

November 14, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

Bridge Street was a prominent city thoroughfare which led southbound travelers through town to Lebanon and Norwich. A new stone bridge, replacing an ancient wooden structure, was built over the Willimantic River by local builder Lyman Jordan shortly after the Civil War. Unfortunately, no further improvements were made in the area during the subsequent quarter of a century. The area was one of the busiest in town. Steam engines traveled over the Central Vermont and Consolidated Company's railroad lines which straddled the entrance to Bridge Street. Hundreds of millworkers walked up and down the street going to and from their labors in the Smithville cotton mills located on the east side, and the Windham Company's cotton mills located on the west side of the busy thoroughfare. The city fathers dug into their coffers, and traffic became snarled as extensive improvements were made to the problem plagued street. The road was straightened, and a new stone culvert was built. This much welcomed drain now connected Main Street's gutters to the river, and drained away the rain water which for years had flooded down Bridge Street on stormy days. The subsequent muddy pools often trapped the horse drawn traffic. The problem was further alleviated by the laying of crushed stones on the street. Curbing, sidewalks and gutters were also laid. Everyone commented about the vast improvements.

A large congregation assembled in the Methodist Church on Church Street to listen to a passionate address from the Reverend D. N. Stafford, entitled, "What Shall Young People do with the Long Winter Evenings?" Actually, the epistle was more concerned with what young people should not do. The Rev Stafford must have been a grim fellow. He demanded that amusements be innocent. "It is as natural for young people to crave amusement as it is for lambs to act differently from old sheep." However, these amusements should never take place in the saloon, where billiard and pool rooms were the first stepping stones to that most heinous of sins - gambling. Dice games were taboo, and the youngsters were further warned that such innocent pastimes as card playing in the parlor, and guessing the weight of a cake at a church fair were forms of gambling, and must be avoided at all costs.

Even those who did not venture out in the evenings were exposed to danger. They read lurid magazines, and were occupied by the demon of bad literature which corrupted the innocent mind. Stafford urged that if one could not resist the desire to read, they should pick up the bible, where God's word contained the most sublime and helpful love story ever written.

Mr. Stafford was certainly full of fun. His next target was dancing. Stafford believed in dancing as much as he believed in "white blackbirds." "Of all amusements, dancing is the most dangerous, most deceptive, most disgraceful, most unholy, and destroying to physical health and beauty. He considered ballroom carousing to be devilish and wicked." Stafford defined dance halls as where "one played the fiddle and the others played the fool." Dancing was contrary to every principle of Christianity, every fire of manhood and every pure sentiment.

George Prutting Jr. was furious with the Rev. Stafford. He had every right to be. He was a "Master of Dancing and Deportment" who ran a dance school in Willimantic. Mr Prutting, in an indignant letter, gave several biblical examples which praised dancing. He believed that dancing gave children good deportment and confidence, and served "to improve the mind and moral power, and gave relief to diseases." Prutting reminded the Rev. Stafford that many sons and daughters of religious ministers had received dancing instruction in his classes, and he invited the Methodist Minister to one of those classes. It is not known whether the Reverend accepted this invitation. But if I was a gambling man...

## 1917

There was a change of agent at the New Haven Railroad's Willimantic depot. Edward Wyatt, agent for the past 14 months, was replaced by Harry Blanchette, who had been agent at the Bristol depot. Wyatt was transferred to Manchester. Blanchette remained at Willimantic for many years, and became one of the most well known men in town.

Willimantic's barbers met in William Elliot's barbershop on Main Street, and agreed to raise their prices. From November 12, 1917, haircuts would be 35 cents each, and the charge for honing and re-sharpening cut throat razors was raised to 30 cents.

There was much building activity in town. The bridge over the Shetucket River at South Windham was re-planked and given a new coating of asphalt. Concrete pillars and steel girders were put in place for a new second story entrance at the American Thread's Number One mill on Main Street. The thread company was also extending its 1864 women's boarding house, the Elms, by building a 10 foot long, three store extension on the rear to allow for ten additional sleeping rooms. It was expected that the extensions being built at the Rossie velvet mill would be completed by Christmas.

## 1942

Before his retirement, 91 year old Archibald William Buchanan Sr. of Mansfield had served as the agent for the state board of education in Eastern Connecticut for more than 15 years. He died at the Windham Community Memorial Hospital. Mr. Buchanan was born at Holland, Vermont on May 27, 1851, and arrived in Mansfield Center in 1871. He was an active community member, having served as the secretary for the local board of education, a popular member of the Mansfield Center Congregational church, a director and president of the Mansfield Public Library, and a president and

trustee of the Mansfield Cemetery Association. He was also affiliated to the Uriel Lodge A. F. and A.M. of Merrow and Echo Grange of Mansfield. His wife of many years, Josephine (Fitch) Buchanan had died in 1919. He left one daughter, Miss Annie W. Buchanan, and a son, A. W. Buchanan Jr.

## 1967

Controversy reigned on the Storrs campus after 100 members of the Students for a Democratic Society organization, turned away two interviewers from the Dow Chemical Company, manufacturers of napalm, currently being used in the war in Vietnam. UConn President Homer Babbidge deplored the actions of the minority, and stressed that the University was a forum for all ideas. Babbidge was also critical of immature students who had vandalized and damaged half of the bicycles supplied free by the University to solve transportation problems. The president was still confident, however, that the "Blue Bike" experiment would be a success.

Twenty Five employees of Main Street's First National Store picketed the premises after the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen's Union ordered them to quit work . Some 383 stores across New England were effected. The call was successful in 277 stores, but stores in Danbury, Brooklyn, Putnam, Pawcatuck, New Haven, Branford and Hamden ignored the call. The union had rejected a pay rise, and were unhappy with several other items in the contract, including insufficient health care and sick leave allowances. It was announced that negotiations would continue, but when the union members arrived at work they were locked out. Picketts persuaded Willimantic shoppers to stay away, until negotiations in Boston were completed.