

— HISTORY —

Gov. Wilbur Cross returns to his roots for a dedication

In the spring of 1932 Connecticut Gov. Wilbur Lucius Cross paid a brief visit to his native northeastern Connecticut. Cross was born in the Gurleyville section of Mansfield in 1862, and educated at the private Natchaug School in Willimantic between 1876 and 1880. He returned to the city to dedicate the laying of the cornerstone of the new \$500,000 Willimantic Community Memorial Hospital.

Mother Tharsilla of the Sisters of Charity, a nun affiliated with St. Joseph's Church, suggested in 1907 that Willimantic needed a new hospital. Guilford Smith, the millionaire proprietor of the Smith and Winchester Manufacturing Co. in South Windham, launched a call for funds and St. Joseph's Hospital was incorporated shortly afterwards.

St Joseph Church's convent was expanded and refitted, thanks to a \$30,000 donation from the church, and it opened for business in 1909 as St. Joseph's Hospital. The board consisted of Dr. John Weldon as president, Dr. Frank

Guild as vice president, and Dr. Robert C. White as secretary. The hospital was generously funded thanks to the work of the Ladies Auxiliary to St. Joseph's Hospital.

Records revealed that in the last 25 years some 18,306 patients had received treatment at the converted convent, but in 1929 it was decided to expand the hospital.

Space was at a premium on Jackson Street, so later that year the Vanderman family donated a 13-acre tract of land on Mansfield Avenue in memory of William Vanderman (1856-1914) who had founded and operated in Willimantic one of the Northeast's largest plumbing and heating manufacturing businesses. A campaign to build a new hospital on the site got under way in December 1930. Construction began in 1931, and the following spring Gov. Wilbur Cross accept-



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ed the invitation to dedicate the laying of the cornerstone.

The Willimantic Chamber of Commerce closed all businesses for the day, and it was estimated that more than a thousand people attended the ceremony. A troop of Boy Scouts escorted the guests to a small podium built in front of the entrance of the hospital. They consisted of Dr. Seldon Overlock of the Connecticut Medical Society, George Taylor, chairman of the building committee, Dr. Guild, president of the medical staff, and William B. Sweeney, secretary of the board of trustees.

The dedication program for the Willimantic Community Memorial Hospital's cornerstone commenced at 3:30 p.m. on May



Gov. Wilbur Cross addresses the audience during the 1932 dedication of the hospital.

11, 1932. Willimantic Mayor James H. Hurley gave the address of welcome. David Winslow Lovett, the Baptist Church's pas-

tor, gave the invocation, and the benediction was pronounced by Father Henry Quinn of St. Joseph's Church. Charles N. C. Wheeler conducted the BPOE band, and the Willimantic Men's Glee Club sang "America" and other patriotic renderings. Attorney E. Frank Bugbee, president of the hospital's board of trustees, was program chairman.

In his speech, Cross recalled his youth in the area and made references to the fine work carried out by St. Joseph's Hospital over the past quarter of a century. Nevertheless, an expanding city such as Willimantic required a modern, up-to-date hospital — a hospital that has now served the region for 70 years.

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