

August 01, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

Mr. Horatio Nelson Bill, father of Arthur. I. Bill of the Hall & Bill Printing Company, publishers of the Willimantic Journal, died, aged 68, at his summer home in Niantic. Mr. Bill was born in Lebanon on March 25, 1824. His first job, after graduating High School was with Edwin Allen, a wood type manufacturer, operating out of South Windham. Bill was also employed for a while at the Smith & Winchester plant in South Windham. In 1854, Horatio Bill went into partnership with his brother, Jeremiah. C. Bill, and opened a wood type manufactory in Willimantic. They traded under the name of Bill, Stark and Company, but were forced into liquidation in an economic downturn in 1857.

Horatio later became involved in sign and ornamental painting, designing and wood engraving. He also became deeply involved in the study of geology and mineralogy, and became an expert on the geological makeup of Windham County - a subject on which he widely wrote and lectured. at the time of his death, Bill was employed in the business office of the Hall & Bill Printing Company.

Before the Civil War, Horatio and his brother had been staunch abolitionists, a stand which led them to be "excommunicated" from the Lebanon Congregational Church, and subsequently they became a strong advocate for Horace Greeley's challenge for the presidency in 1872.

Following his ejection from the Congregational Faith, Bill became involved with the Willimantic Spiritual Society, and later became its president, a post he held when he died. Mr. Bill was survived by his wife, Julia (Branch) Bill, one son, Arthur, and two daughters, Carrie and Ida. Despite the sad occasion, it was decided to go ahead with Hall & Bill's annual clambake at Columbia reservoir.

The annual reunion of the Eighteenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers was organized to take place in Winchester, Virginia on September 22, 1892. Volunteers from Willimantic made up one whole company in the 18th, led by Captain Charles Bowen. Twenty Union Army veterans, who had fought in the Willimantic company, still resided in town. It was arranged that they would leave Willimantic on September 19, to arrive in Virginia on time for the 27th annual reunion.

1917

The Willimantic yard of the New York, New Haven and Hartford railroad company

was the scene of a potentially disastrous collision. The Air Line passenger train from New Haven hit a light locomotive heading for the engine house near the Bridge Street crossing. The light engine had just arrived from Providence, manned by an engineer and fireman who were unfamiliar with the complex set up at the Willimantic yards. The engineer and fireman leaped from their cabin as they saw the Air Line locomotive bearing down upon them. The Air Line train was crowded, and consisted of a mail car, a baggage car and four passenger cars. The collision caused the front cars to jackknife and they crushed the rear of the engine. Over 30 passengers were injured. Physicians arrived on the scene and examined the passengers before sending them down to the depot, from where several were ferried to St. Joseph's Hospital. The most serious injuries were cuts, bruises and sprains. Most of the passengers were injured by being thrown about in their seats, and several were cut by breaking glass from the windows. Luckily, no one was seriously injured. This collision was believed to have been the first ever to have occurred in the Willimantic yards. It took seven hours to clear the lines of wreckage.

## 1942

A drive for scrap metal proved to be a great success. It was coordinated by Benjamin Eisenberg, and local people donated over 35 tons for the war effort. Six trucks, donated by Nathan Schilberg and Joseph Coutu, were employed to collect the material. A volunteer collector commented that he was surprised by the number of unused beds and gas stoves in Willimantic and the three Windhams.

The local chapter of the American Red Cross were donated quarters in the American Thread Company's boarding house, "The Elms," to manufacture surgical dressings for the armed forces. "The Elms" also housed the offices of the British War Relief Society. The local Red Cross organization HQ was located in the town building, but that space was currently being utilized to sew kit bags. Mrs. Philip Lauter was in charge of the manufacture of the kit bags, and she made an appeal for buttons, hooks and eyes and snaps.

## 1967

A sudden torrential downpour caused problems for local residents. The thunderstorm started at 4 am on August 1, waking many people. A lightning bolt struck the William B. Sweeney School on Quarry Street and set off a fire alarm. Firemen rushed to the scene but were slowed down on Mansfield Avenue by a torrent of water rushing down the hill. The water overflowed gratings and deposited sand, stones and debris on the streets. Two major outages were reported by the C.P. & L. The first occurred at 5. 57 am, the second occurred at 7. 34 am, as tree limbs downed power lines.

The U.S. Post Office Department agreed to issue a special cancellation stamp on all outgoing mail to celebrate Windham's 275th anniversary. The stamp read; "Windham, 275th anniversary, 1692 - 1967, Sept. 8, 9, 10." First Selectman Ralph Crosthwaite

announced that the original plans called for a frog to be in the center of the cancellation, but it was too large for the stamp. He also announced that a celebration planning session would take place on August 5 at the Ukrainian Club at 7. 30 pm. A wide program of entertainments was being organized, with the centerpiece being a large parade, commencing at Cardinal Square and proceeding up Main Street to Bridge Street on September 9.