

History

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Eagle's Nest house was victim of tragic 1929 fire



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In the early hours of April 5, 1929, the city of Willimantic lost one of its historic landmarks when the famed Eagle's Nest house burnt to the ground. The two-and-a-half-story structure stood almost on the border with Lebanon. It was so named because no other house in the borough stood on a higher location, halfway up Hosmer Mountain. Hosmer Mountain was deforested during the 19th century. Much of its fertile, spring-fed land was fanned, and the lack of trees provided a magnificent view of Willimantic. The Eagle's Nest was built as a farmhouse in 1849 by a local landowner and farmer, Martin Harris.

During the 1890s the Eagle's Nest was home to one of Willimantic's most well-known characters. Charles Henry Dimmick was born in Newark, N.J., in 1854. His father Edwin, although born in Mansfield, traveled extensively on railroad work and business



The Eagle's Nest house was built on Hosmer Mountain in 1849, providing a fine vista of Willimantic in the valley below. It is pictured here in 1912.

ventures.

Charles worked at several occupations in New Jersey and New York City, but shortly after the Civil War he fell in with a disreputable crowd, and he embarked upon an unofficial invasion of Cuba. The ship carrying Dimmick was captured by the U.S. Revenue cutter, "Grant" and the would-be conquerors of Cuba were imprisoned in New York City. He was released by a guard who, be-

cause of 17-year-old Dimmick's diminutive size, thought he was a child mistakenly arrested.

In 1871, just after the Cuba escapade, Charles came to Willimantic to live with family. Shortly afterwards he was hired by a migrating Windham family to drive a "prairie schooner" to Nebraska. Dimmick worked 18 months in Nebraska breaking prairie, hunting buffalo and herding cattle.

He returned to Willimantic in 1873, with only two dollars and a "store of eventful experiences."

Dimmick then found employment as a barber in Willimantic before returning to New York City to work in a hotel that would soon be demolished when the entrances to the Brooklyn Bridge were built. Dimmick returned to Willimantic and was employed in a butcher's store and a grocery store before opening a barber's shop in the Commercial Hotel on Main and Church.

By 1893, thanks to his connections in the local Republican Party, Dimmick was elected town clerk, a post he held until 1899, the year he was appointed Willimantic postmaster. During this period he purchased the Eagle's Nest farm and house, and conducted a successful berry and fruit growing business there.

Charles Dimmick, one of Willimantic's most colorful character's died in 1922.

In 1929, the Eagle's Nest was owned by Sadie Borowitz of Colchester, and rented to David Fleishman. A stylish Victorian porch, gazebo and entrance was added to the 11-room house in the 1880s.

Fleishman and his wife were awakened at 2 a.m. on the

morning of April 5, 1929, when they heard their infant child coughing because of smoke. The family quickly evacuated the house, and Willimantic Fire Department was quickly upon the scene, but because of the high elevation of the Eagle's Nest, and the fact that the nearest hydrant was three quarters of a mile away, Chief Wade Webster decided that nothing could be done to save the house, which was fully ablaze. The Mack pumper engine was returned to Bank Street and the Reo chemical wagon was dispatched to the scene. The fireman then concentrated on saving a large barn in the rear, but they did not save the ice house and a wood shed.

The Eagle's Nest and its furniture and furnishings were valued at \$9,000. The house was insured by the Frank M. Lincoln Agency. The Fleishman's neighbors, the Bellers, were the owners of the Hosmer Mountain Soda Co., and they were kind enough to accommodate the homeless family.

The Eagle's Nest was completely rebuilt in the 1930s, and the new house on the site is today owned by Gil Fournier, the proprietor of Gils Restaurant on Willimantic's Main Street.