



Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association

Spring 2018

P.O. Box 555, Willimantic, CT 06226

WWW.VictorianWillimantic.org

Neighborhood News

Willimantic/Windham

“Where History Meets the Arts”

By Bob Horrocks

During the past month, Pam and I have attended the following:

- Bread Box Folk Music concerts
- Choral Concert at St. Mary Church (Puccini Music)
- Art Exhibit at Kerri Studio
- 35th Anniversary celebration of the Windham Regional Arts Council
- Two organizational meetings for the upcoming Victorian Days in Willimantic (aka Home Tour)
- A Wood Worker's Crafts Festival, and
- A community meeting to save the historic Windham Inn

I also,

- Accepted two donations to the Jillson Museum, and interviewed a new board member.
- Corresponded with 16 musicians who will be providing music at eight homes open for visitors at our 19th annual Victorian Home Tour.

This is quite a list of activities for two people, and is probably repeated many times over by others in our community. It is not unusual to see in the Chronicle a listing of upcoming events with a focus on history and the arts. This leads me to think that Windham/Willimantic should begin to promote itself as a center of history and the

arts. I have thought this for several years when I inventory our assets: three historic museums, four art galleries, three theaters, one historic vaudeville theater on Main St., and, a local university that has recently added a fine arts center. Eastern Connecticut State University has subsequently increased by ten-fold the arts programs offered to our community.

Our high school for the ARTS at the Capitol Theater is now six years old and is actively engaging young people in various forms of the arts. In addition, we have become a center for cottage industries with a focus on arts and crafts. The Hill section of Willimantic boasts more than 600 vintage homes listed on the National Register. The Windham Center Historic district includes beautiful homes and is steeped in tales of our early history. I'm sure an inventory of musicians, artists, and crafts people would exceed more than 500. This is quite a large number for our small town. It is no wonder why a surfacing mantra for Windham/Willimantic is a place “Where History Meets the Arts.”

We can be proud of who we are and what defines us as a community. We are undoubtedly a multicultural center of Connecticut with our rich history and our wide range of arts. Our history defines from where we came and our arts projects define where we are going. We can all be proud of living in this area of Connecticut.

Historic Work in Progress

The magnificent building at 321 Prospect Street was just waiting for someone to restore it to its original glory. (Andrée and Chris Shepard were the recipients of the WVNA Preservation Award in 2014 because of their painstaking restoration work on the brick house next door). They heard that 321 Prospect was available, so they bought it and began to restore it.

This Queen Anne is a huge house, so the restoration work will be a huge effort! When finished, the house will be a Victorian showcase. Why? Because Chris respects the original colors, roofing material, siding materials and design patterns.

Meanwhile, on the Home Tour this year you will see a work in progress. Many visitors prefer to see the work being done, rather than a completed house. "Aha," they say, "so that's how they frame the tower!"

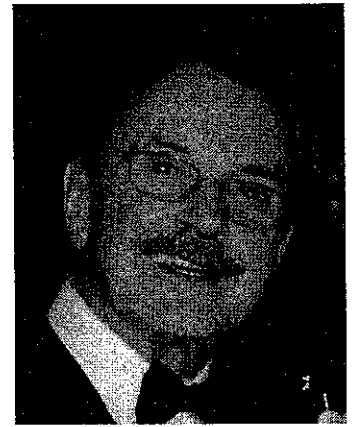
When you visit, you'll see new roofing, updated plumbing and wiring, where the insulation was blown into the walls. .. from inside the house.

Sheetrock is being put up, the maple flooring is being sanded and varnished. Bathroom and kitchen fixture are being installed, too, and some rooms have already been painted.

When visitors come in Chris will explain what was done first, and why. Ask about exciting stuff, like getting permits and protecting the environment from asbestos-based oil paint. But best of all, drive by in mid-summer and see the progress for yourself. You'll be pleased. We can imagine your smiles.

Known as the William Asher house, it is a fine example of the Queen Anne genre of the late-nineteenth century.

Although Willimantic gained fame as a textile city, with an economic and social elite,



by Dean Williams

who had direct relationship with the city's cotton and silk industries, bankers and business professionals built the vast majority of Victorian mansions in the city's Hill District. Known as Prospect Hill, the area became home to Willimantic's growing middle classes.

The land value of the Prospect Hill locality increased when the city built a new high school in 1897. Two years later, a local industrialist -- William J. Asher and his wife Nellie -- bought a lot opposite the school, from the Windham Manufacturing Company. Both the original and subsequent owners of the house were typical of the commercial and industrial leaders who made their home on Prospect Hill.

William J. Asher was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1865. He arrived in Willimantic in 1888, and bought the Connecticut Steam Laundry at 828 Main Street, renaming it the 'Maverick Steam Laundry.' He installed a 12-horsepower boiler, a 6-horsepower steam engine, and built a large steam-heated drying room. By 1894, the prospering company was proudly called: "The only steam domestic washing machines in New London." In 1910, at the urging of the Willimantic Chamber of Commerce, this young businessman was asked to bring the business to Willimantic from New London. Mr. Asher was a prominent member of Willimantic's early Jewish community.

