

Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association

Fall 2017

P.O. Box 555, Willimantic, CT 06226

WWW.VictorianWillimantic.org

Neighborhood News

Resilience!

By Bob Horrocks

I, like many other folks, have been transfixed watching the progress and results of hurricanes Harvey and Irma. Forecasters are reluctant to predict the time it will take to rebuild Rockport & Houston, Texas; the islands; and Florida. Nevertheless citizens and public officials have all but guaranteed that they will rebuild to a level that is "better than ever." Those of us following these reports are buoyed by such optimism.

One has to admire the resilience of the citizenry in these areas. They are true believers. It is also apparent that those talking about rebuilding their communities value their neighbors and their shared history. For these reasons, I have no doubt that rebuilding of their communities will begin immediately following the arduous task of cleaning up the debris left by the storms.

Perhaps I am an eternal optimist, but in a way, I can identify with these citizens and their love of community. Although Willimantic has had its problems, it has not succumbed to feelings of pessimism. We lament when stores move out of Main Street, but are elated when stores move in. Willimantic has had its share of loosing businesses, as evidenced by the large buildings unoccupied for the past ten years. But the town has experienced slow and subtle growth that to many people has gone unnoticed. Some of our businesses are enjoying a long history of 40+ years of success: Schiller's Sewing Circle, the Bench Shop, Rajeans Gifts. Unfortunately, when we look at an unoccupied store front, we tend to think the town is spiraling downward. This, however, is not the case. Restaurants, coffee shops, and specialized eateries have popped up. I heard a university president once say, "If there are not bulldozers on campus, you are not progressing." Well, we have bulldozers on Main St. This should make us happy. We will have major construction on Jillson Square when the town green

becomes a destination for concerts, theatrical plays, and other major outdoor events. In addition, we are considering a major renovation of our high school. These are not signs of a town that is spiraling downward, rather of a resilient citizenry anxious to build for future success. If you want to experience this sense of optimism, visit the business owners on Main St. They love this town and are our best public relations representatives.

Walktober Walks in Connecticut -- Historic Homes Walk through the Prospect Hill section of Willimantic September 21 - November 5

355 High St., Willimantic, CT. Park in the Windham High School lot, and walk onto High St. or to Walnut Street (through gate).

This is an opportunity to peek into 19th century life with the aid of 21st century technology. Using your Smart Phone, you will stop in front of historic homes from the Victorian era, and listen to their stories. Each story ends with directions to the next home. Learn about the architecture and family histories. This self-guided walk will be available Sept. 21 - Nov. 5. You'll need a Smart Phone to hear the stories and to download any QR Code Reader. Stroll an easy mile through a different time. Park at Windham High School, 355 High Street and follow signs. Check out <http://listivus.net/mWVNA/> for a great sneak peek! 860-208-7914

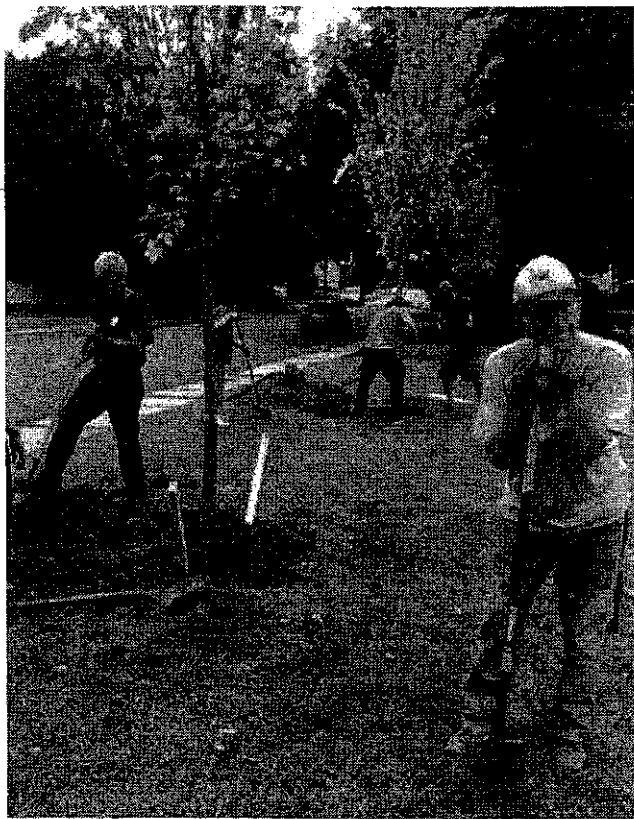
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Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association.
www.victorianwillimantic.org

