

July 12, 1997

## The Spellman Meat Market, Church Street, Willimantic, 1902-1958 (Part One)

For two generations of Willimantic residents, the name 'Spellman' was synonymous with meat. The Spellman Meat Market operated from its Church Street store from 1902 until 1958. Alonzo Dwight Spellman (1862-1953) founded this Willimantic institution. He was born in Stafford Springs, Connecticut, and arrived in Willimantic in 1887, to work in Julius Pinney's butchery department located in the building occupied today by the Windham Textile & History Museum. This fine building was erected in 1877 by William Eliot Barrows, the president of the Willimantic Linen Company, and served as its company store until 1883. In 1885, Julius Pinney of Hartford purchased the vacant company store, and converted it into a meat and grocery market. Pinney had plenty of retail experience, having recently managed the Cheney's company store in Manchester.

Alonzo Spellman came to work for Pinney in 1887, but in 1889 Pinney sold out to W. E. Amidon and Charles Dimmick, who were operating the Windham Company's store on Main Street. Amidon and Dimmick dispensed with Spellman's services, and Spellman went on to manage the Central Meat Market in the Melony block at 824 Main Street. He remained in that position until 1893, when he was hired by H. Howey, who operated a meat market at 32 North Street. Howey was a dealer in "choice beef, pork, mutton, lard, hams, sausage, canned goods, etc." Howey employed Spellman until 1897. In 1898 he was hired by Charles M. Thompson who operated a meat market at 27 Church Street, Thompson was a dealer in, "choice meats and vegetables, with specialties in beef, pork, lard, ham and poultry."



**These photographs show how the Spellman meat market evolved over a 15 year period. Above, the interior in 1912, and below, the same store pictured in 1927.**



Charles Merrick Thompson (1859-1934) was born in Mansfield. He came to Willimantic in 1878, and was employed by the Joel W. Webb meat market. In 1892 Thompson entered into his own butchery business at 901 Main Street. He moved into the "Turner Block" on Church Street in 1895, and three years later he hired Alonzo Spellman. In June 1901 Thompson and Spellman went into partnership, with Spellman being the senior partner. The two specialized in high quality meats for the town's growing middle classes who were occupying and building the fine Victorian mansions in the hill district.

In January 1915, the A. D. Spellman & Co. meat market was described in a Willimantic Chronicle feature article. It stated that the "Spellman Sanitary Meat Market" as it was known, gave "prestige" to Willimantic. Vegetarians may want to skip this next section: "The quarters are 20 X 80 ft. and are fitted up with the very latest fixtures and appointments. The Company specializes in handling western beef. . . and embraces veal, mutton, pork, lamb, boiled hams, bacon and frankfurters from Swift & Co., the noted Chicago packers, and Armour's star brand. Both brands are popular as they are sweet and delicious smoked in the old fashioned hickory chip way mild cured fat-trimmed to perfection." Spellman was well known for his "rendered lard," calves hearts, sweet-breads, liver, kidneys, and brains. Poultry was a specialty too. The Church Street butcher sold "plump young roasting chickens, broilers, fowls, ducks, turkeys, geese, and game in season."

The Spellman meat market was the local dealer in Heinz 57 varieties and specialty flours and one of the first butchers in town to take telephone orders. The 1915 article stressed that all implements were scoured daily, and the floors cleaned, "freeing the entire premises from unpleasant odor." It was also noted that the Spellman Company enjoyed the "exclusive patronage of the leading hotels and families of this city." In 1915, Spellman and Thompson had four horse-drawn delivery wagons, and a "commercial auto" ensuring "prompt deliveries."

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