery department, presided over by Mrs. Hanover, and a manufactory where she employed seamstresses

During the 1870s, the borough laid a new thoroughfare to connect with Valley Street, east of Temple Street, and named it Center Street. In 1880 a state armory building was constructed on this road, located halfway between Temple and Jackson streets. Many will recall this state armory as the home of the French Canadian Club.

Up until the 1880s, the land between Center and Jackson streets was occupied by Silas Loomer's lumberyard. After this closed down, the area was occupied by livery stables, and small industrial buildings, but in the mid 1890s Broad Street was laid through the location to connect Union and Valley streets. The entire area was bulldozed in 1973-74, to create the "major parcel."

Most contributors correctly identified this section of the major parcel as it looked before demolition, and recalled the businesses on the street. The building at the right of the photograph with the television antenna stood on the corner of Union and Broad streets, and in the early 1950s housed a paint shop ran by Jake Lewis. Other businesses identified in and around this location included the Brass Rail Tavern, Ernie Losen's Tailor Shop, Goettelich Furniture and the Killourey Funeral Home.

Evelyn Chalifoux recalled that the second building east of Temple was Rob Roy Jewelers, and that Rob's father Homer ran a Barber Shop just around the corner on Temple Street. Next to Rob Roy's store were Willimantic Glass, and the Morris Hardware

store. Evelyn's godfather, Charles Martin, had an appliance and record store almost across the street from Rob Roy, her aunt was a longtime employee at the Goettelich-Bacon Furniture store, and Evelyn's neighbor, a Mr. Sylvester, owned an ice cream store and her father used to shoot pool in its back room.

Several web site contributors also recalled a Jewish grocery store called Flaum's in this vicinity, which was well known for its delicious pickles. Ada Kerachsky

Albright's grandmother, Celia Chasen, was for many years this store's proprietor, and she sold the business to the Flaum family. City directories from the early years of the 20th century reveal that a Minnie Chasen ran a shoe stop at 24 Union St. and that Celia Chasen's grocery store was located at 70 Union St.

If you disagree with the web site contributors regarding locations, or have other information about the area, drop me an e-mail at tom@threadcity.com.



Union Street in 1972.

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