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10 ALBUM, Chronicle, Saturday, August 30, 2003

— HISTORY —

The Knights of Columbus helped beautify the city

In April 1910, Willimantic's San Jose Council No. 14, Knights of Columbus celebrated its 25th anniversary in its headquarters at the Center Street Armory. The Knights' ladies auxiliary served a banquet, and Harry Tobin, Lawrence Casey and Vincent Sweeney performed Irish melodies on the piano and violin to almost 400 members and guests.

The toastmaster, Grand Knight George Grady, introduced the evening's speakers, commencing with St. Mary's pastor, Father Arthur DeBruycker, the council's chaplain. Grady congratulated Father DeBruycker on his work in building St. Mary's Church and for transforming an unsightly corner of the city. DeBruycker spoke, urging the council's members to continue their fraternal work on

behalf of the city's poor.

Bishop Henry Gabriels followed DeBruycker onto the podium, and recalled that he last came to Willimantic in 1865 to meet

DeBruycker's late cousin, Florimond DeBruycker, who had just been appointed the pastor of St. Joseph's Church. Bishop Gabriels and Florimond DeBruycker were originally from Belgium, and came to the United States together as Catholic missionaries. The bishop was amazed at how much Willimantic had grown since his previous visit 45 years earlier. Mayor Danny Dunn



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was the next speaker, and he thanked the Bishop for his comments, and proudly announced that the Knights of Columbus had helped to make Willimantic into the state's most progressive city.

James Twomey, the San Jose Council's president, was the next speaker, and recalled the local branch's interesting history. It came into existence as a result of a wager between leading Knights from Hartford and New Haven over which group could most quickly institute a new council after one formed at Norwich.

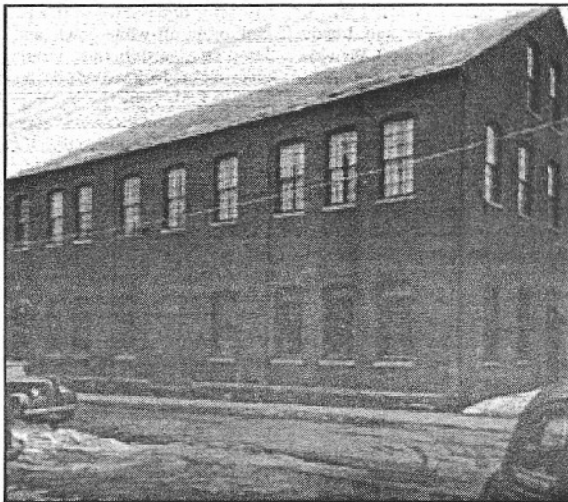
On Feb. 18, 1885, the Knights instituted the White Cross Council No. 13 at Norwich. The next day, Supreme Knight James Mullen and National Secretary Daniel Colwell from New Haven headed to New London with the intention of instituting a branch there, and Michael Scanlon, the editor of the Connecticut Catholic, Andrew Smith and Denis O'Brien from Hartford went on the train in the opposite direction to Willimantic, hoping to institute a branch in the Thread City before their rivals could establish a branch at New London.

On Feb. 22, 1885, Scanlon, Smith and O'Brien met leaders of Willimantic's Irish community in the Young Men's Institute Rooms, located in the Loomer Opera House Block.

James Murray led the Willimantic delegation, and he and 12 colleagues signed an application to form a Knights of Columbus council.

The San Jose Council No. 14 came into existence on March 12, 1885, several months before the establishment of the New London Seaside Council No. 17, so the Hartford delegation won the wager.

The San Jose Council No. 14 was the most active group of Knights in eastern Connecticut,



The Center Street Armory in the 1950s

and became responsible for instituting Ponemah No. 34 of Taftville, Mystic Rose No. 49 of Wauregan, and Rose of Lima No. 52 of Danielson, Cargill Council No. 64 of Putnam, All Hallows No. 270 of Moosup, Campbell Council No. 573 of South Manchester, and Stafford Council No 1395 of Stafford Springs. Moreover, on Feb. 1, 1898, Willimantic was granted the honor of hosting the Knights of Columbus annual convention, and the San Jose Council treated the national delegates to a fine banquet at the Hooker Hotel.

At the end of the evening, a toast was made in memory and recognition of the San Jose Council's past Grand Knights. They included James Murray, Edward Casey, Joseph Cotter, Thomas Ashton, James Lynch, Dennis Broderick, Thomas Kelley, James Twomey, John Donahue, Daniel Long, John Shea, William Costello, Edward Murphy, Eugene Hickey, John Moran, and James Maxwell.