

Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association

April 2017

P.O. Box 555, Willimantic, CT 06226

WWW.VictorianWillimantic.org

Neighborhood News

Time To Celebrate

By Bob Horrocks

I don't know about you, but I like a birthday party. Growing up in Philadelphia, my family was not given to ceremony and therefore parties were a rare occasion. My birthday parties amounted to a lopsided cake with wax drippings from the requisite number of candles. I vividly remember on a number of occasions that I was given the slice of cake with dried up candle wax on the frosting.

Well, I've gotten over my aversion to parties and am now a proud member of a committee to organize events for the town of Windham's 325th anniversary party. The committee has identified more than a dozen activities that will take place under the rubric of Windham's anniversary. Among them is a children's writing and photography project that will result in several entries buried in a time capsule.

Windham, as we all know, is a community rich in diversity. To celebrate this, a multicultural cook book is being developed. Entries will be divided into ethnic categories. There may be more than fifteen different nationalities represented.

There are more trees in Connecticut now than there were 150 years ago. This is due to the large percentage of land used for agrarian purposes. It is also known that some of these 150-year-old trees are decaying and in need of replacement. Faith Kenton is spearheading a project to replant 325 trees as part of the centennial celebration. Windham will soon be greener than ever.

Two major events will take place on May 12th, the charter date of Windham's founding. One is an original stage production written by Steve Kaminski and Jimmy Barran called "The Book of Windham." The weekend shows will take place at the middle school and may sell out. The other event will be an historical re-enactment of military encampments on Jillson Square representing Revolutionary and WWI campsites. This event is being developed by the Jillson House Museum and will include actors, musicians, and an occasional blast from a musket.

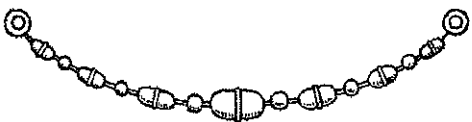
A third event is a community-wide picnic on June 4th on Jillson Square. Activities are being organized by the WVNA and the Windham Historic Society and will include music, a large canopy, pre-paid box lunches, and children's games. Bring your blankets, canopies, lawn chairs, picnic baskets, top hats/bowlers/straw hats and parasols. Victorian or country dress is encouraged but not required.

**"Happy 325 Windham
Anniversary"**

In our continuing paean to Windham's 325th birthday anniversary celebration, we offer another contribution to Windham's long history.

Windham Town Historian William McMunn has created this impressive Timeline: Part 1 of the fascinating origins and early history of the town we are privileged to call home.

Windham 325th Anniversary Timeline: Part 1

- Pre 1650 Native Americans occupied all of northeastern Connecticut. The Windham County area was called Nipmuck "fresh water" country to distinguish it from areas closer to the shore.
- mid-1600s Uncas emerged as the leader of a small band of Mohegans who had revolted from the Pequots. The Windham area was largely unoccupied after King Philip's War.
- May 1678 The will of Joshua, third son of Uncas, was granted by the General Court of the Connecticut Colony. It defined "Joshua's Tract," consisting of most of the present towns of Windham, Mansfield, Chaplin, Hampton, and Scotland, and left it to 16 gentlemen, mostly residing in Norwich. In 1682 these legatees met in Norwich and agreed to award thousand-acre plots to each legatee by drawing lots.
- 1688 John Cates, an English refugee, possibly one of the British regicides, and his African-American slave Joe Ginne, purchased in Virginia, settled in Windham, spending their first winter in a cave.
- 1689 Cates bought land allocated to Daniel Mason and built the first house in Windham.
- 1690 Jonathan Ginnings bought land from John Birchard and settled in Windham. Jennings Lane is named for him and indicates the location of his house. His daughter, born in February 1691, was the first child of European ancestry born in Windham.
- 1691 At least nine more families settled in Windham, cleared land, and began to farm.
- Oct. 6, 1691 Residents of Windham petitioned the General Court in Hartford to grant a township, to be called "Windham," named for Wyndham, England.
- May 12, 1692 The General Court granted the petition and Windham was established.**
- May 1694 Windham was annexed to Hartford County.
- 1695 A site was chosen for a meeting house. A bridge was built over the Natchaug River to facilitate travel between "Hither Place" (Windham Center) and "Pond Place" (Mansfield Center), the first two settlements.
- 1699- Hannah Bradford, descended from the governor of the Plymouth Colony, wife of Joshua Ripley, was the first practicing physician in Windham. Other notable early Windham women include Mary Howard, who was John Cates's housekeeper—she settled Cates's estate; and Lucy Reynolds, who could kill a bear, lift a barrel of meat, and throw the strongest man in Windham.
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- May 1702 Mansfield separated from Windham and established as a town.
- April 1703 First town meeting-house opened in Windham Center.
- 1704 Indian war. Windham militia established under Captain John Fitch. No significant hostilities occurred in Windham.
- 1706 First grist mill and saw mill built in Windham, powered by the falls in the Willimantic River.
- 1710 First two houses built in Willimantic.
- 1716 Canada Parish established at "Windham Village" (now Hampton).
- 1719 Probate court established in Windham Center for the nine-town region. John Fitch appointed the first judge.

