

May 16, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

Willimantic's semi-professional baseball team was criticized in the *Hartford Sunday Journal*, much to the chagrin of the team's managers, who responded in a lengthy letter. The managers complained of limited funds. Looking back to 1891, they revealed that the town's merchants had donated \$418, and gate receipts were high, but because of high expenses on wages, uniforms, equipment, ground upkeep, and guaranteed purses for visiting nines, the Willimantic club lost over \$200 on the 1891 season. The club's limited funds did not allow traveling expenses for out-of-town players, and local players from the textile mills could not be reimbursed for the time lost at the mill when they played ball for their home town club, so the players consequently went elsewhere for richer pickings, subsequently the team's fortunes suffered on the diamond.

On May 7 1892, New London were the opponents, but hardly no one turned up for the contest on the Willimantic Fairgrounds because of the bitterly cold weather. The club lost a great deal of money, and were considering suspending operations for the season. The managers gave the *Sunday Journal* critic two options. He could take over the management - or donate \$5 a week to keep baseball alive in the city!

John Brown started work for the Willimantic Post Office on May 19, 1861. His fellow employees presented the veteran clerk with a gold headed cane to celebrate his 31 years as a carrier, clerk, assistant post master and eleven years as post master. Brown was 76 years old, and could boast that he knew every person living in Willimantic.

1917

The Willimantic Temperance Union calculated that each Willimantic saloon took in \$67,000 a year. As Willimantic had 25 saloons in 1917, the total figure was rather high. The Union argued that the saloons took cash, whereas the city's businesses were in debt as the drinkers paid them by account. Also, the city had to pick up the bill of the crime and poverty caused by excessive drinking in these houses of disrepute.

The Hotel Hooker had gone broke. Its proprietor, Abbot Davis, was deep in debt. The city's famous Hotel was built by Chauncey S. Hooker in 1886. It opened for business in February 1887, and was considered to be the finest hotel east of Hartford. Hooker sold the hotel in 1909 to E. A. Winter, who, in 1916, sold it to Harriet Pillsbury of Londonderry N.H. Mrs. Pillsbury leased it to Mr. Davis, who managed to amount a great deal of debt. Davis had forty years experience in hotel management in New

England. He lived in Methuen, Mass., and was also the proprietor of the Deerfield House in Deerfield, N.H.

1942

The recently built \$110,000 Louis I. Mason Nurses Home at Windham Hospital, designed by architect Claude E. Adams, was dedicated in a ceremony on National Hospital Day, May 12, which was Florence Nightingale's birthday. An invocation ceremony was conducted by Benjamin Styring, rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and the principal speaker was Dr. E. J. Ottenheimer, chief of surgery. The builders, the H. Wales Lines Company of Meriden, handed over the keys. The building contained rest rooms, laundry rooms, bathrooms, a linen room, a recreation center, a sun deck, a library, offices, smoking room, a kitchenette, fourteen single bedrooms, and overall accommodation for 27 nurses.

The annual concert of the University Choir of the Storrs Congregational Church had a very special guest singer on May 14, 1942. Over 1,000 people packed into the church to listen to the choir perform with Paul Robeson, "noted negro singer," who came over especially from his home in England. He performed the "Ballad for Americans," and sang a number of negro spirituals and work songs with his own piano accompanist Lawrence Brown. Robeson brought the house down with his rendition of a little ditty entitled "Old Man River." The Choir, and their Director Robert Yingling were not completely outshaded. They received continual applause for their version of an ancient English hymn, "O God Our Help in Ages Past. Several hundred people could not get into the church for this historic performance, so the concert was relayed to them by amplifiers specially set up for the occasion.

1967

The foundations were completed for Willimantic's new \$298,000 public library, and the laying of a concrete floor for the slab construction building went ahead, and the steel framing for the one and a half story building would be erected the following week. Plans for the library had were first drawn up in 1953. The project went ahead thanks to a generous federal grant of almost \$100,000. The rest of the money was raised by a bond sale. It was hoped that the new library would be open for business on September 1, 1967.

The Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra (ECSO) was organized in 1922 by Mary Blanchette, a local music teacher. Blanchette had conducted the Willimantic Symphony Orchestra since 1897, but financial necessities led to a merger with the New London Civic Orchestra in 1922. Since 1946, Norwegian native Victor Norman had conducted the ECSO in twin concert series in New London and Willimantic. There were exciting plans for the 1967 season, including a young artists competition and numerous demonstrations in regional schools. the ECSO also offered scholarships for young talented musicians. However, the ECSO had been operating with a heavy deficit since

1964. The current season's shortage was some \$2,000. A meeting was organized in the Nathan Hale Hotel to discuss ways of clearing the deficit and financing the orchestra in years to come. All were welcome to attend.