325 Trees/Shrubs Project as of September 2017

by Faith Kenton

Our tree and shrub planting effort which began in January has been very successful in its first year. The number "325" was chosen to reflect the 325 years since Windham has been incorporated, making 2016-2017 Windham's 325th Birthday Year. So far, our group has planted about 70 small trees and shrubs of a native-habitat type around town, many on the new Greenway Trail and Whitewater Park both on Bridge Street. We intend to continue the project to help beautify our city, clean and cool our air, and provide food and shelter for native wildlife. Appropriate plantings raise property values, build community pride, even raise people's spirits and sense of well-being.



Steve Kenton, Lynn Keleher, Scott Clairmont, Mooney Haddad

Memorial Park was our first major installation. It is central to the city on Main Street, offers open space for quiet relaxing, has a ball field and a wonderful fenced-in playground for children. Being as old as it is (1920s), the park needs new trees planted to continue providing the full benefits of an urban park.

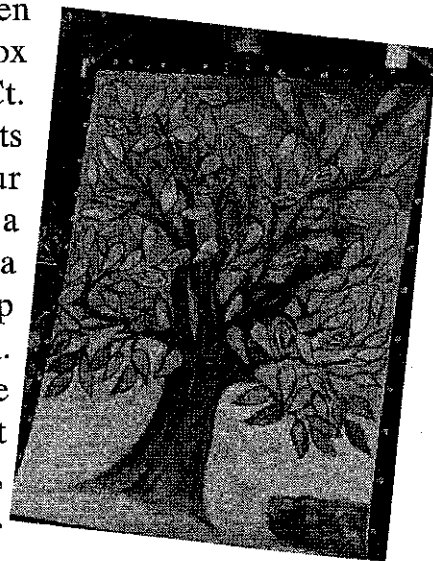
With successful grants (especially from the Savings Institute) and donations from businesses and citizens, we have purchased 25 "real" trees for Memorial Park. There are oaks, Princeton elms, sugar maple, cedar, redbud, sweet gum and others to be planted. The Willimantic Public Works and fire department helped this important part of the project.

Over the last year, Public Works has prepared Memorial Park for new plantings by removing several aged trees deemed unsafe, and cleaning out overgrown evergreens from around the actual Memorial Arch. Part of the plan is to now frame the arch with a white oak on each side, donated by the Potter-Mustard family to honor its patriarch William Niles Potter (1846 - 1937), chairman of the 1896 building committee of Windham's Town Hall. His grandson, longtime community elected official and volunteer Robert H. Mustard, was honored by the companion oak! In addition, a Cousa dogwood will be planted on October 7 at 3:00 in Potter's honor at the Town Hall. Public invited.

The other 20+ trees will be planted strategically around the park, including the boundary streets of Watson, Main, and Tingley to balance their benefits visually and seasonally.

Good trees from reputable growers are expensive, but will provide years and years of benefit. Year 2 is coming up and donations are still acceptable. If you wish to support the project, please send a

check to The Garden Club of Windham, Box 773, Willimantic, Ct. 06226. \$100-\$299 gets the name of your choice painted on a leaf. \$300-\$999 on a branch, \$1,000 and up on the tree's trunk. Any questions, please email Faith Kenton at phiona8@sbcglobal.net, or call 456-0817. Thank you



Original Play at ECSU

by Chase Rozelle

Thread City is a multimedia performance, co-devised at Eastern Connecticut State University by Professors Kristen Morgan and Alycia Bright Holland, in collaboration with students; residents of Windham, Connecticut; Eastern's Center for Community Engagement and Center for Connecticut Studies; the Windham Textile & History Museum; members of the Eastern faculty; and other contributors.