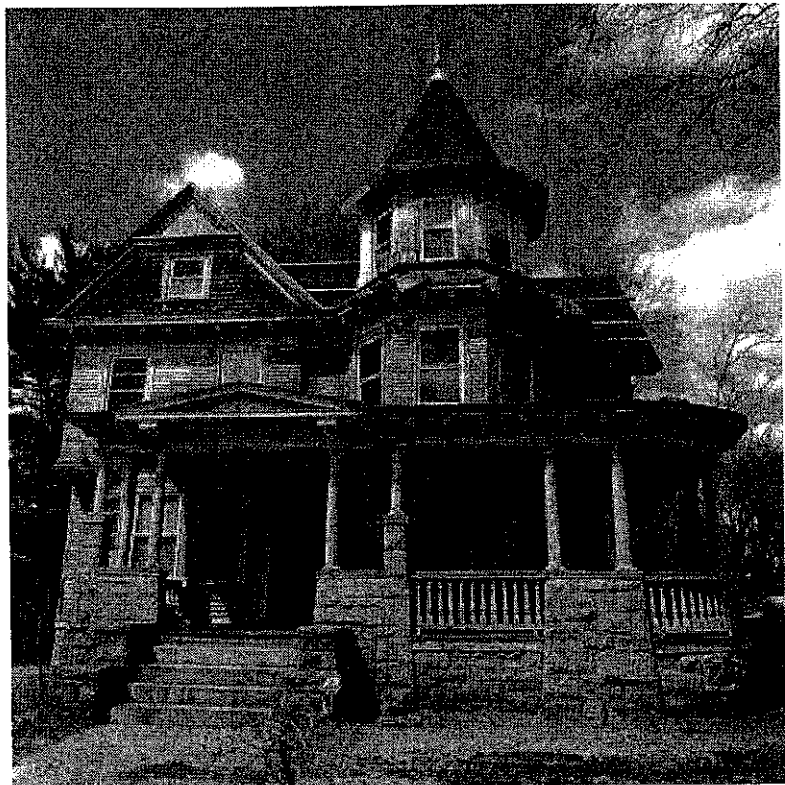
Mr. Asher owned one of the town's first automobiles and built a custom garage for it

... under the rear porch! He also installed an underground gasoline tank just a little east of the garage. We don't know if the gas tank is still there, but a fuel line into the garage is.

It's probably the oldest surviving custom-built garage in town. Members of the Willimantic Automobile Club in 1902 said that existing barns and stables gave suitable cover for their brand-new autos. Mr. Asher left Willimantic in 1914 and moved to Worcester, Massachusetts.

The mansion has a hipped-roof with cross gables, a five-sided tower, and an extensively detailed porch that extends across the front and continues along the east side of the first story. The porch is raised and entered by four stone steps. Tuscan columns on granite pedestal, between which run machined wooden railings, support the roof. The stone used to build the porch was recycled from a local textile mill. The mill was destroyed by fire in the 1890s. Early 20th century insurance maps of Willimantic reveal that the original front porch was smaller. The present, extensive porch was built between 1909 and 1914, more or less at the same time as the stone garage.

The gables are faced with textured shingles. The house has 5 rooms on the first floor, 5 on the second, and 4 on the third floor. The outside walls are covered by clapboards and shingles. The chimney is distinctively patterned, and the



porch piers and walls are made from gray 'gneiss,' known locally as 'Willimantic granite.' The east-facing gable has a cut-away corner that forms a 2nd story balcony. the interior is impressive by current standards. Woods used include: detailed pine board, cypress, chestnut, and maple. Pocket doors with smoked glass provide privacy and light. Some Lincrusta remains. 321 Prospect was converted to a multi-family house in the 1930s. The kitchen was enlarged in the 1940s, and new chimneys were added in 1945.

The deep foundation forms a large basement. In order to heat the house, a large, coal-fired boiler was used, and the original steam radiators can be seen in each room.

A curved 2nd story window on the west-facing wall has a large window seat and has an elaborate floral design stained glass with pastel colors. It is definitely one of the house's treasures.

A tower forms a three-windowed front bay on the first 2 floors. The apex of the south-facing gable is unique. The gable is patterned-stucco, onto which scallop shells have been 'imprinted.' The shells were considered to be a sign of good luck by some European Jewish cultures.

The Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association appreciates the work the Shepards are doing and that they are sharing this home with the community.

The historic details were provided by Tom Beardsley in articles he wrote for the Chronicle in 1998.

