

December 5, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

People who resided around South Coventry's railroad station asked local officials to do something about the rowdys who went into Willimantic by train every Saturday afternoon.

Willimantic's numerous saloons attracted certain South Coventry residents like a magnet. Unfortunately, a number of people could not hold their liquor or beer, and the "late train north" from Willimantic to Coventry on a Saturday night was often packed with intoxicated revelers. Fights often broke out on the train and at the station, disturbing the Coventry peace.

There were 32 operating saloons in Willimantic at this time. This was considered to be far too many, but the county commissioners had recently granted two new saloon licenses to Peter Gilbert's bar on Ash Street and to Jerry Young's on Main Street. Robert Melody applied for a license to operate a saloon from the old town agency building on Church Street, but the nearby Methodist Church's minister, the Dr. Rev. Stafford put his foot down, and the license was refused. Nevertheless, the citizens of Willimantic and surrounding districts could not complain of the lack of watering holes - much to the chagrin of local prohibitionists and certain Coventry residents.

Windham lost one of its most well known residents with the death of Rufus Rood. He was born in Colchester in March, 1815, and succumbed to gastric flu in his 77th year. Rood relocated in Windham in 1832, during a time when the community was a thriving town situated on the New York- Boston mail route. From 1835 to 1850, Rood was employed as a stagecoach driver between South Windham through Scotland, Westminster and Canterbury and onto Plainfield. He retired from the transport business in 1850, and for the subsequent 30 years he operated a blacksmiths shop on Windham Green. In 1880, he sold his smithy and went into business with his son, George Rood, and operated a successful horse dealing business. The funeral was well attended, and was conducted from his home. Rood was buried in Windham cemetery. He left five children, three sons, George, Frank and Charles, and two daughters Mrs. Chauncey Wilson of Windham and Mrs. James Lamb of Willimantic.

1917

Mayor Danny Dunn's annual review of city affairs in 1917 revealed a busy year. The city's streets were now illuminated by 263 electric lights. The gas and kerosene lamps

had been slowly phased out to be replaced by 100 incandescent electric lights and 160 electric arc lamp. Dunn noted that the incandescent lights were more economic and gave out a brighter light than the arc lamps. He therefore recommended that the arc lights all be phased out and wholly replaced by the incandescent lamps.

The Pleasant Street sewer was extended by 614 feet and connected with a new sewer on Lebanon Avenue. The year 1917 also witnessed the laying of three quarters of a mile of extra sidewalks and curbing. Dunn also reminded the voters that he had built a municipal ice house at the pumping station which provide Willimantic's citizens with ice throughout the summer at a much reduced price. The owners of area ice houses were furious with Dunn for interfering with market forces - but the shrewd Irish-American politician believed that this move was worth votes, and that the criticisms aimed at him were meant for the city council which had been named, by its opponents, "Little Tammany."

However, the days of Democratic rule were almost over. On Monday, December 3, the Republicans swept the board in local elections. Daniel Patrick Dunn had first become the mayor of Willimantic in 1905. It was thought that he was unbeatable. He had won six consecutive elections, but his 1917 opponent in the city's 13th biennial election, Sheriff Charles A. Gates, was considered to be the "the most popular republican that ever grew in the town of Windham." And so it proved, when Gates gained 1084 votes to Dunn's 646. The democratic city clerk, treasurer, sheriff, auditors and assessors were all replaced by republicans. The long reign of "Little Tammany" was over.

## 1942

One of the city's most respected and widely known citizens died at the Hartford Hospital. Alex Caisse Sr. was born in Canada in 1867. He came to Willimantic as a young man, and built a a successful building company, from which he retired in 1932. Caisse served as an alderman when Danny Dunn was mayor of Willimantic, between 1905 and 1917. He was also a town assessor and a member of the board of relief. Caisse became widely known locally through his involvement with the French-Canadian community in Willimantic. He was a president and member of the St. Jean Baptiste society for 25 years, and a founder member of Willimantic's Franco-American Civic and Social Club.

Director William Keighley's movie, "The Man Who Came to Dinner," starring Bette Davis, Monty Woolley and Jimmy Durante had been a smash hit nationwide during 1941. Much local interest was generated when it became known that the Windham Players, under the direction of Elizabeth Griffin, would perform the play, on which the movie was based, at Windham High School. The leading roles went to Nicholas Linsley, who played the temperamental author Sheridan Whiteside. Theresa Dion played his secretary Maggie Cutter, and Priscilla Crim played the "glamorous actress" Lorraine Sheldon. The play was a huge hit, and the cast received a standing ovation from the packed Windham High School auditorium.

1967 It became a three horse race for Willimantic Mayor, when an Independent candidate, Willimantic born Florence MacFarlane, a

retired educator, threw her hat into the ring. The other two candidates were Albert Harvey (D) and Stanley Kokosa (R). Harvey was born in Canada, and educated at Willimantic's St. Mary's school. He had served 10 years as a State Representative, and was currently self-employed in the furniture and antique business. Kokosa was born in Meriden and educated at Woolsey School, Fair Haven Junior High Hillhouse High School, West Haven, University of Connecticut and the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He was employed as the Assistant Director of the Manpower Development Training Division of Vocational Education at the State Department of Education.

Kokosa became Mayor after a landslide victory. He gained 2161 votes to Harvey's 1531 and MacFarlane's 205. Mayor Kokosa was 36 years old, and had been a resident in Willimantic since 1958, when he came to teach at the Windham Regional technical School. He was born in 1931, one of twelve children of a Polish immigrant foundry worker. in 1951 he entered the U.S. air-force and was stationed in Korea, where he gained a Bronze Star. Kokosa was Willimantic's first GOP mayor since John Wrana defeated Florimond Bergeron by 86 votes in 1961. The voter turnout was disappointing, only 3887 of 6487 eligible voters bothered to turnout.

The new basketball season began at Storrs where the Huskies defeated Yale 70 - 62, in front of "4,257 frenzied fans" in the Field House. It was a nerve racking finale for Husky fans as Yale fought back to trail by two points, 62 - 60 with just over 2 minutes remaining. But Bob Steinberg and Bill Corley came to the rescue and took UConn past the winning post.