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The saga of the 'Connecticut Home'

Part two of two

In October 1886, Allen Bennet Lincoln, the son of a prominent real estate dealer and merchant Allen Lincoln, established a newspaper in Willimantic dedicated to the prohibitionist movement. Lincoln graduated from Yale University in 1881, and was hired as a subeditor by the Providence Press and Star. Two years later he became chief clerk of the Connecticut state board of education, and then in 1886 he returned to his hometown to establish the Connecticut Home

newspaper.

Lincoln had hoped that the newspaper would attain a circulation of 3,000, but it peaked at 1,900. So after a year in Willimantic he renamed it the New England Home and removed the operation from Church Street in Willimantic to Hartford. However, in that year the



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Connecticut Home provided a unique perspective of everyday life in Willimantic. For example, during the paper's tenure in the Thread City, local businessmen formed the Willimantic Board of Trade, the forerunner of today's Chamber of Commerce, to attract new industries to the borough.

The first success was to convince the Coventry's Addison Kingsbury Box Manufacturing Co. to build a one and a half story building, a 30 by 60 foot factory on Valley Street and
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employ 50 hands to make boxes and crates. This building is occupied today by the O. L. Willard Co. Kingsbury, who had box shops at South Coventry, Rockville, New London and Northampton, Mass., manufactured about 20,000 boxes a day.

Lincoln's main interest was to fight the influences of the demon drink, and on June 29, 1887, he gave over his editorial page to discuss the death of his friend, Henry L. Hall, from alcohol and drug-related diseases.

Hall was the son of Henry Hall, a prominent cotton manufacturer who had helped to establish the Windham Manufacturing Co. on Bridge Street in the 1820s. Henry L. Hall was born in 1835 and after a private education entered the drug store business in Hartford.

Hall returned to Willimantic in 1860 and established a drugstore business on Cunningham Lane (Walnut Street), selling oils, drugs, chemicals and groceries. In 1871 he accepted a position as editor on the Willimantic Journal. Hall purchased the newspaper in 1875 and in 1880 went into partnership with Arthur I. Bill and

formed the Hall & Bill Printing Co.

Thanks to Hall's wit and eloquence, the Journal became one of the state's leading newspapers. However, for Lincoln, Hall's subsequent death was yet another addition "to the thousands of lives and promise which have gone down in unspeakable sadness sacrificed to the curse of drink."

However, everything was not enthralled in such sadness in the Thread City during the summer of 1887. Willimantic was a booming young borough, and a New Yorker, Isaac Stahl, was attempting to secure a franchise for building a horse railway from the Fairgrounds (Recreation Park) to the cemetery, with a Jackson Street branch.

Stahl was constructing a similar project at Westfield, Mass., and was looking at several Connecticut cities. He found Willimantic's topography ideally suitable. However, Willimantic's Main Street was having a sewer pipe installed and Stahl would have to wait.

The Connecticut Home avidly reported on civic construction projects. For example, the sewage plan proposed the laying of

64,025 a feet of vitrified earthenware pipe, varying in size from 6 to 24 inches in diameter and 620 feet of brick sewers near the outlets, 62 flush tanks and 245 manholes, also a storm sewer to relieve North, Meadow, Walnut and Valley streets, comprising of 3,010 feet of brick and stone sewer from 30 to 44 inches in diameter with six catch basins.

Lincoln was proud to report on the development of his hometown, and also how it was becoming a regional transportation hub. He informed his readers in August that 39 passenger trains now passed through Willimantic each day, more than at Norwich, New London or Middletown.

For Allen Lincoln, Willimantic was the "coming city of Southern New England."

The newspaper ceased publication in Willimantic just over a year after its publication, and Lincoln relocated it in Hartford where he hoped that his prohibition outlook would gain a wider readership.

The newspaper survived in its new form until 1892. Lincoln then returned to Willimantic and became involved in the insurance business. After World War I, he compiled the two volumes of "A Modern History of Windham County," which was published in 1920. However, the year the Connecticut Home was published from offices on Church Street 33 years earlier, left us with a glimpse into the life of the growing borough.