

March 21, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

Willimantic residents and members of the bicentennial committee, who subscribed to the Hartford Times, were surprised to discover that extensive plans had been made for the May 12th celebration of Windham's bicentennial! To date, the organizing committee had been beset with inner turmoil and disagreement - so the Times article was the first bit of good news for those looking forward to the local celebrations, and a shock to those on the committee not "in the know"!

James Walden, the secretary of the bicentennial committee - and local correspondent for the Times, was identified as the author of the optimistic piece. It forecast a bicentennial parade through the streets of Willimantic. The parade was planned to be the largest ever held "east of the river," consisting of 4,000 people, including the 3rd Connecticut Regiment, which according to the article, had been ordered to hold their Spring Parade in Willimantic, accompanied by the Governor's footguard and local members of the G.A.R. Various Orders of Connecticut Hibernians would also participate, along with civic societies and fire companies from across the state.

Willimantic based members of the bicentennial committee were annoyed with the members from Windham Center, who failed to appear for the committee's latest meeting. Those who did attend heard that the committee had requested \$2,500 from the state to help finance the celebration. It was suggested that the Windham Center celebration be abandoned, and be held in Willimantic on May 12.

1917

Willimantic was proud of its Irish heritage. A large number of the community's Irish born and descended traveled to New York City on the Air Line to participate in their St Patrick Day's celebrations. Those who remained in Willimantic celebrated their special day with gusto. The local branch of the Ancient Order of Hibernians organized a special performance of the melodrama , "The Shamrock and the Rose" at the Loomer Opera House. The play recounted the 1798 Irish uprising against British rule. It played before two capacity houses, totaling 1400 people.

Across town the Montgomery Hose Company celebrated the day with a special concert at their Fire House on Jackson Street. It consisted of a meal, music, singing, dancing and speeches. The "Monties" always celebrated "St Paddy's Day" with relish.

Local celebrations by the area's "Emerald Islanders" were somewhat subdued the day after St Patrick's day. One of Willimantic's most well known Irishmen passed away. John Mallon, of 12 Oak Street, was born in Ireland in 1875. Mallon, a dyer, was employed by the American Thread Company. He died of pneumonia, aged 42, in St Joseph's hospital on March 18, 1917.

The charismatic Irishman, "Jack" Mallon, was a colorful, well loved and highly respected local personality. His U.S.military record was legendary. In 1898 he enlisted in the U.S. Navy at the start of Spanish-American War. He served on the gunboat "Concord," captained by Windham's own William Swift. He saw action in a naval battle at Manila. In 1902 he enlisted in the U.S. Marines. Five years later he enlisted in the regular army, and was shipped to China to help subdue the Boxer Rebellion. In 1909 he rejoined the U.S. Navy. He was a crewman aboard the U.S.S. Georgia when it conducted a goodwill around-the-world cruise. Mallon was honorably discharged from the navy in 1910.

Jack found life in the American Thread dyehouse somewhat boring compared to his worldwide adventures in the military. In 1911, he enlisted as a part time soldier with Company "L" of the First Connecticut Infantry, based at the Armory on Pleasant Street. In 1916, Company "L" and Corporal Mallon journeyed to Nogales, Arizona, to deter across- the- border attacks by Mexican "bandit" Pancho Villa.

All flags in Willimantic were flown at half staff as Corporal"Jack" Malon received full military honors at his funeral. In attendance were numerous friends and family, Company "L", with its full military band, and Spanish War Veterans, who bade farewell to Willimantic's famous sailor-marine-soldier.

1942

George K. Allen, a local born 22 year old millworker, watched with fascination as engineers, employed by the Willimantic Traction Company, laid trolley car tracks along Main Street in 1903. The first trolley car journey to South Windham, on August 17, 1903, caused near hysteria in town. Allen was further intrigued, a couple of years, later when the Willimantic Post Office advertised for the part-time position of trolley car mail carrier. Here was a chance, not only to ride the trolley car free, but to ride it - and get paid! Allen went to the Post Office - in 1905 it was situated on North Street - to be interviewed. He was appointed Willimantic's first trolley car mail carrier. He began work on November 30, 1905. On March 1, 1906, he became a substitute carrier, and was appointed to the much coveted position of full time mail carrier on January 28, 1909.

On March 12, 1942, after 37 years of service, Allen was forced to hang up his mailbag. A new Federal act demanded that all mail carriers retire before the age of 61. George Allen had one of the most well known faces in Willimantic. It was a sad occasion as he bade farewell to his colleagues at the Post Office. He also retired from the position of President of the Local Branch of the National Association of Letter Carriers. George K. Allen was succeeded as mail carrier by William Gurnick.

1967

I recall being advised as a kid back in England, to never discuss religion or politics! The subjects could not be avoided in Willimantic, when the Connecticut Council of Churches (CCC) complained to the Willimantic Area Clergy Association(WACA) that right wing political groups were undermining them through syndicated articles in the Chronicle, and a syndicated radio show on WILI.

The CCC had recently locked horns with the John Birch Society, who accused them of being Soviet agents! The CCC., represented by the Rev Richard T. Purchase, of Coventry, CT., believed the John Birch Society were behind the latest onslaught of criticism. Purchase pointed the finger at Dr. Bob Jones, who penned a syndicated column published in the Chronicle. Jones had condemned "communist sympathizing ecclesiastics." The Rev. Purchase also criticized Carl McIntire's anti - church radio broadcasts, relayed on WILI. He linked Jones and McIntire to the national right wing crusader Billy James Hargis, a long time critic of the National Council of Churches.

The Chronicle, represented by Ray Martin, and WILI, represented by Herbert Rice, refused to censor McIntyre and Jones. They stated that the newspaper and radio station fostered free exchanges of ideas. Martin reminded the CCC that their philosophies would never be censored in the Chronicle.

The Jillson Hill, Pleasant Street intersection was the scene of numerous auto accidents. The Willimantic Traffic Authority reported that the Traffic Division of the State Highway Department were to fund and install traffic lights at this dangerous junction. The Authority also established permanent one way traffic on Park Street to Fairview Street, to further lessen traffic hazards in that area.