

Sept. 22

## Everyone shopped at Frank's



Tom  
Beardsley

### Part three of three

The area's wealthiest families patronized Frank P. Lombardo's fruit and vegetable store, but it was also a favorite of the city's working class. Frank's son, Michael Lombardo, recalls how generous his father was to those less fortunate.

"The store was located next to an alley. At Christmas time my father would go to the tree farms and purchase hundreds of Christmas trees.

He would have them placed in the alley next to the building. During the night time, the youngsters from the poorer families would raid the valley and get a nice Christmas trees to brighten up their homes for the holiday. Many would tell my father the trees were being stolen but he would just smile and say, 'They need a tree for Christmas.' Of course, he always had his mental calculator operating so he knew how many trees he could afford to have stolen and still make a profit. Christmas Eve was especially tearful when the weary mothers would come with their children and their pennies to purchase whatever trees were left. My father took their pennies but always threw in fruits and holiday candy to go with the trees."

Michael Lombardo, like the majority of long time residents, has fond memories of Willimantic's thriving Main Street during the 1920s and 1930s.

"On a Saturday afternoon it would take two or three hours just

to walk from Church Street to Bank Street. We chatted with the people on the street, and stopped in the shops to pass the time.

No one would think of passing by Hurley's without stopping in to visit with Edmund and Verna Hurley and later the three boys, George Fraser, Earl McSweeney and Arthur Loiselle.

The shops were open Christmas Eve and everyone was downtown doing the last minute shopping and kissing their Willimantic neighbors for a Merry Christmas. It was a perfect beginning for a wonderful holiday season."

Frank Lombardo discontinued the business in the W. T. Grant building in 1939, but continued it briefly at 18 Union St. with his daughter Lorena, who was also employed as a tester at the Electro Motive Co. During World War II, Frank worked as a machine operator at American Thread.

At the very end of the war, Frank tragically lost his son, Frank P. Lombardo Jr., who was killed at Okinawa, age 20.

After the war, Frank Lombardo worked as a machinist at Brand Rex. He died on June 22, 1951, in Windham Hospital, age 67.

The funeral was held at his home, 78 Walnut St., and was followed by a solemn high mass of requiem at St. Joseph Church led by the Rev. Lucien I Siedzik. Frank was buried at St. Joseph Cemetery and the coffin bearers, all members of the B. P. O Elks, Willimantic Lodge No. 1311, were F. N. Normandin, Maynard Sullivan, William H. Nichols, Arnold Bocash, J. Bruno Piccin and Vincent Luciani.

Two of Frank and Mary Lombardo's family still live in Windham. Michael, a retired U.S. Air Force officer and a retired assistant attorney general, lives in Windham Center, and Lorena Lombardo, a retired Brand Rex sales representative lives, in Willimantic.

Many thanks to them for reminding us all what shopping was like before the advent of super and mega-markets.

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