

March 07, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

The founder of UConn's forerunner, the Storrs Agricultural College, died on March 3, 1892. Augustus Storrs was born in Mansfield, Connecticut, on June 4, 1817. He was from "old New England stock." His father, Royal Storrs, had researched the family tree, and discovered that his forebears arrived in America in 1663. The Storrs family settled in Mansfield in 1798.

Augustus Storrs had a "county school education." In 1839 he wed and went into business. He married Antoinette Abbe, who died in 1888, and opened a farming provisions store in Gurleyville. Several years later, the Hanks family hired him as agent of their Mansfield Silk Manufacturing Company.

Storrs expanded his provisions business, and opened stores in Hartford and Willimantic in 1846. In 1854 he went into business with his brothers. They built an extensive farming provisions store in Brooklyn NY. In 1875, the now wealthy businessman retired to the Storrs family homestead in the north parish of Mansfield. Storrs had acquired a passion for the scientific side of agricultural, and was expert in field drainage and fertilization. In 1881, he set aside 170 acres of his 500 acre property, built school houses and stables, and formed the Storrs Agricultural College, dedicating it to the scientific advancement of farming techniques.

The residents of Spring Street were delighted when the city fathers laid a sewer in their thoroughfare, connecting them to the city system. Spring Street had been laid out and built upon a series of rocky ledges, so the contractor, A . Brazos & Sons, found it necessary to blast a trench in the rock to accommodate the sewer pipe. Brazos miscalculated the amounts of dynamite, and caused extensive damage to the resident's houses. Dr. O.B. Griggs' large brick built house suffered the most. The blasting caused structural damage, and shattered 94 panes of glass. It cost Brazos \$74 in compensation to Griggs. He also settled numerous smaller claims from other Spring Street householders.

1917

Passengers who awaited trains at the Willimantic railroad depot, had their curiosity aroused by four strange looking rail passenger cars parked in the Central Vermont's sidings. They housed CV engineers, and the equipment required for the massive task of mapping and tabulating CV's holdings and property, such as depots, bridges and rails.

The federal Interstate Commerce Commission(ICC) instructed the nation's railroad companies to evaluate their holdings. The ICC were reacting to complaints from around the U.S. The railroad companies were charged with profiteering by grossly overcharging passenger and freight rates. The ICC set new rates based upon each company's capital holdings.

The CV engaged a dozen engineers to evaluate their property, which ranged across New England between New London and Canada. The specially painted and adapted passenger cars contained sleeping quarters, workrooms, a kitchen, a diner, offices and supplies. The CV held a considerable amount of property in the Willimantic area. It took more than two week to tabulate it all. A spokesman for the CV engineers stated that they were looking forward to the next two stops, as the CV's property and materiel in rural South Coventry and Stafford Springs would be easier to evaluate than that in the crowded Willimantic complex.

Willimantic's well heeled women did not have to travel to Boston, New York or Hartford to keep up with the latest in hat fashions. They need go no farther than 833 Main Street, which housed Mrs. Rose Lafleur's "Paris Hat Shop." Business was booming, enabling Mrs. Lafleur to hire an assistant who was trained in hat design at a New York fashion salon. Miss Gregoire offered an "exclusive and sophisticated" service, and could only be consulted by appointment.

1942

Windham township experienced its first blackout of the war. It was hailed a resounding success by T. Frank Cunningham, the executive chairman of the Windham Defense Council.(WDS) The blackout was used to evaluate public response. It was planned for several weeks. Future air raid warning practices and subsequent blackouts occurred without forewarning. Almost everyone followed the instructions to extinguish lights for a 15 minutes from 9 pm. A Spruce Street resident refused to co-operate, and the WDS pushed through a city ordinance to outlaw such action. Windham Center, North Windham and South Windham reported 100 per cent blackouts.

The alarm included previously tested sirens and bells, plus Electro Motive's new whistle and the St Paul's Episcopal Church bell. Mayor Russell Hinman, Police Chief Grant Brombria and WDS representatives cruised the area during the blackout, and were elated at its effectiveness. Only one irregularity was noted. Air raid wardens and auxiliary police did not point their flashlights to the ground as instructed.

General President Emil Rieve of the C.I.O. Textile Workers Union of America submitted a demand for a 10 cent hourly wage increase to individual textile mills across the nation. The Willimantic mills of the American Thread Company employed the largest number of C.I.O. members locally, thanks to recent recruitment drives. The demand was discussed at Boston by the joint labor-industry conference - the first convention in the history of the textile industry, involving national participation between textile companies and their workers. It was chaired by the United States Department of Labor.

The mill owners resisted all attempts by the unions and the War Production Board to raise wages. The textile producers argued that the switching of production to manufacture textiles needed for the war, caused profits to plummet. The mill owners also argued that wages were too high. Advanced social legislation introduced in the New Deal during the 1930s had further diminished their profits. The matter was referred to the War Labor Board.

1967

The Norwich Roman Catholic Diocese abandoned plans to build a High School to serve the Windhams. High interest rates, tight money, and a shortage of religious teachers, priests and nuns were cited by the Rt. Rev. Vincent Hines, Bishop of Norwich, in a letter read out to the congregations of St. Joseph's and St. Mary's. The new school was due to be built at the location today occupied by the St Joseph's Living Center, at Rt. 14 and Club Road. It's opening was scheduled for September, 1969. If the plans had gone ahead, 800 students in nine grades from the Windhams, Mansfield, Coventry, Columbia and Lebanon, would have been studying at the new school in 1972.

The Catholic Diocesan School Superintendent, Richard Archambeault, blamed the cancellation on the fact that eastern Connecticut was a textile area and not as "education conscious as other sections of the state." He announced that a new Catholic school would be built in Vernon, instead.

Harold Nelson, the chairman of the Windham Board of Education, announced that the cancellation made little difference to their plans to expand Windham High School. Their designs were flexible and any extra students would be easily accommodated for.

A week later Nelson announced an extra expansion of 3,724 square feet, including a larger pool, larger auditorium, corridors, art room, girls locker room and a shop area. The cost was \$67,000, to be drawn from the contingency fund of \$200,000. The cost of the entire project rose to \$5. 17 m., Projections forecast 1,800 students enrolled at the new Windham High School by the 1977-78 school year.