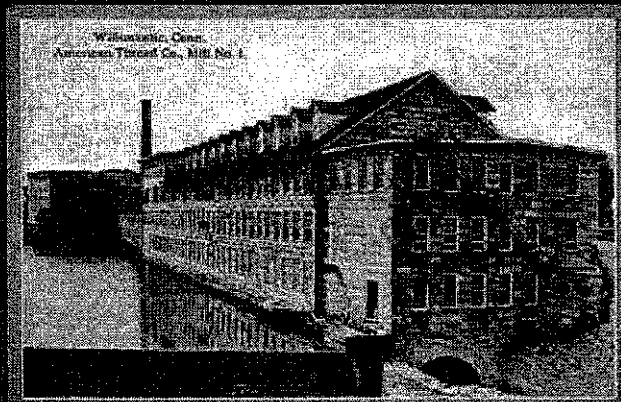
Interviews with community members and archival oral histories of Windham residents inspired the stories told in **Thread City**. The play's narrative was developed through two integrated Theatre courses in Spring of 2017: Experimental Theatre and Public Dialogue. The choreography and design of **Thread City** was developed in class and workshopped several times for public audiences. The creators hope that the community will feel empowered by seeing their personal narrative celebrated, and will develop a deeper connection with Eastern Connecticut State University.

Thread City will run from October 11-15, 2017 in the Proscenium Theater in Eastern's Fine Arts Instructional Center Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday at 7:30 P.M.; Thursday at 5:30 P.M.; Friday matinee at 11 A.M. and a Sunday matinee at 4 P.M.

EASTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY PERFORMING ARTS DEPARTMENT DRAAMA SOCIETY PRESENT


Thread CITY

An original multimedia performance about the people who built Willimantic.



Willimantic, Conn.
American Thread Co. Mill No. 1

OCTOBER 11-15, 2017



EASTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY



Beautiful 1725 colonial located in Hebron. Home is a mix of Colonial and Greek Revival periods and contains a kitchen fireplace with a beehive oven. Wide board floors, 2 full baths. Lovely side porch, many stone walls 8.20 acres, barns, pastures. Level lot. Call Jennifer for your inspection. \$285,000.

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WILLIMANTIC IN THE 20TH CENTURY: A TIMELINE (Continued from June)

1901 The Willimantic Colts amateur baseball team, coached by local sports legend Danny Dunn, becomes an unaffiliated professional team. The Colts move from their old quarters at the Willimantic Fair Grounds (Recreation Park) to Windham Field, now Memorial Park.

1902 President Theodore Roosevelt visits Willimantic – in large part because Willimantic is located conveniently halfway between New York and Boston by rail.

1903 Trolley service begins in Willimantic – both within the city, and connecting the city via other trolley lines to other cities, such as Norwich and Hartford – by the Willimantic Traction Company. It will last only about a generation, ending in 1936 when the trolley companies switch to buses.

1903 The Windham High School girls' basketball team defeats the Connecticut Agricultural College women's basketball team – twice. The Connecticut Agricultural College is now the University of Connecticut.

1905 Local Irish-American sports legend Danny Dunn is elected mayor of Willimantic. One consequence of Dunn's election is that he gives up managing the Willimantic Colts minor league baseball team.

1905 President William Howard Taft visits Willimantic. Alas, no President has visited since.

1906 The Willimantic Foot Bridge is built, at a cost of \$13,000.

1910 Construction begins on the new Willimantic Post Office at the corner of Main and High streets, finished the next year. The property was purchased in 1909 for \$10,064, the large house that formerly occupied the lot was demolished, and the new building was constructed of limestone and granite. Replaced by the current post office on Main Street in 1966, the building stood empty for more than 20 years before being renovated into the Willimantic Brewing Company.

1910 Willimantic gets its first chain store, the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company – the A & P – at 793 Main Street, the marble-faced Hayden Block.

1912 Gem Theater opened.

1912 In a "Little Bread and Roses Strike," workers at several Willimantic textile mills strike for higher wages. Instigated by women workers, the strikes started in the summer as wildcat strikes, without support from the United Textile Workers. As the strikes escalate, leadership is provided by the radical Industrial Workers of the World. Anxious not to have their machines idle during a decade of high demand for textiles, Willimantic's mills give in and the strikers win higher wages.

1913 The new high school burns on Prospect Street.

1914 The Willimantic YMCA outgrows its building on Valley Street and moves to new quarters at 844 Main Street.

1914 The Willimantic Elks Club is organized.

1914 World War I begins in Europe. With European factories converting to military production, American mills and factories – including Willimantic's textile mills – fill the gap and prosper.

