

— HISTORY —

The Card House has a long, generous history

Today the fifth annual Willimantic Victorian House Tour gets under way and features some of the northeast's finest examples of Victorian domestic architecture. There are also other attractions, including tours of the Willimantic Cemetery and Windham Mills.

Come and join me today at the cemetery gates opposite the Super Stop & Shop gas station at 10:30 a.m. and at noon, and Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and at noon at the Windham Mills complex. But of course, the Victorian houses are the main attractions of the weekend.

Among the Victorian houses on display are five that are appearing for the first time. They are the 1869 Keigwin House at 54 Pleasant St., the 1888 Little House at 232 North St., the 1895 Scripture House at 114 Windham St., the 1901 Bugbee House at 76 Bellevue St. and the 1927 Ladd House at 30 Potter St. Last week featured a look at the builder of the Bugbee House, and today we'll explore the history of the

Keigwin house, which is more widely known as the Card Home. John Keigwin (1825-97) was born in Griswold. After the premature death of his parents, he was sent to Willimantic to live with his mother's family, the Hibbards. In 1850 he entered the retail clothing and tailoring trade in the expanding borough of Willimantic.

An 1862 ad in the Willimantic Journal revealed Keigwin had a stand in the Brainard Building, and offered "great bargains in ready made clothing, hats and caps. John thinks if he cannot give his customers particular fits, and suit them from top to toe, both as regards quality — and price, then there is no use trying."

In 1868 Keigwin married Eva Young, the daughter of Alfred Young, one of Willimantic's first settlers for whom Young Street is



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named. The following year Keigwin built a magnificent Italian renaissance mansion on Pleasant Street, which was one of Willimantic's 19th century show-piece houses.

John Keigwin sold his clothing business in 1878, to enter the plumbing, stove and crockery business with his son Lewis. He served on the Board of Relief, represented Windham in General Assembly in 1885, and was a burgess of the borough for 11 years.

Keigwin was also Windham's registrar of voters, but in 1881 he was summoned before the superior court for illegally tending the ballot box on election day. However, the judge was a good friend, and a colleague in the GOP, and he dismissed the case.

John Keigwin died in 1897, and his wife inherited his extensive estate of \$31,130, plus the house, which was then valued at \$6,500. After Mrs. Keigwin's death the house was on the market for several years, until it was developed into the Card Home for Aged Women.

The home was named for Dr. David Card (1822-99). He was born at Charleston, R.I., and graduated from the New York University medical school in 1849. Card then practiced for 12 years at Clayville, and Carolina Mills, Rhode Island, before enlisting as a field surgeon during the Civil War. He arrived in Willimantic in 1861 and estab-

lished a practice in Willimantic, located at 765 Main St., from which he served the community for almost 40 years.

Card was concerned that the city had no homes for people of advanced age, so stipulated in his will that after the death of his wife, Hannah T. Card, funds from his estate would be used to establish such a home. His widow died in 1915, and left her entire estate "to establish, conduct and maintain a Home for the Aged in Willimantic."

The money was entrusted to a group of trustees consisting of James Hillhouse, George Hatch, Seth Chauncey Hooker, and Eugene Boss. They organized a corporation, entitled "Card Home for the Aged Inc.," and purchased a lot on Windham Road, commanding a view of the entire city

of Willimantic.

An architect was engaged to design a home there "fireproof and modern in every particular." However, this scheme was abandoned because of rising costs. To reduce expenses the trustees decided to purchase a house, and convert it. After viewing several properties in the city, they eventually purchased the vacant Keigwin mansion on Pleasant Street, "until conditions warrant the building of a new home." A new home was never built, but extensive expansion occurred in 1967.

Visitors will see an old kerosene lamp inside the front entrance, which had hung outside Dr. Card's Main Street offices. Card never practiced medicine in the Card Home. He died some 16 years before it was established.



The 1869 Keigwin mansion, known as the Card House

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