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FLASHBACKS

VOLUME 6

A CELEBRATION OF THE HISTORY OF WINDSOR, MA

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East is East

Each part of our sprawling town has its own special character, but perhaps none more so than East Windsor. From the mid-1800s until the early-1900s, East Windsor – also known as Jordanville for the many members of the Jordan family who lived there – stood out for energy and industry, a touch of mill town bustle.

Commerce and Community

John Jordan's machine shop, a tannery, a shoemaker, a cider mill, a whetstone maker, a carriage builder and blacksmith, a manufacturer of butts for whip handles and the C. H. Ball factory...East Windsor was home to all of these, many powered by the Westfield Brook.

Residents could shop at the Pierce store, and later at the Gardner Miner Store, each also home to a Post Office.

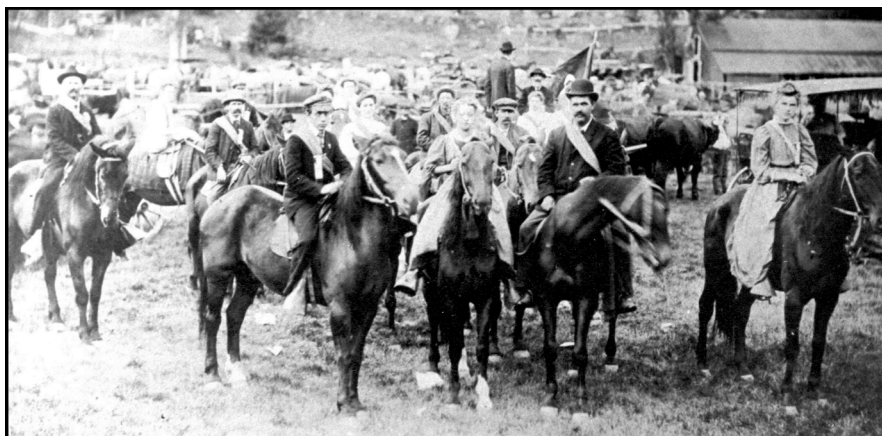
The community supported a number of organizations through the years, bringing East Windsor residents together. There was a Lyceum group that held debates, such as one on the position that "George Washington was a better man than Abraham Lincoln," a Christian Endeavor Society, and an active Grange.

For those unfamiliar with it, the Grange (more formally The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry) is a national fraternal organization devoted to increasing community bonds in rural areas and improving agriculture. It began, like many such groups, after the Civil War.

All-Purpose, No Purpose, Gone

The home for much of this activity was for some years the handsome A.O.U.W. (Ancient Order of United Workmen) Hall. It was built in about 1876 by the Jordan and Medbury families to serve as a "select" school for their children, meaning that the families hired their own teacher and did not open the school to other children.

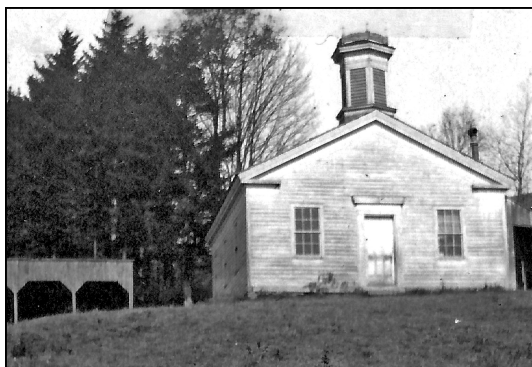
From about 1880, it became a sort of all-purpose community center. It was the first home of the East Windsor Grange. Church services were held there until 1909 (the East Windsor Chapel was built in 1910). In the 1890s, local amateur actors presented the drama "The Spy of



Officers of East Windsor Grange #77, all on black horses, at the 1909 Cummington Fair. In front are Tommy Day, Della Cleveland Day, Charles Hathaway, Ruth Hathaway Parker.

Gettysburg," in the hall. Admission was ten cents and characters included "Cyril Blackburn, the black sheep of a noble Virginia family," "Mabel Meredith, a true-hearted girl," and "Uncle Moses Mulvey, a relic of the Mexican War."

After the A.O.U.W. purchased the building, it appears other organizations were no longer welcome to use it. An obituary for Alvin Shaw, an East Windsor shoemaker, butcher and farmer who represented Windsor in the state legislature in 1890s, notes that he was a member. But there is little evidence that chapter was ever very active. The building was sold and then torn down in 1915.

