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Costello proficient in silk industry



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Part One

Some time ago, Ginnie Lord of Mansfield discovered an old Willimantic newspaper in a local antique store, entitled Willimantic News. It appeared in 1937 and was published from 18 Oak St. by a "M.E. Costello." Ginnie contacted me and I featured the newspaper in a recent article, but no one recalled it.

However, 85-year-old Alice (Costello) Parker of Lebanon realized that M.E. Costello was her mother, and 18 Oak St. was the house where she was raised! Alice realized that the newspaper was produced by her father, Walter J. Costello. She contacted me, and provided a further fascinating chapter of Windham's Irish history and

heritage.

Alice's father, Walter J. Costello, was born in Providence, R.I., on May 9, 1875. His father Patrick, a railroad engineer, was from old Irish stock. Patrick's brother, 18-year-old Thomas was killed at Antietam in 1861. The Costellos were a railroad family, and moved regularly around New England. Patrick Costello was hired by New York City's elevated railroads, and he moved his young family there in the early 1880s.

Shortly afterwards, Patrick was tragically killed at work. His widow, Mary (Roach) Costello, left New York and brought her family to South Windham. The Roach family had lived in Northampton, Mass., and had relocated to South Windham after Mary's father, Thomas Roach, was hired by the Smith and Winchester Company as a bookkeeper.

There is no trace of the Roach family in the 1850 Windham census, but the 1860 census records that Thomas Roach

(40), and his wife Catherine (39), lived in Windham with their three children, Mary (13), Bridget (5) and five month old Isabella. Mary's mother, Catherine (Shea) Roach (1820-1871), died in South Windham on Oct. 14, 1871, age 51. She was born in Ireland, a daughter of Thomas and Bridget Shea. Mary (Roach) Costello (1848-1906) was born in Northampton, Mass. She died at home, 203 Jackson St., Willimantic, age 58 on March 31, 1906.

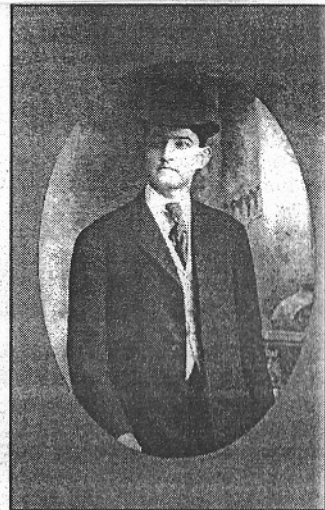
Mary Costello's sisters, Bridget and Isabell Roach, were in the Willimantic Linen Co.'s mills, and lived on Maple Street, Willimantic. Mary was also hired at the cotton mill in 1885, and she moved into the Maple Street house with her young children. Alice (Costello) Parker's father, Walter, recalled the Great Blizzard of 1888 when the snow came up to the second floor of the family's Maple Street house.

Walter Costello grew up in Willimantic. He went to St. Joseph's Parochial School and

briefly attended the Normal School. In 1891, he began work in the Turner Silk Mill, which was located on the western corner of the junction of Valley and Bank Streets.

Turner was the son of Phineas Turner, who had built a silk manufacturing community at Turnerville in Hebron on the North Pond — known today as Amston Lake. Some may recall that the old Turner mill once served as the Willimantic Trade School.

Walter Costello quickly became proficient in the spinning and weaving of silk. The Turner mills manufactured high-quality silk thread and silk fishing lines. Costello remained with the company until it went into liquidation in 1917. In the preceding 26 years, Costello had risen from a being an apprentice to the superintendent of the Turner Silk Mills. Despite the local mill's decline, he had no trouble gaining employment in the industry. The Costello family



Walter Costello in 1896.

moved to New London when Walter was hired as an overseer by the Brainerd and Armstrong Silk Co.

Alice recalled that the family lived on Coleman Street in that city. But Walter was a Willimantic boy, and he jumped at the chance to return home when he was hired as the overseer at the Washburn Silk Mills on Valley Street.

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