

WILLIMANTIC RAILS, YESTERDAY AND TODAY

A Talk by Railroad Historian Pieter Roos

Although the mills were here first, railroads soon followed. Willimantic, CT, became a textile mill center in the 1820s, when four cotton mills opened on the banks of the Willimantic River, powered by the water thundering through the Willimantic gorge. The nearest port was Norwich, 17 miles away to the south, at the head of tide on the Thames River. Willimantic industry also used the port of Providence, RI, 47 miles to the east. For more than 25 years, wagons ran regularly between Willimantic and Norwich and Providence, carrying raw cotton in and manufactured thread out. Then, in 1849, the railroad opened between Willimantic and Norwich, vastly increasing the amounts of raw materials and finished products that could be transported. Willimantic became one of Connecticut's important rail hubs, along with Hartford, New Haven, and Waterbury. Pieter Roos, a railroad historian, visited the Windham Textile and History Museum and recounted the history of Willimantic and the railroads.

