

April 25, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

Telephones had been a novel feature in town for several years. However, the Willimantic Linen Company were responsible for a local innovation - the city's first long distance hook up to New York City. It was installed in their new offices in the recently abandoned Company store building - which today houses the Textile Museum. The company could now talk directly with their HQ in the New York.

Repeated complaints about the sticky and gooey morass which doubled as the streets of Willimantic's business district, led to the resignation of the city's superintendent of streets. It was the same every spring when the thaw washed away the thin layers of crushed stone. The new superintendent was aware of the criticism, and requested that the city invested in a program which would lay granite blocks on the parts of Main, North, Church and Railroad Streets in the city center.

The "Boston-Brooklyn Flyer" was one of New England's most popular steam trains. It arrived in Willimantic during the early hours of the morning, just as the Montrealer does today. The New England and New Haven Railroad rescheduled the "Flyer." It arrived in Willimantic at 2. 17 pm after departing Boston at noon. From Willimantic, it went on to Hartford, Waterbury and Hawleyville before transferring onto the Housatonic railroad. The passengers disembarked and climbed aboard a ferry at Wilson's Point, which ploughed across Long Island sound to Oyster Bay for a "delightful sail of one hour" and onwards via the Long Island Railroad to Brooklyn NY.

1917

Students and Faculty at the Storrs Agricultural College had long complained about their isolation. College officials, supported by the Public Utilities Commission and the "Shore Line Electric Car Company," introduced a bill in the state legislature to request \$50,000 to provide a trolley car connection between Storrs and Willimantic.

Everyone in the city was surprised by the shock resignation of Chief of Police Edgar H. Richmond. The Chief joined the Willimantic Police as a constable in 1893, serving Captain William Hillhouse. He was quickly promoted to lieutenant, and succeeded Hillhouse as Captain in 1900. On June 22, 1911, the city created the post of Chief of Police, and Richmond advanced to the new rank. His retirement gave him an annual city pension of \$360.

The city announced that Richmond was forced to retire because of an injury he had received on duty in 1906, when he was kicked in the stomach by an "insane man." A growth had appeared in his abdomen, and physicians recommended his retirement. That was the official record. It later transpired that Richmond had received an offer he couldn't refuse!

The American Thread Company decided to end the long time tradition of non employees wandering around the plant and yards, either visiting friends and relatives, or seeking employment from the various overseers in the different departments. It was rumored that the Company feared sabotage by enemy aliens. They erected a white picket fence around their property, and banned everyone but employees from their premises, and opened an office in the building now occupied by the Windham Textile and History Museum. This office housed the new "security and employment bureau" And guess who was in charge - on a salary which dwarfed his police pay! Richmond was placed in charge of the Company's nightwatchmen, and all visitors had to seek his written approval to enter the plant.

1942

The Calvary Baptist Church was established in Willimantic on July 6, 1916. In 1918, they purchased a private residence on Meadow Street for \$4,500, and converted into a church. By April, 1942, the Church had completed the loan payments and conducted a mortgage burning ceremony, sponsored by the Minister's Alliance of the Hartford District. The Reverend Robert Moody of Hartford was the master of ceremonies. Services of dedication were conducted by their former pastor, the Rev. C.P. Powell, now of Norwich, and by the Rev. Samuel Ellison of Suffield.

Burkamp's mill in "Barber's Village" in Coventry was a well known landmark. A brush fire in the land at the rear of the mill ignited a fire, and the historic wooden structure was burnt to the ground in a matter of minutes. The Coventry fire department responded quickly, but they were too late. The mill was re-opened in 1940 by E.C. Burkamp, who employed 25 people under contract to make silk cords and parachutes for the U.S. Government.

1967

The Willimantic Redevelopment Agency and the Willimantic Housing Authority asked officials at the federal organization of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to conduct a survey in the town in the light of plans to demolish 290 residences in the proposed redevelopment area. It was projected that private enterprise, financed by federal funds, would build new moderate income two bedroom housing, renting at \$110 a month, to replace the demolished premises.

Local officials were optimistic. They had recently conducted a tour of the redevelopment area with HUD officials. When the tour through Center, Church, Broad, Valley, Jackson and Meadow streets was completed, a HUD representative commented

that, "Willimantic is certainly eligible for funds."

The Windham High School Building Committee decided to install oil heating, rather than electric heating, for the new \$5.17m school. A financial analysis revealed a saving of \$64,000 in the cost of installing oil heating facilities over electric. It also revealed that an electric heating system would cost \$53,218 per year to run, as opposed to \$39,047 per annum for oil. The design engineers explained that large areas, such as auditoriums, pools and gymnasiums, were more cheaply and efficiently heated by oil. They could not know that the 1967 Arab - Israeli "Six Day War" would explode in two months time - causing the price of heating oil to eventually soar.

A new Windham High School had been initially proposed in 1959, but it did not get off the ground until March, 1965. The Building Committee paid \$301,000 for Joseph Nasin's 40.4 acre High Street site, and hired an architectural firm, Butterfield & Associates, to draw up plans. The completed layouts reflected the international political climate. The High School's proposed gymnasium had fewer windows, and concrete was preferred to steel in its overall construction. It was designed to double as a Civil Defense fallout shelter for the town.

The Willimantic Savings Institute, founded in 1842, celebrated its 125th anniversary. The seventh oldest bank in Connecticut was established to serve millhands who labored in two of the town's earliest cotton mills. The Windham and Smithville Manufacturing Companies were located on land east and west of Bridge Street. Between 1842 and 1869, the bank was housed in premises opposite Memorial Field. In 1869, they built one of the most modern business blocks, east of Hartford, on the corner of Main and Bank Street. Raymond Longley was the current President. His thirteen predecessors had provided the funds which facilitated Willimantic's dramatic urban expansion after the Civil War.