1916 The ornate Tilden Building on Main Street burns. Originally the home to the 19th-century Tilden and Courtney department store, it was purchased by the Jordan family in 1906. After the fire, the Jordans rebuilt the building as the Jordan Block. The new structure was still large, but less ornate – but it was constructed supposedly to be fireproof. With a new 1970s stucco façade, the building still stands at the corner of Main and Railroad streets.

1916 The United States has not yet entered World War I, but the country nevertheless is embroiled in other military activities, including the undeclared Mexican Border War. Willimantic's Company L of the Connecticut National Guard is called up, marches through the city to Union Station, boards a train, and heads for the front.

1917 The Turner Silk Mill on Valley Street closes, despite the 1910's boom years.

1917 The United States enters World War I, further stimulating production by U. S. textile mills. This will be the high point for textile production in Connecticut and Willimantic.

1919 The end of World War I signals a long, slow decline in the Connecticut textile industry. The decade of the 1920s witnesses falling demand for Connecticut-made textiles and cut-backs in production at Willimantic's several textile mills.

The following decade – the 1930s – will be even worse, because of the Great Depression.

1924 “Artificial silk” – first invented in France in the late 1800s – is perfected and named “rayon.” By the 1940s, the American Thread Company (ATCO) is manufacturing rayon and other artificial and synthetic fibers into thread, temporarily rejuvenating the textile industry in Connecticut and Willimantic.

1925 Following World War I, the global demand for textiles contracted. The American Thread Company (ATCO), Willimantic’s largest textile mill, responded with pay cuts, reducing the piece rate. After several cuts, workers – now led by Mary Kelleher and Amy Hooker of the United Textile Workers Union – strike. All 2500 ATCO workers strike. The mill replaces them with 1700 replacement workers recruited from other mill cities in New England. After nine months, the strike collapses. The workforce at ATCO is downsized from 2500 to 1800, and wages are reduced.

The UTW is crushed in Willimantic for a decade. Bitterness lasts for two generations. Despite a persistent myth that the strikers were mostly Irish and Yankees, and the replacements were French Canadian, workers of all nationalities and ethnicities were among both the strikers and the replacements.

Strike of 1925



1926 Willimantic’s several fire companies are combined into a single municipal fire department, headquartered at the old firehouse on Bank Street. It would remain Willimantic’s firehouse until the construction of a new Fire-Safety Complex on the corner of Bank and Meadow streets in 1977.

1926 Capitol Theater opens.

1927 The Willimantic Elks Club opens its ornate new Victorian lodge on Pleasant Street.

1928 Despite malaise in the textile industry, the number of stores in Willimantic surged in the 1920s. By 1928, the city had 12 chain grocery stores, although they were all small: five Economy Groceries, four A & P’s, two First Nationals, and one Grand Union Tea Company.

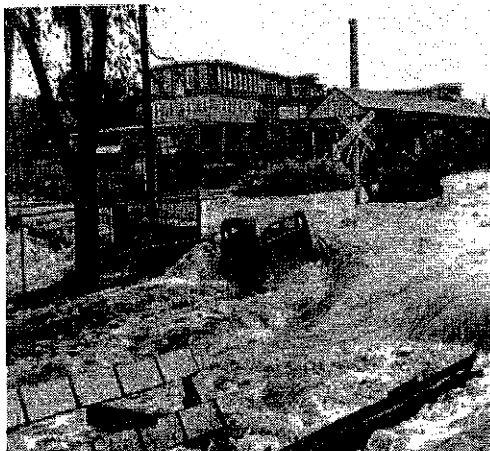
1929 The New York Stock Exchange crashes, causing the Great Depression of the 1930s.

1930s In the late 1930s, the old Loomer Opera House closed. It was demolished to make way for a new Woolworths.

1933 The Windham Community Memorial Hospital opens. About 2700 people contributed \$500,000 to build the modern hospital, replacing three smaller hospitals – St. Joseph Hospital on Jackson Street with 20 beds, and two smaller, private hospitals operated by local physicians. Gov. Wilbur Cross (D), Connecticut’s “Little New Deal” governor, dedicated the edifice.

