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## Floyd Atkins Helped to Build Windham From the Ground Up, (Part Two of Two)

Willimantic's famous Windham Grill as pictured in 1935, shortly after Floyd Atkins built the rear brick addition.



Floyd Atkins was married in 1928 to Alice Jenner. The Jenners were of English descent, and Alice was born in Southbridge, Massachusetts in 1909. Her father was employed there at American Optic. The Jenners then moved to Mansfield in 1910 when Alice's father found employment in the Kirby Mill, which in

those days manufactured spectacles.

Floyd moved to Mansfield from Mystic during the early years of the Depression, and found work as a builder. Despite the devastating effects, nationwide, of the Wall Street Crash, nearby Willimantic barely suffered as the American Thread Company kept operating, and new silk manufacturing began in the ancient Bridge Street cotton mills. One of his first jobs in Windham was in 1931, when he built a house for Harold Storrs on Shetucket Park, near South Windham. Another early job was to take down an eight-sided house which stood on Summit Street in Willimantic. This extraordinary house stood at the extreme west end of the street on the northern side. Its a vacant lot today, but the house can be clearly seen on the 1909 Aero View of Willimantic. Does any one remember it?

I asked Floyd how Mansfield City Road got its name. It was not, as many suppose, the Mansfield to (Willimantic) City Road. In the early 19th century it was thought that Mansfield would one day become a great city in its own right, thanks to its numerous silk mills. Floyd recalled that in his youth this section of Mansfield had a country store, a root beer manufacturer, a carpenter shop, blacksmith shop, a jail, distillery, butcher shop and a button factory.

In 1934, Floyd remodeled the Windham Grill restaurant. This was a landmark for generations of area residents. It was located at 585 Main Street, near the railroad crossing, between the old junction of Main and Union Streets. In 1935, after Floyd at completed the brick addition at the rear of the diner, the Windham Grill was advertised as follows: "The most modern equipped Diner in eastern Connecticut. Air-conditioned

and positively clean. More than 200,000 patrons served in 1934, requiring six tons of hamburger, 200,000 cups of coffee, six tons of sugar and 96,000 eggs. The Grill is never closed."

In 1938/39, after the hurricane, Floyd did a lot of work at the Willimantic Camp Ground, remodeling the caretakers house, the preacher's stand and a dining hall. In fact, Floyd's order books were full after the 1938 Hurricane. He did work on around 70 hurricane-damaged buildings. He renovated the Agway building in 1942, then known at the Farmer's Eastern States Exchange. Around 1950 Floyd helped to take down the old Clark Hospital on Jackson Street. The Potter Funeral Home was built and designed by Floyd, on the same site. In 1953/54 he designed and built the Natchaug Hospital-and built and designed the hospital's north wing in 1968. From 1928 until 1960, Floyd built around 80 new homes in the area, as well as being involved in the construction of numerous commercial and farming buildings, including the original gas stations on the junction of Ash Street and Jackson Street in Willimantic, and Martin's of Willimantic on Main Street. This is to say nothing of the multitude of remodeling projects he carried out. Floyd liked nothing better than to have someone tell him to restore an old building. He took over his old planes and made moldings to match the originals, and if he did not have the right plane, he made one. Many of the fine houses in The Windham Center Historic district have benefited from Floyd's restoration skills. Floyd also worked on a complex project around 1950 to save the Windham Center Congregational Church from collapsing. Have you been in the Windham Center Post Office recently? Floyd built that also.

All this, and I only went over to see Floyd's Eagleville musket. But the musket itself is interesting. The Eagle mill in Mansfield won a contract to build 25,000. It is a 58 caliber, single shot musket with a ramrod, but it is missing its bayonet. It has an engraved Eagle insignia, with the words "U. S. Eagleville" and the initials "AWJ." Floyd also recalled the Eagleville mills from his youth. He remembered watching workers unloading bails of raw cotton from the adjacent railroad, and that in later years, the Eagleville Mill housed Everett Allen's Sterling Fiber Company, and manufactured fiber board for the strengthening in shoes.

Floyd L. Atkins: December 15, 1903 to June 24, 1997.