

History

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Weekly newspaper provides view of 1930s Willimantic.

Old newspapers are an excellent source of information for historians. These weekly columns partly rely on the microfilm records of *the Chronicle* (1877-current) and the *Willimantic Journal* (1847-1911).

Several months ago, Mansfield's Ginnie Lord discovered an old Willimantic newspaper in a local antiques store. It was the first edition of the *Willimantic News*, dated Dec. 17, 1937. This newspaper provides us with an interesting view of life in Willimantic during the Depression. Franklin D. Roosevelt was in the White House, well into the second term of his New Deal, and World War II was four years away.

The first edition of the *Willimantic News* cost one cent, and 5,000 copies were printed and distributed by the editor and publisher, M.E. Costello. F. Haddad was the paper's advertising manager, and its business office was located at 18 Oak St., Willimantic. The newspaper's front page consisted of four articles. Two outlined the purpose of the new publication, one dealt with Mayor Pierre Laramee's re-election, and one examined



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The new *Willimantic News* announced that its central role was to advance the city's civic interests. It believed that many useful community activities went unnoticed, and urged local churches, clubs, societies and local and suburban civic organizations to use its columns to advertise their meetings and programs. "Our principle is to be nonpartisan in all political, racial and religious matters. A strict impartiality will be adhered to in making this a democratic expression of the people."

Costello's new paper was distributed every Friday morning in Coventry, Columbia, Mansfield, Storrs, and the Windhams. The *News* contained a valuable shopping guide for weekend shoppers. Costello stressed that his

and local papers. It was a private and independent business that was determined to convince local people to shop at local stores, instead of giving their trade to stores in neighboring cities. Costello may have been horrified if he knew what lay in store at neighboring places such as the Buckland Hills Mall in Manchester.

Costello had interviewed Mrs. John Reilly, the local chairman of the Xmas Seal Sale Committee, to discuss its 1937 program. The proceeds from the sales drive was to pay for the health needs of local, poverty-stricken families for sanitarium expenses, the distribution of free milk, health programs and medical supplies, plus a small amount for Christmas cheer. In 1936, the drive raised \$931 from 17,365 donations. Reilly had conducted the sales drive since 1914, then under the auspices of the St. Joseph's Hospital Auxiliary. Since then it had been administered by the Visiting Nurses Association. In 1937, Reilly's sales committee consisted of Mrs. Robert Fenton, Mrs. Arthur Connor, Mrs. Clarrie Stiles and Mrs. A.L.



The *Willimantic News* debuted on Dec. 17, 1937. The weekly newspaper's role was to advance the city's civic interests.

just been re-elected as city a local civics work program, mayor for a second term, and which included work in the in a front page column he promised to carry on his programs of local relief. He aimed street and highway departments. Laramee stated that, "Every conceivable effort will