1934 The steam-powered Holland Silk Mills on Valley Street moved from Willimantic to Stroudsburg, PA. The company claims that it is because Windham’s taxes are too high, but the town had just reduced its property tax bill to the Holland Co. by \$40,000. The Great Depression, the general decline of the New England textile industry, and the age of the company’s Willimantic buildings may also have been factors.

During the 20s and 30s one after another mill closes.



Hurricane of 1938

1934 Facing a tough economy during the Great Depression, ATCO puts all of its company housing up for sale, effectively ending the era of company housing in Willimantic. While some of the units are purchased by homeowners, most are bought by landlords and remain rental housing. You will see that one after another mill closes over the decades.

1936 Trolley service, begun in 1903, comes to an end after only one generation. The Connecticut Company, a subsidiary of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad, switches to buses. In 1964, the NYNH and H sells the Connecticut Company to a Hartford businessman, who operates it until 1976, when it becomes part of the state-owned Connecticut Transit.

1938 The Great New England Hurricane wreaks major damage in Willimantic. The steeples of both the First Congregational Church and St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church are toppled.

Read more about Willimantic history in next newsletter

Another Gingerbread Discovery

Once in a while serendipity comes knocking at your door like a charming, unexpected guest. Best answer the knock. Which is exactly what we did, in a manner of speaking.

Quite by accident, Co-op assistant manager, Bruce Oscar (a Prospect Hill neighbor), introduced us to a new employee who had recently purchased a Victorian home at 63 Turner Street. After promises to meet for the customary interview for a feature article, we couldn't wait to scope out the new find. Wow!

What a charmer! This 1886 eclectic Victorian instantly draws your attention to its varied architectural details, golden olive body and deeper value trim, taxi-yellow front door, and super abundant hydrangea flowering poufs – reminiscent of ubiquitous fair cotton candy.

Cara and Chris are the happy owners of this unheralded jewel and welcomed us to explore the property's setting. This is truly a realtor's version of "a find." Word of mouth from a friend at the Co-op gave Cara and Chris a heads up on this prized property. Cara knew immediately that they had found just the right house. And how lucky they were: it had been on the market a mere 7 days and had had 4 offers!



The original owner was Charles Snow, a clerk in the J.C. Lincoln Store in the H.C. Murray building (often referred to as the Hurley building). The structure is architecturally one-of-a-kind (at least in this area) with its three-bay façade, gabled peak with curved braces and a small front dormer with a two and a half story high magnificent etched and stained-glass window. The entire affect is a display of medieval gothic-like details.

The inviting yard is resplendent with fruit-laden apple trees, holly bushes, fenced yard, 20th century 2-car garage, and 2-sided deck. The rear view is enhanced by the almost pastoral look of a large, handsome, well-



maintained, red 2-story barn – former site of the Froman School of Dance in the '60s and '70s.

The charming, small foyer sets the stage for the delights within. It has two tall narrow double-hung stained-glass windows at each end. An authentic Victorian mahogany umbrella stand with mirror and carved details seems to have been nestled in that spot since 1886.

Hardwood floors throughout both levels contrast nicely with the white molded baseboards, crown molding, and doorways. Two fireplaces are recent additions in two of the four roomy ground floor rooms.

The kitchen alone would surely have convinced any prospective buyer to make an offer ASAP. It is large, with sturdy cabinets of all sizes on three walls and a utilitarian granite island in the center with both a range and a sink. The other wall contains another small vegetable sink and provides a view of the bucolic rear yard.

The second story contains three generous bedrooms with excellent closet space. The full bath is modern and sports ample cabinets similar to those in the kitchen.

The previous owners, who returned to their native Iceland, practically gave away many of the large pieces of furniture, an added bonus for the new owners.

When asked what brought the young couple to Willi, we learned that Chris works at Horizons and that Cara has been a staff member of our much-valued Co-op for 2 years. During that time she was happy in the environment and becoming acquainted with the good people here. You might say she was seduced by the caring community that exists here and that we all appreciate.

We welcome them both with open arms and wish them long life and happiness in your distinctive and comfortable home.

Windham Victorian Neighborhood Association Minutes

Sun. June 25, 2017 3:30 PM at the Jillson House Museum

Attendance included both WVNA board members and individuals from the general membership.

