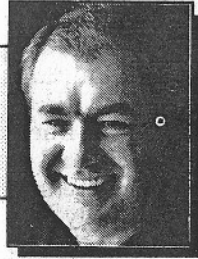


History

1940s magazine took a look at Electro-Motive



Tom Beardsley

The December 1945 issue of the Connecticut Circle, the Magazine of the Constitution State featured a series of articles and features on Willimantic. They provide a fascinating snapshot of the city of Willimantic as the United States was emerging from World War II.

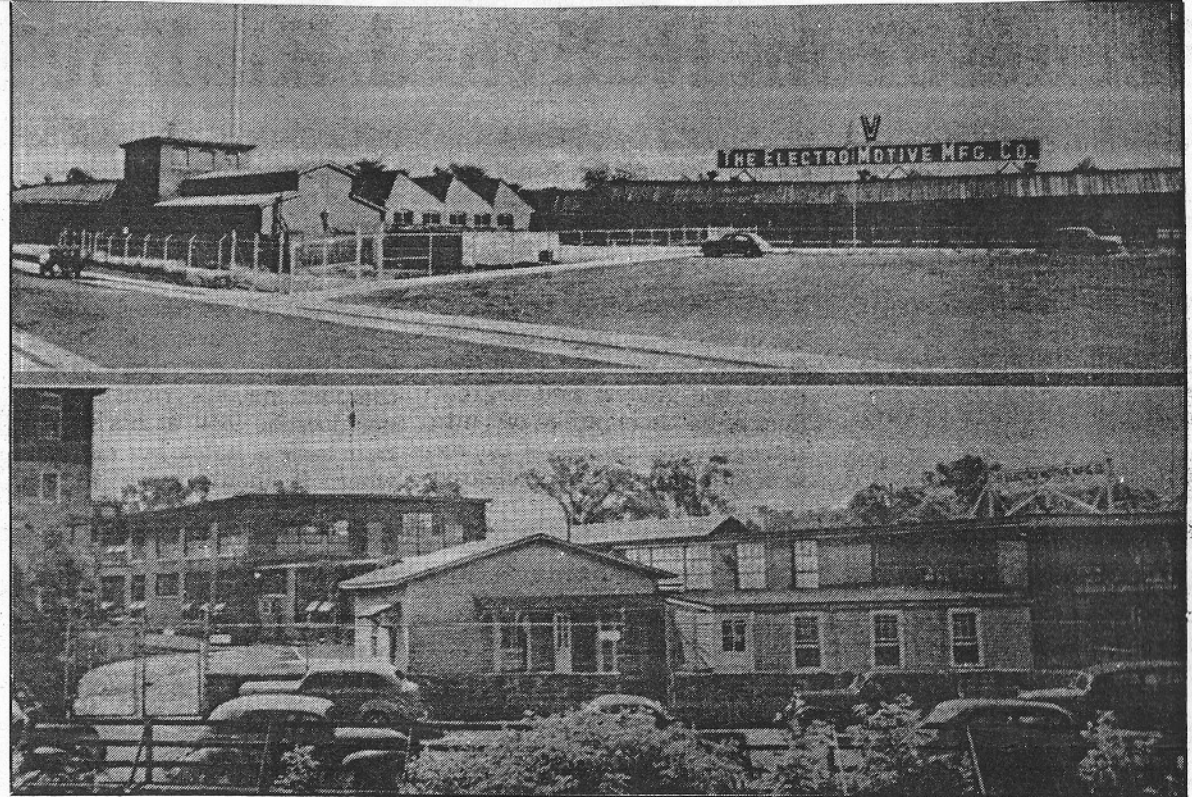
Over the forthcoming weeks, courtesy of the Connecticut Circle, we'll journey back some 54 years to look at the city in the immediate post war period. The Circle articles were as follows: "Willimantic, the Thread City," by William Rolley; "No Strings Attached," a piece on American Thread Co. written by Thomas Phillips; "Insulation Products," a brief article by Alfred Brand, the founder of the Brand-Rex Co.; "The Electro-Motive Company," uncredited, and two features on the University of Con-

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necticut and the Willimantic State Teachers College by Frank Atwood and Eugene Sloane. The series begins with a two-parter on Willimantic's Electro-Motive Co., and the company's subsequent growth after World War II, based on the Circle article.

The Electro-Motive Co. was founded by a Romanian immigrant, Phillip Lauter (1885-1945), in New York City. He relocated his company to Willimantic in 1939 and began manufacturing radio parts in the city's old cotton and velvet mills. His wife, Josephine (Rosenstein) Lauter (1891-1969), had grown up in Willimantic, where her father was the Rabbi for the city's growing Jewish community. The 1945 Connecticut Circle article reads like a promotional piece. Nevertheless, it provides in depth information on a company which provided employment for thousands of area residents in the postwar years.

The company's founder had died some six months before the article was published. His widow was better known as Josephine Harmon, an accomplished singer and comedienne on the vaudeville circuit. In the



Electro-Motive Co.'s South Park Street and Bridge Street plants in 1945.

1920s she starred with Sophie Tucker in New York City cabaret, and later became understudy to "The Last of the Red Hot Mommas" in Broadway shows.

Josephine Harmon retired from the stage in 1937, and settled in Willimantic when her husband's company relocated to an old velvet mill in the city. She claimed that her

husband had transferred the small outfit, originally consisting of a dozen employees, to Willimantic because of the city's skilled workforce. There was some inducement, however, from the local Chamber of Commerce — and Josephine Lauter was returning "home."

The company's major product was the El Menco (a name derived from Electro-Motive

Engineering Co.) trimmer condenser, an important component of push-button radios. Listeners no longer had to "tune that dial." Electro-Motive also manufactured Mica capacitors for radios. The Lauters had manufactured 100,000 of them per month in New York City before the war. Electro-Motive was manufacturing 2.5 million per month in Willimantic in 1945.