

FEB 29, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

From its inception in 1887, the Willimantic Board of Trade planned to construct an industrial building, furnished with steam power, to induce new businesses to town. The scheme was abandoned when members of the Board accused each other of organizing "personal schemes" for their own profit. The idea was rekindled by a newly formed committee of 75 "independent businessmen."

A.G. Turner operated a Valley Street silk mill. He recounted a recent trip to Lehigh, Penn., a thriving industrial area, expanded through civic financing of industrial locations. Nearby Norwich recently completed such a building, and rent out space in it to the Crescent Fire Arms Company, for the manufacture of pistols. Turner forecast that Willimantic would prosper in future years if it consisted of dozens of small manufacturers, rather than be dominated by one large concern.

The chairman of the meeting, M.E. Lincoln, recounted a conversation with an entrepreneur who had conceived a new process to manufacture butter. He was seeking a location between Boston and New York, and chose Willimantic - but left when he could not find a suitable site for his venture. The "butter factory" would have initially employed twelve local workers. Such future opportunities should not be lost!

The meeting voted to organize a joint stock company to raise \$20,000, to finance the construction of a steam powered factory, and rent it out at 10% the cost of construction, and supply a 10 year local tax break.

Police Officer Killourey had the toughest beat in Willimantic. Every night he patrolled the Jackson Street district of town by foot. Locals referred to the vicinity as "County Cork," because of its predominantly Irish born population. The officer was called upon to stop organized dog fights, gambling, domestic quarrels and bar-room brawls. The Police Department decided he needed assistance, and hired a partner for Killourey. A massive Newfoundland hound now accompanied Killourey on his nightly beat!

1917

Willimantic had rarely experienced such industrial disquietude in its history. The Rossie Velvet Company was embroiled in a long standing strike - even though their management denied it. The town's decorating contractors were the next to experience dissatisfaction from their employees. A new union local was formed. The "Willimantic

Labor Local No. 537 - Painters, Decorators & Paperhangers of America" demanded a pay rise. The painters, who were paid \$18 a week, were displeased that paperhangers received \$19. 50. a week! The newnewly formed union local met and voted to demand an across the board pay rate of \$22 a week for every member. The contractors initially refused to pay their employees the new rate, but they gave in a couple of weeks later, when a strike loomed.

The Willimantic Chamber of Commerce invited the controversial secretary of the Connecticut Board of Health, Dr. Walter H. Brown, to address their monthly meeting. Brown was a passionate advocate of disease prevention, and had ruffled many feathers across the state. He did not disappoint his Willimantic audience when he declared that, in Connecticut, the health of hogs and domestic animals was taken more care of than humans! He blamed this upon the lack of power and influence designated to the Board's city and town health officers, whose recommendations were either ignored, and often overturned in courtroom decisions. The officers were underpaid, and abused, despite the qualifications their positions demanded. They made less than \$800 a year. Loomfixing, a job requiring much less education, paid \$1,500 a year at the American Thread plant in town.

The Chamber were delighted with Brown's address, and agreed that he was one of the most interesting of all their guest speakers over the years. William C. Norris, the secretary of the Willimantic Board of Health rose to speak, and heartily agreed with Dr. Brown's criticism of the state health system. He recounted a confrontation with a Willimantic butcher on Main Street the previous summer. The butcher hung recently slaughtered hogs on hooks outside his shop, which dripped copious amounts of blood onto the sidewalk, attracting infestations of flies and bugs. These swarms of disease laden flies were attracted to the numerous uncovered garbage cans which stood in the alleys and on the streets of Willimantic. Open air meat hanging and uncovered garbage were not deemed illegal, so Willimantic's health officers could do nothing to subdue the plague of flies which swarmed through the city's streets each summer.

## 1942

Because of the war, the general public were restricted in their use of certain commodities. Rationing Boards were organized in each of Connecticut's electoral districts, to rule upon the distribution of scarce resources. Windham came under the jurisdiction of the 13 th district. The Board met weekly, and allocated automobile and tractor tires and tubes, to the most deserving and vital local causes. These included school bus operators, farmers, mail deliverers, public health nurses, and clergymen.

The Windham Civilian Defense Service appealed for volunteers to man strategic observation posts around the town, to warn of the approach of enemy aircraft. A Mansfield Center resident, William H. Homer, was deputy state director of Eastern Connecticut's Aircraft Warning Service . He was concerned about the shortage of "spotters" in Willimantic. Spotting positions were manned 24 hours a day. It was calculated that Windham required 168 volunteers to occupy the positions for a

minimum period of 2 hours in any 24 hour period. The 168 Windham residents were part of a projected 10,000 force of "spotters" recruited along the Atlantic seaboard. The authorities were determined to avoid a "Pearl Harbor" in the eastern United States.

avoid a "Pearl Harbor" in the eastern United States. The UConn "Huskie Hoopsters" completed a successful season with a 66 - 44 victory over Wesleyan at the Hawley Armory. This was coach Don White's sixth season in charge. His record stood at 70 victories and 32 defeats. White's Huskies broke a number of records during the 1940/41 season, as they won 14 of 16, to be hailed the greatest team in UConn history. This season, the Huskies' record was 12 wins and 5 defeats.

White was losing several key players through graduation, but was confident that a winning side could be maintained for the 1942/43 season , thanks to the quality of young players such as Jim Connors, Milt Dropo, Ellis Beck, Vince Cuddy, Bob Moss and Ben Miskavech. But White admitted that the war, not academic ineligibility, threatened the continuation of not just a successful basketball team - but of any team at all! Discussions were taking place to decide if University athletic programs should be suspended for the duration of hostilities.

## 1967

At last! Prohibition was repealed in Mansfield. The 17,000 inhabitants no longer lived in a dry town. Three package store and one grocery store permits were granted. Fred Haddad of the Altnaveigh Inn on Route 195 expected to be granted a liquor license during the forthcoming week.

Edwina Whitney was celebrating her 99th birthday. She was born in the old north parish of Mansfield in 1868, in the Colonial house on route 195 near Mirror Lake. Miss Whitney recalled the old Storrs Congregational Church at the center of the old parish, and a silk mill, a tannery, a grocery store and a comb factory. Edwina Whitney was educated at the Northfield Seminary for Girls and Oberlin College in Ohio. She returned to Storrs in 1900, to work at the Connecticut Agricultural College as a librarian and teacher of German. When she retired in 1934, the UConn library possessed less than 10,000 volumes. Miss Whitney had personally known every UConn president since the institution was founded, and was the "Matron Saint" of the Phi Delta Phi sorority, whose members baked her a cake every Christmas.