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Jordans unknown but for road that bears name

Other than being preserved in the name of a Willimantic thoroughfare, the Jordan family is virtually forgotten. The Jordan homestead on Jordan Road, was home to Lyman Jordan (1817-1882), a famous builder and mason, and his twin sons Julius (Jules) and Julian Jordan, who became well-known popular and classical musicians. The Jordan family originated from Greene, R.I. The Jordans who settled in Willimantic became devout Methodists. Jules Jordan recalled in his autobiography, "The Happenings of a Musical Life" (1922) that the Jordans had been, "of wayward inclination until the transforming influence of religious experience changed both my father and grandfather."

Lyman Jordan was born in Coventry, R.I., in 1817, and came to Willimantic with his parents in 1833. He married Susan Kenyon in 1835 and they had three children. Jordan was remarried, to Susan Beckwith, shortly after the death of his first wife in 1843. Jordan and his second wife, who was a direct descendant of Capt. Isaac Beckwith, renown for building the first ship in New London.

Lyman Jordan was a founder



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of the Methodist Church in Willimantic, and a central figure of building the edifice that gave Church Street its name in 1851. He possessed a "melodious tenor voice," and led the Willimantic Methodist Church's choir. The twins Julius and Julian were born in Willimantic Nov. 10, 1850. The Jordans moved briefly to Bolton in 1854, when Lyman was contracted to build the Bolton reservoir dam, but returned to Willimantic in 1856. Jules Jordan's earliest memory was when he and Julian, the aged five, performed at an entertainment given at the Universalist church in Bolton, and "sang in pretty dresses with palm leaf patterns." Jules and Julian had perfect pitch and excellent singing voices, and from the age of 10 they sang regularly in the choir at the Willimantic Camp Ground.

Lyman Jordan was a highly skilled mason. In 1857 and

1868 he built the two stone arch bridges that cross the Willimantic River between the Windham Mills and across Bridge Street, replacing old wooden bridges. Jordan also completed a large amount of masonry work for the cotton mills. In 1858, he purchased a 125-acre farm in Willimantic and two years later demolished the small house on the site, to build an 11-room, Greek Revival-style house constructed from fieldstone on an old public road to Lebanon (138 Jordan Road). It was built by the labor of all his sons, under Lyman's direction. George E. Jordan, a son from his first marriage, became a skilled mason like his father, and is known for building the stone dam at Mill No. 1, after the old wooden dam was destroyed after the blizzard of 1888.

The material for the new house consisted of stones dug from the surrounding fields. The stones were laid in mortar to make a rough wall, which was plastered on the weather side and finished off in square blocks. In 1902, Julian, who had built a substantial musical career in New York City's Tin Pan Alley, wrote a song published in sheet music form, entitled the "The Picture In My



Lyman Jordan

Heart." This was a follow-up to his big hit, "The Song That Reached My Heart," that was more commonly known as "Home Sweet Home."

It was upon Lyman Jordan's suggestion that the Willimantic Methodist Church located a revivalist camp ground just to the east of his farm and new house. He knew the location well, as Jordan and his boys

hauled stones from that hill to build their new home. It was an ideal position for a campground, on a hill, supplied with natural springs, and close to the New England railroad network. The Willimantic Camp Ground became famous in the late nineteenth century, attracting tens of thousands of worshippers from across the country. The original tents were eventually replaced by small, attractive Victorian "gingerbread" houses. Jordan was an important member of the committee which purchased the Methodist Camp Ground in 1860, and did much to develop it.

Continued next week

Don't forget that next week is the Quiet Comer Walking Weekend. I'll be conducting an outside tour of the Victorian Mansions on Windham and Prospect streets next Saturday at 2 p.m., meeting at the Kramer School. Join me on a stroll around the Willimantic Cemetery on Sunday, Oct. 10, at 9 a.m. Finally, on Monday, Oct. 11 Jeffrey Voce and I will conduct a tour of Windham Mills at 11 a.m.