- 1725-26 Windham County formally defined and established to include all the towns in the northeast corner of Connecticut: the present towns plus Lebanon, Mansfield, and Coventry. These three towns later separated from Windham County.
- 1726 Court of Common Pleas for Windham County established at Windham Center. Construction of a jail authorized.
- 1727 Scotland Parish established, still a part of Windham until 1857.

1740 Rev. Thomas Clap, pastor of the Windham (Center) Congregational Church installed as President of Yale College.

1744 John Backus, last of the original settlers, died.

Eliphalet Dyer, son of Thomas Dyer, Yale graduate 1740, studied law and was made a Justice of the Peace and Captain of a military company. He went on to a distinguished career as a lawyer, as a representative to the Continental Congresses, during the Revolution, and as the Chief Justice of the Connecticut Superior Court.

1745 First public execution in Windham: Elizabeth Shaw was convicted of murdering her newborn son and hanged on Gallows Hill.

1740-60 Great Religious Awakening swept across southern New England, especially strong in Canterbury, Mansfield, and Plainfield. Windham was more conservative and was not so much affected.

1750-55 Susquehanna Company established in Windham to develop a colony in the Wyoming valley of northeastern Pennsylvania. In 1769, 1770, and 1771 the Company sent groups of armed men to occupy the area and claim it for Connecticut.

1753 Grammar school building erected in Windham Center.

1754 Battle of the Frogs.

1754-63 French and Indian War.

1756 First census of Windham County: Town of Windham had 2,406 whites, 40 African-Americans.

1759 Mary Jennings, widow of Richard Abbe, bequeathed freedom to Ginna, her African-American slave, the first slave freed in Windham County.

1765 The local deputy stamp officer was hanged in effigy on Windham Green in response to passage of the Stamp Act.

1770 Strong support in Windham and throughout Windham County for the non-importation agreement to protest British import duties.

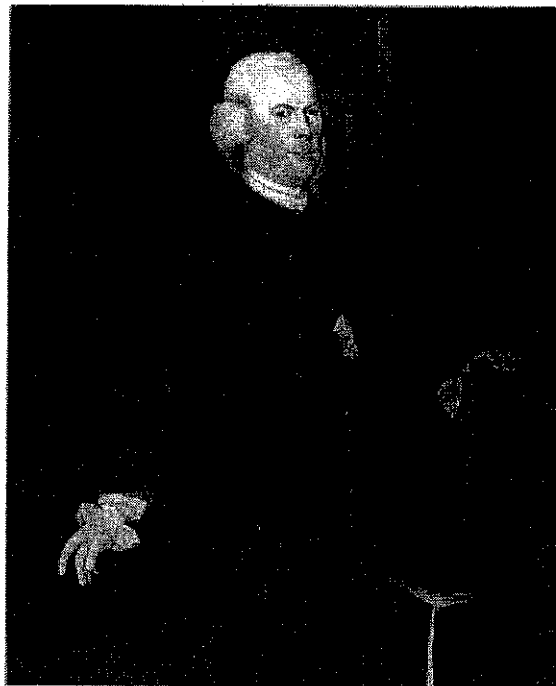
1774 Windham a hotbed of revolutionary fervor. Tories denounced and publicly humiliated. Tax imposed to buy arms and ammunition in preparation for war.

1776 Jedediah Elderkin and Nathaniel Wales build a gunpowder mill at Willimantic.

1776-83 Windham actively participated in the war for independence, sending many soldiers and officers to the battles and providing significant support in materials and supplies.

1780s Benjamin Dyer operated a drug store near the Windham Green, which claimed "the largest assortment of drugs, dye-stuffs, paints, spices, &c. to be found in Eastern Connecticut."

1785 Canada Parish ("Windham Village") incorporated as a separate town, re-named Hampton.



Colonel Dyer

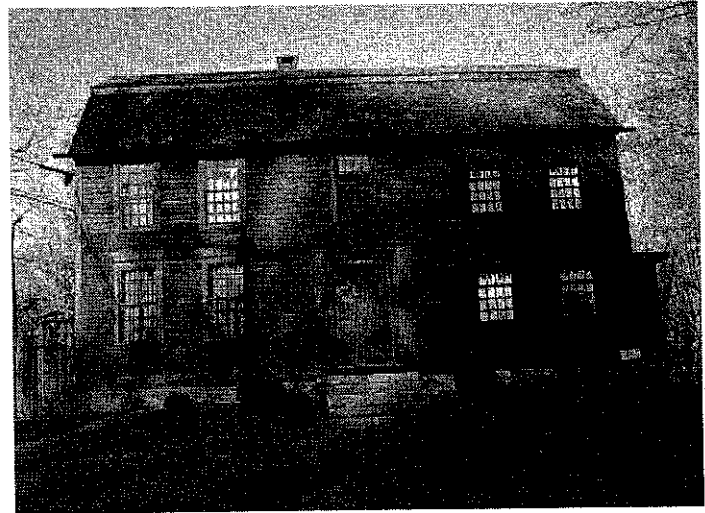
1790-1815 John Byrne published "The Phenix; Or, Windham Herald" newspaper from a printing press" at the Windham Green.

