

July 25, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

Willimantic was growing. It was reported that new houses were "springing up like mushrooms on Lewiston Avenue, situated on the "Hewitt Estate."

Murray Scott, son of John Scott, the Superintendent of the Willimantic Linen Company, was riding his bicycle along Main Street, when he was deliberately run into by a team of horses, driven by a man who screaming his dislike of bicycles. Young Murray was hurled into some bushes, and his bicycle was badly damaged. The Scotts knew the man responsible, and intended to make him pay for the damages.

The New York and New Haven Railroad Company employed a large gang of carpenters to build a large freight house near to the Windham Manufacturing Company's mills, west of Bridge Street in Willimantic. The Windham Company subsequently built a small iron bridge, west of the new freight house, to enable their employees easier access across the railroad lines from Main Street. The new freight house blocked the old driveway to the Windham mills from Main Street, which had included a perilous journey across the busy railroad tracks.

1917

The Corner Cigar Store, located on west corner of Main and Railroad Street, was the scene of an illegal crap game. Someone informed the police, who, led by Police Chief Killourey, raided a rear room in the store. The proprietor of the store, C. A. Comins was charged with running an illegal gaming place. He pleaded guilty and was fined \$56. The gamesters, all in their early twenties, gave false names and addresses to the police. Their real identity was under investigation, and it was believed they were all from Willimantic, even though they had stated that they came from New London, New York, Waterbury, New Haven and Bridgeport. The police recovered \$11. 60 from the table. They expected to make arrests in the near future.

The City fathers forked out \$1,800 for a chlorinating plant, which was installed in the city's pumping station located in Mansfield. The consultant for the project was New Haven's civil engineer, J. Frederick Jackson. It was sincerely hoped that the plant would alleviate recent problems with discolored water. The new system was guaranteed to remove all impurities and discolorations from the water, even when it was disturbed by heavy rain. This plant was being successfully used in water works in cities across the nation. The plant used about 2 lbs of chlorine per day, and local doctors had to assure

the public that it would not be detrimental to their health. This was collaborated by Dr. Black of the State Board of Health. A portable bacteriological testing outfit also came with the plant, housed in a separate building.

1942

The Veterans of Foreign Wars in Willimantic agreed to turn back to the government a 75 mm French cannon, and a heavy mobile trench cannon, which had been obtained from the War Department after the First World War. Both guns were constructed of steel and weighed in at over 2 tons each. They had been in storage at the Gold Star Post No. 1724 since the VFW state parade and convention had been held in the city in the late 1930s. The heavy guns had been towed along Main Street by tractors on that occasion. The Post also had a German 89 mm cannon on display, and were prepared to hand that back if asked.

Willimantic's VFW also sent a fifty dollar contribution to national headquarters towards the purchase of a squadron of training planes for the army. The planes were currently touring America, and held the VFW insignia. It was hoped that the planes would be displayed at the Windsor Locks Airbase, so local members could see them. Contributions continued, and the national VFW hoped to present a second squadron to the army air corps the following September. Post 1724 also announced that their annual picnic would be held at Clark's Grove in Mansfield on August 9th,

Every year, the New York Herald Tribune's "Fresh Air Fund" sponsored a two week holiday in the countryside for New York City's underprivileged kids, from "the hot and crowded tenement districts." This year the kids were coming to stay in the Willimantic area. The kids were allocated to private homes in Willimantic, Hampton, Scotland, Hebron and Andover. The fortunate children would leave behind, "...the tense atmosphere of New York City with its wartime alertness and restrictions."

Mrs. Harry M. Mosley from Scotland had been coordinating a "Friendly Town Campaign" to prepare for the visit of the 47 children. She was at the railroad depot, with other hosts, to meet the children who arrived on the 7. 11 pm train from New York City. They were accompanied by Mrs. E. Ricardo, a social worker working for the "Fresh Air Fund." The children nervously alighted from the train, carrying an assortment of hat boxes, small suitcases, paper bags and cardboard boxes. They were described as an heterogeneous group, varying in appearance, dress and nationality. One small Irish boy declared he had the jitters, but he didn't expect them to last long. The group also included two "sedate and grave" Chinese girls, two "vociferous" Polish girls, two "lovely" Jewish children, and a "tiny colored boy who endeared himself to all who saw him." The reporter covering the arrival of the children concluded; "Where but in the United States could one witness such a scene where race, creed, color and social standing were forgotten or disregarded in the desire to do everything possible to make a group of underprivileged youngsters happy?"

1967

Some local residents were becoming increasingly worried about the rising crime rate in town. The local Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) decided to form an 11 strong special group to study public safety. The CAC was alarmed with increasing prostitution, the distribution of narcotics, the use of alcohol by minors and illegal gaming operations. The chairman of the CAC, Ugo G. Masi, blamed young people for the rise in crime. He was worried about the tarnished image of Willimantic, but stressed that the group was not criticizing the mayor or police - even though they had just formed an ad hoc committee to reform the local police. Masi did say that he believed police pay was too low to attract the right recruits.

The Willimantic Police Benevolent Association (WPBA) called for the CAC to abandon its investigation in local crime, and reminded the mayor, Leo Carey, that the group was formed to advise the city council regarding the problems that could arise through urban renewal. William Krug, representing the WPBA, reminded the CAC that Willimantic was not New York, Chicago or Miami, and further criticized the CAC for suggesting that local police were turning a blind eye to crime. He suggested that their action was political, carried out with one eye on the forthcoming local elections in December.