

— HISTORY —

# A pair of Yalies establish a profitable firm

Willimantic's setting in a mainly rural region, and its central location on the New England railroad network made it an ideal distribution point for lumber, grain and farm produce.

These natural and geographical advantages resulted in the establishment of four major lumber and coal companies in the city during the second half of the 19th century.

Silas Loomer and Hyde Kingsley established the city's first lumber company in 1861, and located it between Church and Temple streets. It was better known in recent times as the Willimantic Lumber and Coal Co. Melvin Lincoln and Charles Boss were next upon the scene, and in 1881 they established the Lincoln and Boss Co., which operated out of lumber sheds located on the Willimantic borough block bordered by North, Meadow, Bank and Valley streets.

The profitability of the lumber and coal distribution business attracted two Yale University

graduates to Willimantic and in 1883 James W. Hillhouse and George F. Taylor established the Hillhouse and Taylor Co.

The duo operated out of several locations in the city until 1901, when they purchased a lot adjacent to the Airline Railroad between Dunham and Milk streets from the American Thread Co.

In 1887, Hillhouse and Taylor purchased Dwight Potter's wood-finishing business, and built a fine reputation for providing decorative details for the more stylistic Victorian houses being built across southern New England.

It is doubtless that their own building materials were used in many of the fine houses on the Hill district — and that most likely included the houses built by James and George for their own



Tom Beardsley

families at 185 and 193 Church St.

Hillhouse and Taylor differed from the other lumber dealers in town inasmuch they were not local men like Loomer, Kingsley, Lincoln and Boss.

James W. Hillhouse was born in Montville in 1854 and was extremely proud of his English Puritan stock. He was a direct descendant of the Rev. James Hillhouse, who came to New England in 1719 after attending a private academy in Boston. Hillhouse entered the Norwich Free Academy in 1868, and went on to Yale from where he graduated in 1879.

Four years later he arrived in the Thread City and went into business with George Taylor.

George F. Taylor was born in Vermont in 1857, and came to Willimantic with his parents at the age of 8.

He entered the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale, and graduated in 1876. Taylor had ambitions of a military career, but

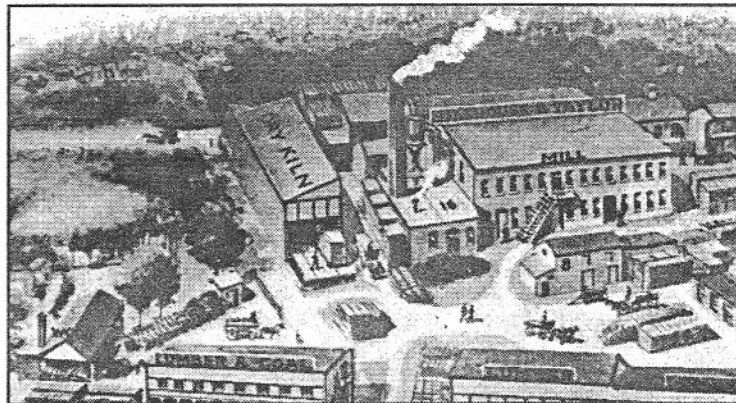
he failed to get into West Point because of bad eyesight. He consequently left the United States and spent a year touring Europe.

He returned and entered the profession of civil engineering, and in 1879 established a small lumber business in Willimantic. Four years later Hillhouse, who injected a substantial amount of capital in the business, joined him and became the senior partner.

By 1920, Hillhouse and Taylor

had 50 employees, three auto trucks and three teams. They delivered building materials to construction jobs being undertaken across eastern Connecticut.

All raw materials were originally delivered to their own siding on the New York and Boston railroad. Hillhouse and Taylor's extensive industrial site is still in operation, and is today the home of Schilberg Integrated Metals at 47 Milk St.



The Hillhouse and Taylor plant, located on Milk Street, is pictured in 1909.

This digitized version of Tom Beardsley's article is made possible by The Willimantic Public Library. All Tom's articles and much more Willimantic history can be accessed at the library. We are grateful to the copyright owner, "The Chronicle" for permission to reproduce this article. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.