

## A unique snapshot

In 1983, Willimantic celebrated its sesquicentennial. The Windham-based community became a semi-autonomous borough within the town in 1833. One hundred



Tom Beardsley

and fifty years, later the city residents organized a steering committee and a fine arts committee to arrange the celebrations.

To record the occasion for posterity, the Windham Regional Arts Council published a pamphlet entitled "City of Willimantic: 150th Birthday Celebration." Printed by the Hall and Bill Co., this 48-page booklet presents a unique snapshot of Willimantic 21 years ago, thanks to the many local businesses that purchased advertising.

Local photographer Roland Laramie designed the pamphlet's front cover, which consisted of comparative photographs of Lincoln Square in 1907 and 1983. The inside cover lists the names of

## Weekend

# A 21-year-old snapshot of Willimantic

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of the people in the celebration's two committees. Included among the names are Armand Martineau, Barbara Johnson, Ray Axelrod and Bruce Clements.

Ray Axelrod penned a brief history of the city on the first page. A calendar of events followed, which reveals that celebrations got under way at a fund-raising ceremony held at Lauter Park on June 26. The first major event was a grand celebration ball at the Elks Club on Aug. 20, followed by Arts Spectrum Day on Aug. 21, a cultural and historical fair. Held in the St. Mary's School gym, the Jillson House Museum, the Jillson Square Cinema and on the "Redevelopment Parcel" the commemorations displayed the talents of more than 100 participating artists.

Art Spectrum Day commenced with a poetry reading in St. Mary's School, conducted by Alexander Taylor and George Butterick. The Jubilation Singers, a puppet show, selections from Burton Leavitt's operetta "The Frogs of Windham", dancing programs and the Seventh Day Adventist Choir provided the bulk of the day's indoor attractions. However, there were also indoor events provided by the Windham Historical Society and by local historian Bruce Clouette.

The Jillson House Museum



MEIKLE  
3 - 1984

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY  
ROMANTIC WILLIMANTIC

And Thanks To All Our  
Customers



The Italian Garden Restaurant advertisement in the 150th birthday pamphlet for the city.

hosted an exhibit of late 18th century woodcuts that illustrated craftsmen at work. Laura Knott Twine and Beverly York, attired in period costume, demonstrated some of the crafts depicted. Twine, who later established the Windham Textile and History Museum, discussed cotton manufacturing and weaving as she worked at a loom.

In addition, Claire Meikle, Willimantic's Cupid for 1983-84, provided photographs for an exhibit of Willimantic personali-

ties in one of the Jillson House's upstairs rooms. In the nearby Jillson Square Cinemas, Bruce Clouette presented a slide show of historical photographs. A screening of local home movies showing Willimantic scenes accompanied Clouette's slide presentation.

The major parcel hosted brass, jazz and string band performances, Morris dancing, theatrical performances, poetry readings, "tadpole tales" for children, and a mime performance. Restaurants Cosmopolitan and Remy's

Grinder Shop provided food and refreshments.

The official pamphlet included brief biographies of all the local and regional artists who had contributed to the celebration. They included local photographer Sandy Hale, Barbara Johnson, the Windham Ballet Co.'s artistic director, and local artist Annie Wandell.

Somewhat poignantly, the celebration brochure was full of ads for local businesses, illustrating how the 150-year-old community was still a vibrant commercial community. Some of the businesses are still with us, such as O. L. Willard's, the Lily Pad, John Monahan's framing shop, Schiller's Sewing Circle, Hosmer Mountain Soda, Sumner and Sumner Insurance Agency, Lounsbury's pole and lumber hauling company, and Mackey's. However, many more businesses only live on in memory. They include the Italian Garden Restaurant, Willimantic Camera the Surplus Center, LaMorte's News, the Willimantic Lumber and Coal Co., Ridge's Manufacturing Outlet and the South Side Superette.

Willimantic will celebrate its bicentennial in 2033. Many predict that the local stalwarts who frame pictures and manufacture soda will still be with us, providing services into the community's third century.