

— HISTORY —

John Lathrop Hunter, attorney and journalist

John Lathrop Hunter, one of Willimantic's leading 19th century lawyers, was Windham County's state attorney from 1894 to 1903.

He was born in Gardiner, Maine, in 1834, the son of John Patton Hunter, a merchant and shipbuilder who had fought in the war of 1812, and grandson of Col. George Hunter, a veteran of the revolutionary wars. The family traced its lineage back to a Scots-Irish Hunter who purchased land in Maine in 1718.

Hunter was educated at Gardiner and Wiscasset academies in Maine and in 1851 entered Bowdoin College, from which he graduated in 1855. He was admitted to the bar in Maine in 1859 and practised law in Gardiner for several years, residing in the adjoining town of Farmingdale where he was the supervisor of schools. At this time he edited a Democratic weekly newspaper, "The Age," published in Augusta, Maine.

Chief Justice Melville Weston Fuller, a U.S. Supreme Court judge from 1888 to 1910, also

published this paper for a while.

As publisher of "The Age," Hunter challenged the legitimacy of Maine's Civil War conscription laws, and launched editorial attacks

upon James G. Blaine, Maine's congressional representative. Blaine responded by having Hunter jailed for two weeks at Fort Peble in Portland Harbor.

Hunter gained revenge in 1876 when Blaine was the leading candidate for the Republican Party's presidential nomination.

He uncovered the "Mulligan Letters" that proved Blaine's involvement in an Arkansas railroad share corruption scandal in 1869. Blaine was subsequently defeated for the nomination by Rutherford B. Hayes, who went on to become president.

From 1864 until 1869, Hunter studied law with Charles Danforth, a judge of Maine's



Tom Beardsley

superior and supreme courts. From Maine, Hunter went on to practice law in Boston and Webster, Mass., and arrived in Willimantic in 1871.

He quickly became one of the town's leading lawyers and a prominent figure in the local Democratic Party. Hunter was a delegate in 1872 and in 1876 to the National Democratic Convention, and in 1879 was elected a member of the state legislature where he worked on the judiciary committee, helping to update the state's legal practices.

Hunter and his wife, a direct descendant of Jonathan Trumbull and a founder member of local chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution, were founders of the Willimantic Episcopal Church. In 1884 along with local manufacturer A. R. Morrison and tailor John Bowman, the Hunters financed the removal of a small frame-wood church from Central Village at Plainfield, and relocating it at the corner of Walnut and Valley streets.

In 1887, Hunter, tired of the

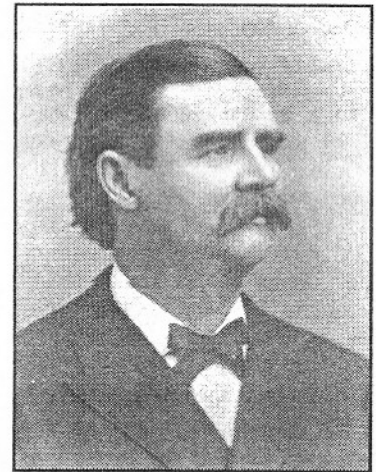
Republican Party bias of the Willimantic Journal and Willimantic Chronicle, founded the democratic Willimantic Daily News. However, its existence was short-lived, it being published only between January and April 1887. Hunter was also a member of the Connecticut Society, Sons of the American Revolution and Natchaug Lodge, Knights of Pythias.

In 1894 Hunter became state's attorney for Windham County, succeeding John Penrose of Central Village. He also filled many positions in Willimantic, serving with distinction on the town's school board and as attorney for the town, borough and city.

He was appointed corporation counsel of the new city of Willimantic in 1897 and was retained as counsel by the principal corporations in Willimantic and vicinity.

John L. Hunter and his wife had lived at a fine house at 219 Pleasant St. in Willimantic, but Hunter had occupied it only during the summer after the death of

his wife. In the winters he lodged at the Hooker House Hotel, from where he also partly ran his law practice. Hunter, along with John Manning Hall (1841-1905) and Thomas J. Kelley (1854-1927) were Willimantic's most famous attorneys. He died in Willimantic in 1903, age 69.



An 1877 portrait of John Lathrop Hunter, one of Willimantic's leading attorneys.

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