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Local History



The 1931 city report: repairs, arrests

(Part two of three)

The mayor's 1931 Willimantic City Report provides a window through which we can peer at the Thread City at the onset of the Great Dep-



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ression. Last week we saw local concerns regarding milk-borne diseases, the cleanliness of the city's water supply and a librarian's observations on the free time of the unemployed. This week, we will look at the city's streets and the problems encountered by the police force.

In his report to Mayor Walter King, Edwin Sumner, the street superintendent, noted that despite the long hard winter and cuts in his budget, the streets were in excellent condition. Sumner had battled a long, winter of storms which meant that sidewalks were sanded daily and the constant use of chains on automobile and wagon wheels created havoc with the street surfaces, so grooves and holes had to be refilled.

Sumner was aware of the poor state of the city's outlying streets, such as Mountain, Ash, Mansfield, South, Card and upper High street. Accordingly, he had spent more of his budget on patching and oiling these streets.

During the year, Sumner's department had rebuilt Wilson, Windham, Quarry, Ash and Adelbert streets. He cut a foot from Wilson. Street's surface to

bring it level to Main Street and laid sidewalks and gutters on the other streets. In each case, the department resurfaced each thoroughfare with native stone, pulverized by the city's stone crusher.

He also laid this crushed stone on North Street between Bolivia and Ash, as many motor vehicles were now using this route as a short cut. Sumner reckoned his department had made great savings by using the "free" gneiss stone available for surfacing streets instead of purchasing "trap rock" from outside vendors.

Sumner praised his department's work at Whittemore Park (now Alex Caisse Park). He had removed all the brush from the roadside, rebuilt drainage ditches and built a wall around the spring house, to which were applied several coats of paint. However, Sumner saved his greatest praise for the new "tarvia lithic" road his department had laid from the new concrete bridge on Route 6 to Cardinal Square.

Tarvia lithic was crushed stone bound by tar and Sumner hoped to lay it on more city roads in the forthcoming year.

He ended his report with an inventory which included a 12-ton gasoline street roller, two Mack trucks, one a 5-ton 1929 model, the other a 3-ton 1927 model. He could also call upon a 2 ton 1920 Cletrac tractor, a 1928 Caterpillar tractor, two concrete mixers and four snow plows for trucks.

While not as detailed as Sumner's, Police Chief Thomas Grady's report provides an inter-

esting social history of the city three generations ago. The city had appointed Grady as a patrolman back in 1900, now he was the head of a force consisting of Capt. Frank McClean, Lt. Edward Leahy and 19 patrolmen. His men had made almost 500 arrests during the year, the majority being for drunkenness and vagrancy.

His report recorded 47 motor vehicle-related arrests, 25 for theft and 13 for non-support of wives and children. His patrolmen arrested six people for "fornication," two "incorrigible children" and a woman who was in "manifest danger of falling into vice." They also arrested someone for accepting a bribe, an individual for defrauding a gas bill and a person for poaching game. Of all the arrests, 166 were locked up in the city jail, but 129 avoided imprisonment by immediately paying fines. Grady committed three women to the state farm, two women to the Home of the Good Shepherd, two men to the inebriate farm and he sent three boys to a state reformatory.

Grady noted that he had lodged 1,060 "tramps" in the jail, before sending them on their way. His officers had found 103 open doors and secured them and had recovered more than \$4,000 in stolen goods, returned nine lost children to their parents and returned five lost bicycles to their owners. In closing his report, Grady thanked the mayor, judges, the board of aldermen and prosecuting attorneys for their cooperation.

Concluded next week

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