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— HISTORY —

## Myrtle Barden: At 90 years old, a true asset to her community

This article is dedicated to Myrtle Barden and her late husband Walter Barden. It also celebrates her upcoming 90th birthday. Myrtle and Walter enjoyed local history, and I met them both to discuss local events.

Myrtle was born at St. Joseph's Hospital in Willimantic on Sept. 17, 1912, the only daughter of Irwin Emerson Morse, and the granddaughter of Emerson Morse, a builder of many of Willimantic's principal buildings during the 1880s. Myrtle's mother, Julia Maud Lathrop, was a member of an old Hampton family, and Irwin and Julia were married in the Willimantic Episcopal Church, circa 1910. Irwin and Julia had two more children. Roland Lathrop Morse was born in 1913 and Ervin Emerson Morse followed in 1915.

The Morse family lived at 442 North St. in Willimantic. Irwin Morse was embarking upon a promising career as a builder and contractor, and had opened an office at 666 Main St. He had just completed several buildings for the expanding Connecticut Agricultural College at Storrs and

was employing a small workforce of carpenters and builders on several local projects. In July 1916, Myrtle's father was working on a contract in Scotland and

was tragically killed in a motoring accident on Route 14 while returning to Willimantic during a rainstorm. He was 38 years old.

Morse's widow and three children moved in with Sadie Lathrop Norton, Myrtle's aunt and her mother's sister. Aunt Sadie lived with her husband, housepainter Elmer Norton, at 24 Turner St. She was a talented seamstress and dressmaker who made clothes for many of the Hill district's leading families. Myrtle, her mother and two brothers lived in the third story of the Turner Street house, and Aunt Sadie let the second story to schoolteachers from the Natchaug School. Myrtle recalls Gertrude Denehy and Myrtle Hill, who she was named for, and that



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as soon as women teachers were married they had to retire.

Myrtle's mother, Julia, worked as a house cleaner to support her children and a rare family luxury was a 10 cent trolley ride to Norwich, where Myrtle, Roland and Emerson enjoyed candy treats. After the death of her mother in 1926, 14-year-old Myrtle went to live with her aunt, Gladys Lathrop Alford, the wife of Carl Alford who was the proprietor of the Alford Hardware Store on Main Street.

The Alfords lived at 106 Windham St. in a house built in 1896 by Carl's father, Giles Alford (1827-1908), who had established a hardware business in Willimantic shortly after the Civil War. Giles Alford's uncle, Alfred Alford, was a partner in the Hitchcock and Alford Furniture Manufacturing Co. of Riverton. Myrtle's Aunt Gladys had trained as a teacher at the Willimantic Normal School, and taught at the Storrs Agricultural College before marrying Carl Alford.

Myrtle attended the Natchaug School and Windham High School. After graduating in 1930,

she worked as a secretary at the Willimantic Trade School, where she met Charles Hinckley, who was training to be a plumber.

Myrtle recalls that when they were courting she walked all the way from Willimantic to visit Charles at his family's farm in the Goshen Hill section of Lebanon, in a new silk outfit and pumps.

Myrtle worked as a secretary for the Willimantic Chamber of Commerce and Willimantic Building and Loan during the 1930s, and in 1938 she married Charles Hinckley. He worked for more than 26 years for the Wood and Ladd Plumbing Co., which was located on Railroad Street next to Watson's Taxis. The couple lived briefly in Lebanon, and then moved into an apartment on Ivanhill Road in Willimantic, before moving to 106 Windham St. where Myrtle cared for her aging uncle and aunt, Carl and Gladys Alford.

Myrtle's husband Charles died in 1969, and afterwards she worked in Dr. Nathan Spector's office at 59 Church St. until 1977. After the death of her aunt and uncle, Myrtle built a house in

Lebanon. She then married Walter Barden, who sadly died in 1996. Myrtle lead an active life, and we talked about her life on one occasion when she had just returned from an exercise class.

Myrtle has many talents and interests. She sews, knits, paints, travels and cooks, enjoys watching a couple of soap operas daily, visits the Indian casinos, corresponds with numerous friends, and reads a couple of newspapers daily, to keep up to date on what's happening in the world. Happy Birthday Myrtle.



Myrtle and her late husband Charles pictured in their Ivanhill Road apartment in 1940.