

Willimantic

Willimantic has a rich history of sporting achievement from baseball to basketball and from golf to boxing. In 1936 Anthony McKenna celebrated the fact by publishing a



Tom Beardsley

120-page illustrated booklet entitled "The Sports Review: A Resume of Athletic Endeavor in the City of Willimantic."

Claire Meikle republished McKenna's booklet in 1983 and dedicated it to Willimantic's famous baseball-playing family, the Nichols. The most accomplished member was Art (Meikle) Nichols who played for the Chicago Cubs and the St. Louis Cardinals during the early years of the 20th century.

McKenna's booklet featured numerous ads from local businesses of the time, which in their own right provide an interesting commercial history of the city during the Depression years. The local merchants asked everyone to

"consider your home town first" when thinking about a purchase. Page 2 included a full-page ad for the Delmar Radio Co. of 31 Church St. Named for its proprietors, Delphis Dion and Charles Martin, Delmar dealt in radios, washers, ironers and refrigerators. One of Willimantic's oldest businesses, William J. Sweeney's sta-

tionary store, also featured prominently in the volume's first pages.

The Sports Review's first section dealt with baseball and opened with a picture and brief biography of local baseball hero Arthur "Art" Nichols. Historic pictures of the city's famous baseball teams included the city's professional team, the Willimantic

Colts, the all-Irish Emerald baseball team, the Sodom Stars, and from 1915 the Dye House team, the first American Thread league champions.

The publication's second section dealt with football and included pictures of leading football teams from Windham High School taken between 1898 and 1925. This part also featured a photograph of Edward "Sheik" Saba who had played for Windham High School and

Vermont University. In 1933 Saba had been included in the All-New England College Eleven.

The booklet's largest section included photographs of men and women's basketball team pictures.

These captioned pictures range in date from 1903 and 1934 and the players include some of Willimantic's most prominent citizens. One of the most well-known was city mayor James Hurley who in the early years of the century played for the Rubicon Rubes of the Royal Order of the Rollicking Rams, a Willimantic basketball team that

lost only three games in five years.

Beyond basketball, baseball and football, McKenna's Sports Review featured women's tennis, trotting, contract bridge, golf and box ball rolling. Tennis was played at the Willimantic Country Club, founded in 1899 in the west end of the city as a golf club. In 1922 the golfers moved to Cemetery Road (Club Road) when the club built a new 18-hole golf course there.

Trotting competitions took place at the Willimantic racetrack (Recreation Park) from 1883 until just before World War I. Box ball rolling was a forerunner of 10 pin bowling, and was originally played in Willimantic in the Hotel Hooker's basement. In 1912 the new YMCA building on Main Street included a bowling alley. Soon afterwards, entrepreneurs built alleys in the old Center

Street Armory and at Wood's Smoke Shop. Moreover, in the 1920s the Elks built one in their new home on Pleasant Street. Willimantic became a well-known bowling center, and in 1931 the Lucky Strike lanes opened in Leonard's Garage.

McKenna's sporting booklet also featured a number of brief biographies on local notables such as Danny Dunn, Thomas Callaghan, Arthur T. Kelley and Oscar Tanner. The volume ends as it began, with ads, and the back cover includes an interesting piece about the Windham Grill. Opened in 1931 by Stephen Chontos and William Sledjeski, everyone knew that the Grill sold "Faultless Food for Fastidious Folks."

achievements



The Sodom Stars baseball team of 1908

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