

June 06, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

During the summer of 1890, a Main Street shop window displayed a massive silver loaded nugget, from the New State Mining Company's silver mine located at Oro Fino, Deer Lodge County, Montana. The nugget was displayed by Edward Young, the nephew of one of Willimantic's leading citizens, the Reverend George Buck of St. Pauls Episcopal Church. Young, aged 30, and a Yale graduate, convinced his Uncle George to become Willimantic agent for the sale of stock in his booming mining company.

The Reverend Buck's reputation in town was impeccable, so, aided by the handsome silver ore nugget, he had no trouble in selling \$30,000 of shares. Investments were secured from parishioners and friends. One man invested \$2,150. secured from parishioners and friends. One man invested \$2,150. The first dividend was 30%. Local investors were ecstatic. The Reverend Buck was a hero - until Edward Young and his company disappeared. There was absolutely no trace of them by June, 1892. The mine or company did not exist. It was the biggest, most successful scam Willimantic had ever witnessed. Everyone, from wealthy bankers to poor mill-hands, had their fingers burned. The initial 30% dividend was paid out of the initial investment to attract extra investments. It worked, and Mr. Young walked. Young was denounced as a hustler. His aggrieved uncle called him a knave. Edward Young was a very wealthy knave, having secured the savings of a large number of "millgirls."

1917

The Chautauqua Institution began life in 1874 as a Methodist Sunday School teacher training camp on the west shore of Lake Chautauqua in upstate New York. It quickly developed into a cultural center, which sponsored nationwide book clubs. By the early years of this century Chautauqua had evolved into a 856 acre "cultural city." It was a large, complex version of Willimantic's own methodist camp ground, replete with attractive gingerbread Victorian cottages and mansions, and a 6,000 seat amphitheater. Over 25,000 people studied there each summer, taking courses in dance, music, languages and arts and crafts. Teddy Roosevelt referred to Chautauqua as "America at its best." An individual's spiritual and intellectual health thrived in its hothouse atmosphere.

In 1900, Chautauqua hit the road. Traveling Chautauquas played in every major city across the United States. The week long concerts, often referred to as "Seven Joyous Days" were conducted in a massive tent, circus style. They were highly popular.

William Jennings Bryan, the "boy orator" of Nebraska, made a career out of delivering versions of his famous 1896 "cross of gold" speech at these traveling Chautauquas. Bryan was the Democratic Party's unsuccessful nominee for President in 1896, 1900 and 1908. He captivated crowds by decrying the "cross of gold" upon which eastern capitalists had crucified western and southern farmers.

During the first week of June, 1917, culture, Chautauqua style, arrived in Willimantic. There was no William Jennings Bryan. His absence was filled by orators of equal ability. The seven day festival was held in a massive tent erected on Windham Field, better known today as Memorial Park. Season tickets were sold at Murray's Boston Store for \$1. 25 and \$2. 00. A soldier's uniform was a "free ticket." The Willimantic Chautauqua was opened by a speech from the head of the Chautauqua organization, Professor Paul Pearson of Swathmore College. This was the first of 3,000 Chautauquas planned for the summer of 1917.

The opening day was a resounding success. A concert by the Chicago Musical Club drew the crowds, who were further entertained in the evening by orator and comedian, Bob Seeds. He cracked jokes on stage with Willimantic's mayor Danny Dunn - whose Irish wit was more than a match for the professional performer. Seeds promised "200 laughs" and kept the crowd in a continual uproar.

Willimantic's residents were entertained all week by this orgy of culture. Each afternoon and evening, over a thousand people packed into the tent to be treated to lectures on literature, suffrage, economics, history and philosophy. They were educated by morality plays, and entertained by piano recitals, barbershop quartets, bands and orchestras. Kids were cared for by the Junior Chautauqua organization. Takings at the Loomer Opera House were down!

Marguerite Backler, the Prima Donna of the Chicago Grand Opera Company, wowed the audience, particularly Willimantic's Italian community - who were the only ones able to understand what Ms. Backler was singing about! Willimantic's Irish had their turn, when the Kerry Singers took to the stage. Their speciality? Irish songs. There was not a dry eye in the tent.

The concert ended on Tuesday, June 5, with a performance of "The Mikado." At the closing ceremony, Miss M. O. Hamilton, superintendent of the Willimantic Chautauqua, was presented with a large bouquet of roses "in recognition of the pleasure afforded the people of Willimantic." She announced, amid great applause, that the Chautauqua would return next year. Fifty leading Willimantic businessmen had signed up as guarantors for another week of culture in 1918.

1942

The Polish Naturalization Club burnt the \$15,000 mortgage of their Ives Street headquarters, built in 1933. Club President Henry Wojick and John Laboy, who was president when the building was erected and dedicated, took charge of the ceremony.

They were ably assisted by officials Alexander Halecki, Walter Wojik, Michael Stygar and the oldest member, Michael Wojick. There was an attendance of more than 150 members and friends at a dinner which preceded the ceremony. Speakers, representing American Thread, included David Moxon, Clarence Mathieu, Carelton King, Charles Hill and Ted Shaw. Others invited to address the gathering were the Reverend Victor Plaskowski, Town Clerk J. Francis Moriarty and Probate Judge C. Vincent Shea.

1967

The Arab-Israeli war had just broken out in the Sinai Desert. The event drew reaction from prominent Israelis and Arabs in the Willimantic area. Mrs. Jesse Greer urged all local Jewish persons to pray for the discontinuation of the war. Maxwell Foster, president of the Temple B'nai Israel had contacted the area's Senators and representatives in Washington DC to ensure their commitment to the state of Israel.

Falsai Anani, a Saudi Arabian member of the international student community at the University of Connecticut believed that Arab nations were justified in going to war with Israel. Anani stated that. " the Arabs do not fight against the Jewish people. We are fighting against the State of Israel. It is our land." Richard Nasiff, a member of the local Syrian community, hoped that the United States would do all in its power to straighten out the situation."