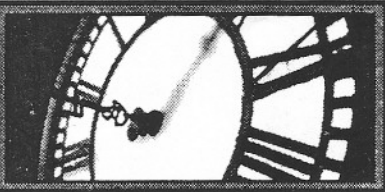


in

Local History



# The evolution of Valley Street

Part two of two

In December 1863, the Willimantic Journal's editor William Weaver and local merchant and mill owner Ona Carpenter took a horse and buggy ride down memory lane. They conducted a journey along a narrow thoroughfare, which was soon to be developed as a new road between Jackson and High streets known as Valley Street.

Weaver and Carpenter recalled that this land had once been a marshy swamp that lay in the foot of the valley that separated the Willimantic River from 'Hogback' hill, and that during the 1840s it had been developed into meadow land by local merchant Thomas Cunningham. Weaver and Carpenter now continued their journey, which had begun on Tanner's Lane or North Street.

Before traveling west along the road that led across the old valley, Weaver and Carpenter looked to the east and noted Warren Atwood's steam-driven sash and blind factory. This considerable stone structure was built, owned and operated by Warren Atwood (1813-87), an eccentric, but central figure in Willimantic's 19th century development.

Atwood was born at Conantville, and served an apprenticeship as a stonemason. He was considered "a peculiar genius," and was responsible for building "numberless houses" in the expanding borough of

Willimantic. He was the founder of the Willimantic Methodist Society and in 1850 he built the Willimantic Methodist Church. Demolished in 1974, it gave Church Street its name.



Tom Beardsley

In 1859, Atwood was hired to work on the building of the Ohio State Capitol building at Columbus, Ohio. Returning to Willimantic during the Civil War, Atwood became involved in the development of the Willimantic Methodist Campground, and later opened a shirt manufactory in his old sash and blind factory.

Weaver and Carpenter then headed west down the road soon to be known as Valley Street. They noted a blacksmith shop, and a large tenement house built by Harry Boss (1816-93), an overseer in the mills. His son, Eugene Boss (1842-1920), became a long serving agent and manager at the American Thread Co. mills.

Carpenter noted that Harry Boss's brother-in-law, Lloyd Baldwin, also owned much land and property in this area.

The pair looked over to their right, and recalled that in their schoolboy days, the elevated area was full of shagbark walnut trees. But today they had gone, and several pretty cottages had been erected in their place. Of the five

buildings in a row they belonged to Mr. Stearns, a harness maker, to Mr. Randall, to Mr. Green, to Mr. Morse, the tailor, and to Lloyd Baldwin, who rented it to Mr. Robertson, the jeweler, and Mr. Sparks, the baker.

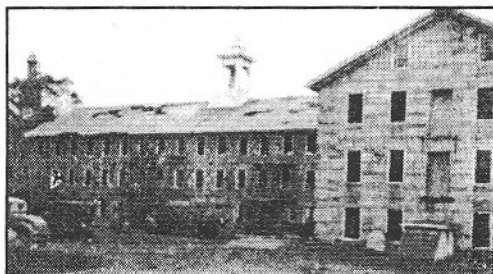
Weaver and Carpenter noted the house of George Alpaugh (1814-96), Willimantic's best known merchant. Alpaugh was known as Windham County's John Wanamaker, the individual who had built America's first all purpose department store at Philadelphia in 1875. Alpaugh had arrived in Willimantic from New York City in 1848, and had entered into partnership with Robert Hooper. Alpaugh and Hooper operated Windham County's largest department store in the Franklin Block on Main Street. Alpaugh was a well known figure around town, and walked the streets in a tall stove pipe hat, similar to that worn by Abraham Lincoln. Alpaugh's daughter Arabella would marry Harry Boss's son Eugene Boss. Weaver and Carpenter eventually reached the junction of High Street, and noted a new dwelling, being built for Dr. Fitch the borough's dentist.

They noted that this was the end of vehicle navigation, as the land west of High Street was impassable. The journey down the small lane connecting Jackson and High Streets was over, and similar voyages would soon be impossible. In 1864, the narrow lane was replaced by a wide thoroughfare known as Valley Street.

## Picture of the Week

This week's mystery picture of the week is of a once-thriving business in the Bridge Street area. It was torn down in 1940. Jan. 8's mystery picture was of Church Street in 1952. Thanks to Sam

Gordon and Robert Ouellette who correctly identified it. If you want to take a stab this week, contact tkarmel@thechronicle.com



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