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After the completion of the Airline railroad through the borough in the mid 1870s, Willimantic embarked on a journey of growth and prosperity. Consequently, in 1879, the town of Windham applied for reinstatement as the county seat, a status it had lost to Brooklyn in 1819.

However, the town of Putnam and the borough of Danielsonville also decided to fight for the same status. In order to reduce the competition, Windham had joined forces with Putnam and hatched a deal, wherein each town would hold county court sessions for six months each. However, the Willimantic borough burgesses had secretly contacted state officials and offered to build a jail if the state awarded Windham alone the court sessions.

Details of this "Willimantic Bribe" leaked out, and infuriated the civic leaders of Brooklyn, Putnam and Killingly. These towns then launched a vigorous campaign in the pages of the Putnam Patriot, Danielsonville Sentinel, and Windham County Transcript to retain the superior court in eastern Windham County. Feeling jilted and betrayed by Windham, Putnam withdrew its "half-shire" plan and voted to appropriate \$30,000 to erect a

courthouse and jail as it applied for full county seat status.

Danielsonville's burgesses voted to provide funds for new county buildings in the Killingly borough. The so-called Windham County "imbroglio" fascinated the state. The combatants formed battle lines and in February 1881 began to fight out the issue at the Connecticut General Assembly.

The Connecticut General Assembly's March 1881 session voted to remove the county seat from Brooklyn to Putnam — a decision that infuriated the majority of the county towns. A year of fierce debates ensued and the combatants reached a compromise in the General Assembly's March 1882 session, where the

state granted the towns of Brooklyn and Windham half shire status. Simple economics won the day as the appropriations for building new county buildings at Putnam and Danielsonville needed supplementing by increasing taxes in the other county towns. A suitable courthouse and jail already existed in Brooklyn and the new Willimantic courtroom in the Hayden Block would not cost the state a cent.

Windham was proud to have regained the status lost in 1819, even if only for six months each year. However, after Whiting Hayden's death in 1886, his son James Hayden (1830-98) raised



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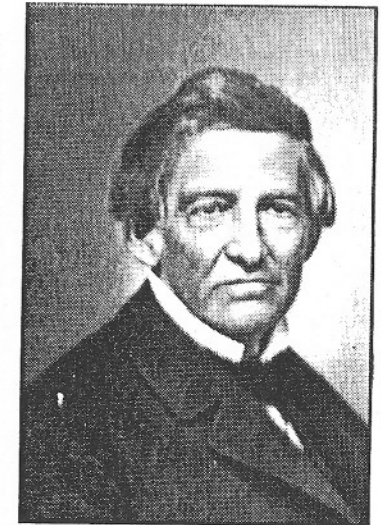
Time and Again

The Willimantic 'bribe'

the rents annually on the Hayden Block's judicial and political facilities. In response, Windham's selectmen and Willimantic's burgesses joined forces and hired a nationally known architect, Warren Richard Briggs, to design and build an edifice to serve the town, borough, and county. Briggs, renown for his work on the Indiana State House at Indianapolis and the Connecticut state building at the 1893 Columbian Exposition at Chicago, provided the new Windham County Court building with a towering spire, which soared through the western Windham County sky. It may have shocked some Victorian sensibilities, but affirmed Willimantic as the new

locus of power.

After the selectmen, lawyers and judges left the Hayden Block and removed to the new town hall, a number of civic organizations such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Knights of Columbus used the vacant courtroom. Throughout the 20th century, small businesses employed this grand space for a variety of uses. Unfortunately, the lowering of the ceilings in the building's top story ensured that this beautifully designed and decorated space had remained hidden for half a century, until The Savings Institute recently renovated it, and re-opened the historic location for the public gaze.



Whiting Hayden, circa 1870.