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History

255 High St. is rich in history

The borough of Willimantic expanded rapidly in the 1880s. There was much building on Prospect Hill in that decade. Visitors to the forthcoming Victorian Home Show and Symposium will be able to tour 10 of the "painted ladies" on the weekend of May 6-7: the Grant House (Eastern Connecticut State University) at Prospect and High, the Hinckley House at 122 Windham St., the Berkett House at 255 High St., the Riley House at 142 Prospect St., the Krich House at 183 Prospect St., the Bellingham House at 183 Summit St., the Darrow House at 275 Summit St., the Horrocks House at 202 Lewiston Ave., the Young House at 210 Lewiston Ave. and the Ivan House at 18 Bellevue St.

One of the new houses to be featured this year is 255 High St., a house with a fascinating social history that reveals much about the nature of this 19th century mill town. On July 7, 1890, Edgar and Abbie Young purchased the Victorian cottage they were renting on High Street extension. The Youngs purchased the house from local real estate agent Mary E. Ford for \$900. Edgar



Tom Beardsley

and Abbie had moved into the new house in 1888, and rented it for two years. The property became 255 High St. in 1894 when the city renumbered its houses.

Edgar Young was born in Chapachet, R.I., in 1847. His family moved to the growing textile town of Putnam when he was a boy. At age 37, and with a young family, the Youngs moved to Willimantic in 1884. Edgar worked as a loom fixer/engineer for the Smithville Manufacturing Co. The family originally lived in the "white row" on Main Street. The "white row" consisted of a number of old tenement houses that stood across from the town hall. They had been erected by the Smithville Manufacturing Co. in the 1840s, and were demolished in 1940. The Smithville Manufacturing Co. was one of the city's oldest cot-

ton weaving companies, being incorporated in 1825. They occupied substantial granite mills located on the east side of Bridge Street. The mills were demolished in 1939. In 1888, Edgar Young lived on Spring Street, Willimantic, and later that year moved into the new house on High Street. From 1906 to 1920, he was employed by the American Thread Co., primarily as an engineer and then as foreman in the carding room — the noisiest and most dangerous department at ATCO.

Edgar Young is a prime example of the rise of Willimantic's 19th century skilled elite — the lower middle class. Their higher wages allowed them to purchase small properties. On his retirement in 1920 at age 73, Edgar exchanged the bedlam of the carding room for the less demanding position of watchman. After being ill for a year, he died at home on April 10, 1926, age 78. Two sons, Albert M. and Elmer M. Young, survived him.

Albert Young inherited the property from his father, making his home there in 1927. Albert was born in Putnam on April 27, 1880. During the



Mike Mazzola

The Berkett House at 255 High St. in Willimantic is one of the 10 houses to be open during the Willimantic Victorian Home Show and Symposium on May 6 and 7.

1920s, Albert owned and operated a small farm on Upper High Street. He married in 1934. His wife Emma ran a telephone answering service from the rear of 255 High St. During World War II, Albert worked for the Lounsbury Trucking Co., based on Main Street. He also worked for the Connecticut Light and Power Co. He also worked as a foreman for the Southern New England Telephone Co., retiring in 1947. During his early years, Albert was a well-known

sportsman, his specialties being fox hunting and trapping. Albert Young died on Aug. 10, 1971, age 91. His wife Emma died in 1975 at the age of 82. They did not have any children.

Executors of the Young estate then sold the property to Peter Tilley and Brad Vincent who, after carrying out some modernizations to the property, sold it to the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. John Berkett, in 1977. The house is a delightful example of folk Victorian architecture.