

— HISTORY —

In early 1900s, Willimantic railroad's hub

(Part one of two)

In 1914, Businessmen's Associations at Norwich, New London, Danielson, Putnam and Willimantic joined forces and organized the Eastern Connecticut Development Committee to "stimulate the development of local enterprises by local men as well as by men and by capital from outside the territory." The result was a 70-page pamphlet entitled "Picturesque and Industrial Eastern Connecticut." It featured articles outlining the history and attractions of the region's leading communities.

The pamphlet was issued as the automobile was growing in popularity. By 1913, the state of Connecticut was building better roads into Windham and New London counties, and local businessmen hoped that these tarmac roads would bring new economic opportunities to a region rapidly losing its historic textile industries. The section of the pamphlet featuring Willimantic filled 12 pages, and it provides a snapshot of the city as Europe was embarking upon World War I.

Willimantic, it was noted, lay at eastern Connecticut's geographic center, and was the hub of three

major railroads. The city's Union Station received 62 passenger trains every day, and Willimantic was also well served by a trolley car system that linked it with Norwich via Baltic, and with South Coventry. Furthermore, the Willimantic and Stafford Trolley Car Co. was planning to build a line from Willimantic to the Connecticut Agricultural College in Storrs, and then to South Willington and Stafford Springs.

Also, the Willimantic and Southbridge Trolley Co. was projecting a line from Willimantic to North Windham, Chaplin, Eastford, the Woodstocks and on to Southbridge. Ironically, despite the pamphlet's optimism, the new tarmac roads and increasing automobile ownership would mean that these inter-urban trolley car lines would never be constructed.

The pamphlet stressed that the city's geographic and transportation links had been central to the establishment of major cotton and silk companies, including the American Thread Co. and the



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Quidnick-Windham Co. Located on Bridge Street, this company was a combination of older mills, and manufactured "prints, twills" and high-grade weavings known as "lenos" and "lappetts." The Holland, Windham, Chaffee, Turner and Rossie silk companies employed several hundred people, and the Willimantic Machine Co. manufactured silk looms, exported to England and Germany.

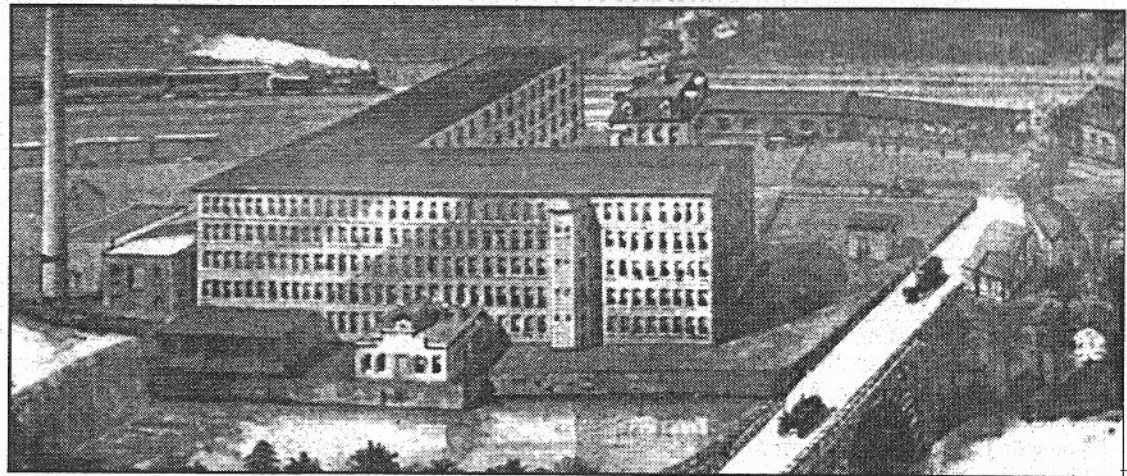
Manufacturing in the vicinity was not limited to textiles, however. The Smith and Winchester Co. at South Windham produced machinery for paper mills, laun-

dries and paper bag manufacturers, and employed 75 skilled mechanics. The Hall and Bill Co. printed labels, cards and advertising pamphlets. The Chronicle Printing Co. published the only daily newspaper in Windham County, and leather board mills operated in the nearby villages of Andover and Hop River.

Not only was Willimantic a great place to work, it was also a fine place to build a home, particularly in the Hill District. The city boasted several leading building contractors, one of which had just constructed Teddy Roosevelt's

summer home at Oyster Bay, Long Island. Prospective industrialists and residents were also reminded that Willimantic had "abundant and handsome granite for building." Builders across the Northeast remarked upon the exceptionally fine gneiss stone that lay beneath the city's surface. Once factories and houses were constructed, there would be no trouble in getting the structures heated and ventilated because the city was home to the famous Vanderman Plumbing and Heating Co.

Continued next week



Above is a sketch of the Quidnick-Windham Mills on Bridge Street in Willimantic taken from the 1914 pamphlet "Picturesque and Industrial Eastern Connecticut."

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