

May 09, 1992

## THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

### 1892

Although primarily known for its silk and cotton products, Willimantic had built a reputation for manufacturing superior plumbing and house heating supplies. The man responsible was William Vanderman, whose products were shipped to every corner of the United States. Vanderman, was born and educated in Hartford. He arrived in Willimantic in 1879, aged 27, and established a plumbing shop in the basement of the Holmes building (719 Main Street). His business grew and he transferred to the Turner Building at 41 Church Street. Trade increased further and in 1892 he built a modern new factory and workshop at 152 Valley Street. This was state of the art in the 1890s. It was heated by a sophisticated system of steam power. Vanderman manufactured his own personally designed steam heaters in the new workshops, and patented plumbing trade tools and steam boiler valves.

Vanderman organized a joint stock company on May 4, 1892, consisting of 600 shares of which he held 378, and the business became known as the Vanderman Plumbing & Heating Company. Vanderman won the contract for designing and supplying central heating to Willimantic's latest prestigious buildings, the State Normal School and the H.C. Murray block.

The town's leading citizens - those wealthy enough to purchase bicycles, organized a new club in Willimantic, the Thread City Cyclers. A committee was appointed to draft rules, hire meeting rooms and buy uniforms.

### 1917

People stopped and stared as a band of twenty gypsies traveled along Main street in some style. They rode in three automobiles, two Buick 6 models, converted into trucks, and a large Ford. The cars were registered in Pennsylvania. However, reports of the groups' "undesirability" had reached the ears of city mayor, Danny Dunn. He rushed out onto Main Street like a U.S. Marshall from the old west, and ordered them out of town. He told them that, "...the city's hospitality is not for you." Danny Dunn arrived as several gypsy women were reading fortunes on the sidewalks. "Marshall" Dunn followed the group out of town, and they were last seen heading into the sun on the road to Colombia.

When not throwing "undesirables" out of town, Mayor Dunn had the more pleasant task of overseeing the city's new fire fighting equipment. Horses were replaced by a six

cylinder gasoline engine, and the gasoline driven pump produced incredible pressures. A large crowd gathered in the yard of American Thread's mill number 3, which stood on Recreation Park, and witnessed the Alert Hose Company conducting a two hour long test of the pump, which maintained an average pressure of 122 lbs, and a discharge of 780 gallons a minute. Future tests were planned with the pressure being increased to 200 and 250 lbs. The new equipment easily met the requirements of insurance underwriters.

## 1942

One of Willimantic's foremost residents died aged 74. Edwin Francis Bugbee was born in Willimantic on January 21, 1868, a son of Edwin and Sarah (Preston) Bugbee. He graduated from the old Natchaug High School in 1886, attended the Wellstone Seminary in Easthampton, Mass., and pursued a course in banking at the Eastman School of Business in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. He gained a law degree at Yale in 1890, and came back to Willimantic to practise law, becoming a junior partner of John L. Hunter. Between 1893 and 1913 he served as the prosecuting attorney in the local police courts. In 1913 he represented the town of Windham in the state legislature as an independent Democrat. In 1920, Bugbee became the attorney and vice-president of the Willimantic Trust Company. He was appointed president in 1926, retaining the title until his death. He was active in local hospital circles, and became the first president of the Windham Community Memorial Hospital. Bugbee spent his summers in his home at Groton Long Point, and escaped the New England winters by living in Deland, Florida. He was well known for his extreme generosity and philanthropy for local causes, being Willimantic's leading benefactor. In his will he left \$400,000 to Willimantic causes, the Windham hospital received \$150,000 outright, and another \$100,000 on the death of his wife. Other beneficiaries were the First Congregational Church, the First Baptist Church and the local YMCA.

A large number of Willimantic workers found employment in expanded war work at Electric Boat in Groton. A special "war transportation" bus was hired to transport them to and from Groton. It cost the employees \$4 a week in fares, and departed from the YMCA on Main Street at 5. 45 am, 1. 45 pm and 9. 45 pm to facilitate the three shifts. The bus also picked up workers in South Windham and Franklin, but it was organized strictly for people involved in war work.

## 1967

The health of Willimantic's populace in the late nineteenth century was monitored by Dr. David Card, who worked from offices at the junction of Main and North Streets. In 1910, after Card's death, his widow, Hannah, founded the Card Home for Aged Women, in his memory. The Pleasant Street building had been expanded over the years, but the latest refurbishments, according to residents and staff, gave it the appearance and feel of a top hotel. The Card Home only accepted women who were not confined to their beds. Despite the remodeling, a relic from the old days survived. Inside the front

entrance, an old kerosene lamp, which had hung outside Dr. Card's Main Street offices, dangled from the ceiling.

Officials at Connecticut's judicial HQ agreed that Willimantic's law court facilities needed replacing. They responded to a petition from the Windham Bar Association (WBA), who illustrated their dilemma with photographs of the Windham's Court House's drab interior. The structure was impressive from the outside, but it was condemned as a fire trap. The court was situated on the third floor of an 1897 building. It had no elevator, only one stairway and one exit. There were no conference rooms for counsel to confer with clients. Lawyers, clients and witnesses huddled in groups in the hallway. There was no jury room. And why had Putnam received \$600,000 ahead of Windham for a new courthouse!?

The WBA asserted that Willimantic's geographical position made it an ideal location for new court facilities. It was the "natural hub of the area." The old Court house contained the offices of the Willimantic Police Department, the Common Council Chambers and the Superior and Common Pleas Courthouse. The application was impressive. The state's Judicial committee, in principal, favored Windham's application for a \$800,000 appropriation to build a new courthouse - but not just yet. The wheels of bureaucracy needed a little more lubrication.