

Eunice Heap: The essence of generosity

Part one of two

The Willimantic Episcopal Church on Valley Street, a well-known local landmark, owes its existence and location to the generosity of one of Willimantic's wealthiest 19th century women, Eunice Heap (1801-87).

An Episcopal church had operated in the Windham Center village from 1735, but St. Paul's was not officially established there until 1832. A church was built the following year and was consecrated in 1834.

However, changes were afoot in the wider town of Windham. The nearby expanding borough of Willimantic was attracting more people to the old county seat. Consequently, in 1850 the church's new rector, the Rev. Henry Edwards, received an instruction from the bishop of Connecticut that he should spend an occasional Sunday afternoon to establish an Episcopal church in the "village of Willimantic."

Congregations met in certain halls and rooms in Willimantic, until the archdeaconry officially established a temporary mission in the Thread City in 1865, also named St. Paul's like its sister church in Windham Center. The rectors of the Windham Center church continued to hold services in Willimantic until 1869, when the bishop appointed Isaac Hallam as the Willimantic missionary's first resident rector.

Meetings continued in various halls, but in December 1882, Eunice Heap met with the Rev. Lemuel Wells and promised to give the Episcopal society a "valuable and desirable lot situated at the south-easterly corner of Valley and Walnut streets."

This was on the condition that the society raised \$1,000 to build a church without going outside the borough. The society circulated a subscription paper and within a week, it had raised half the required sum towards construction of a new church edifice.

Eunice (Richmond) Heap was born in East Hampton in 1801, the daughter of Dr. John Richmond. In 1819, she married Henry Smith a physician in her father's office and in 1840, their daughter Prudence Smith married Willimantic's wealthiest merchant and trader, Daniel Lord. Their daughter, Marion Lord, was educated in the best finishing schools in Boston.

Built in 1838, the Lord mansion was adjacent to the Willimantic Baptist Church. It was removed after the Civil War to Turner Street to make way for the building of a new commercial block —



Tom
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which burned down in the famous St. Valentine Day's fire in 1968. Windham historian Allen Lincoln recalled Daniel Lord's house in its original Willimantic location in an article published in 1893:

"I well remember that old Lord mansion. It stood well back from the street, with portico and bay windows, marvelous luxuries for those days, and in front was a lawn varied by shrubbery and flower beds, while along the street line was a handsome fence, the whole making a picture to my childish eyes which only the word 'grandeur' could adequately convey. Here dwelt Marion Lord, the sole heiress of her father's (Daniel Lord's) score or more of thousands, and she died on what was to have been her wedding day, at

the age of 18, and they buried her with her diamond ring on."

Marion Lord's tragic death meant that her grandmother, Eunice Heap, inherited the vast Lord estate. After the death of her first husband, Dr. Smith, Eunice had married Willimantic businessman David Kellog and when he died, Eunice wed English-born tailor George Heap who operated a tailoring business on Willimantic's Main Street until his death in 1878.

Eunice and George Heap had been devout Episcopalians and in 1883, Eunice gave the valuable plot of land on Valley Street to the St. Paul's mission once members had raised the necessary \$1,000.

Continued next week



The Lord Mansion on Main Street, pictured shortly before it was removed to Turner Street in 1866.