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14 ALBUM, the Chronicle, Saturday, August 4, 2001

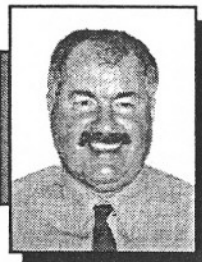
History

When electric cookers came to the city

A Willimantic anniversary was overlooked last year. On June 10, 1940, the Connecticut Light & Power Co. officially opened its Eastern division headquarters at 1270 Main St., Willimantic. To celebrate the occasion, CL&P published an illustrated eight-page brochure, entitled "A New Landmark in Eastern Connecticut."

The company proudly announced that its new "handsome brick and concrete structure" and landscaped grounds would be a genuine civic improvement to Willimantic. The new building was "a model of architectural beauty" on the city's "main thoroughfare." It consisted of offices, a display auditorium, a showroom, a service department, garage and supply warehouses.

The new facility served as a district office for Willimantic and vicinity, and as administrative



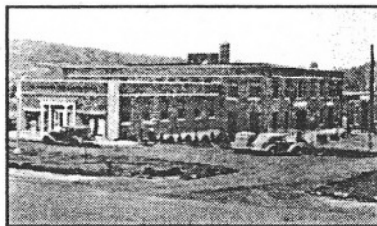
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headquarters for CL&P's Eastern division, which included districts at Danielson and Essex. The new building replaced smaller quarters at 850 Main St., which had once been the home of CL&P's predecessors in the region. The Rockville-Willimantic Lighting Co. provided "light, heat and power services" from its centers at Willimantic, Rockville and Stafford Springs. However, those old Main Street quarters provided no parking and created traffic congestion problems downtown. The new headquar-

ters provided ample parking. Furthermore, the Connecticut Bus Co. operated a schedule past the building.

The new facilities provided more "pleasant surroundings" for its customers, including a sizable customer-service and merchandise-display auditorium that was described as "bigger, better, handsomer and more comfortable." CL&P could now provide "help and enjoyment" to the district's women by providing cooking classes and other demonstrations of the usefulness of electric power.

A photograph of the second-floor auditorium revealed the latest in 1940 kitchen equipment, including fridges and cookers located on a stage in the form of an ultra-modern kitchen, where electric cooking displays could be performed. CL&P now offered "up-to-the-minute advice on problems close to the heart of all



CL&P's new regional headquarters at 1270 Main St., Willimantic, as pictured in spring 1940.

women."

The CL&P brochure includes a picture of the new facility, reproduced here, an interior photograph of the garage, containing the company's fleet of trucks that ensured "swift and efficient service to customers in this area."

A photograph of the showroom features pictures of electric stoves and the "Universal Electric Oven." Also featured is a picture of H.D. Larrabee, the stern-faced manager of CL&P's East-

ern division.

CL&P provided a public inspection and formal opening week from June 10 until June 15, 1940, to which everyone was invited. On Thursday, June 13 at 2:30, special exercises took place to formally open the facility, and it was declared officially open by C.L. Campbell, the president of CL&P, and Pierre Laramée, the mayor of the city of Willimantic.

A selected group of employees acted as guides to the visiting public, and it was estimated that between 2,000 to 3,000 people came to inspect the new premises. Even as late as 1940, most of the homes in Willimantic were supplied with gas for cooking from the gas works that once stood to the west of the railroad station. Willimantic's housewives had now to be convinced that electric cooking was as efficient as gas cooking.