

December 26, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

Severe cold weather dominated the area. The Windham cotton Company's section of the Willimantic Rivers was frozen solid, much to the glee of local skaters, who sped down its mile long length. The area was "thickly covered with young people of both sexes every morning and afternoon." The low temperatures also caused cracks in the town's gas mains. A large crack in the main situated under the corner of Church and Valley streets caused a dangerous leak. The gas could find no way out of the frozen ground and consequently made its way into the lower stories of the Holland and Natchaug Silk Company's mills, causing them to be evacuated of workers.

The Willimantic Linen Company was preparing to ship a large consignment of thread to California by ship via Cape Horn. The thread was packed in cases holding 2,000 dozen spools. To insure that the thread did not suffer through dampness, the cases were lined with tin, with all the joints being tightly soldered. The company's Pacific coast shipments had previously been deposited overland by railroad, but the much cheaper freight rates by water induced them to make this experiment. Willimantic's recently organized non-partisan police force was congratulated with keeping the city streets free of "habitual bums, loafers and drunkards" over the Christmas holiday. It was reported that, "scarcely a drunken man was seen, certainly fewer than were customary a month ago."

1917

Dario, the ten year old son of Mr. and Mrs. George McClure of 58 Chapman Street, was seriously injured by a bullet fired from a .22 caliber rifle. Dario's friend, 10 year old Richard Ellis, of 28 Chapman Street, had just received the rifle as a Christmas present. Richard was cleaning the gun when it accidentally fired and shot Dario in the back, some three inches above the right kidney. Dr. Girouard rushed to the scene. He decided to take the boy by automobile to St. Francis hospital to get an X-Ray to locate the bullet, as St. Joseph's hospital in Willimantic did not possess an X-ray machine. It was discovered that the bullet was lodged just above the boy's fourth vertebrae, and had not punctured any vital organs. Dr. Girouard brought the boy back to Willimantic and kept him under observation at St. Joseph's. Infection was feared, but it was thought that young Dario would make a full recovery.

Other than Dario's unfortunate accident, Christmas in Willimantic passed quietly. It was a bright cold day which greeted worshipers to five masses at St. Mary's and the

four masses at St. Joseph's. Each church provided colorful decorations and a program of Christmas songs performed by the church choir. It was a busy day for the railroads and the trolley cars, which deposited visiting relatives in town from outlying areas. Willimantic's three movie houses were packed for each performance, and a Christmas Day dance at the town hall attracted over 200 people, who waltzed to the music of Pickett's orchestra. The 29 inmates at the town alms-house were treated to a roast pork dinner. Superintendent Slater presented each man with cigars and candy, and Mrs. Clinton, the matron, each of the women with two handkerchiefs and a box of candy. And to round of a this quiet Christmas, the police reported no arrests.

1942

the Textile Workers' Union of America, C.I.O. affiliate. The party was held in the Capitol Theater. C.I.O area organizers, Edward Cluney and James Coyle attended the affair in the hope of recruiting some of the childrens' parents into the union. They dressed as Santa Claus and organized games and handed out packages of candy and refreshments to the children, all aged between 7 and 14. Miss Jean Antonaccio, resident C.I.O organizer, was chairwoman of the committee of arrangements, which also included Romeo Benoit, Frank Brown and Nellie Bergeron. The party was considered to be a great success, and the C.I.O. announced that from now it would be an annual event.

Manufacturing Company at a Christmas tree party at the plant. the bonuses were determined by each individuals period of employment at the plant. The minimum payout was \$10. Company President Philip Lauter announced that everyone was invited to Electro Motives annual holiday party to be held on January 23, 1943. Each employee was urged to bring a friend to enjoy a "high grade floor show, dancing refreshment and novelties."

1967

A lack of funds controversially closed down the second floor of the new Willimantic public library, where it was planned to house a new children's library and a conference room. John Sinder, chairman of the Library Advisory Committee, told the Board of Finance that the librarian, Phyllis Belair had refused permission for them to use the new conference room on the second floor for their meeting because it lacked chairs and tables. Sinder further explained that funds would become available once the Taylor-Hatheway Children's Library on Prospect Street had been sold. The \$39,095 for library operation costs in the current budget included the sale of Prospect Street premises. Charlie Hill, the head of the finance board, recommended that the Prospect Street library stayed open until room could be found in the new library for a children's section. The late Mrs. D. Everett Taylor gave her home at 191 Prospect Street to the city in June, 1957 to be used as a children's library, to be known as the Taylor-Hatheway Memorial Library.

American Thread (ATCO) gave promotions to John Love and William Burton. ATCO president E.B. Shaw announced that Love would be ATCO's new executive vice-president, and Burton would be responsible for all of the company's finishing operations in Willimantic, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Maine. Love began his career in Willimantic in 1947 as a management trainee. He became Assistant manager of the Willimantic plant in 1954, and general manager in 1961. In 1963 he was named director of General Executive Services, and transferred to ATCO's New York office, and was promoted to the Board of directors in 1966.

Burton had been serving as assistant to the vice president of Manufacturing. He was a textile engineering graduate of North Carolina State University, and held a law degree from the University of North Carolina. He began his textile career with J.P. Stevens and Company as a management trainee, and became a plant superintendent in 1952. Before joining ATCO, Burton was the vice president of the Abney textile mills in Greenwood, South Carolina.

If you remember John Love, ATCO's popular manager during the 1950s and 60s, be sure to buy a copy of *Willimantic Industry and Community*, on sale soon - watch this newspaper for details. It contains a detailed interview with John Love, who fondly recalls his years in Willimantic. The book is also full of never-before-seen historical photographs of Willimantic, and tells the community's history through the eyes of local men and women who worked at ATCO, plus a detailed look at the silk industry which also thrived in Willimantic until World War Two.

Heavy snow on December 23 ensured that it was a White Christmas in Willimantic. A heavy storm deposited five inches of the white stuff onto the city streets, beginning at 2 am. Public Works Superintendent Alexis Caisse announced that ploughing, sanding and salting commenced at 3. 30 am, but there was still a large number of minor auto accidents during the early morning. The snow did not bother employees of Electro-Motive. They had just received a generous Xmas bonus. It was calculated that nationwide, Electro-Motive's 1,600 employees had received an extra \$298,000 in the wage packets to help them celebrate Christmas.