

— HISTORY —

# The armory dedication committee: a few good men

*Part two of two*

Willimantic's National Guard Company was formed in 1874, and drilled and met in a variety of locations on Main Street, Center Street and Valley Street. However, in 1913, Company L moved into a brand new armory built on Pleasant Street.

The dedicatory ceremony was one of the finest social occasions witnessed in Willimantic for many years, and the dedicating committee consisted of some of Willimantic leading citizens. They were led by the city mayor, Danny Dunn, and included company Capt. Elmer Carpenter, Charles Gates, William Arnold, and John F. Carr.

Carpenter was born in Willimantic in 1887. He enlisted in Company L, First Infantry on July 14, 1905, and worked as a supervisor at the Windham Silk Co. He was also a foreman in the Alert Hose Co. Charles Gates was born in Ohio in 1867, and came to Willimantic in 1888 as station agent for the New England Railroad. He was a city councilman, president of the Horseshoe Park Agricultural Association, and a state senator in 1903 and 1907.

William Arnold was born in Willimantic in 1874, the son of Ansel Arnold, a wealthy merchant. He was educated at

Williston Academy and Yale, and was a member of the Hartford law firm of Clark and Arnold. Arnold was also the president of the Willimantic Board of



Tom Beardsley

Trade. John F. Carr, was born Lee, Mass., in 1860, and came to Willimantic in 1891 to conduct a men's clothing business, which was located at 744 Main St. for many years. He was a member of Board of Trade, the Knights of Columbus, and was an incorporator of St. Joseph Hospital.

The new armory was designed by Hartford architects Whiton and McMahon, and consisted of a head house, two floors, a basement, and a drill shed. It had concrete foundations, walls of red brick with white stone trimmings. The second floor had a yellow pine and maple drill floor, and all the company rooms were trimmed with oak. The basement was lined with cypress, and the Captain's private office, measuring 12 by 12 feet was to the right of the main entrance. The company's parlor measured 32 by 28 feet, and the drill shed was 150 feet long and 70 feet wide.

All the first-floor rooms were for officers, and each had its own bathroom. There were also smaller rooms for non-commissioned officers and the quartermaster sergeant. A card and poolroom was located on the second floor, above the main entrance.

The ordinance sergeant lived on the premises in his own apartment. There was also a special room for the veterans of the Spanish War. The basement had two large refrigerator rooms, a mess room, kitchen and a boiler room, a bowling alley and a 100-foot-long rifle range.

In 1913, Connecticut's National Guard consisted of one company of signal corps, two troops of cavalry, one battery of field artillery, four detachments of hospital corps, 14 companies of coast artillery, two regiments of infantry, 12 companies in each. There were also two companies of black infantry, and four divisions of Navy militia who had a modern gunboat. Willimantic's Company L consisted of 60 men and officers.

The officers were usually leading professionals and businessmen, such as Lts. Louis Dondero and Herbert Tiesing. Dondero was born in Willimantic in 1880, and managed a pool and billiard hall in the hotel at the corner of Main and Church.

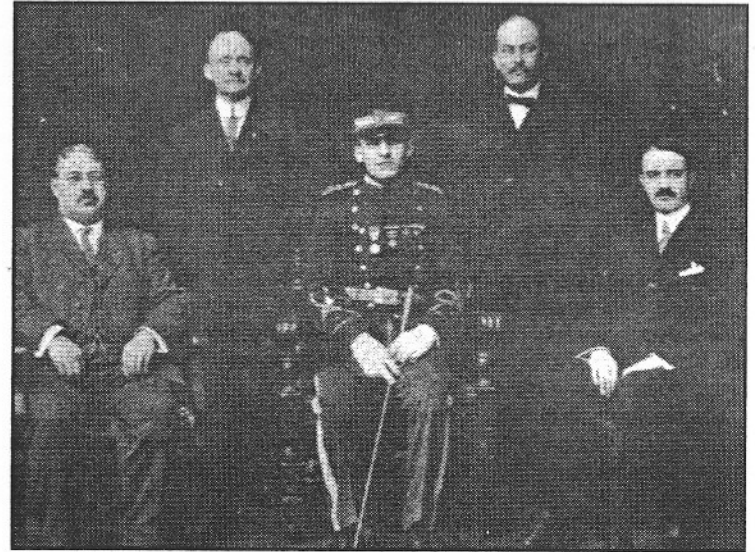
He was a member of the Hilltop Hose Co., a founder and vice commodore of the Nipnet Canoe Club, and had organized the Windham Athletic Club. Dondero was an accomplished basketball player, and also owned and trained racing horses.

Herbert Tiesing was born in New Haven in 1880, and privately educated in Germany and Connecticut.

He then trained as a dentist, and opened a practice in Willimantic

in 1907. He was a member of the Thread City Cyclers and the Nipnet Canoe Club. He joined the local National Guard in May 1912, and was commissioned an officer three weeks later in light of his previous service in other regions.

The excellent example of early 20th century American armory architecture on Pleasant Street is today utilized as an apartment complex.



The Willimantic Armory dedication committee, Jan. 31, 1913. From left: John F. Carr, Danny Dunn, Capt. Elmer Carpenter, Charles Gates and William Arnold.

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