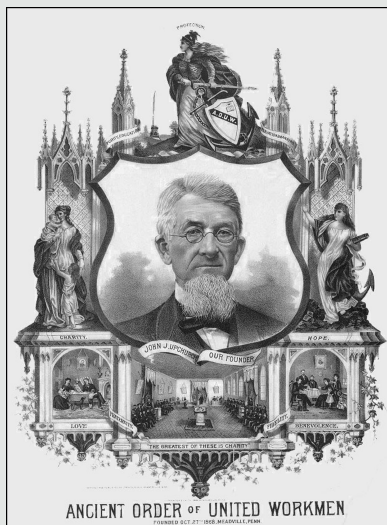


A.O.U.W. Hall, from the collection of the Windsor Historical Commission.

See friendsofwindsor.com for more information on the topics covered in our FLASHBACKS series.

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WHAT WAS THE A.O.U.W.?

The A.O.U.W. was an innovative organization that emerged in the post-Civil War era. As society was being transformed by railroads and industrialization, working people struggled to find both a sense of belonging and financial security. Railroad mechanic John Jordan Upchurch (pictured in the poster), a freemason, founded the A.O.U.W. in 1868 in Meadville, Pennsylvania with the aim of addressing these issues.

Upchurch and the A.O.U.W. pioneered a new kind of fraternal group that offered both brotherhood in the Masonic tradition and affordable life insurance for ordinary workers (as long as they were men, and white). Members paid a small amount to join and every time a member died, the surviving members would pay another small assessment. From this money, a sum of at least \$500 (eventually rising to \$2,000) was paid out to the worker's family. The idea proved popular, and the A.O.U.W. had 318,000 members in 1895.

The A.O.U.W. dissolved in 1952, with Massachusetts' remaining lodges joining the New England Order of Protection.



Jordan Hotel. From the Windsor Historical Commission.

All-Night Revelry

This sad photograph of the Jordan Hotel in its late, ramshackle stage makes it hard to imagine a livelier era. But the hotel, a stop for the stagecoach between Boston and Albany, did have its glory days. "There was a tavern on the first floor, guest rooms on the second floor, and a large dance hall on the third floor. Sleigh ride parties from Northampton often came there to dance until dawn." (*Progress*, Sept. 1969) This golden age seems to have been in the 1880s, though dates are scarce in the accounts I have found.

It was built about 1875 by a Mr. Tower, but for most of its existence was owned and operated by Elijah Jordan and his descendants. Later, it was owned by Charles Ball, who rented rooms to workers at his factory. Its final owner was Charles Dewey, who eventually requested that it be burned by the Windsor Fire Department.

Let's make FLASHBACKS a community effort! If you have historical information, artifacts, photos or ideas for us, please share them. E-mail Susan Phillips at susanphillips57@gmail.com.

The Persistence of *Progress*

Much of what we know about East Windsor's past comes from the pages of *Progress*, the monthly newsletter of the East Windsor Progressive Club. Established in 1949 with the goal of re-building East Windsor's civic life, the club started *Progress* in 1951 to raise money to renovate the ground floor of the East Windsor Chapel as a community space. Nine years of dedicated editorial work later, the room, complete with kitchen, opened. Mary Ball Bowman, daughter of Charles H. Ball, and Bernice Filkins were the backbone of the operation. *Progress* ceased publication upon Bowman's death on November 26, 1969.

Windsor Now & Then admires their persistence and fine work in the pre-computer, mimeograph era.

PITTSFIELD CASTS A CRITICAL EYE...

"We rattle along a few miles farther and then Jordanville, and our destination is reached. Of all the quaint, tumble-down, little villages, Jordanville is the quaintest and most tumble-down, looking for all the world as if it had been caught up by some wandering blizzard and hurled into the cleft between the hills for no earthly purpose but to suit the blizzard's erratic fancy." (From "A Trip Through Windsor – Far From the Maddening Crowd." *The Pittsfield Sun*, 1888. Reproduced in *Progress*, April 1969.)



The store in East Windsor with Mr. Shaw, his meat wagon, and a hopeful canine. Windsor Historical Commission.