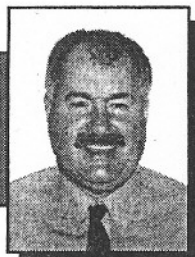
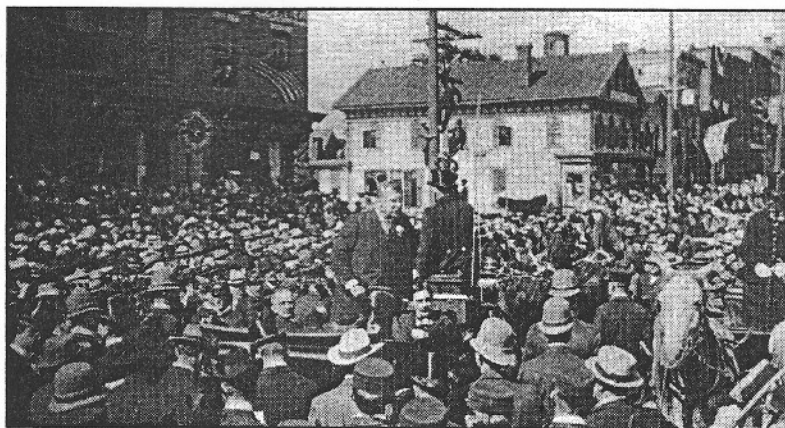


# History

## The city's big day finally arrives



Tom Beardsley



City police and Connecticut National Guardsmen encircle President Roosevelt's carriage as he addresses crowds in Willimantic.

The presidential train arrived at Bridge Street on the stroke of 9 a.m. on Aug. 23, 1902. Andrew F. Gates of Willimantic, the chairman of the State Republican Central Committee was standing in the balcony of the rear carriage as it came to a standstill on the Bridge Street crossing.

He beckoned Mayor Barrows to come into the carriage and meet the president. When Roosevelt appeared from the carriage he was met by loud cheering. The president responded by raising his silk top hat, and waving it to the massed crowds standing behind the ropes at the junction of Main and Bridge Streets.

"Teddy" was wearing a black cutaway coat, with gray trousers. The steps of the rear car were lowered so Roosevelt could climb onto Willimantic soil. Barrows then officially welcomed him to the Thread City.

Roosevelt, his secretary George Courtelyou, Barrows and Frank Fenton climbed into the carriage. A secret service officer climbed onto the driver's seat and sat next to the driver Merrill H. Jones. Local liveryman W. L. Williams organized the carriages that followed the president. The second carriage had Roosevelt's physician, Dr. George A. Lung, assistant secretary Barnes, Connecticut State Attorney John L. Hunter of Willimantic, and President George E. Stiles of the Willimantic Board of Trade.

As Roosevelt's carriage passed the town hall, over 200 schoolchildren, waving American flags

and dressed in white, sang "America," accompanied by a cornet player. When the carriage passed the junction of High Street, Frank Fenton pointed out that one of his "Rough Riders" was in the crowd, and Roosevelt stood up in the carriage and tipped his hat to Billy Jackson who had served in the 12th U. S. Infantry at San Juan.

As the carriages proceeded down Main, the crowds became thicker and the troops had to clear the way ahead, but by the time the procession reached Lincoln Square, there was a mass of humanity, and the windows in the buildings were filled with people. The presidential carriage came to a halt at the head of Church Street, and Barrows addressed the mass of people.

Willimantic had never seen anything like this. The atmosphere was electric.

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