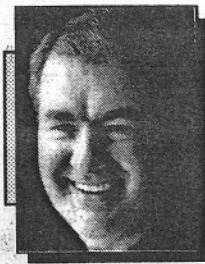


History

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Coming-Home Parade an unforgettable event



Tom
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July 6, 1946, was a big day in Willimantic. The city organized a parade to welcome home its World War II veterans. George H. Millard Jr. was the chairman of the general committee in charge of the celebration. The Windham/Willimantic Coming Home Parade was financed by the town of Windham and the city of Willimantic, each appropriating \$3,000.

The day began at 10 a.m. with a memorial service on the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Field. City Mayor Andrew Carey and Windham First Selectman George Fraser remained on the review stand at the park, as they declared the commencement of the parade. The massive procession of local servicemen and floats headed down Main Street to Recreation Park, accompanied by an overhead flight of World War

II aircraft. Robert Squires, an assistant marshal, led the parade, followed by a group of horseback riders, ranks of servicemen and numerous, colorful and meticulously prepared floats.

Everyone agreed that American Thread Co.'s float was by far the best. It featured a re-creation of American soldiers raising the flag at Iwo Jima. The organizers awarded ATCO a trophy for the best float, and trophies to floats featured by the Franco-American Civic and Social Club, the Princess Yolanda Lodge, Daughters of Italy, and Willimantic Lodge No. 1311, BPO Elks.

Also featured at the head of the parade was a platoon from the Willimantic police department under the leadership of Chief Grant Bombria. This meant that the state police came to the city to organize crowd control and traffic in the absence of the local cops. City and town officials rode in jeeps in the procession, and also featured was current and historic firefighting equipment from city and surrounding fire departments. The rear of the parade included an early automobile, an antique horseless car-



Courtesy of Willimantic Fire Department

Crowds on Main Street watch as an antique firefighting vehicle passes by in Willimantic's 1946 Coming Home Parade. Note the south side of Main Street with the Willimantic Bowling Alley and the Willimantic Grain Co.

riage. A band, the "Spirit of 76," played rousing, patriotic music as the parade headed to Recreation Park. But the greatest applause was received by the Manchester Pipe Band, playing Scottish bagpipes.

When the parade ended, the mothers of local veterans were treated to a sumptuous meal at the Nathan Hale Hotel, and the veterans themselves

feasted from open-air tables at Recreation Park. Once the meal was completed, the Norwich All Stars baseball team played a team of local veterans, defeating them 7-5. There was also a track meet for local schoolchildren, and a demonstration of motorcycle driving.

The celebrations continued into the evening. Police esti-

mated the crowd at Recreation Park that night to be in excess of 15,000. The gates of the park were locked to motor traffic at 8:30 p.m. on the orders of Captain F.R. Laramie.

It was an unforgettable parade and day to welcome back Windham's servicemen from the Pacific and European theaters of war.