

— HISTORY —

The sad saga of Henry Hall: promise comes to tragic end

In June 1887, Willimantic lost a link with its formative years when Henry L. Hall died at his home in Conantville. He was born in August, 1835 in one of Willimantic's earliest houses. It was located at the corner of Main Street and Cunningham Lane, which is now Walnut Street.

His grandfather, Dixon Hall, was a cotton pioneer who had worked with Samuel Slater in Providence, and his father, Horace Hall (1807-82), was the manager of the Windham Manufacturing Co.'s mills.

Henry Hall was considered by all to possess brilliant natural abilities and was educated in a private school in south Coventry. He planned a literary career but was convinced by his elder brother,

Horace Archibald Hall, to relocate to Hartford and enter business in a drug store. He returned to Willimantic several years later and went into business with his father selling oils, drugs, chemicals and groceries.

In 1871, Hall sold out to his father and became editor of the Willimantic Journal. He purchased the newspaper in 1876, and four years later took on Arthur I. Bill as a partner. Bill had worked his way up in the office from a boy to a successful printer



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and business manager, and bought a half interest in the concern.

Under this partnership, the Hall and Bill Printing Co. was formed, and the Journal became one of Connecticut's leading 19th century country newspapers. Hall's keen wit, perennial good humor, and incisive editorials won him wide attention and favor.

Hall's premature death at 53 was a tremendous loss to Willimantic and the publishing world. His obituary in the local *Chronicle* and Journal newspapers stated that he had died from a "paralysis of the brain." The *Chronicle* went further: "Of late years an infirmity had grown upon him that he was unable to shake off, and for which he perhaps was not responsible." Hall's good friend Allen

Lincoln Jr., a staunch prohibitionist, stated the true reason for Hall's early demise.

Lincoln repeatedly fought to close down Willimantic's burgeoning saloons and in 1884 began publishing a prohibitionist newspaper called the Connecticut Home where he detailed the reasons behind his friend's death.

He explained that Hall had been heading for a brilliant literary and political career, thanks to his abilities as a writer, orator and speaker.

However, he did not attend university as his father wished, because at an early age he became addicted to the alcohol and drugs sold in his family business. He contracted serious liver and respiratory diseases and never fully

recovered. Lincoln concluded by saying that Hall's demise was one of "unspeakable sadness" and that he had been "sacrificed to the curse of drink."

Hall's younger brother, John Manning Hall (1841-1905), was also talented. He studied at Yale University, where in 1866 he became a member of the infamous Skull and Bones Society. He trained to be a lawyer, became a judge and bought recognition to Willimantic in 1899 when J.P. Morgan hired him as the president of the New Haven and Hartford Railroad. Although drink and drugs had killed his brother, it is said that the stress of overseeing the corrupt railroad company eventually killed Judge Hall.

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