

October 31, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

On the morning of October 27, at 3 am, Willimantic was stirred from its slumber as locomotive whistles and fire company bells alarmed the populace to a massive blaze between Walnut Street and High Street. Three large barns were reportedly set alight by "three half-drunk tramps" who had been on the streets the day before, begging smoking tobacco. The Montgomery and Alert Hose Companies soon had three powerful streams aimed at the conflagration, but one barn was razed and the other two were severely damaged. They had belonged to the Cassazza Brothers, John Hopkins, the owner of the Smithville mills boarding houses, and a Mr. J. H. Gray, who all lost horses, cows, wagons and harnesses.

1917

When Hannah T. Card, the widow of a famous Willimantic physician, died in 1915, she left her entire estate "to establish, conduct and maintain a Home for the Aged in Willimantic." The money was entrusted to a group of local people who organized a corporation, entitled "Card Home for the Aged Inc." These trustees included James Hillhouse, George Hatch and S.C. Hooker. The treasurer was Eugene Boss, the agent at the American Thread Company. After several meetings, it was decided to purchase a site, engage an architect and proceed to construct a home fireproof and modern in every particular. a beautiful lot was purchased on Windham Road, commanding a view of the entire city of Willimantic, but the scheme had to be abandoned because of rising costs. The trustees then decided to purchase a house, and convert it. After viewing several houses, they eventually purchased the Keigwin residence on Pleasant street, "until conditions warrant the building of a new home."

The Keigwin property was one of the showplaces of Willimantic during the 19th century. It was built in 1869 by John T. Keigwin, and occupied by him until his death. The lot on which the house stood was 160 x 260 feet, and preparations were made to commence conversion, as there was already a long waiting list of ladies waiting to live in the new Card Home.

1942

Willimantic's Rotary and Lions Clubs and the Chamber of Commerce organized a dinner-meeting at the Nathan Hale Hotel to welcome officials of the Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Corporation. The Aircraft Company were building an assembly plant on West

Main Street, which was expected to eventually give employment to 4,400 workers. Mayor Russell Hinman welcomed George Miller, the plant manager of the United Aircraft Corporation, of which Pratt & Whitney were a subsidiary. He gave a brief history of the Company. In 1935, they employed some 2,000 workers in their East Hartford plant, but war conditions had led to massive expansion. They currently employed 31,000 workers, and their workforce would soon increase to 47,000 when new plants in Willimantic, Southington and East Longmeadow were in operation. Another 27,000 workers would be added to the payroll when their Kansas City, Mo. was completed. Miller introduced Newton B. Turney, the Company accountant, Thomas F. Kahoe, the general manager of the new Willimantic plant, and Morgan Mooney and Tennant Downs, the Company's personnel managers.

Former Connecticut Governor Raymond Baldwin addressed a Republican luncheon at Willimantic's Shell Chateau Restaurant. He asserted that the State Teachers College in town played a vital part in the educational system of the state, and that if he was re-elected, there would be no repeat of threats he made in 1938 to close the school down because they were educating too many teachers. Over 200 people attended the occasion to listen to a program of Democratic Party bashing, led by Mayor Russell Hinman and First Selectman George Fraser.

1967

The Columbia Congregational Church was celebrating its 250 birthday. In May, 1716, the Connecticut Legislature approved a request of the inhabitants of Lebanon Crank, as Columbia was then known, to have a parish and separate from Lebanon. The first pastor arrived in 1720, and the anniversary committee, which consisted of Rachel Buell, Gertrude Gates, Edith Haver, Phillip Isham, Arnold Sihvonen Mrs. Donald Tuttle, felt that organization had taken place between 1717 and 1720, even though no records could be found. Therefore, the celebrations were to start this year, culminating in 1970.

Of the 23 pastors who had served the Columbia Congregationalists, the most famous was the Reverend Eleazer Wheelock, who served from 1735 until 1770. He started a school for local Native-Americans in Columbia, and his most famous pupil was Occum, who was sent to England to speak to large gatherings. The Earl of Dartmouth was so impressed that he secured a contribution of 200 pounds from King George, and eventually over 10,000 pounds was collected. Wheelock took the money and with it founded Dartmouth College. The celebration was opened by Dr. Arthur S. Wheelock, a direct descendant of Eleazer.

Martin D. Viullermet, a 30 year veteran of the Willimantic Police department, succeeded Phillip M. Rose as local Chief-of-Police. Captain Viullermet had been acting Chief-of-Police since May, and it was noted that the morale of the department had greatly improved. Viullermet joined the department in 1937, and served with Company L, 169th Infantry, in the Pacific from 1941 until 1946.. He was appointed a regular patrolman with the Willimantic Police Force on April 8, 1946. He was promoted to detective-sergeant in 1957; to lieutenant in 1962; and to captain in 1965.