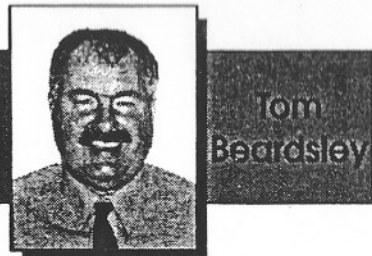


This digitized version of Tom Beardsley's article is made possible by The Willimantic Public Library. All Tom's articles and much more Willimantic history can be accessed at the library. We are grateful to the copyright owner, "The Chronicle" for permission to reproduce this article. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

## A suitable place for the city's Baptist deaconry



Part one of two

Some of the finest Victorian houses in New England are located on Willimantic's hill district, Windham Street and Windham Road. However, the earlier-built Victorian houses on Pleasant Street are often overlooked.

Pleasant Street was originally the old turnpike to Hartford, and before Willimantic developed in

the 19th century, it was referred to as "Back Road." After 1850, some of Willimantic's leading citizens decided to build their homes there and Back Road became Willimantic's first suburb.

In 1860, Andrew H. Fuller (1812-1891), the Willimantic Linen Co.'s box maker, was appointed deacon of the Willimantic Baptist Church. On July 12, 1860, he purchased land on the southern side of Back Road, on the church's behalf. The lot was adjacent to the linen company's quarry. In recording the transaction, the Windham land records noted that "the Willimantic Linen Company reserves themselves the right to cross or



The parsonage and its elaborate cupola shown after the 1938 hurricane.

land at all times at a suitable place with teams to their quarry on the bank of the river."

In 1861, the Baptist Church financed the building of a large house for its deaconry, or "parsonage" where visiting pastors were often lodged. Up until 1890, the property was known as 47 Pleasant St. It became 197 Pleasant St. during the renumbering of Willimantic's streets in 1891, and locals today know the old deaconry as the home of the "Hairloom" hairdressing estab-

lishment, and Evelyn, the seamstress.

Andrew H. Fuller was born in Mansfield in 1812. He came to Willimantic in 1854 to work for the Willimantic Linen Co., and became its chief box maker for the wooden packing cases employed to transport spools of thread.

He served as deacon of the Baptist Church for 30 years. Shortly after his retirement from the post, Fuller died of a heart attack. After his widow departed for Hartford in 1896, the house was bought by one of the city's leading businessmen and politicians. Shortly afterwards his brother bought the house immediately east of the old parsonage at 185 Pleasant St. On Oct. 16, 1868, Fuller sold half of the lot he had purchased from the Willimantic Linen Co. in 1860, to his friend and fellow Baptist, Jonas Sparks Parker (1826-1898), the Willimantic Linen Co.'s head mechanic, who then built the house that would become 185 Pleasant St. Parker was born in Amherst, Mass., and trained as a machinist. He became one of the head mechanics at the linen company, and was their chief electrician for 12 years. He died at 185

Pleasant, in April 1898.

On Aug. 15, 1896, Ernest Pashur Chesboro purchased the parsonage from the First Baptist Church of Willimantic, and on April 29, 1899, Ernest's brother, Samuel Chesboro, bought 185 Pleasant St. The Chesboro brothers were two of Willimantic's leading citizens during its boom period of the late 19th century. They dealt in automobile sales, bicycle manufacturing, drug manufacturing, real estate, retail drugstores and were heavily involved in the local Republican Party. Samuel Chesboro was born in Mystic in 1861, and was privately educated at the South Windham Academy. He trained as an apothecary, and developed a patented liquid corn plaster.

Samuel Chesboro practiced in Willimantic from 1876 until 1916, and was active politically. He was a keen proponent for the building of the footbridge in 1906. In 1912 Chesboro strongly supported the building of the Willimantic armory and the Rossie Velvet Mill. This may have been because he owned the Pleasant Street and John Street sites.

Continued next week