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Showing postings 1 - 15 of 15 in the thread: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire.

Posting:	Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire	Posting 1
Poster:	Scorpio	
Date:	2 March 2006 4:25 PM	
<p>I have different recollections of these fires than are currently depicted in any of the information that I have found on the WEB regarding times and dates.</p> <p>Do any of you folks have full information or pictures of either or both incidents?</p> <p>I stood and watched the flames shoot into the night sky as windows exploded onto horrified onlookers, mesmerized, by the Teacher's College fire. It sure wasn't in 1924, which is put forth in all accounts that I have been able to find!</p> <p>Thank you. Scorpio</p>		
Posting:	Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire	Posting 2
Poster:	Francis "Whitey" Sellars	
Date:	2 March 2006 9:06 PM	
<p>Scorpio, I believe the teachers college burned in 1942. The St.Mary's school fire was in 1946. I believe I have some pictures of the St. Mary's school fire around here some where. I will try to look them up.</p>		
Posting:	Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire	Posting 3
Poster:	remembering when	
Date:	3 March 2006 7:04 AM	
<p>Whitey, I'm not sure about the Teacher's College date but I do know it wasn't '24. My mother watched that blaze and she was born in '27!! As for St. Mary's, I was around for that one, going to school at St. Joe's next door. It was in the '50's somewhere, not '46.</p>		
Posting:	Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire	Posting 4
Poster:	Pippin	
Date:	3 March 2006 7:22 AM	
<p>The St. Mary School fire occurred just before I entered school. The kids who were due to go to St. Mary's started Kindergarten at Natchaug and then went for a 1/2 year to first grade in what is now St. Joseph's Shelter before the new school opened in what must have been 1954/55. So I'd place the fire around 1952 or 1953. A few months after the fire, some photo shop was selling albums of pictures and my aunt bought one that I still have. I had sent the digital photos to Tom and they were on this site for a while but I just looked at the picture gallery and noticed that most of the sections are gone. I can e-mail the pics to Tom again if he can get them onto his server.</p> <p>Best, Pippin</p>		
Posting:	Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire	Posting 5
Poster:	Tom	
Date:	4 March 2006 1:45 PM	
<p>Thanks Pippin -- the actual date of the St Mary's school fire fire was Jan 31, 1953. Here's a Chronicle article I penned several years ago about the school and fire. I have the fire pics somewhere, and will post them.</p> <p>St. Mary's Parochial School</p> <p>In 1990, 84 year-old Rose Dunham, a staunch and proud Irish-American, recounted her Willimantic youth and the rivalry between the Irish and French-Canadian communities. A small fence separated St. Mary's and St. Joseph's schools, and at recess St. Mary's students chanted "Corn beef and cabbage make the Irish Savage." St. Joseph's students responded, "Pea soup and Johnny cake make a Frenchman's belly ache." Rose was a student at St Joseph's recently built (1907) brick school. Beyond the fence Rose's French-Canadian rivals studied at a school with a short but interesting history.</p> <p>On February 20, 1903, St. Mary's French-Canadian Roman Catholic parish and parochial school came into being. Students transferred from other schools, and in 1904 Phillipe LaPalme, Arthur LaBarge, Henry Martin, Carrie Dion, Olivina Bacon, and Hilda Trudeau were the parochial schools first graduates. Their schoolhouse dated back to the early years of the 19th century. It was</p>		

originally built by the Baptists in the 1820s.

In 1857, the Irish-born members of St. Joseph's parish purchased the Baptists' wood-frame church and removed it from Main to Jackson Street. In 1872, just before construction began on St. Joseph's current edifice, the old church was moved on again to Valley Street to be utilized as St. Mary's, a parish hall of St. Joseph's to accommodate the growing French-Canadian population.

An extension was added to the rear of the hall around 1876, and became the home of St. Joseph's elementary school. The entire building and adjacent land on Valley Street was left in the will of Florimond DeBruyker—St. Joseph's Belgian-born Pastor from 1863 until 1902—to be developed as a French-Canadian parish. St. Mary's Hall served as the place of worship until the new church was ready. In 1905 a two story ell with bell tower was added and the ancient Baptist church, the 1876 addition and new ell served as St. Mary's parochial school and hall.

In 1910, St Mary's pastor, Mnsgr. Joseph Papillon (1866-1965), inaugurated French language classes, and the foundations of the school's high reputation were laid. A small fire in 1925 led to some remodeling, but on the night of January 31, 1953, the school was completely destroyed by fire, leaving the whole community in a state of shock. Over two hundred fireman fought the fierce blaze, which began in the school's boiler-room beneath the 1876 extension. Embers and sparks threatened houses on Maple Avenue and Jackson Street, and the Sisters of Charity in St. Joseph's Convent had to evacuate. St. Mary's 540 pupils were relocated at Natchaug School and the Teacher's College. The community responded with a remarkable effort which led to the complete rebuilding of the school within two years.

A building fund campaign was launched. Within 48 hours, school principal Father Roland Guilmette announced a \$10,000 contribution from Electromotive's Phillip Lauter Foundation, and \$5,000 from American Thread. The Franco-American Civic Social Club, in the old state armory building on the junction of Center Street and Temple Place, was the HQ for fund raising. The city's major industries, businesses and individuals gave generously. Scrap metal drives and bottle collections helped boost the fund to \$101, 738. 75, just three weeks after the fire.

