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History

Plans for railroad become a reality



Tom Beardsley

Part Two of Three

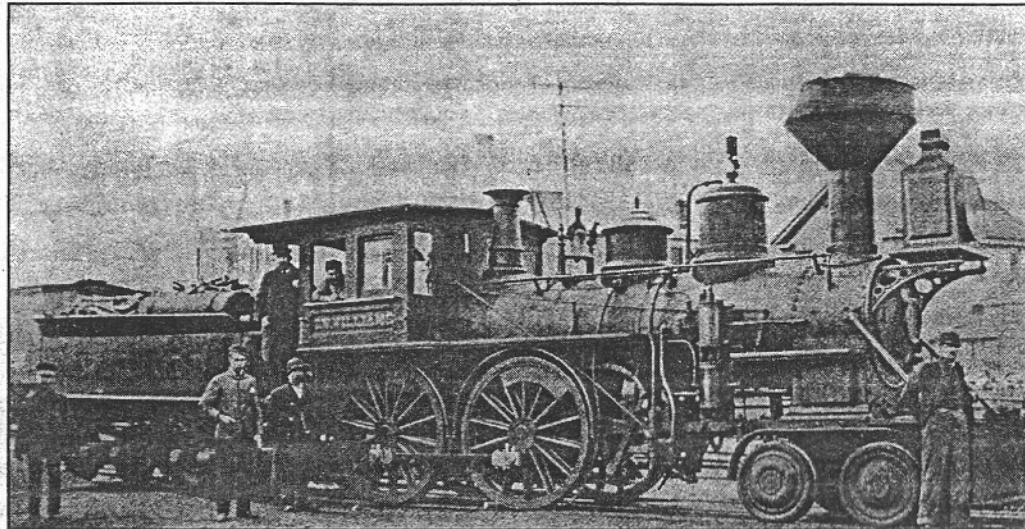
In 1847, the proposed New London, Willimantic and Palmer Railroad attracted investors in communities along the line, particularly from Windham where George Spafford and William L. Jillson of Willimantic became leading shareholders. Spafford had introduced the papermaking machinery industry to Spaffordville, and Jillson was Willimantic's biggest cotton manufacturer. When the road arrived in Spaffordville, the company demanded that it's name be changed as it sounded too much like Staffordville, so Spaffordville was renamed South Windham in 1850.

South Windham's Elisha H. Holmes was an active board member of the New London, Willimantic and Palmer Rail-

road, and negotiated with landowners for damages as the road was built. Construction work was briefly held up in Willimantic in September 1848 when a local farmer, Eli Hewitt, held out for a better price for his land. The railroad sent a delegation to negotiate a better price. It eventually opened from Willimantic to Stafford Springs in March 1850 and to Palmer, Mass., in September 1850.

In August 1849, two wood-burning steam locomotives were purchased from the Taunton Locomotive Manufacturing Co. at \$5,100 each, and named the "New London" and the "Willimantic."

On Nov. 1, 1849, a contract was made with builders Bishop and Watrous and the Hartford, Providence and Fishkill Road to build a brick depot at Willimantic for \$2,225, to be completed in six weeks. On Nov. 16, 1850, a 72-by-30-foot brick passenger and freight depot was ordered for Spaffordville. Contractor W.S. Newell was paid \$2,000 cash. Contracts made also made with steamship lines and the Post Office Department to carry



The locomotive 'Willimantic' is pictured in Amherst, Mass., in 1883. It was built in 1849, and renamed 'T.W. Williams' in 1874 in honor of the founder of the New London, Willimantic and Palmer Railroad. The wood-burning locomotive was scrapped in 1890.

freight and mail. The railroad company's board members negotiated a charge of \$50 per mile per annum for the mail. In May 1850, contracts were taken out for seven station houses at Montville, Norwichtown, Yantic, Morse Mills, Lebanon Crossroads, South Coventry, Mansfield and North Coventry.

The following September, Willimantic's well-known builder, Lloyd Baldwin, won contracts to build freight and passenger depots at Tolland and Willington for \$1,700 and a small depots at

Norwichtown and Lebanon Crossing for \$300 each and a 75-by-25-foot brick freight depot at Palmer for \$1,500.

Train schedules were set on Nov. 11, 1850, and three passenger and freight trains and one freight train ran daily from New London to Palmer and back. It was a 90-minute journey to Willimantic from New London and a two-hour journey from Willimantic to Palmer. An inventory of the company's equipment on Nov. 13, 1850, revealed four locomotives, eight passenger cars, six baggage

cars, 22 flat freight cars, 26 house freight cars, six gravel cars, three dumping cars and four handcars. In December 1850, ticket prices were agreed to with the New Haven and New London Road for through journeys to New York City.

Continued next week

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