1795 Publication of the first volume of Zephaniah Swift, *A System of the Laws of the State of Connecticut*, the first treatise on the origins and organization of Connecticut's laws. Swift, a Windham resident, was later selected by the General Assembly to revise the Statutes of Connecticut to bring them into conformity with the new constitution adopted in 1818.

Be sure to read the continuing story of Windham events from 1900 to the 2nd half of the 19th century in Timeline: Part 1. Timeline: Part 2 will follow with the contribution of Willimantic Town Historian Jamie Eaves, outlining the Willimantic story from its industrial beginnings to the present.

The Early 18th Century Col. Eliphalet Dyer House in Windham Center

This gambrel roofed colonial house was the home of Col. Eliphalet Dyer, a Yale graduate, a lawyer, a veteran of the French & Indian War, delegate to the 1st and 2nd Continental Congresses, 1st Chief Justice of the Superior Court, and member of the Committee of Safety. He was also famous for being a participant in the infamous Windham Frog Fight.



The first recorded deed for the property was in 1704. The house was originally built by Thomas Dyer (167-1766) and later owned by his son Eliphalet (1721-1807).

Eliphalet and his wife Huldah Bowen had 5 children: Thomas, who became a Colonel in the Colonial Militia; Amelia, who married Gov. Trumbull's son Joseph; Benjamin, who became one of the 1st pharmacists in the state; Oliver; and Jabez, who became a casualty of the Revolutionary War.

The house was built prior to 1730 and is the only remaining 2-1/2 story gambrel in Windham. The main roof is wood shingled. Above the windows and exterior doors are rusticated, flared header boards, some of which are original. Five cut granite steps lead to the front entrance.

Contemplate for a moment, dear reader, that Colonel Dyer, a patriot who rubbed elbows with the likes of Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and even hosted George Washington when he was passing through. This house definitely represents our deep historic roots.

According to the Windham Bicentennial memorial volume (1892) "General Washington stopped at the Dyer mansion on his visit to the town." Current owner, artist Annie Wandell is as distinguished in the Windham area today as were the historic 18th century figures whose 1705 house she occupies in the heart of Windham Center. The Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association was thrilled to have had the house on the

annual June Home Tour. The reasons are twofold: first, the early owners were significant players in the pre-republic history of this country and, second, Annie has long been associated with the WVNA by dint of the handsome wood paintings of the Grant House which are presented each year as the Gillard Award to a local business. You may have noticed these beautiful replicas, each slightly different, at local businesses throughout Willimantic.

TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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CONNECTICUT TRAINED REALTOR

Progressive Dinner

The mid-March blizzard fortunately did not shutdown or hamper in anyway the convivial evening enjoyed by the diners at the 16th Annual Progressive Dinner on March 18.

Hors d'oeuvres, soup, entrées and desserts were featured during the 4-hour event. Once again, appreciation is extended to ECSU Foundation for its generous sparkling donation to the event. Thanks also, of course, to the hosts and other cooks and bakers whose goodies enriched the veritable feast.

Pres. Bob H. outdid himself once more with his Willimantic-adapted version of "How Much is that Doggie in the Window?" As you will see in the enclosed lyrics, he was actually speaking to the seemingly never-ending surprises encountered by new Victorian homeowners. A problem to which many of our readers should be able to relate.

Darjeeling:

A Gift from Bengal

leaf & flour hosts a presentation,

tea tasting, and cake plates at

The Fitch House, Mansfield Center

May 21st 1:30-3:30

\$35 per person.

Reservations required,

860.786.7786



Buyer's Remorse

Tune of: "Doggie in the Window"

I once took a trip to Willimantic
To buy a Victorian home
I travelled Connecticut's coastline
And never the more will I roam

I found a Victorian cottage
With floor boards that let out a squeak
The seller quite nicely informed me
They're made of imported teak

I purchased the house but soon noticed
The attic had great water stains
The seller was quick to remind me
The roof only leaks when it rains

The windows I found do not open
Which caused my calm heart to throb
The seller reminded me quickly
The house then will never be robbed

I discovered the sink in the kitchen
At most times would drain very slow
The seller quite readily gave me
A large can of plumber's Draino

I love my new home in Willimantic
And now many new friends I've got
The carpenters, plumbers, electricians
They all seem to like me a lot

And now my sad story is over
I've found a great home in this town
A wonderful house in Willimantic
I'm finally settling down.

Be sure to enjoy the perky daffodils under the
Welcome to Victorian Willimantic sign on
Windham Road.

Other newly planted flowers and plants are beginning to emerge.





**Willimantic Victorian
Neighborhood Association**

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* Non-voting members

Photo Credit:

Annie Wandell

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**

**Sunday, April 23 3:30 PM
Jillson House, 627 Main Street
WVNA Annual Meeting**

**Agenda: Discussion of new Victorian
Home Tour Events**

**After meeting dinner: 5:15 pm
"Wings N' Pies" Restaurant (Valley Street)
across from Court house.**