

April 11, 1992

## THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

A WEEKLY REVIEW OF LOCAL NEWS  
ITEMS FOR 1892, 1917, 1942 AND 1967

### 1892

The balmy spring evenings and increasing daylight attracted the area's youth to the Windham Center green, to the chagrin of local inhabitants. They indulged in their favorite pastime - hard cider and ice cream parties!

Once the cider took affect, the sprees became rather noisome. No one could identify the culprits. The Chronicle correspondent reporting these events knew them, and divulged several clues as to their identity. His expose revealed that the ringleaders were English, and that they all worked together in the Thread Company's Number Four mill on a series of carding machines nicknamed "Ives Street Lane." No more cider and ice cream parties were reported in Windham Center!

A clue to why Willimantic's revelers fled to Windham Center for their entertainment, can be found in the local Police Chief's edict which banned "loafing" on Willimantic's streets. Chief Hills posted notices on every Main Street building, stating that if three or more people collected in one spot, they were liable to arrest, imprisonment and a seven dollar fine.

The city's female population were distraught. They were the targets of crude and lewd remarks as the passed by the loafers. Hills also banned the posting of "obscene bills" advertising future burlesque attractions at the Loomer Opera House. The bills featured provocative poses of actresses in various states of undress - at a time when "a glimpse of stocking was considered something shocking." The bills often attracted groups of loafers.

Hills also dispersed loafers from their favorite spot at the junction of Main and Union Street, where they insulted people who came to use the mailbox. The police discouraged "loafing and idling" upon the city's "highways, sidewalks, bridges, fences and structures" which "hindrance travel."

### 1917

Francis E. Herrick, of 151 Windham Road, died of pneumonia in Worcester Mass., during a visit to relations, on April 11. His passing revealed an interesting chapter in Willimantic history. He was born in Willimantic in 1841, and worked for the Willimantic Linen Company and the American Thread Company for 55 years. He retired as the overseer for the dresser - tenders on April 27, 1912, and was succeeded by

his son, Frank.

Francis Herrick joined the recently formed Willimantic Linen Company in August 1857, as a dresser-tender. A fellow employee at this time was the young Eugene Boss, who later became mill agent. Herrick was appointed overseer of the dresser-tenders in 1864, in the newly built mill no. 2. Up until his retirement, he worked in every department in the entire mill complex, except the pulp room. Herrick was apparently an overseer "with an heart." He was greatly respected, and missed, by the several generations of local millworkers who had labored under him.

The United States declared war on Germany on April 6. There was much activity at the city Armory on Pleasant Street. Twenty members of Company L, First Connecticut Infantry, Willimantic, were sent to Putnam to guard roads and bridges. They were billeted in the Champeau store on South Main Street, Putnam. Guards from Company K, First Connecticut Infantry, Hartford, were posted on the Willimantic footbridge and at other strategic spots in town.

French Canadian men organized the Willimantic Choral Club in rooms in the Windham Hotel. They were congratulated for their patriotism, for decorating the outside of the Hotel with colorful stars and stripes banners and flags, and with a large sign which read, "Here comes the flag, hail it. Who dares to drag it or trail it? Give it hurrahs, three for the stars, three for the bars. Uncover your head to it, the soldiers who tread to it, shout at the sight of it, the unsullied white of it, the blue and the red of it. It's our flag." Every building along Main Street sprouted flags, bunting and banners, and every private residence had "old glory" fluttering from windows and verandas.

Strict war measures were enacted in town. Willimantic's populace was warned that they must comply with the troops guarding the town. If they were challenged, ordered to stop and be searched, they must comply. An incident near the Natchaug River Railroad Bridge in the east end of the town had fanned the flames of war hysteria in Willimantic. A guard had spotted a "prowler" near the bridge abutments. He called for him to stop, but the man ran away. The guard fired warning shots into the air, and the prowler fired shots at the guard!

Two men were seen to be watching the Armory. Troops challenged them, but the men ran away. Several soldiers chased after them, but the men disappeared in the thick woods between the rear of the armory and the Willimantic River. Soon after, an "incendiary fire" near the Willimantic depot was extinguished by a Corporal Tift, guarding the New Haven railroad. It seemed as if German saboteurs were lurking around every corner!

## 1942

Otto Nyffeler, the Director of the Willimantic Trade School, located in the old Turner silk mill building on Valley Street, announced a series of weekend courses to train women and High School seniors in machine shop skills. The regular student body

number at the trade school stood at 65. The new courses increased it to 145. Nyffeler hired Pauline Cole of North Windham as an extra instructor to train Willimantic's women and teenagers to weld and to operate lathes, drilling machines, shaping machines and screw turners.

Registration for the courses was held in the U.S. Employment Service offices located in the Jordan block on Main Street. Nyffeler stressed that skilled industrial workers were required for the war effort, and that he could guarantee placement upon graduation.

Colonel Ernest Averill, the Connecticut state director of selective service, began the task of registering more than 180,000 men, aged between 45 and 64, according to their skills and aptitudes, for war production work. He pointed out that these men were not liable for military service. Two registration posts were opened in Willimantic. American Thread employees only were registered in a special office at the plant. Everyone else had to register at the YMCA.

J. Nelson Platt, the local coordinator for selective service, stated that a mobile unit would be on hand to register anyone ill or unable to leave their homes. All prospective registrants should be prepared to tell the registrar his trade, name, address, telephone number, age, date of birth, place of birth, weight, height, and his employer's name and address.

The national headquarters of selective service, in Washington DC, expected to register some 13 million men nationwide. The registration in Windham produced 1612 names, about 300 more than expected.

## 1967

Joseph Talge, of 298 Pleasant Street, filed papers in the offices of Willimantic Building Inspector, Silvio Sirelli. Main Street was to get a new building. Construction began on the site of an abandoned service station at 920 Main Street, next to the Capitol Theater. The new 43 x 68 foot structure was designed by Columbia architect David Butts. The specifications called for the space to house four businesses, including Talge's barbershop, currently located on Jackson Street.

Forty Willimantic State College students arranged a "sophomore sweep" to clean the city streets as part of their school year's "college and community" project. The sweep became a "town - gown" partnership when Willimantic Public Works Superintendent, Alexis Caisse, loaned the students the use of city equipment. Prizes were presented to the teams producing the largest amounts of litter.

Officials from the University of Connecticut sought permission to develop a 42 acre site on the southeastern corner of Dog Lane and Route 195 in Storrs. The plans, generated by the school's Center for Real Estate and Urban Economic Studies, called for non student multi family rental housing and shopping center facilities. They consisted of 80 one bedroom units renting at \$85 per month in a 8 story building, 96 three bedroom

units renting at \$140 a month in 12 8-unit buildings, and 120 two bedroom units renting at \$110 per month in five three-story 24 unit buildings.

Mansfield Town officials, fearing increased taxes, and the Mansfield Housing Association, owners of over 600 apartments in town, fearing competition from UConn, vigorously opposed the plans.