President Bob Horrocks thanked all who contributed to the latest newsletter, which lists the sponsors and docents for Victorian Days. He said having the home tour on one day, Saturday, was a good idea that worked out well. The Sunday picnic was fun, mildly successful with a modest response; it brought together music, antique cars, magicians, and other performers; in all, it was "a good event."

Treasurer Claire Lary gave the budget report. It is hard to say whether we had a loss or broke even after the Victorian Days weekend. Advertising and mailing was expensive. The brochure was smaller with fewer ads, but the event is very popular in town. Delia Berlin noted that good publicity is an important asset, so the financial loss is minimal. The Victorian tea is traditionally a money maker, but we did not hold it this year because it is labor-intensive and requires many volunteers; we might do it as a separate activity at another time of the year. The QR code signs were a new feature, and some people were seen using them. Michael Mahoney noted some new possibilities for the signs might include the Hurley Building and the Hooker Hotel, and downtown businesses might pay to have research done by our interns concerning their properties. The horse and wagon was a great hit, as always. Musicians on the porches of the tour houses were very well received.

The future of the WVNA was discussed. Bob reminded us that he and others are growing tired of the time-consuming work. Shirley sent word that we do not need to produce ten newsletters a year, two or three would probably be enough, and if so, she would continue with this assignment. Claire Lary agreed to continue as treasurer. Any new president of the organization, according to Bob, should live in Willimantic. Lists of the organization's events from 2016 to 2017, prepared by Claire and Barbara, show we have done a lot, but it is difficult to bring people to meetings and to prepare potlucks. The Garden Club has paid speakers, which might be a draw if we adopted this practice.

Some ways to address the various problems were considered: We could have four meetings and four newsletters a year. We could turn the WVNA into a foundation with an educational mission; of our \$52,000 funds, five percent could be designated for interns or scholarships. Debbie Bellingham said more information is needed about license requirements and reports to the federal government before moving in this direction. Bob noted that we had been thinking about closing up shop, but after the home tours there was so much enthusiasm for our work that the entire subject is up for review again. Bev York reviewed how we got to this point, and suggested we have new workshops, such as ones on house repair. The problem of finding a qualified intern was discussed. We have to grow with the needs of the membership; we can evolve and move in new directions, but it may be time for a new president. No one has volunteered yet to serve in that capacity, but Bob believes there is someone who will come forward.

It was agreed that we would have four meetings and four newsletters. No decision was reached about being a foundation. We need to ask the membership to take some responsibility and let us know how we best can serve. What speakers would be welcome? How can we spread the work? The technology piece needs attention and could help attract young people: a web presence is important; the newsletter could go online; we could be on Facebook; we could have links to the National Trust organization. The possibility of a summer garden party was revived (but subsequently dropped because no host was found who would make the commitment). Finally, there was discussion about having the entire Windham area designated as a Historic District on the National Register. In the past, the town had a study done on this subject with respect to the Hill; but the findings could be expanded to include South Windham and the Windhams in general. It would cost \$2,000 to bring the research to the next step.

The meeting adjourned about 4:45 PM.

Barbara E. Lacey, Secretary



Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association

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Please call on the WVNA Officers & Board for Information or Assistance:

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Vice President/Secretary, Barbara Lacey	456-1214
Treasurer, Claire Lary	456-3088
Membership, Pam Horrocks*	456-1666
Home Tour & Newsletter, Lynn Duval*	456-4476
Publicity, Public Relations, Newsletter Shirley Mustard	423-1481
Social, Jennifer Clark	208-6257
Legal, Charles Krich	456-8874

Board Members

Sue Humes	423-0576
James Lacey	456-1214
Gordon MacDonald	423-8845

* Non-voting members

Photos by

**Jamie Eves
Cara Fodaski
Bob Horrocks**

The Willimantic Victorian
Neighborhood Association
is the key to communication in
regard to the Hill Section,
the Home Tour, Economic Development
and a better quality of life in our town.
Join today if you have not already done
so. Send us your ideas and thoughts,
participate in the meetings and events.
Be a part of this wonderful community
and this extraordinary neighborhood.
Call Bob Horrocks (860) 456-1666.

Calendar of Events

Next Meeting of the
**Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood
Association**

**Fall meeting of the WVNA
October 29th, 3:30pm
ECSU's Early Childhood Building**

**Agenda:
Meet Windham Town Candidates
for November election**