On October 11, 1953, the architectural firm of Dirienzio and Holmes were hired to design a new school building. The J. S. Nasin construction company began work in late 1953, and the school was completed by early 1955. The dedication ceremony was a grand affair. The local political community were led by Mayor Florimond Bergeron, Donald Kramer, the Chairman of the Board of Education, and First Selectman Ralph Crosstwaitte. Spiritual matters were attended to by Mnsgr. W. Arthur Routhier, pastor of St. Annes in Hartford, a Willimantic native, and the Right Rev. Bernard Flanagan, Bishop of the Norwich diocese, and fifty area priests. The ceremony took place on February 13, 1955, exactly 50 years to the day that St. Mary's new church was dedicated.

Posting: Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire Posting 6
 Poster: Ada
 Date: 6 March 2006 2:33 PM

The St. Mary's School fire was 1952 or 1953. I was still a student at Natchaug and some classrooms and auditorium at Natchaug were used for classes from St. Mary's running double sessions.

Posting: Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire Posting 7
 Poster: Kate Fortier
 Date: 6 March 2006 3:23 PM

That's really neat to think about ... I'm actually sitting in my office (yes, I'm at work ... shame on me!) in the old St. Joseph's school and can look out my window at St. Mary's School. It's cool to imagine the kids taunting each other out where my car is currently parked. :)

Posting: Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire Posting 8
 Poster: David Colby
 Date: 6 March 2006 4:29 PM

I went to St. Joes in the mid to late 60s. We used to go over to St Marys once a week for hot lunch. On all the other days we went down to the basement to get our milk and I believe we took it back up to our class for our brown bag lunch. Such memories, four square, shooting baseball cards, Sister Michael, they go on and on. I wonder how much the building has changed

Posting: Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire Posting 9
 Poster: Kate Fortier
 Date: 6 March 2006 5:07 PM

Well, according to a lot of alumni who come in for various reasons and reminisce with the staff here, not a whole lot has changed. The memories they share are great ... :)

Posting: Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire Posting 10
 Poster: Tom
 Date: 7 March 2006 11:50 AM

The old Willimantic State Teacher's College, originally the Willimantic Normal School, built in 1894, burnt to the ground on the night of August 29, 1943, because of a faulty boiler. Schaffer Hall was built on the site. This picture was taken on the morning of August 30, 1943.



Posting: Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire Posting 11
 Poster: Tina
 Date: 7 March 2006 12:41 AM

I was a student at St. Mary's when they merged with St. Joseph's. I spent third and fourth grade in the St. Joe's building. I remember it being cold in the winter, but I loved the details of old building. Back then, there was carpeting on the floors, and we used to scuff our feet along it and give each other shocks! There were no lockers like the other school- just coat hooks and a shelf for book bags. Such a stark contrast to St. Mary's with its space age light fixtures in the classrooms, metal lockers, water fountain sinks in the bathroom that turned on by pressing your foot on a bar, and the deluxe cafeteria that we used to walk over to every day at 11:45. It's good to hear that old St. Joseph's School hasn't changed much.

Posting: Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire Posting 12
 Poster: mammabear
 Date: 7 March 2006 12:44 AM

"The dedication ceremony was a grand affair. The local political community were led by Mayor Florimond Bergeron, Donald Kramer, the Chairman of the Board of Education, and First Selectman Ralph Crosstwaitte. Spiritual matters were attended to by Mmsgnr. W. Arthur Routhier, pastor of St. Annes in Hartford, a Willimantic native, and the Right Rev. Bernard Flanagan, Bishop of the Norwich diocese, and fifty area priests. "

I was a 7-year old 2nd grader in St Joseph's School when this happened, so I don't remember much about it at all... The dedication ceremony that you describe must have been something else... All of those political and religious leaders together in one place to celebrate this major event... Sad to think that a gathering of this kind in today's day and age would bring about all sorts of protest...

mammabear

Posting: Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire Posting 13
 Poster: JayJay
 Date: 7 March 2006 10:18 PM

Tom...

Thanks for providing not only the date of the Teacher's College fire, but a great picture. I remember hearing the tolling of the fire alarm bell in the wee hours of that morning, counting the "bongs" and looking from my bedroom window in the direction of the alarm box (everyone had a list of box locations handy). The awesome glow was very visible even from our house on Pleasant Street. I was dressed and downstairs in seconds. My mother and I were the "fire horses" who were always awakened by the first stroke of the bell. This was the ONE TIME she didn't hear it, and, without stopping to check her, I was out the door and on my bike, across the footbridge, up North Street, up Valley to the college. She never forgave me for not waking her! I was sixteen at the time, and my sister had graduated from WSTC three years earlier, class of 1940. Not so strange, but I sometimes think I can smell the smoke and feel the heat, when I recall that fire, and the Willimantic Lumber & Coal Company some years earlier when I was attending St. Joseph's.

Posting: Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's School fire Posting 14
 Poster: Tom

Date: 8 March 2006 10:00 PM

Good to here from you JayJay.

Great Post!

Here's a particularly dramatic pic of that 1943 fire.



Posting: Re: Willimantic State Teacher's College Fire and St. Mary's
School fire
Poster: John B
Date: 11 March 2006 8:17 PM

Posting 15

" I went to St. Joes in the mid to late 60s. We used to go over to St Marys once a week for hot lunch. On all the other days we went down to the basement to get our milk and I believe we took it back up to our class for our brown bag lunch. Such memories, four square, shooting baseball cards, Sister Michael, they go on and on. I wonder how much the building has changed "

I went to St. Mary's from 1957-1966 . I don't recall St. Joe's kids coming over for lunch . Must have been post-66 .