Washburn Street One-Of-A-Kind



Three 1930's houses on the Tour are adjacent to each other and share many similarities while each retains its own distinctive identity. They represent the 2 styles which were fashionable in the 1920s and early 1930s. The Alvin W. Maxwell home was open to visitors in 2015 with its owners so enthusiastic that they encouraged their neighbors to share the same positive experience.

Thus, in addition to 251 Walnut Street, the Tour includes 257 Walnut Street and 16 Washburn Street. Let's begin with the common features each house contains. Each was built on spec, and has had very few (3-4) owners which is reflected in the excellent condition of all three. They all have a garage; trees; flowering bushes; archways; three/four bedrooms; oak floors throughout; landing staircases; 1 1/2 baths; and, best of all, owners who love their homes and continually work to beautify them and to incorporate nature in their planning (planting?).

The Tudor on Washburn Street, home of Pat Calvo and Peter Huckins is featured as one of this trio of houses designed by Alice Washburn, but it really is one-of-a-kind. The soft green exterior with half-timbering wood accents is framed by two large trees which are called wedding maples to signify their owners as newlyweds. And perhaps that's what Russell J. McDermott and his wife were in 1936. He was District Traffic Agent for New Haven Railroad. The pavers leading up to the screened porch are accented by a holly bush, found art, and lilac trees. The wicker furniture and casual ambience make this area on the southwest side of the property ideal for a late afternoon glass of wine with friends.

Upon entering the living room, it's easy to see why the current owners were so taken with the house when they visited friends who owned it in

1988. Pat exclaimed, "I would love to live in this house." And that's exactly what happened in July of 1998.

Delightful, homey, charming are just a few adjectives that come to mind. The two curved arches between living and dining rooms and the stairway hall provide an openness that belies the fact that this house is the smallest of the three (largest yard, however!). The six-pane-over-one windows throughout are a characteristic of this architectural style. Several pieces of furniture have interesting stories which the owner will expand on during the Tour.

The kitchen is a cozy room with some brick and a sunny breakfast nook with windows that allow a peek out to Peter's answer to sustainable, urban farming in the heart of the city. He estimates that they grow enough vegetables and herbs for the year.

You can also enjoy the beautiful, oblong, hospitable deck that the couple built recently. Lattice work, built in seat/storage, exotic woods, and comfortable furniture make this another perfect spot for entertaining and enjoying a private back yard.

Pat and Pete have always loved Willimantic with its diversity and easy access to everything on foot. Peter is a consultant for economic development with a penchant for bicycling, soccer, and kayaking. Pat is a program director for Windham Youth Services. She also has a wholesale business selling tea sent from her native Argentina.



Spoiler alert: One of Pat's and sister Delia's (251 Walnut Street) brothers is a movie director. So, if you saw on Netflix "The Haunting of Amelia" starring Shirley Knight, you would have noticed this wonderful home's porch and kitchen.

Great to have this delightful home on the Tour for its premier showing.

Garden Club of Windham Plant Sale

June 2, 2018 from 9 AM - 12 Noon

Perennials dug from members' gardens

15 Washburn St., Willimantic

Rain or Shine

This House Can Talk

Small yellow signs in the shape of a house will be affixed to posts in front of the houses with a story to tell. A small square, black and white design, referred to as a 'QR Code' (for Quick Response), appears on each sign.

The Victorian Days wayfarer will approach the sign with a *smart phone* in hand. Holding the phone to capture the image of the QR Code prompts the phone to open a web page that displays a picture of the house, a recorded story and a map of other houses. Tapping the "Play" button will start the story. Each story is read by a volunteer and runs between one and three minutes.

We are excited about using 21st Century technology to make 19th century history come alive. We want both residents and visitors to become comfortable with the story telling feature. In the near future, visitors on foot and visitors on the internet will be able to learn more about our historic town.

Visitors will be advised to download a QR Reader from their phone if they do not already have one. There are many free apps to choose from, and you will find one where you normally install apps.

Volunteers Needed for Home Tour

- Volunteers are needed to sell tickets for the Home Tour, orient visitors and hand out programs.

- Docents are also needed at the 8 homes. You may select one or both sessions:

11:00 - 1:30 or 1:30 - 4:00.

Additional help is needed to:

- Put up signs.
- Work with horse & wagon ride.
- Collect money at the Cemetery Tour

Please contact Jennifer Clark
860-208-6257 if you can h



Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association

P.O. Box 555
Willimantic, CT 06226
Return Service Requested

NONPROFIT
PRESORT
MARKETING MAIL
US POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 6
WILLIMANTIC, CT
06226

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

President, Bob Horrocks	456-1666
Vice President/Secretary, Barbara Lacey	456-1214
Treasurer, Claire Lary	456-3088
Membership, Pam Horrocks*	456-1666
Home Tour Et Newsletter, Lynn Duval*	456-4476
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

**Pat Calvo
Claire Lary**

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

**Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood
Association**

**Victorian Days in Willimantic
May 30 - June 2**