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Aiding the war effort by Willimantic's industries

Part two of four

During the first full year of World War II, Willimantic's industries played a significant role in the national war effort. The American Thread Co. supplied thread for servicemen's boots, uniforms, belts, and packs. ElectroMotive supplied mica capacitors for armed forces communications and Pratt & Whitney began construction of an aircraft plant on West Main Street.

In May 1942, Dean Brossman, personnel supervisor at the new Pratt & Whitney plant, addressed the Willimantic Rotarians at the Nathan Hale Hotel. Although Brossman dealt in generalities because of strict wartime censorship regulations, he did reveal that his company's policy was to bring those Willimantic people who worked in the East Hartford plant, back to work in the Thread City. Furthermore, he added that it was

not Pratt & Whitney's intention to lure workers away from industries already operating in town.

Shortly after Brossman's address, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's production chief, Gen. W. S. Knudsen, paid a lightning-quick visit to Willimantic, and was "most impressed" with the new Pratt & Whitney plant. To house the workers employed there, the Willimantic Housing Authority received funds from the Federal Housing Administration to build 369 family units through conversions and 185 new family units.



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A large number of Willimantic residents worked at Electric Boat in Groton. A special bus transported them to and from the boatyard. It cost \$4 a week in fares, and departed from the YMCA on Main Street at 5:45 a.m., 1:45 p.m. and 9:45 p.m., to facilitate the three shifts.

Nurses working awkward shifts at Windham Community Memorial Hospital in 1942 could stay in the Louis I. Mason Nurses Home at the hospital, which was officially opened on May 12, Florence Nightingale's birthday. Benjamin Styring, the rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, conducted the invocation ceremony and the principal speaker was the hospital's chief of surgery Dr. E. J.

Ottenheimer.

The new building contained rest rooms, laundry rooms, bathrooms, a linen room, a recreation center, a sun deck, a library, offices, smoking room, a kitchenette, 14 single bedrooms and overall accommodation for 27 nurses.

Two days after the home's official opening, the University Choir of the Storrs Congregational Church held its annual concert, and introduced a special guest singer Paul Robeson. More than 1,000 people packed into the church and heard Robeson perform such songs as "Ballad for Americans," and "Old Man River." Several hundred people could not get into the church for this historic performance, so the church set up amplifiers to relay

Robeson's performance.

Back in Willimantic, the Veterans of Foreign Wars Gold Star Post No. 1724 gave the government a World War I 75 mm French cannon and a heavy mobile trench cannon. The post also had a German 89 mm cannon on display, and informed the government that they were prepared to donate that if necessary. Willimantic's VFW also sent a \$50 contribution to headquarters towards the purchase of a squadron of training planes for the army.

The planes were touring America at the time and held the VFW insignia and it was hoped that they would be displayed at the Windsor Locks Airbase so local members could view them.

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