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## The Potter family: a long proud history

William Niles Potter (1846-1937) was a leading businessman and civic leader in Willimantic for more than a century. One of his grandsons, Willimantic born



Tom Beardsley

Stephen Potter, who died recently at age 81, was a vice president of American Petroleum and another, 88-year old Bob Mustard, is a well known Willimantic resident.

The Potter genealogy reveals a line that goes back to Robert Potter of Coventry in Warwickshire, England. Robert Potter arrived in Lynn, Mass. in 1634 and in 1642 became one of the proprietors and purchasers of a tract of land in Rhode Island from the Shawmut Indians, which was later named Warwick.

Potter was a ninth generation descendant of Robert Potter and was born April 10, 1846 in Willimantic in a house that stood on the site of the Loomer Opera House. This location is now occupied by Nassiff's, on the western corner of Main and North streets.

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Potter was involved with civic affairs. He was a devout Republican and cast his first vote in 1868 for Gen. Ulysses Grant. Potter was a founder of the Natchaug Lodge of the Knights of Pythias, and became prominent in the organization. In 1895-96 he was the Knights' Grand Chancellor of the State and in 1897 became the Knights' Connecticut State Exchequer.

He was also a charter member of the Willimantic branch of the International Order of Odd Fellows, Obwebeetuck Lodge No. 16. Potter was also an organizer of the Willimantic Board of Trade in the 1880s, later known as the

William N. Potter's father, John Niles Potter (1809-87), had arrived in Willimantic from Scituate, R.I. in 1830 to work at the Windham Manufacturing Co. He married Amy Dorrance of Willimantic on Nov. 7, 1833.

John and Amy Potter built a hotel on the site today occupied by the Nathan Hale Hotel and in 1847 they purchased a large farm at the western end of the borough of Willimantic. This land was later developed as the Willimantic Town Farm and the Willimantic Cemetery. In 1863 John Potter abandoned farming and became the steward of the Connecticut Literary Institute in Suffield. Potter returned to Willimantic in 1869, purchased a farm on South Street and remained there until his death.

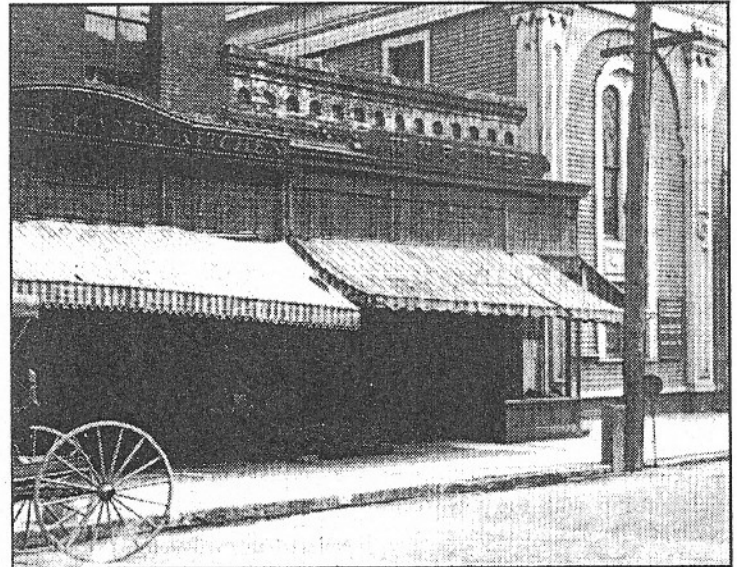
Potter was the only son of John and Amy Potter who lived into adulthood. He grew up on his father's original farm, now the site of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. He studied at the Connecticut Literary Institute in Suffield, graduating in 1867. Potter subsequently taught there, but returned to Willimantic with his parents in 1869. On May 1, 1870, he became a shoe merchant

Chamber of Commerce.

The rapidly expanding borough of Willimantic was the ideal place to organize a building loan company, and in 1891 Potter was a central figure in the chartering of the Willimantic Building and Loan Association.

He was the treasurer of that organization until his death. From 1892 until 1897, Potter was a Republican selectman in the town of Windham. He served three terms as first selectman, two as second and one as third selectman. Moreover, during 1895-96 Potter was a member of the Windham Town Hall building committee.

Other than his civic, social and political roles in Windham, Potter



William Niles Potter's shoe store, pictured at 2 Union St. in 1905.

when he entered into partnership with Armin Martin to form the company Potter & Martin. Potter became sole proprietor upon the death of Martin. On May 1, 1920, the merchants of the city organized a party to celebrate Potter's 50 years in business in Willimantic.

Potter married Estella Bump on May 4, 1874. Estella was born in Stockton, N.Y. and had arrived in

Willimantic to live with her aunt after the death of her parents. She graduated from Natchaug High School in 1873. The Potters had five children. Eudora, Bob Mustard's mother, was born in 1875, Amy in 1877, Arthur, Stephen Potter's father, in 1879, Ida in 1882 and a son, William, who died in infancy.

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was a staunch Baptist. He became a trustee of the Willimantic Baptist Church in 1869, and from 1870 was the its clerk.

William Niles Potter died at his home, 146 Church St. on August 7, 1937, at the age of 91, and was referred to in his obituary as the dean of local businessmen. Potter had retired from his shoe business the previous year, which meant he had been in business in Willimantic for 66 years.

From 1870 until 1879, his business was located in the Windham Hotel block on the eastern corner of Main and Church streets. From 1879 until 1887, the Potter shoe company traded from the Tilden block and from 1887 until 1936 from a store at 2 Union St.