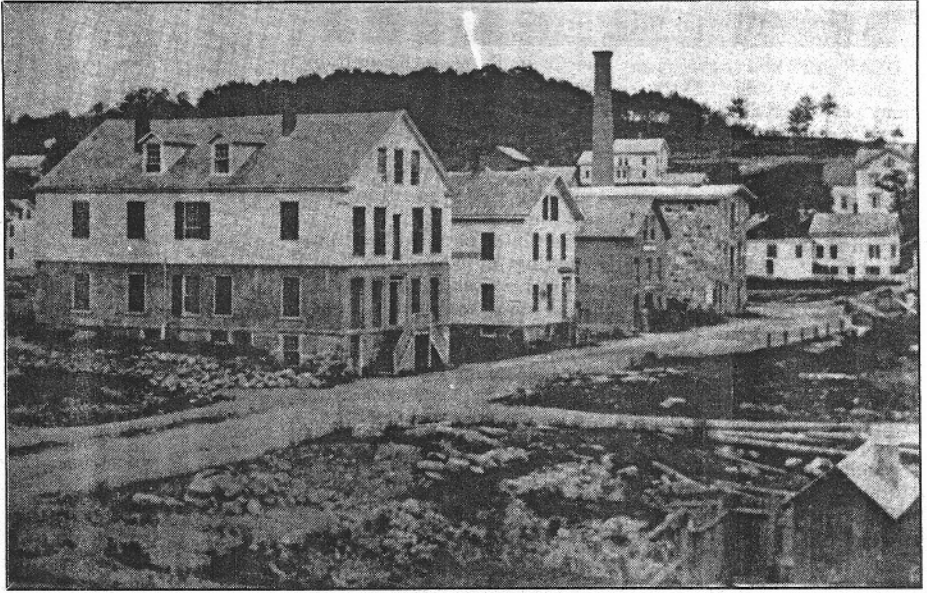


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Church Street in Willimantic, circa 1869.

Church St. sure has changed



Tom
Beardsley

This week's photograph depicts a downtown section of Willimantic almost unrecognizable today. The cameraman situated himself along the eastern side of Church Street, and aimed his camera to the northwest. He captured four structures on the west side of Church Street in a location today occupied by the Windham Courthouse and a parking lot. Also note Prospect Hill in the background, almost totally undeveloped.

The photograph was taken sometime between the end of the Civil War and 1873. These dates are verifiable because town records reveal that Church and Valley streets were not laid until 1866-67, and the west mill of the Holland Silk Co. was not built until 1873, on the northwest corner of Valley and Church. The photograph reveals a wooden structure in that location.

The first structure actually erected was the Methodist Church in 1851, thus giving the future thoroughfare its name. The four Church Street structures pictured are, from left to right, a paper storage facility that also housed a barber shop and a grocery store; a box-making factory (the San-

born Insurance maps inform us that glue in the box factory was heated over tin kerosene lamps); the town lock-up, or jail; and Warren Atwood's sash and blind factory. Atwood's stone factory was later occupied by The Willimantic Steam Laundry, and in 1873 it was home to the Paisley Silk and Thread Co.

On June 22, 1865, the Willimantic Journal reported that "Church Street, north of the Methodist Church, is being graded down to almost a level, making it much more agreeable to pass over. This is destined to be quite a thoroughfare."

In the summer of 1873, many towns in the New England area were suffering from outbreaks of cholera. This led to a demand for more sewerage in the borough. The Journal petitioned for a sewer from High Street to Church Street "to accommodate, the people owning property on Valley street and between Main and Valley who have no place whatsoever to drain their waste or other water except for standing cess pools." The sewer was laid, and soon after the borough laid concrete sidewalks along the street.

In 1879, the Chaffees of Mansfield purchased Atwood's stone factory, demolished it and built a brick silk mill. In 1882, the borough extended Church Street. The *Chronicle* reported that "there is a stubborn ledge requiring a great deal of blasting," and that, "along the line of this exten-

sion are some of the very best building lots in the village and we believe they have all been sold to parties intending to build on them. At the present time there are five dwellings in the process of being erected within a distance of 20 rods and others are contemplated. The man who owns property in that section suitable for building purposes is fortunate indeed for it is the place all others in this section for a pleasant and beautiful home.

On April 6, 1887, the *Chronicle* built a new printworks and offices on Church Street, and five years later that same newspaper was pleased to report that the borough were to pave Main, Railroad, Church, and North streets with granite blocks — but this attracted a problem. On July 19, 1892, the borough ordered that, "No person shall ride, drive or run a bicycle, tricycle or velocipede on sidewalks of Main or Union streets, from High to Jackson streets, nor on Church and North streets, or from Main to Valley streets or Railroad street. All persons riding on non-prohibited streets shall give suitable warning by bell or whistle when about to pass or meet any person. If a person does not heed warning, leave sidewalk or dismount and pass. No person shall ride on sidewalk after dark. Penalty for above violations shall not be more than \$10."

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