

October 10, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

Willimantic celebrated Columbus Day in some style. The town's mills and businesses were closed on Monday, October 22, 1992, so the populace could celebrate the 400th anniversary of the "discovery" of America. The day's celebrations began at 9 am with a service in St. Joseph's Church. The Church organized a vast parade which began on Valley Street, turned south onto Jackson Street, and then west onto Main Street. It was headed by local Chief-of-Police J.H. Hills, and a platoon of policeman. They were followed by the town's dignitaries, who marched to the stirring music of the Thread City Band. The town's fraternal organizations were well represented, including the Grand Army of the Republic, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the St. Jean Baptiste Society, the Montgomery Hose Company, and the Knights of Columbus. The town Warden and Burgesses reviewed the parade from a stand located at the corner of Bank and Main Street.

The afternoon's celebrations took place in front of the new Catholic Convent on Jackson Street. At 2 pm, a choir and orchestra performed a program of patriotic singing and music. The assembled crowd was then addressed in French, before Father DeBruyker unveiled a statue of Christopher Columbus. DeBruyker had purchased the statue during a recent visit to Europe. It depicted Columbus in the act of stepping on American soil for the first time, bearing a cross and a banner. The statue was fitted on a pedestal, and placed in the grounds of the new convent. In the evening, the children of the parochial school rendered a four act drama in St. Joseph's hall, portraying the voyage and discoveries of Columbus, "with musical and literary pieces."

1917

John T. Ashton, a local electrical contractor, had designed an "air bomb" or "balloon mine." It was the size of a small suitcase, and it was designed to float over enemy positions, and explode, "causing much damage to the men in the trenches." Ashton had sent in his designs to the U.S. War Department, who had informed the Willimantic inventor that his design "looked good on paper." Ashton was keenly awaiting further developments.

Local town elections led to a Republican landslide. The GOP won all the top offices up for grab, except for two assessor positions won by James Mustard and John Picket for the Democrats. 1723 votes were cast, compared to 1857 in the 1915 elections. The shortfall was accredited to the fact that many voters were now in the armed forces. E.P.

Chesboro and Alphonse Gelinas were elected First and Second Selectmen ahead of their rivals from the Democratic Part, Joseph Martin and Frank Lincoln. The first man to cast his vote was Michael J. Welch of Jackson Street, an employee of American Thread. Many local people will know his daughter, "Babe" Welch, who is better known today as Rose Dunham. She is now 86 years young and resides in a nursing home in Manchester.

## 1942

Isaac Cooperman, president of the New England Pants Company and Jack Yelowitz, business agent of Local 280 Amalgamated Clothing workers announced that for the duration of the war, employees of that concern were to receive bonuses every three months equal to 5% of their wages. Workers at the New England Pants factory had already seen their wages raise by some 35% since the war began. They gave much of the raise to the US Government by purchasing large numbers of War Bonds and Saving Stamps, and were highly involved in various forms of civilian defense work.

The Capitol Theater organized a scrap metal drive for children, by offering free tickets for a 9. 30 am matinee to each child bringing up to five pounds of scrap metal, and depositing in trucks stationed outside the cinema. The show featured a movie and two cartoons, and it was expected that a thousand kids would attend.

## 1967

The phone lines to Willimantic's police station were jammed with calls from panicked locals who thought that flying saucers were landing. Local residents were being treated to a multi-colored display of lights in the night sky. The UFOs turned out to be traces of barium vapor emitted at intervals from an experimental atmospheric research rocket launched from Wallops Island, Virginia. The green, red, purple and orange lights seen in the night sky were part of an experiment to detect electric fields in the upper atmosphere, conducted from the Air Force Cambridge Research Laboratory at New Bedford, Mass.

Voters in Columbia elected to allow package stores in town to sell alcohol. This was considered to be a great victory for the "Wet Voters" in town - but they refused to go as far as to permit the opening of bars and taverns.