

Time and Again

Local
History



The Vanderman family was prominent in city business circles:

Mona Friedland, Windham Community Memorial Hospital's vice president of development and community relations, recently received an inquiry from Jack Hargreaves, the grandson of a well-known Willimantic industrialist, for information on his grandfather and about a box manufacturing company that operated in the Thread City between 1912 and 1926.

Jack contacted Mona because in 1930 his family had donated the land upon which Windham Hospital was built. Jack's grandfather was William Vanderman and Mona contacted me for further information.

Coincidentally, I receive many requests via the Threadcity.com web site about boxes manufactured by Willimantic's Vanderman Co. The most recent request for information came several weeks ago from Neal Johnston in Alabama:

"We have a wooden and metal trunk dated 1897 — patent date July 13, 1897. The Vanderman Plumbing and Heating Co. in Willimantic, Conn., manufactured it. Would you have any information about the company and possibly what the company shipped in the trunk?"

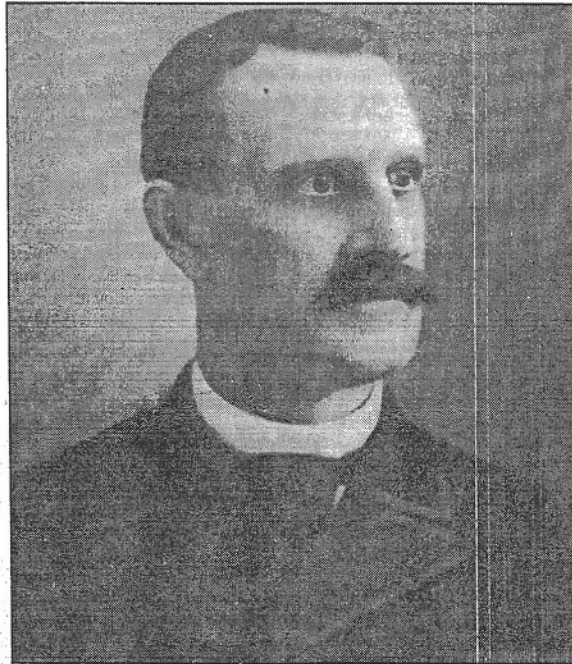
The trunks were actually plumbers' toolboxes, and were widely used across the United States a century ago. William Vanderman was born in Hartford in 1852, where he served a

plumbing apprenticeship. He arrived in Willimantic in 1878 and opened a small plumbing workshop at 719 Main St. Vanderman won numerous contracts for installing heating systems in the new houses cropping up on the Hill district. Consequently, his business expanded rapidly, and in 1886 he transferred to larger premises at 41 Church St.

In 1892 Vanderman built a new factory and workshop at 152 Valley St. and he heated it by a sophisticated system of steam power of his own design, located through its three floors. Vanderman manufactured his own heaters in the new workshops. He also worked on some of Willimantic's largest buildings such as the State Normal School and the Murray Block (Hurley Building) and he fulfilled lucra-



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William Vanderman, pictured in 1894

tive contracts in cities and towns across Connecticut. He also built a national reputation in the trade for his patented "Vanderman"

steam boiler valves.

Vanderman became involved in local politics and civic movements and he displayed a keen

interest in Willimantic's industrial growth. He was the Second Ward's Democratic counselor from 1895 to 1896 and was actively involved in the board of trade, St. Vincent De Paul's charity work and the Knights of Columbus.

Business growth continued and in 1899, Vanderman acquired the vacant Gorry iron foundry on Mansfield Avenue. He trained his sons as mechanics and plumbers and in 1908 turned over his whole business to them, including a branch in Hartford, so he could develop further tools for the plumbing trade. William Vanderman worked in his Valley Street shop, where he designed new toolboxes, bench vices and pipe bending devices.

The prospering Vanderman Co. added a 90 by 50 feet concrete extension to its Mansfield Avenue factory in 1911 and the following year, Vanderman leased part of his plant to the SCS Box Manufacturing Co.

The following year this company relocated to new industrial premises built on Moulton Court and Winter streets by the Willimantic Development Co.

The SCS Box Manufacturing Co. manufactured wooden boxes

for chain stores, packers and butter and egg dealers in the city between 1912 and 1926. Jack Hargreaves recalls that the manager's name was Frances Sherman, who lived at 23 Turner St. Jack's grandfather, William Vanderman, lived at 3 Turner St.

Jack's father, John Hargreaves, was born in England. He came to the United States in 1905 and arrived in Willimantic to work for the SCS Box Co. John married William Vanderman's daughter Annie in 1923 and Jack was born in Willimantic in 1932.

He grew up in Willimantic and has many fond memories of the city from the 1940s.

When the SCS Box Co. closed down in Willimantic in 1926, it moved to Palmer, Mass., and Jack's father commuted daily by rail from Willimantic to Palmer for 25 years.

William Vanderman died in Willimantic in 1914 and in 1930 Vanderman's sons donated the land upon which Windham Hospital would be built.

If you have any further information on the SCS Box Co. or any photographs, please contact me through the web site or the *Chronicle*, and I'll pass the information onto Jack.

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