

July 11, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

The Willimantic Linen Company announced that they intended to remove their dance pavilion, located in the "Oaks" because of a number of recent disturbances at the site. The pavilion had been one of the city's most famous social centers since erected by William Barrows, the Linen Company's president, in 1882. It would be sadly missed by many. The structure made an attractive addition to the grove of oaks, which had been reduced in 1880 for the construction of the "Oaks" cottages on Quercus Avenue. Those who had abused it would soon realize, when it disappeared, that they should have appreciated it more. For more information on the pavilion and the "Oaks," refer to "A Tour of the Oaks," on sale at the Windham Textile & History Museum for \$3.95.

The city's young boys often got around Willimantic by hopping aboard freight trains passing through the railroad depot. The police and railroad authorities were powerless to stop this sport - until a 10 year old boy, Joseph LaBarre fell under railroad car and had his legs severed, one at the knee, the other at the thigh. He survived, in great pain, for some ten hours, but died the following morning. Willimantic's parents were strongly urged to keep their children away from the city's highly dangerous railroads..

1917

The state of Connecticut introduced a statute on July 1, 1917, which called for all motorized trucks registered in the state to be fitted with rear view mirrors. Willimantic's police force was busy checking for offenders, and found that most local truck owners were ignoring the new law. They thought it unfair, as "pleasure" automobiles escaped the new ruling. The police announced that they were willing to give truck owners a few more days leeway - then offenders would be invited to the Willimantic courthouse to explain their delinquency.

The first Connecticut Infantry, Company L, was stationed in Willimantic to guard strategic points in the city. However, they were causing much disturbance in town when off duty. They regularly visited Willimantic's numerous taverns, and ended up in brawls with the locals. The civil authorities allowed the military to deal with the offenders - until one intoxicated soldier stabbed a local, Grant Brombriand, in the shoulder with a jack knife causing a one and a half inch cut, one inch deep. Brombriand was employed by the Rockville-Willimantic Gas and Electric Company, and was forced to be absent from work for a long period. He was attacked by five soldiers, late in the evening while walking home from work on Main Street near ATCO's Number One Mill.

He had no idea why he was attacked. The soldier with the knife threatened to cut Brombriand's heart out, and struck him in the upper right arm, causing the wound. Willimantic's Chief of Police visited the state armory on Pleasant Street to carry out investigations. The culprit was discovered to be one Private Durwain Keller. It was agreed that Keller would be tried by a military court martial. Under the current war conditions, the military had precedence over civil authorities in such cases as this.

A severe thunderstorm hit the district. South Coventry took the full brunt of the storm. A bolt of lightning struck a large oak tree outside the garage owned by the Cotter Brothers on the shore of Lake Wangumbaug. The tree was split in two, and the bolt was deflected onto the garage, setting it alight, and burning it to the ground. Inside was a new eight cylinder Cadillac, belonging to Thomas Cotter. It was destroyed, along with a large number of tools and tires. The loss was estimated at over \$3,000. The recently purchased automobile had cost \$2,230. Luckily, the Cotters were well insured.

## 1942

The Max Pollack Company operated thread manufacturing plants in Conantville and Groton. The Company announced that they had entered into a 2 year agreement with the Textile Workers' of America. They also announced that they recognized the union's affiliate, the CIO, as the collective bargaining agency for workers at the Conantville plant. The agreement was signed at the Windsor Locks Air Base by company president Max Johl, who was stationed there in the army air service. Other signatures included those of Company superintendent Walter Lowell and Bruno Rantane, field representative for the union. The workers were represented in the negotiations by Arthur Koepke, Raymond Aldrich and Sidney Hall.

The matter of a wage increase was passed on to the National War Labor Board, which was studying the matter of a general increase in the textile industry. Under the terms of the agreement, all disputes were to be settled by arbitration, because strikes and lockouts were banned. A paid vacation of one week was provided with employees having at least one year of service. Pay would also be provided for those workers who turned up at the plant, only to be told that there was no work for them on that day. This had been an objective of the wider American Labor movement for many years. The Company also agreed to subtract union dues straight from their pay packets.

## 1967

The death was announced of the Reverend Benjamin Buckingham Styring, the rector at St. Pauls Church in Willimantic from 1931 to 1957. Buckingham had served as a priest in the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut for more than 40 years. He was born in Worcester, Mass. on October 2, 1887. His father, George Styring, was a skilled cutler from Sheffield, Yorkshire, who had emigrated to America in the early 1880s. Buckingham Sr. found work at his trade in Southington, Conn., where he was employed as a contractor in the finishing of razors.

Ben Styring was educated in Southington, and was a member of the class of 1922 at Trinity College. He then went on to study at the Yale School of Medicine before deciding on a career in the ministry, for which he was educated at Berkshire Divinity School. He became a dean of the Episcopal Church in 1923 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1925. He served at St. Pauls in Southington, and St. Marks in New Britain before arriving in Willimantic in 1931. Styring had the additional responsibilities for St. Pauls Church in Windham Center and was the Chaplain to Episcopal students at UConn.

Styring was active in local civic affairs. He was the chairman of the Willimantic Chapter of the American Red Cross, and a charter member of the Willimantic Kiwanis Club. In 1956, the Policeman's Benevolent Association presented him with its plaque as the Outstanding Citizen of the Year. In 1962 the VFW presented him with the American Citizenship Medal. Styring, who lived in Windham, also taught religion at the Rectory School in Pomfret. He retired, and moved to Wethersfield in 1962.