

# Lincoln Square: Once a busy city intersection

Part one of two

For many generations of Willimantic residents, the area at the old intersection of Union and Lower Main streets, just east of the entrance to Church Street, was known as Lincoln Square. It was a gathering place for meetings, demonstrations and public occasions for more than a century.

During the 1890s, Lincoln

Square became the preferred location for Windham's new town hall. However, some of the town fathers balked at the expense of the land in that location, and a



Tom Beardsley

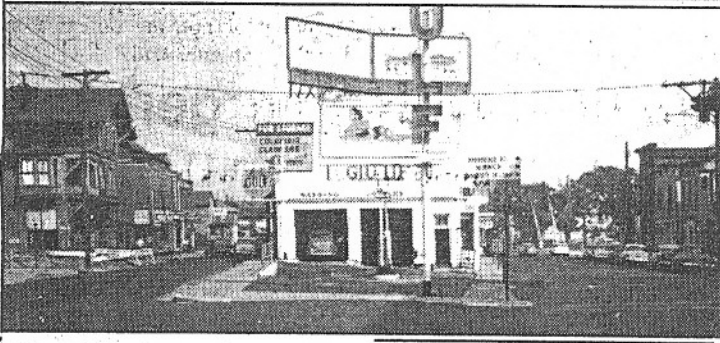
fierce debate ensued between two factions: "downtowners," who wanted to demolish the Lincoln block and build it facing onto Lincoln Square, and the "uptowners," who wanted to build it opposite the entrance to Bridge Street on less expensive land. The uptowners won, so Lincoln Square did not become the seat of local government. Nevertheless, in 1902, President Teddy Roose-

velt addressed massed crowds in the square.

The Lincoln block was demolished sometime during the 1950s, and a Gulf gas station filled the location for many years. Older residents will remember that a Christmas tree graced Lincoln Square throughout the festive season. However, this historic space

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## Picture of the week



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disappeared with redevelopment in 1974.

The intersection which created the "square" came into being in 1862 when George W. Burnham (1818-1907) built a triangle-style building there, and established a grocery store in it. In 1874 he sold the building to his future son-in-law, John C. Lincoln (1851-1925), who established a furniture store at the location and gave his name to Lincoln Square. Lincoln was a native of North Windham and back in 1692, his forebears were some of the first settlers in Windham.

The Lincoln family was originally from Wymondham, a market town located nine miles southwest of the city of Norwich, in the county of Norfolk, England. Thomas Lincoln was born at Wymondham in 1603 and came to Hingham, Mass. in 1635. He later settled at Taunton, and was one of the original stockholders in the famous Taunton iron works. Thomas' grandson Samuel Lincoln was born at Taunton in 1664, but left and settled at Norwich and later in Windham, where he was the proprietor of a vast acreage of land located on what is now the North Windham and Chaplin border.

Samuel's son, also Samuel, was born in Windham in 1693 and developed a sheep farm on the

family land. Samuel's grandson Jonah Lincoln (1760-1845) took advantage of the raw material available to him and became a well-known wool manufacturer.

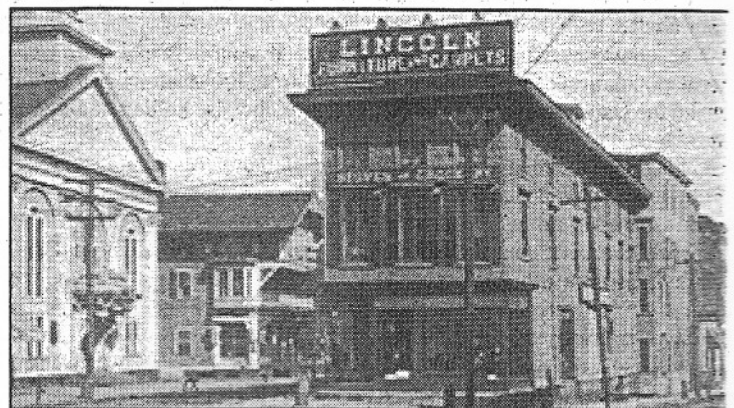
Jonah Lincoln built a woolen mill on the Natchaug River in North Windham and the blue satinet material he manufactured was used in making uniforms for revolutionary soldiers and felt for paper machines. He was for many years representative to the General Assembly for the towns of Hampton, Windham and Chaplin and was active in organizing the Christian Church in North Windham.

Two of Jonah Lincoln's sons, Dan Lincoln (1786-1864) and

Stowell Lincoln (1788-1870) took over their father's woolen mill, but after the Civil War they abandoned it to run the family farm. Dan then purchased the Tucker farm in Chaplin and built a saw and grist mill. "Captain Dan" was an officer in the local infantry and a selectman in both Windham and Chaplin. His sons, Mason Lincoln (1816-89) and Allen Lincoln (1819-82), would leave North Windham and Chaplin and take advantage of the increased business opportunities becoming available in the nearby textile manufacturing borough of Willimantic.

Continued next week

Join me in a tour of the Willimantic Cemetery on June 12 or



The Lincoln block, which gave its name to Lincoln Square, pictured in 1910.

13, at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m., during the sixth Victorian Willimantic Home Tour. Meet at the cemetery gates opposite Super Stop &

Shop.

There is a \$5 cover charge for the hour-long tour.

June 3, 2007