

# Remembering Winsted

In August 1935, the Winsted Tercentenarian Commission published the Winsted Tercentenarian. At one-half inch thick, it cost 25 cents. It is, essentially, a report on the state of the town. It includes photos of places and people, descriptive text, and an exhaustive list of every business, civic organization, and activity in Winsted in 1935.

The opening heading is telling:

"Ideally situated in the Litchfield Hills, in the Heart of the Mountain and Lake District of Connecticut — A County Seat Town, Shopping Center for 20,000 People — Ten Improved Highways Leading Into It"

As is the opening sentence:

"Winsted, a typical, progressive, small New England city, is ideally situated in the heart of the recreational section of Connecticut up in the Litchfield Hills, where the mountain scenery, the swift-running streams and babbling brooks, the silvery lakes and all nature join with the handiwork of man in a strong appeal to visitors to enjoy the many advantages which it offers, whether it be for a permanent home or for a season or a day. The invitation never ceases and the welcome is always a hearty one."

It describes the geography, topography, manmade improvements and brags of a local government that is managed "ably and economically" and enjoys a low tax rate. It describes Winsted as having:

"...a \$150,000 modern theater, a thoroughly up-to-date school system, four public and a parochial schools, a free endowed high school, a heavily endowed home for dependent children, two splendidly equipped free libraries, a modern hospital, 10 magnificent churches, an unusually fine centrally located YMCA, four flourishing hotels, four public parks, a well-equipped playground, four beautiful cemeteries and a granite chapel, attractive club house, a splendid golf course, a fine athletic field and the highest ski hill in the world."

The report goes on for 68 pages describing individuals and busi-

nesses and includes lengthy pieces about Highland Lake, The Gilbert Home, the Gilbert School, the Beardsley Library, the Litchfield County Hospital, the churches,

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the YMCA, the volunteer fire department — described as having the oldest active fireman in the state, the schools (what a shame to demolish such a magnificent structure as the Fourth School!).

Then there is the section about Winsted's three newspapers, which begins with the old saying, "A drop of ink may make a million think." Noting that a good newspaper is "an invaluable asset to a community," the report heralds Winsted's newspapers as of a "high standing among the Connecticut press." It provides the history of the Winsted Evening Citizen (launched in 1888) and the two weeklies, the Winsted Herald and Litchfield County Leader. Very much worth reading.

An exhaustive inventory of businesses from insurance companies to furniture stores, banks, gas stations, dry goods, restaurants, auto dealers, shoe stores, grocers, lumber, sweet shops, jewelers, theaters ...you get the picture. Then a comprehensive review of the history of the governmental structure of the town — the first suggestion of organizing a town of Winsted apart from the town of Winchester was at the first annual meeting of the Winsted Ecclesiastical Society in 1778 and included the land from:

"Highland Lake and north on the 2-mile tier line from Barkhamsted to Mad River thence up the Mad River to the 3-mile line, thence to Colebrook, east to the west branch of the Farmington River in Barkhamsted, Hence the name Winsted, a word coined from the first syllable of Winchester and the last syllable of Barkhamsted."

One of my favorites sections is the multipage review of the homes

and biographies of some of Winsted's families — with wonderful photos of the beautiful homes of Tiffany, Gaylord and Moore.

A review of the civic, social and welfare organizations and then, of course, of the many manufacturers in town with descriptions of the industry and photos or drawings of the factory buildings.

This report is a treasure of information. Did you know that nine houses were demolished in the Winsted Cyclone in 1882?

The Winsted Tercentenary Celebration was held the week of Aug. 25, 1935. It was, evidently, a great party.

A tour of historic places and a picnic by the DAR, a fireworks celebration by the Italians, a choral concert, an industrial exhibit by the Winsted Manufacturers Association, a boat race and aquatic carnival, moving pictures of the Sesqui-Centennial: marking dates of some of the old houses and historic sites are some of the things planned.

This report is kept at the town clerk's office. Perhaps the town should consider reprinting this wonderful catalog of Winsted — not just for nostalgia's sake, but to raise expectations.

*Charlene LaVoie is the community lawyer in Winsted.*