

October 24, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

The pupils of Willimantic High School wore school uniforms a century ago. The new school year saw the addition of blue "yachting caps" with the letters W H S embroidered in a gold German text. Everyone agreed how smart the pupils looked as they walked around the city streets.

Willimantic and surrounding districts suffered through a late summer and fall drought. Lake Wangumbaug at Coventry was some 10 feet lower than its usual level. The Willimantic River was very low, and this was causing problems for the textile mills who relied on its powerful flow to power their machines. The Linen Company's mills were closed down for three days because of insufficient power. Other mills were closing down for longer spells, as they possessed no auxiliary steam engines. It was reported that the people of Hartford were forced to drink water straight from the Connecticut River because their reservoirs were bone dry. No such problems in Willimantic, however, as the Willimantic Water Works had ample supplies in their Mansfield reservoir.

1917

Willimantic had never seen the like. The streets were thronging with people. The crowd was estimated at 4,000. Who was coming to town? President Woodrow Wilson? No, it was Jack Williams, the Human Fly. He was described as a "slender young man who crept up the walls of the Windham Hotel," which was located on the northeast corner of Main Street and Church Street, opposite "Hurley's," then known as the Murray Block. Police Chief Killourey had his entire force on duty to keep order. They were ably assisted by members of the Home Guard who were posted in Willimantic.

Williams had announced that he intended scaling the walls of the Murray Block, which was the tallest structure in town. He changed his mind, and began to climb the Windham Hotel building, claiming that he would ascend the Murray Block the following evening - blindfolded.

He made a speech to the large crowd, announcing that he had scaled the tallest buildings in the country, some of them being over 20 stories in height, and detailing the narrow escapes he had experienced. Mayor Danny Dunn was next to speak. He announced that a collection would be made for "The Fly" by members of the Home Guard, and of the amount collected, thirty percent would be donated towards the war

fund.

As Dunn spoke, Williams slipped into his climbing attire which consisted of a black slouch hat, blue jersey, brown trousers and "sneaks" encased his feet. The collection went ahead, and the response was "most generous." Williams emptied the collection into a black bag, locked it, and handed it to Mayor Dunn. At 8 pm he began his climb. His agility astounded the crowd, who gasped as he finally swung himself over the extending cornice which decorated the roof of the Windham Hotel. It took him 21 minutes. He performed with the aid of a spotlight, flashed from an automobile situated at the Union Shoe Store.

The Home Guard and large crowd then walked up to the Town Hall - and Williams surprised everyone by climbing its walls, and entering the building through a second story window. The collection was counted. Williams received \$91. 49 and the Willimantic War Fund received \$39. 49.

It rained heavily the following night, and Williams declined to climb the Murray Block. It was also raining the day after, but Williams had promised that he would climb the Murray Block blindfolded, and then climb the town hall, going over the top of the clock and down the other side. Because of the inclement weather, only a thousand or so lined the streets. Williams announced that it was too dangerous to climb the Murray Block and the Town Hall - and not worth the risk due to the meager collection, but he volunteered to go up the Windham Hotel again - a climb he completed in 9 minutes. Williams received \$16. 50 from this climb, and the town's war fund made \$7. 07.

1942

The War Department's Civilian Protection School, based at Amherst, Mass. had organized a program to teach air raid wardens, policemen, evacuation and medical services and first aiders, how to deal with fires caused by incendiary bombs. Their latest demonstration was earmarked for Storrs, and would be held on Route 195 at UConn "between the poultry farm and the dairy at the east side of the highway." There were ample parking facilities, and all local civilian defense workers were urged to attend.

1967

The Willimantic Board of Finance was requested to approve funds for the development of a ski area on the town farm property on Valley Street, earmarked to be the site of the new state court. The request came from Edward Ferrigno, director of the Recreation Commission, believed a ski area could be developed for \$500. He understood that the court would not be built for another 4 or 5 years, and this plan would put the vacant site to use.

The Loyal Order of Moose Lodge 1440 was celebrating its 54 th anniversary. The Willimantic Lodge being founded in 1913. In addition to the traditional birthday cake, the Lodge intended to hold a Halloween Dance with several prizes to be awarded for

the best costumes.. Junior Governor Theodore Winot was named chairman for the event. He announced that cider and doughnuts would be served during the 54th birthday party. Governor John Buskey revealed that the mortgage on the Moose club's parking lot on Brook Street had been paid in full, and that a mortgage burning ceremony would soon be organized.