

— HISTORY —

The life and achievements of Willimantic's water giver

Henry T. Wales (1837-92) was born on a Windham farm and died of kidney disease in Willimantic 54 years later. However, in his brief lifetime he was involved in a wide-ranging number of careers, and became a significant figure in Willimantic's history.

Wales was described as one of nature's noblemen and a man of high character. Wales left the Wales family farm in 1860, and to work in a meat market in Norwich. He returned to his hometown in 1868, and formed a partnership with his brother-in-law, Joel Webb, a Windham selectman. Webb and Wales sold meat and groceries in South Windham, and two years later the partners purchased Giles Alford's grocery business in Willimantic. Wales left Willimantic in 1871 and worked for a tobacco company in Hartford. Shortly he was hired as a foreman of a construction company building the section of the Air Line railroad connecting Willimantic with Putnam.

In 1874 Wales married Euphemia Tanner, the sister of

Oscar Tanner, who would become Willimantic's first Democratic Party mayor in the 1890s. This family connection would later prove fruitful for Wales. After completing the Airlane project, Wales was hired by George H. Norman as superintendent of construction for a waterworks being built at New Bedford, Mass. Norman was a highly respected builder of waterworks, whose reputation is preserved in the American Society of Civil Engineers' Norman Medal, instituted in 1872 for the architects and builders of the year's best civil engineering project.

After completing the New Bedford project, Wales supervised waterworks construction projects in Middletown, Providence, Boston, Newton, Charlton and Lowell, Mass., and



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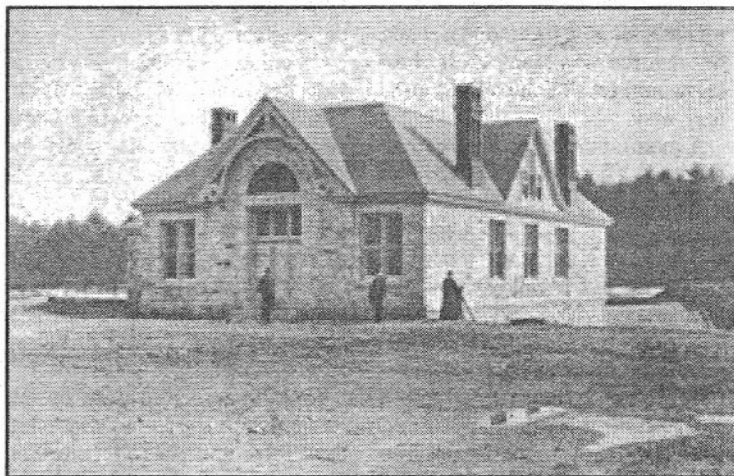
Manchester, N.H. He returned to Willimantic in 1878, and was hired as clerk in the Loomer and Kingsley lumberyard. After several hundred cholera and dysentery deaths in the borough's working class tenement sections during the late 1870s and early 1880s, the borough authorities planned to build a waterworks to improve Willimantic's sanitary conditions. Because of his vast experience in the field, Wales was appointed chairman of the borough waterworks committee in 1882, and served two terms as Willimantic's water commissioner.

Wales oversaw the waterworks project, and negotiated with Mansfield to build the pumping house and with the owners of Hosmer Mountain to purchase enough land at the peak of the hill to build a holding reservoir. He served as Willimantic town clerk from 1881 to 1884, and during President Grover Cleveland's term was appointed Willimantic's postmaster. His Democratic Party connections led to his nomination as Willimantic's judge of probate

in 1890. He was elected, but shortly afterwards Wales contracted a disease, and died just two years into his term.

Henry Wales' funeral was a grand affair, and Willimantic's dignitaries attended the service at the Congregational Church en masse. Wales was buried in the Willimantic cemetery, and Silas Loomer, Frank Wilson, John

Moulton, George Johnson, George Melony and Julius Pinney were coffin bearers. A special meeting was arranged at the town hall, and Thomas Kelley, John Keigwin and Theodore Potvin drafted resolutions that celebrated the life and achievements of Judge Henry Wales, Willimantic's giver of water.



The Willimantic Water Works pictured shortly after construction in 1885.

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