

August 15, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

Willimantic's theater aficionados were looking forward to the new season at the Loomer Opera House. The summer vacation allowed the manager, Mr. Gray to redecorate, and improve the theater's amenities. The opening night, August 15, 1892, would feature "a well known star and popular favorite," Agnes Herndon, who was to feature in a "powerful drama" entitled, "La Belle Marie." Miss Herndon was considered to be one of America's leading actresses. "She is a beautiful woman, thoroughly conscientious in her art and the theatrical season will open auspiciously with her advent."

The play was widely advertised. It was also known as "A Woman's Revenge" and Miss Herndon was supported by her own company of players. Bills and advertisements stated that Willimantic had never before witnessed such costumes as would be worn by Miss Herndon. The best seats were available for 75 cents. Cheaper seats, at 25 cents were available in the gallery, or the "gods." It was from this area that Miss Herndon and her troop of young players, received a great deal of unconstructive criticism. Miss Herndon's performance was considered by some to be "capable," and the supporting company were "sufficient." The critics seated in the 25 cent seats did not agree. The performance was plagued with, "foot stamping, cat calls, shrieks and whistling...enough to drive a person wild." If that was not enough, a critic from the Willimantic Journal wrote that the Loomer Opera House's resident orchestra, "needed a large amount of improvement." Mr. Gray received the advice that the crowds would flock back to his theater if he provided "good shows, good order and good music."

1917

Willimantic discovered the horrors of war. Until 1914, Napoleon Couture had worked in textile mills in Centerville, Rhode Island. He joined the Canadian army, and fought in numerous campaigns at the front in France. He was considered to be "a hero of the trenches." When it was known that his train was due to stop at Willimantic's railroad depot, a small crowd assembled to greet him. Couture stepped onto the platform and related his experiences to those assembled. He recalled how his hair stood on end when the Germans pounded their trenches with artillery. Couture spoke encouragingly of the British tanks which he thought would win the war. They ran alongside the German trenches, machine gunning their positions, "killing scores who could not escape." He was disgusted with the German use of mustard gas. Couture explained the devastating effect it had upon men and vegetation. He enthralled the crowd with a detailed description of the gas mask which had often saved his life.

Every day young Willimantic men signed up and were shipped to training camps around the nation. The horrors of war, described by the Canadian hero, would soon shatter the lives of many Willimantic families.

1942

The ninth annual field day held by the Franco - American Civic and Social Club on Recreation Park was a huge success. The entertainment provided included a softball game between St. Mary's and Ballon's Painters, a tug o' war contest, horseshoe pitching, cards, running races, quoits, ball throwing, and a "clam band" organized by Joseph Pepin and Stephen Young. Free chowder was served to all those attending - estimated at being over 700 people. Leopold J. Paradis was chairman of the committee in charge of arrangements.

The Connecticut Light and Power Company celebrated its 25th anniversary. It was incorporated in 1917. C. L. & P. had served Willimantic since 1935, when they acquired the properties of the Willimantic - Rockville Lighting Company. They had began life generating electricity for Connecticut's war effort, and were proud to be continuing that service in these equally difficult times. John Ryan, employed by the Willimantic district of the Company, had worked in the electricity generating business since 1903, when he began work for the Enfield Light and Power Company.

1967

A silver jubilee celebration was observed by the parishioners of St. Mary's Ukranian Catholic Church at 70 Oak Street, to honor the 25th anniversary of the ordination of their pastor, the Reverend Andrij Nazarewycz. The event began with a divine liturgy presided over by Bishop Joseph Schmondiuk of Stamford. The service was followed by a special banquet at the Ukranian National Home on Route 6 at North Windham.

Nzarewycz was born in 1912 in the Western Ukraine. He received his degree in theological studies in 1937 from Bohsolovska Akademia in Lviv. He was ordained in 1942 and his first pastoral assignment was in the village of Yablonycia Ruska in Lemkiwshchyna. In 1947, Nazarewycz and his family crossed the Czechoslovakian and West German border and arrived in Ganaker, a displaced persons camp. Nazarewycz arrived in the United States in 1949. He arrived in Willimantic on the advice of the Rev. Fr. Izhak, and served as priest of the community's small Ukranian population giving mass at St. Joseph's Convent. In 1952 the parish purchased land on Oak Street and built their church there in 1954.