

November 28, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

Each Thanksgiving Day, the High Schools of Willimantic and Rockville battled each other on the football field. These games had been played in each town on alternative years since the 1880s, and always attracted large partisan crowds. This year the Willimantic team visited Rockville, and a large number of fans assembled at the railroad station to accompany the team on the short journey to Rockville.

When the game commenced, it seemed that the Rockville players were only interested in "slugging" their Willimantic opponents. Things began to get out of hand, when a number of Rockville "thugs" came onto the field and started hitting the unfortunate Willimantic High school players. It was decided to perform a tactical retreat, and the Willimantic team left the field and headed towards the dressing rooms with the score standing 10 - 0 in Rockville's favor. But this act further enraged the Rockville crowd, and the Willimantic team members were insulted and stoned as they headed towards the railroad station.

A Willimantic based sports reporter was enraged. He explained that "...every member of the team brought back a lump or a bruised face as a souvenir. It will be many a day before they expose themselves to Rockville's cannibals again." The Rockville press excused the riot on the grounds that the Willimantic team was full of "ringers" from Norwich who were posing as Willimantic High School players. This charge was passionately denied by local High school officials. However, it was discovered that the team had included one "accomplished player" not connected with the Willimantic High School. The 10 - 0 score of the abandoned game was declared valid, and Rockville were declared the winners.

The warden and burgesses of Willimantic held a special meeting to discuss the hiring of a non partisan police force. Appointments to Willimantic's Finest were wholly political. If a Democratic administration controlled town hall, Democratic policemen were appointed, and when Republicans took control, they removed the Democratic party cops, and hired their own policemen. A petition to the town council suggested that appointments be equally shared between Republicans and Democrats, whatever the political persuasion of the majority of local selectmen. This was agreed and each party nominated three candidates for the local force. The Republicans chose Frank Newell (captain) for day duty, Charles Anderson for the Valley Street beat, and Joseph Monast for the lower Main Street beat.

The Democrats chose J. Henry Hills for the Jackson Street beat, Daniel Killourey for the West Main street beat, and John Manley for the city center beat. Two policemen, J.F. Twoomey of the Valley street beat and Edward Grimes of the West Main Street beat, lost their jobs due to the new political alignment.

1917

More than 3,000 Willimantic millworkers had an excellent Thanksgiving surprise. Employees at American Thread and the Quidnick-Windham Company were awarded 10% pay raises, taking effect from December 3, 1917. This was ATCO's 5th rise since February, 1916, and affected more than 2,600 employees. The 400 employees of the Quidnick-Windham Company, located in the Bridge Street mills, would also receive their ten per cent on the same date.

The chemistry building at the Connecticut Agricultural College at Storrs burnt to the ground in a disastrous 2 a.m. fire on November 27, which caused damage amounting to \$30,000. The blow to the college was particularly hard as the building was only insured for \$10,700. Students and local inhabitants rushed to the scene when they heard the fire bell, but little could be done to save the building. The firemen therefore concentrated on hosing down the main administration building located 100 feet to the south of the blazing chemistry building. The severe cold weather, recorded at 5 degrees F., iced the building as the water hit it. Even so, the north side of the administration building was severely scorched, causing \$1,000 worth of damage. But the quick thinking fireman saved the president's offices, the registrar's office, the library, the museum, chapel and post office.

The chemistry building was one of the first to be built at the college back in 1890. It was 2 stories high, 40x 60 feet with a basement, laboratories, offices and classrooms. It was discovered that the fire had started because of a defective chimney. Two students were badly injured when their ladder collapsed as they were hauling a hose-pipe to the roof of the main administration building.

1992

Thanksgiving day was celebrated in St. Mary's Hall under the auspices of San Jose Council No 14, Knights of Columbus. A minstrel show was usually staged, but this was abandoned when it was discovered that most of the cast was involved in the war effort. Charles Girard was appointed master of ceremonies. Top of the bill was the Three Debs, "three NBC stars who present an act that has won wide acclaim throughout the principal cities of the east." They were supported by Kirk and Lawrence, "internationally known comedy stars," Fred Jennings, "a wizard on the banjo," and Dolly Zito, "a talented tap dancer." Over 250 people packed into the hall to see the floor show, which was a huge success. The entertainment then continued with dancing, accompanied by Russ Hinman's orchestra.

1967

More than 700 people attended the second ecumenical service held on Thanksgiving eve in Willimantic's First Congregational Church. Pastors and choirs of several Roman Catholic and Protestant churches participated under the sponsorship of the Willimantic Area Clergymen's Association. The first ever joint service in Willimantic had been held during the previous Spring in St. Joseph's. The 12 participating Thanksgiving pastors were Earl Linden (First Congregational), Donald Ellwood, William Belury and Louis Rodriguez (St. Pauls), Raymond Ward (United Church of Christ, Mansfield), Roland Cloutier and Henri Gigon (St. Mary's), Raoul Pronovost (St. Joseph's), David Halmers (Ebenezer Lutheran), Oliver Renaud (Immaculata Retreat House), John Mantor (Windham Center Congregational Church), John Camp (Methodist).

Members of Willimantic's police force were the lowest paid in the state. A possible walkout was averted when Corporation Counsel, Richard Kelley gave details of a new contract. The working week was 40 hours long, with starting patrolmen receiving \$2. 50 per hour, rising to \$3 per hour after 6 months service. Local police, who all had over two years service, were currently receiving \$2. 38 per hour for a 44 hour working week. This came to \$5,445. 44 per year, at a time when policemen in other Connecticut cities of a similar size to Willimantic, were receiving \$6,616 per year for a 40 hour week.