

August 29, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

J.W. Cherry, the Texas agent for the Willimantic Linen Company had been brutally murdered. Cherry worked at the Linen Company's New York office, but he was well known in Willimantic. He was considered "a genial pleasant man and an energetic salesman." His bullet riddled body was discovered in Texan "Indian Territory" by two small Native American boys. Mr. Cherry's three colleagues, had also been shot in cold blood. The four gentlemen had constituted a hunting party, but their murder was not blamed on local "Indians." The pockets of the murdered men had been rifled of all money. It was believed that the party had met their fates at the hands of a crowd of desperadoes, posing as U.S. marshalls, who "infested" this area of the state. The party's camping equipment was left intact, but their horses, guns and ammunition had disappeared. Two bodies lay in the tent. One was discovered under a wagon, and the fourth body lay on the smoldering campfire.

1917

The new owner of the Hooker House Hotel, Mr. H. F. Pillsbury of Derry, NH, made extensive improvements to the Main Street hostelry. Pillsbury had been the proprietor of the Manchester Union hotel in Manchester, NH for 15 years. He announced that the "Hooker" was the finest hotel between New York and Boston, and a city the size of Willimantic should be proud to have such well appointed rooms. Each room was wallpapered and "kalsomined," and supplied with a telephone and a new mattress. 54 of the 70 rooms were fitted out with washing bowls and hot and cold running water. The remaining 12 were fitted with baths. The whole building was wired for electricity, and the old gas lamps were dispensed with. The service in the dining room was a la carte. Special lunches for businessmen and automobile parties were available, and each Sunday Mrs. Pillsbury provided a table d'hote dinner. Mr. Pillsbury hired a Mr. Patrick Carey of Boston as manager of his remodeled establishment.

The Willimantic Lodge No 1311 BPOE, held its annual outing at "Holbrook's grove off West Main Street" on August 27, 1917. Delegations from the New London, Norwich and Putnam joined their Willimantic colleagues. Over 230 people packed into a tent, lined with long tables and comfortable seats. At 11 am a fine chowder was served to all those present, and a baseball game between single and married men got underway. A five dollar gold coin was offered to the player who hit the first home run. It was won by Edmond Peloquin. The single men won 12 - 10.

The fun was not over yet - an athletic meeting followed. Oscar Tanner offered a five dollar prize for the winner of a hundred yard dash, which was also won by Edmond Peloquin. A races with the participants running in only one shoe then followed. The next race was competed by men smoking pipes as they ran. It got sillier. A fat man's race was won by John McCarthy, who was awarded a stetson hat by the Church-Reed Company. The portly participants who finished second and third, won a comfy chair and a large ham to help replace the calories they may have ran off.

When the exertions were over, the party was fed by 25 waiters - Each Elk having more than he could eat. The Willimantic Elks really knew the secret of having a good time. No long trips to Block Island or Ocean Beach - West Main Street Willimantic was good enough for them.

## 1942

Local housewives were beginning to feel the pinch of a nationwide meat shortage. There was, however, no concern up at Storrs where the University of Connecticut's 4- H Club baby beef and fat lamb sale was taking place. 50 fine steers and 25 equally fine lambs had been raised and fattened by 4-H club youngsters and were sold by public auction. The livestock had been prepared for the annual exhibition at the Eastern States Exposition at Springfield, but the U.S. Army had taken over the site, and the meeting was canceled.

The youngsters had been fattening the livestock since January, 1942. The steers ranged in weight from 150 pounds to 1,100 pounds, with the lambs running from 50 to 100 pounds. Mr. Donald Gaylord, the livestock specialist at UConn, pointed out that the sales occupied an important place in the lives of the boys and girls who had invested between \$100 and \$150 in each steer, along with 9 months of care. Lamb club members had been feeding their lambs since May and expended between \$10 and \$15 on each lamb.

The show and auction took place in the horse show ring near UConn's horse barn, and Gaylord believed that Connecticut's butchers would have the most choice beef and lamb made available to them, thus relieving the temporary meat shortage. Willimantic was well represented by butchers at the auction.

## 1967

The death was announced of a well known local manufacturer. 82 year old Walter Abbe Jr. of South Windham, died at the Lawrence Memorial Hospital in New London. Abbe was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., December 16, 1884, a son of Walter and Ida (Patton) Abbe. In 1909 he graduated from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where he received an engineering degree. Walter Abbe Jr. had served as president of the Smith & Winchester Manufacturing Company of South Windham, builders of heavy paper-making machinery from 1923 to 1954. He then became chairman of the board until the business was merged with the Cameron Machine Company of Dover, Delaware in June, 1966.

Abbe was a trustee emeritus of the Windham Hospital, past member and president of the Willimantic Rotary Club, a member of the Mayflower society, president of the Guilford Smith Memorial Library from 1931 to 1966. The death was also announced of 84 year old Edmond Peloquin, who was so successful at that Elks' picnic back in 1917. He was born in Anthony, R.I., on June 17, 1883. Peloquin was widely known as "Mon" around Willimantic, and was considered to be one of Willimantic's best all-round athletes. He excelled in baseball and graduated from Villanova where he gained a reputation as a deadly pitcher, and where he excelled as a member of the track team, setting several school records. "Mon" was given a trial by a major league side, but he developed arm trouble. Nevertheless, he starred in Connecticut League baseball in the early years of the century, and drew crowds to Windham Field, home of Danny Dunn's Willimantic Colts semi- pro. baseball nine, to witness his outstanding feats as an outfielder and hitter. Before his retirement, "Mon" had worked for many years as the caretaker of Recreation Park.