

FEB 01, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

St Paul's Episcopalian guild sponsored an evening of entertainment in Franklin Hall on Main street, Willimantic. The star attraction was an Edison phonograph. Over 200 people listened to the recordings of opera singers, a baby crying and brass bands. Several groups were invited on stage to "perform" for the machine, which recorded their efforts. The Gilmore band, a "colored quartette," were well received by the enthralled audience as they sang and played into the machine, which produced a high quality recording of their performance.

1892 Health care in Willimantic was as relatively expensive as it is today. That's why "Dr. Barbour," a well known touring native American medicine man, did a roaring trade when he set up shop in the Brainard House Hotel during the first six weeks of 1892. The "Brainard" was located on the site now occupied by Hurley's. Barbour furnished medicine to cure any disease. He was famous for diagnosing a patient's ills by just looking at them. His herbal remedies, manufactured from roots, herbs, barks and gum, sold for \$2 each. To put that in perspective, a mulespinner in the thread mills made \$9 for a 60 hour week.

1917

The iceman cometh! It was a bitterly cold winter - but this was good news for the area's ice merchants. In Willimantic, iceman Girouard had stored away almost 6,000 tons, cut from the areas ponds and lakes. Coventry's iceman, Ernest Woodward, reported that Lake Wangumbaug was frozen to a depth of 14 inches and he had cut and stored 400 tons. Private ice cutting was allowed in Coventry and the Lake had supplied local residents with over 1500 tons. (27 Jan).

Willimantic's Solomon Haddad married Mary Libos Lahood of Waterville, Maine. It was one of hundreds of weddings in the city during 1917. This particular ceremony attracted a great deal of attention and curiosity. It was Willimantic's first wedding conducted between native Syrians. The Reverend Solomon Firnanie came from a Syrian Orthodox church in Boston to conduct the ceremony in the Center Street Hall. The 200 guests were entertained by Habib Shake, from Boston, who played the Syrian mandolin to accompany songs from the homeland. The room was illuminated by each guest lighting a wax taper. The invited Catholics, Congregationalists, Methodists and Episcopalians admitted that they were intrigued by the Syrian chanting, incense burning and the ceremonial crowning of the newly wedded couple. (Jan 29)

The War raging in Europe entered into the lives of local residents when they discovered that they were unable to purchase American Line Steamship tickets from William J. Sweeney, the Company's agent in Willimantic. The U.S. Government had banned its citizens from making transatlantic trips, after a number of Americans had died when the ships in which they had been passengers were torpedoed in the Atlantic by German submarines. (Feb 8)

1942

The Turner block stood at the eastern corner of Main and Church streets. The four story building, erected in 1878, was a city landmark. The upper three floors had housed an hotel, the Windham House, later known as the Irvin House. In 1894, a men's clothing establishment, the H. L. Hunt Company was established on the ground floor. In 1915 it became the Church Clothing Company, which later became known as the Church-Reed Company. The ground floor housed P.R. Cohen's Children's Speciality Shop, a Chinese laundry and Dennehy's barber shop. The Hotel had been abandoned and the Church-Reed Company also occupied part of the second floor alongside Attorney Samuel Harvey and real estate and insurance agent William Jordan. The third and fourth floors were apartments. The structure hit the headlines as the Church-Reed Company bought the entire block from the Willimantic Savings Institute, and announced that they intended to renovate and improve the whole building.

The War was on everyone's mind. To escape it they visited the town's three movie houses. The Strand Theater featured Mickey Rooney in "Andy Hardy's Private Secretary." Robert Taylor, fresh from the romantic lead in the much acclaimed "Waterloo Bridge," was starring at the Capitol alongside Lana Turner as a gangster in "Johnny Eager." Lana Turner could also be seen at the Gem Theater where she featured alongside Clark Gable in "Honky Tonk." Windham's moviegoers got a lot for their money in those days. 20 cents for matinees and 30 cents for evening performances paid for the feature movie plus a "B" picture, a newsreel program, shorts and cartoons!

Windham's chief air raid warden, N. C. Bortolan had conferred with the representatives of Windham's leading manufacturing concerns regarding their emergency plans in case of enemy air raids. Albert Welch was in charge of air raid precautions at American Thread. The other firms in town organizing their workers included the Coca Cola Plant, Electro Motive, C.L.&P., L.M. Hartson & Company of North Windham, the Frank Parizek Button Manufacturing Company, the New England Pants Company, Insulation Products Company and the Roselin Manufacturing Company.

1967

The Connecticut Public Expenditure Council's latest report revealed that Windham ranked 63rd out of 169 cities and towns in the state per-pupil spending during 1966. Net expenses ran to \$533 per each of Windham's 3,168 students during the 1965-66 school year. Darien came out top with a figure of \$760 per pupil, and Montville spent the least,

\$329 per pupil. Mansfield was 48th (\$588), Coventry 49th (\$589), Scotland 79th (\$547), Columbia 126th (\$498), Lebanon 130th (\$487), and Ashford 151st (\$453).

Affairs ground to a halt in Willimantic as a snow storm dumped more than six inches onto the city streets. Skidding and poor visibility causing a spate of automobile accidents. The nine hour long storm also caused two light aircraft to make emergency landings at Windham airport. Officials at the town's Public Works Department were misled by a weather bureau report which forecast merely a "dusting."

Will 1992 Husky Senior Chris Smith break Tony Hanson's 1973-77 career scoring record of 1,990 pts? In 1967 the Husky points record was held by Art Quimby's 1,398 haul in the 1950s. It was passed as Wes Bialosuknia, the "Poughkeepsie Popper", scored 50pts in a 109 - 55 victory over Maine in front of 3,848 at the Field House. This performance took him past second placed Tony Kimball with his fourth point, and past Art Quimby with his 40th point. Bialosuknia now headed the list of all time Husky scorers with 1409 pts. This 50 pt haul also broke several other college records including Quimby's all time high of 49pts, Kimball's home court haul of 43 pts. Wes's 21 field goals took him past Quimby's 1954 haul of 20 at Boston College in 1954 , and Ed Slomcenski's home court record of 17pts. "Wonderful Wes" now averaged 27. 3 pts per game.