

September 12, 1992

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS

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

1892

Willimantic lost one of its best known citizens with the death of Chester Tilden Jr. He was born in Franklin in 1826, the son of a well town Baptist preacher. Chester was plagued with ill health in his youth, and was persuaded to go to sea. He returned to Willimantic as a young man, and worked for William Weaver's Adams Express Agency in the town. After a relapse in health, he returned to sea, but finally came back to Willimantic in 1861.

He lived in his father's property on Main Street, and eventually sold it to Silas Loomer, who demolished it and built the "finest theater in eastern Connecticut," the Loomer Opera House. Tilden then established a grocery, variety and notion store in partnership with Ward Dimmick. He later sold his share and established an insurance and pension agency in town.

Chester Tilden was a 32nd degree mason, and belonged to the Scottish rite branch in Norwich, a past Master of Willimantic's Eastern Star Lodge No 44, Deputy Grand Master of the District, Grand High Priest of the Grand Chapter of Connecticut. He was also a staunch Democrat and a trial judge. He was familiarly known to everyone in Willimantic as Judge Tilden. His funeral service was held in his Bridge Street residence, and was attended by masons from across the state.

A plague of flies haunted local cattle owners. The pesky insects were identified as "Texas Flies," "Stockyard Flies," and "Buffalo Gnats." The most feared of these flying bugs were known as "Horn Flies," a particularly nasty critter from Europe which drilled holes in the cattles' horns and laid eggs in the unfortunate beasts' brain, causing their horns to drop off and eventually killing them.

Local farmers were panicking. Their anxiety was relieved by Professor Koons of the Storrs Agricultural School, who explained that much said about the dreaded "Horn Fly" was merely sensationalism and rumor. Koons explained that the flies had arrived in America in 1886, at Philadelphia, on a shipment of European cattle. The "Horn Fly" made its debut in Connecticut this year, after spreading down the eastern seaboard. According to the learned Professor, the flies were bloodsuckers who attacked in large numbers, causing a decrease in milk production. They did not drill into the cows' brains, but laid their eggs in cattle dung. The flies rested on the horns in great numbers to avoid the swatting of the cows tail, thus giving the appearance of holes. The best remedy was to sponge the livestock with fish oil, and to dry the dung, then immerse it

in water to kill the larvae. How fortunate to have such expertise on one's doorstep.

## 1917

Several weeks earlier, Willimantic had been hit by a severe thunderstorm. It was now hit by a severe frost, which caused thousands of dollars worth of damage to late growing vegetables. Ponds and lakes were covered with a thin layer of ice, as the mercury plunged some 10 degrees below freezing point in low laying areas. Farmers lost their crops of corn, beans, squash, melons and tomatoes, with the worst damage being done to the corn crop. It was forecast that prices would rise sharply.

Merrill H. Jones' was the proprietor of Willimantic's jitney service (a jitney was a motorized bus) whose offices were located in a concrete structure on Union Street. The night shift drivers, Joseph Sears and Joseph Conchon, complained bitterly about the cold, and Mr. Jones supplied them with a portable coal stove. A fire was lit, and the drivers left the damper open and fell asleep. Mr. Jones arrived at the offices at 6 am, and was not too impressed with the fact that his drivers were sleeping. He shouted to awaken them, and Joe Sears jumped up, but began to stagger around like someone who had had one cocktail too many. Sears collapsed, but Conchon could not be awakened. Jones realized that the men had been asphyxiated by the fumes from the stove which had no way to escape, so he opened the front and rear doors and broke the windows. Conchon and Sears were revived by a physician.

## 1942

Windham's schools, public and private, reopened for the fall term of the new school year. Windham High School had the highest registration with 1092, with some 300 being members of the freshman class. The State Trade School had an enrollment of 150. 18 pupils were registered in North Windham, 75 registered at the Oaks school, and 443 enrolled at the Windham Street school. The Windham Center Grammar School's enrollment of 96 pupils was identical to the 1941 enrollment. Principal H. K. Viner of the Natchaug Grammar School announced that 454 had registered for classes. The city's two parochial schools, St. Mary's and St. Joseph's had a combined registration of 1,118.s.

The State Teacher's College had full registration rolls. This institution had just hired three new faculty members. Herman Beckert, a graduate of the Yale Music School became the new head of the music department, replacing Morgan R. St. John. Martha Bartlett, of Syracuse, NY, was the new assistant librarian, replacing Annie Marston. Francis Willey replaced Lucy Reddish in the social studies department. Willimantic's Teacher's College played an important part in the local war effort. It was part of the army and navy program to train officers, and classes were reorganized to facilitate a 3 semester school year to allow potential officers to gain their degree in 3 years instead of 4 years. All classroom and extra curricular activities were coordinated with the local defense program.

The greatest activity at the State College was the coordination and orientation of

freshmen. A "freshmen frolic" took place in the Windham Street School auditorium, where faculty danced and played games with the freshmen

## 1967

Miss Carol Anderson (19) was crowned "Miss Windham" as part of the town's celebration of its 275th anniversary. She was described as "a petit blond, a graduate of Windham High School and a freshman at Southern Connecticut State College."

On September 8, First Selectman Ralph Crosthwaite opened the three day celebration with a speech in front of 500 people gathered on Windham Green. He read out letters from President Lyndon Johnson, Governor John Dempsey and Senator Thomas Dodd.

A 12 mile road race began at 10 am on Legion Field, and a sack race and frog jump was scheduled for Windham Green in the afternoon. Other events included a drum and bugle competition sponsored by the Elks, a square dance at Barker's parking lot, and open houses and dances at the Ukranian Club, Moose Club and the Knights of Columbus. The highlight of the celebration took place on Saturday, September 9, when thousands of people lined Main Street to watch a parade by 60 marching bands and musical units, new and antique vehicles, floats, animals and individual performers, which took two and a half hours to pass by. The three day celebration ended on a rainswept Windham Green where a concert was given by the 8th Air Force Band of Westover Air Force Base.