

March 14, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

The Willimantic Chronicle conducted a 10 week long experiment by publishing a daily edition, instead of a weekly edition. It was a resounding success. The experiment was declared permanent. The target for survival was a daily sale of 800 - 1,000. The Chronicle was delighted that its daily average sales were 1,500, with a one day record standing at 1,700. It was hoped to have a daily sale of 3,000 by March, 1893. Even then, explained the editor, the paper could not survive on sales alone at one cent a copy. The cost of paper, printing presses, wages and distribution was extensive. Continued survival relied upon increased advertising revenue. The higher the circulation, the higher the revenue. Advertisers were drawn to a paper boasting a wide readership. Potential advertisers were invited to undertake an extensive tour of the Chronicle's state-of-the-art steam driven printing presses, located in their recently completed Church Street headquarters, to experience how efficiently the paper was written, edited, type set, printed and distributed. When the tour was over, the guests were offered very generous annual rates to run a daily ad, to be "seen in every Willimantic household."

Frank Larrabee, a well known local grocer, took out a ten year lease on the two stores located in the first story of the Chronicle block on Church street. He planned to convert them into one large store, 40' x 70', boasting the largest plate glass window in town. Workers removed the central wall, and relocated the central staircase to the north end of the building.

The Loomer Opera House stood on the site today occupied by "Nassiffs." It was the entertainment center for the region. The weekly burlesque shows always sold out. The area's "red blooded" males were looking forward to a visit from the "London Gaiety Girls" who had performed in Boston to rave reviews. The theater critic from the Boston Herald thought that, "the show...is ideal for the lovers of feminine beauty." The "Gaiety Girls" arrived in Willimantic on the 11. 30 am train from Boston. The platform was thronging with men, young and old, keen to catch a glimpse of ankle! One of the crowd was a scribe from the Chronicle. He was of the opinion that the "15 young ladies are far superior in appearance to any of the burlesque companies that have appeared in the city." He accurately forecast that "bald headed men" and "youths" would be in competition for front rows at the Opera House!

The Opera House was packed to the rafters. The Chronicle reporter had a front row. He was impressed with the acrobats and comedian, but lavished praise upon the "girls." He reported that the show was "replete with sparkling music, delightful scenery, beautiful

girls in entrancing costumes, jingling songs and funny sayings." A fine time was had by all!

## 1917

Dr. Frederick Rogers graduated as a physician from New York University in 1864. In 1866 he came to the growing industrial hamlet of Willimantic and set up shop; a surgery and a drug store. Dr. Rogers announced his retirement after 51 years service to the people of Willimantic. He sold his drug store to the Joseph Lavallo Company of Baltic, thus ending the city's longest continuous business enterprise. The title moved to the shoe dealer, W.N. Potter, who began his business in Willimantic in 1880.

The Women's Charitable Fund of Willimantic (WCFW) petitioned the town's common council to build a park and playground on land recently bequeathed to them by Charles Young, located on the Lebanon Avenue extension. The WCFW wanted to clear the land and erect swings and benches, supply a sand pile and build a rustic bridge over the small brook which ran across the land. The WCFW reminded the council that Young had bequeathed the land to Willimantic with the understanding it be developed as a park site. Several council members believed the land would be put to a more profitable use if houses were built upon it!

## 1942

Long time residents of Willimantic will recall that the area bordered by the Congregational Church, the old Jordan Block and the junction of Union and Main streets, was referred to as "Lincoln Square." The name derived from the business located at the now removed junction of Union and Main Streets, east of the Fleet Bank building and the footbridge, The J.C. Lincoln Furniture Company.

John Clark Lincoln died on March 9, 1942, aged 91. He resided for many years at 139 Church Street. He was born in North Windham on February 22, 1851. He was educated at schools in Chaplin and Willimantic. At the end of the Civil War he began work as apprentice to a local jeweler, Andrew Chester. Several years later Lincoln became a teller for the Willimantic Loan and Trust Company, and a clerk at the Willimantic Savings Institute. He was forced to resign from the latter position in 1873 due to an eye ailment. The following year, Lincoln went into partnership with Abe Clark, a local furniture supplier. The Abel Clark Company operated from buildings erected at the junction of Union and Main Streets in the late 1860s. Clark died and J.C. Lincoln took over the business, continuing it up until 1929, when he retired.

The Lincoln Furniture Store building was torn down in the late 1930s, and replaced with a gas station. "Lincoln Square" disappeared in 1974, when urban redevelopment totally changed the face of that area.

The Willimantic Board of Alderman held a brief session to discuss a couple of urgent matters. They quickly dealt with street lighting applications and a claim for damages -

by Lucy Giddings of North Franklin who was knocked over on a Church Street sidewalk by a young boy riding a bicycle. The matter was referred to city lawyers.

The Board decided to move a fire truck from the Bank Street Headquarters and relocate it in the "over-the-river-section" of town, in case of air raids. The fire department were concerned that a fire truck would not be able to cross the two bridges if they were damaged by floods or bombs. This was followed by a city ordinance to punish those did not conforming to blackout observances. The Board meeting ended when the reports of the police chief, the fire chief, the superintendent of streets, the water department, and the health officer had been read.

Local inhabitants had their names drawn out of a military draft lottery in Washington D.C. The towns of Willimantic, Scotland, Chaplin, Canterbury and Hampton produced 1,850 potential draftees. Harry W. Houle of 190 Main Street, Willimantic, was the first name out of the hat. Superior Court judge John Hamilton King held the tenth number drawn, but all jurists were automatically exempt from military service.

## 1967

The UConn basketball coach Fred Shabel announced his retirement. He became UConn's assistant athletic director. Shabel was replaced by assistant coach Burr Carlson. Shabel had built a 72 - 28 record in his four season stint as head coach, resulting in two outright and one shared Yankee Conference titles. Carlson was a highly rated UConn basketball player in the early 1950s. He was drafted by the Philadelphia Warriors in 1953, but military service hampered his progress in pro. ball. He served in the army and the navy. He coached basketball while serving as a lieutenant in the army, and received a Masters Degree at the University of Hartford in 1959. Carlson consequently built a career as a High School basketball coach. He was appointed assistant coach to Fred Shabel at UConn in 1964.

The area was hit by an unexpected heavy storm, depositing 5 inches of snow and slush on Willimantic. Barkers' parking lot turned into a lake after a quick thaw. Valley Street took on the appearance of a canal, thanks to blocked drains. There were also problems at the Park spring on Rt. 195. A virtual lagoon formed across the road, making it impassable. The volume of snow downed numerous power and telephone lines, and caused countless minor traffic accidents. Worse would follow! On the second day of Spring, two consecutive snowstorms dumped 28 inches inches on Willimantic. All vehicular traffic ground to a halt, and a snow emergency was declared. This brought the total 1967 accumulation to a record 64. 5 inches