

October 03, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

William Weaver was a well known local historian and editor of the *Willimantic Journal* in the years after the Civil War. In 1892, his son, Thomas Weaver, used his father's historical notes and compiled an ancient history of Windham, which appeared in the *Journal* every week. The edition of October 7, 1892, revealed how the road today known as Puddin Lane in Mansfield Center obtained its name.

The area north of Willimantic known as Pleasant Valley, was famous for the fertility of its soil. It was rumored that back in colonial days, one farmer counted 3,368 kernels of rye from one ear. Small farms quickly grew in the area, and the local landholders joined together in the early years of the 19th century, and formed a "bee" to lay a road through their properties to connect with the main highway to Willimantic Falls and Mansfield. When the road was completed the event was celebrated in a unique manner, by the baking of a "monster pudding" on a large flat rock. When baked, the pudding was as big as an haystack. Unfortunately two hungry revelers dug into the base two quickly, effecting the center of gravity of the pudding. It toppled, killing one man instantly and seriously wounding two others. The road has been known as Pudding Lane ever since.

1917

The Willimantic Industrial Company, who had erected a large factory on John Street several years earlier to attract new industries to town, announced they were building an extension to their premises currently occupied by the Rossie Velvet Company. A new one story brick block, 72 x 90, was added, funded from the profits of the ever expanding Velvet company, who needed the extra space to fulfill their growing orders list.

It was noted that an air of prosperity was hanging over Willimantic. The town had just witnessed the completion of the American Thread Company's new concrete block, and a new factory was being built on Wilson Street to house the Watts Laundry Machinery Company.

It was a sad day for Willimantic's saloon keepers. The Internal Revenue Service had introduced a new tax on beer and liquor. The 30 breweries located in Connecticut and Rhode Island were charged an extra \$1. 50 per for every keg of beer brewed (The majority of Willimantic's saloons obtained their beer supplies from breweries located in Providence). Local saloon keepers announced that they would still charge 5 cents for a glass of beer, but they would reduce the size of the glass. They also decided to do the

same with liquor which was dispensed at 15 cents a glass. Local drinkers must have panicked at the news, as Delphis Boucher, who run a saloon on Milk Street, reported that his premises had been broken into, and as near as he could figure, about a half a dozen bottles of whisky had been stolen.

1942

The popularity of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers ensured that Miss Evelyn R. Macfarlane's Willimantic dance school was a success. Miss Macfarlane had recently suffered ill health, and had to close her school down for several months. She announced that the school would soon reopen, and that she had hired Helen Sokolowski as studio pianist and singing coach, and Cecille Vertefeuille as studio receptionist. Miss Macfarlane taught tap dancing and ball room dancing to children and adults. She was an employee of the Travelers Insurance company in Hartford. She received her dance training in Hartford, Springfield and New York City, and had been an assistant instructor in dancing at the Joseph F. Ryan School of Dancing in Hartford. She opened her Willimantic dance studio in 1936.

The Democrats swept the board in local elections. The exception to the rule occurred in the race for first selectman where the GOP's George Fraser defeated William Buck by 54 votes. The Republicans electioneered with verve in Willimantic's Third Ward, traditionally a Democratic stronghold, ensuring Fraser's narrow victory. The emergency conditions ensured that the turnout of voters was well down, only 4,529 out of 7,284 on the registry list voted.

1967

Former Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater spoke to some 3,700 students in the Jorgensen auditorium at the University of Connecticut. He refused to hold a news conference before the speech, but promised to outline his conservative philosophy during his address. The students listened intently as he stated that he recognized only one enemy in the world, the philosophy of communism, and that he supported escalation of the war in Vietnam by the bombing of Haiphong Harbor. Goldwater also threatened "Red China" with massive nuclear retaliation if they joined the war on the side of North Vietnam. Goldwater had unsuccessfully ran for President in 1964, and stated that he intended to run for the Senate in 1968.

The future of Columbia's historic Landmark building was causing great controversy in the town's Planning and Zoning Commission. Over 200 people attended a meeting at the G. W. Porter school gym to listen to the debate, over a petition from Peter and Frances Beckish, who wished to expand their business in the Landmark building. They were asking permission to remove the soda fountain to the basement, so that they could locate a delicatessen in its place on the first floor. They also wished to utilize the second floor as offices for rental to professional people such as "physicians, attorneys, barbers and beauticians."

The most vocal opposition came from Dr. Robert MacDonald who argued that the 200 year old building, constructed in colonial times as an inn, should be preserved in its original form. He also expressed concern about the Landmark's extended opening hours, stating that they might attract undesirable elements. "Consider a group of 50 motor cyclists and think what this would sound like on Old Willimantic Road. We have no crime rate here, if we get one we would have to get a resident state trooper. This would cost the town \$5,000 a year."

Many residents, however, argued that Columbia badly needed a drug store and a barber shop. Mrs. Catherine Rajchel said, "We live here and pay taxes here and we don't want to have to run to Willimantic all the time for these things." Laverne Williams, Columbia Planning and Zoning Chairman noted that zoning regulations called for the best use of all land, and that an empty, historic building was not the "best use." The debate continued.