

May 23, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

Willimantic's Natchaug Silk Company assembled an impressive exhibition which demonstrated how silk was manufactured from cocoon to cloth. It was displayed at their New York City offices, where a man operated a loom, accompanied with depictions of cocoons successfully raised in Pennsylvania, New York and Connecticut, and examples of all the various silk products manufactured in the Company's Willimantic mills. The exhibition was about to embark upon an extensive tour of the companies agencies in the west. The Natchaug Company had applied for space to exhibit their display at the upcoming Colombian Exposition in Chicago.

Willimantic was being diligently mapped by surveyors from the Sanborn Map Company of New York. This task was undertaken every 5 years to enable insurance companies to become familiar with the features of new and existing buildings. The 1892 map differed greatly to the one completed in 1887, thanks to a local building boom. The Sanborn maps provide invaluable material for urban historians. Copies of those made for Willimantic can be viewed on request at the Windham Textile & History Museum

1917

Thomas Connors had a long Irish-Willimantic lineage. Unlike many of his relatives, he escaped servitude in the textile mills. In 1888 he ran away with the circus. He was back in town as an advance man for the Ringling Brothers Circus which was due to appear in Hartford on June 1. He went from house to house handing out colorful lithographed bills, and pasted them on walls when the police chief was not looking. Connors lodged with his cousin, James Haggerty, and declared that Connecticut was in better shape than any other state he had recently visited. The Ringling Brothers Circus was based in the winter in Baraboo, Wisconsin, and Connors often came back to spend the winters in his hometown.

Two state records were set by a cow called Lady Agnes Mercedes. Agnes belonged to the Gardiner Hall Jr. Company in Willington. She produced 731 lbs of milk in one week. This broke the record held by a New Canaan cow, Mary Onyx Brookside, who had produced 687 lbs in a week in 1916. Both cows were under the supervision of the dairy department at the Connecticut Agricultural College at Storrs.

1942

Local auxiliary police were ordered by the state police to guard four bridges in the city, around the clock, until they could be relieved by regular army troops who would be dispatched to Willimantic for the task in thirty days time. The police worked three eight hour shifts guarding the "Natchaug Bridge on the Providence Road, the No. 5 Mill bridge on Windham Road, and those on Bridge Street and Columbia Avenue."

Several hundred people crowded the Willimantic Railroad Depot to say farewell and good luck to a contingent of 97 local and district men who had been inducted into the U.S. Army. Members of the American Legion Post, Salvation Army and Lions Club passed out cigarettes, coffee and candy to those leaving. Mayor Russell Hinman and postmaster James Lee gave speeches to the departing soldiers. Police Officer John Lutton and Philip Chasen were the first local men to pass all requirements to attend officers school, and they led and organized the contingent.

1967

William R. Olds, the executive director of the Windham Area Community Action Program (WACAP), announced that 12% of Windham's families were low income, which, according to federal guidelines, was a family of four living on less than \$3,000 a year. WACAP was organized in 1965 to assist the disadvantaged, by "helping people to help themselves." WACAP's basic objective was to mobilize community services and resources to aid low income persons and fill existing social gaps.

Olds identified three categories in need of help, the Puerto Ricans, who suffered from lack of job skills and the inability to speak English; the elderly - Windham County had the highest percentage of elderly residents in Connecticut, and rural families, without job skills who were underemployed. Olds identified several local assistance programs; Headstart, Neighborhood Youth Corps, Food Services Program, Senior Citizens Center and Manpower and Training. WACAP employed low income field workers to inform the disadvantaged community of the programs available to them. About 800 people a month received assistance from the programs.

The American Thread Company (ATCO) created a new department, a unit to produce filament synthetics in their Willimantic plant. Manager E. B. Shaw appointed Rex Fairchild as manager of the new Filament Synthetics and Cotton Finishing Plant, which employed almost 50% of ATCO's current workforce. The reorganization gave promotion to Andrew Sabo, Oscar Bernier, Richard Brouillard, Arthur Michaud and Harry Larkin. Shaw stressed that the future of ATCO in Willimantic lay in synthetics. The consolidation of existing departments was necessary to maintain, "...the profitability of these vital links to our future."