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History

Drama arrives at Ted's Taxi Service



Tom
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Part two of two

In the 1920s, Ted Marrotte was appointed city deputy sheriff under Mayor Charles A. Gates, and his taxi was often used to transport prisoners around the town. Drama came to Ted's Taxi Service in 1928. Early in that year, two robbers who escaped the crime scene in fast getaway cars raided several Connecticut and Massachusetts grocery stores.

They locked their victims in the store's iceboxes, and became known as the icebox bandits.

The duo entered Willimantic in April 1928 whilst being chased

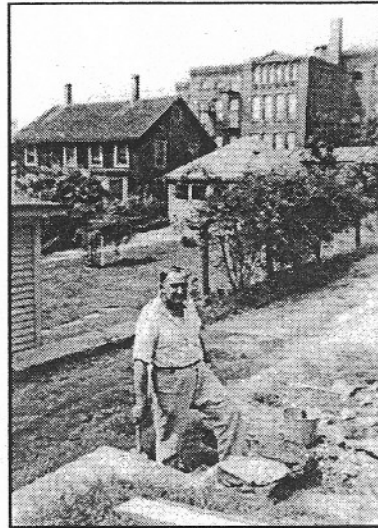
by state troopers on motorcycles. Trooper Irving Nelson chased the bandits from Willimantic to Pomfret, where he was tragically shot to death, becoming the first Connecticut state trooper to lose his life on duty.

After a manhunt lasting five days, the two icebox bandits were apprehended and imprisoned in the Brooklyn jail.

The robbers were put on trial in Willimantic, but the city police department did not possess a police car, so Ted Marrotte was hired to transport the robbers daily from Brooklyn to Willimantic for their court appearances.

The police tired of accompanying Ted on these journeys, and gave him a pair of outdated handcuffs, the keys to the lock-up and a revolver.

Deputy Marrotte assured the bandits that if they moved, he would not hesitate to shoot. Ted continued this task for almost two years.



Ted pictured in the yard of his house at 100 High St. in 1937. The old Willimantic Normal School is in the background.

Columbia's Harold Lester became a key witness in the trial. Seventeen-year-old Harold was helping out at his father's garage

when the two icebox bandits stopped for gas. Harold was alert and he noticed that car's rear window was shattered.

He took the car's number and memorized the faces of the two men.

When the trial was over, one of the robbers was imprisoned, and the other released on bond, and whilst resisting arrest for failure to appear in the Willimantic court, he was shot and killed by a Rhode Island state trooper.

In 1937, Ted was hired as superintendent for the Willimantic Water Works in Mansfield.

He held this job until the outbreak of World War II and went to work for Pratt and Whitney.

After the war Ted worked as a plumber, and in 1954 he was hired by Sturbridge Village and established the tin shop there where he reproduced antique tin utensils, made with antique hand tools.

Whilst at Sturbridge village, Ted was interviewed by the well-known and popular "What's My Line" hostess, Arlene Francis.

Ted left Sturbridge Village in 1959, and spent the last few years of his life in his workshop at North Windham, where he had stored a large collection of antiques with the intention of opening an antique store.

The 1959 city directory refers to Ted as an auctioneer. After a long illness, Willimantic's original jitney owner, Ted A. Marrotte passed away in July, 1965, at age 71.

But his daughter-in-law, Rose and widow Eva gradually removed all the antiques to Columbia, and for 23 years, until 1992, the Marrottes operated Nutmeg Antiques.

Thanks to Rose Marrotte and Richard Curland for their assistance in preparing this article.

For more pictures of Ted and his taxis, log onto threadcity.com