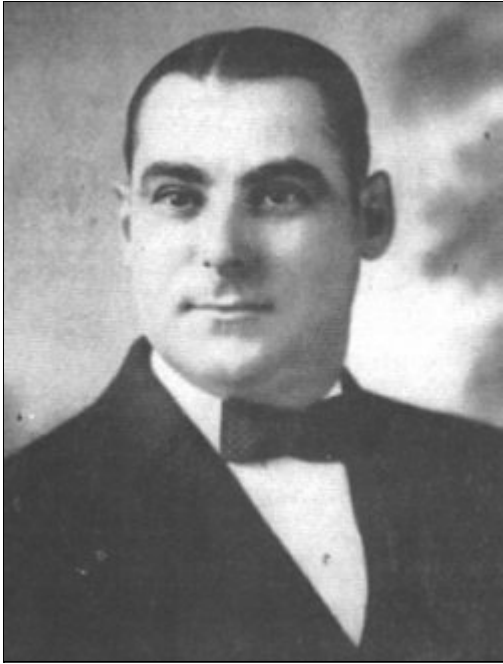


May 23, 1998

## French Canadian Legacy Epitomized by Hurteau

**Clement Hurteau Jr..**



Willimantic has a rich French-Canadian heritage. Displaced agricultural workers from Quebec started arriving in Willimantic during the mid 19th century to find employment in the borough's growing cotton weaving and spinning industries. A large number of second and third generation, Willimantic-born, French-Canadians subsequently provided Willimantic with a wide-ranging array of service industries. One of the most well known was Clement Hurteau Jr. (1883 - 1952).

Clement Hurteau Jr. was born November 11, 1883 in the Smithville Company's tenement mill houses located on the southern side of Main street, Willimantic, east of Bridge Street. Clement's father was employed in the Smithville cotton mill

complex, which was situated on the east side of Bridge Street. The mills were originally erected in 1822 by Charles Lee, and extensively enlarged in 1846 and 1852. From 1845 until 1895 the mills housed the Providence-based Smithville Company, which employed a large number of French-Canadian immigrants. Clement Hurteau's parents, Clement and Malvina Hurteau, could trace their roots back to Paris, France. The Hurteaus had originally left France for Canada in 1635, and settled at Contre Coeur, Quebec. By the 1860s, tens of thousands of French-Canadians were heading south to contribute to New England's industrial revolution. Clement Hurteau Sr. was one of them. He eventually settled in Willimantic. Hurteau Senior was a machinist who had previously worked in Massachusetts and Minnesota. The Hurteaus briefly returned to Quebec on one of the numerous occasions that the Smithville Company laid off workers. The family returned to Willimantic in 1899, and Clement Hurteau Sr. found employment as a fireman at the American Thread Company. He died in 1927.

As a young man, Clement Hurteau Jr. worked in ATCO's spinning frame department, and in the A. A. Trudeau grocery store. In 1908, he was hired by David. P. Comtois, who operated a furniture store and undertaking business in Willimantic. Hurteau and Bosse took over the Comtois business in 1915, and continued operating it from its 814 Main Street location. Clement regularly traveled to Boston to study embalming, catching the early morning train from Willimantic. Returning in the late evening, he then continued to work at the undertaking business. Hurteau and Bosse became one of the foremost undertaking and embalming businesses in the region. They also dealt in "furniture, linoleums, bedding, ranges, sewing machines, etc." Stove repairing was a speciality!

Clement Hurteau married Corinne Cardinal de L'eroux in 1925. In 1930, Bosse left the partnership and Hurteau moved the undertaking business into premises on Valley street, opposite St. Mary's Church. The furniture business was conducted from several locations on Main Street. Hurteau subsequently disposed of the furniture section of his business in 1938, and expanded the undertaking and embalming in premises at 66, 68, 70 Valley street. At this time, Clement's business advertisements announced that the company could serve any nationality in Windham County, reflecting the mass immigration into the area. Hurteau retired in 1949, and sold the business to Hallahan and Cardinal. In 1960, Hallahan and Cardinal transferred the business to 88 Windham Road, to the 1879 Reid mansion. On retiring, Clement Hurteau went into state politics, and in November, 1950 he was elected as a Republican State Senator, representing the nine towns in the Connecticut's 29th District.

Clement Hurteau was a President of Willimantic's Franco-American Civic & Social Club in the days when it was located in the old armory on Center Street. He was also active in the Willimantic Chamber of Commerce, the Elks, St Mary's Church, and the local St. Jean Baptiste Society. He was a strong proponent for the city of Willimantic, and was well known for his generous donations of labor, food and furniture to Joe Nolan, the overseer of the Town Farm. The Town Farm stood at the location occupied today by the Friendly's Restaurant on West Main Street. It was also known as the "Poor House," and carried out social service functions in the city from the 1870s until the 1940s. Clement Hurteau also found time to be a Windham Selectman, an Assessor, a Justice of the Peace and a Public Notary.

Clement Hurteau passed away in May, 1952. He was sadly missed. His obituary stated that he, "possessed a pleasant and radiant personality, and had the faculty of forming friendships quickly." This was reflected at his widely attended funeral. In attendance at Hurteau's St. Mary's Service was Connecticut Governor John Lodge. Pall Bearers included the town's leading citizens. They were Mayor Florimond Bergeron, Roger Paulhus, J. Frances Moriarty, Lester Shea, Alex Caisse and Henry Desormeau. Clement Hurteau Jr.'s busy and rich life reflects the historical indebtedness of the city of Willimantic to its French-Canadian immigrants.