

# Ernest Frederic Low:

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## A significant move to a new location

### Part one of two

One of the most effective ways to record the past is through the oral history of an individual's life. Although subjective, these recorded and transcribed interviews provide us with a unique and valuable view of the past.

What follows is almost an oral history. It is adapted from a eulogy of the late Ernest Frederic Low (1915-2004) prepared by his son, Steve Low.

After World War II, New York City's William Brand, a manufacturer of tubing and insulating materials and wire and cable for the electronics industry, relocated his factory to Willimantic in old silk mills located on North and Valley streets. In the process, he not only rejuvenated the old mill

town's postwar economy, but also enriched its cultural life.

Nevertheless, individuals such as Ernest Low, who left the familiarity of the Big Apple for the virtually unknown

Thread City, underwent a great deal of culture shock before succumbing to northeastern Connecticut's charms. As well as illustrating the tensions and delights of replacing big city for small town life, Low's life also reflects the chapter in Willimantic's history of the decline of the textile town's tradi-



Tom Beardsley

tional industry.

Ernest Frederic Low was born in Manhattan's Upper East Side, the son of Jewish-Hungarian immigrants. He was educated at Yorkville, Queens, and the College of the City of New York. The Depression thwarted any ambitions young Ernest had of becoming a physician and in 1939, he obtained a relatively secure civil service position for the state of New York.

Three years later, Low married Hilda Landø and in 1944 took a job in the private sector, a position that would eventually take the Low family away from their native New York.

Low arrived in Willimantic in 1950 to carry on his post as William Brand's office manager.

He rented a two-bedroom cottage at 323 Jackson St. from Isadore Rosenstein, a braid and ribbon manufacturer had who had previously relocated his company to Willimantic from New York City back in 1935.

Low was involved in Willimantic's civic and religious affairs. He represented the Brand Co. in the Chamber of Commerce and was an officer in the Congregation Sons of Israel Synagogue.

Willimantic was no New York, but Low filled the cultural void in his life by supporting the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra. The closest Broadway style theater to Willimantic was the Bushnell in Hartford and in around 1952, Ernie's son Steve fondly recalls seeing Ezio Pinza and Mary Martin perform in Rodgers and Hammerstein's "South Pacific."

In 1951, Low decided it was time to build a house in his new hometown. Although hiring Archie Sharpe, a well-known architect from Columbia to design the house's exterior, Low set about designing the house's interior layout. He purchased a half-acre lot on a new thoroughfare on the Willimantic-Mansfield border named Pigeon Road.

Although having no experience in construction, the versatile Low became the general contractor for the building project. He hired the subcontractors and purchased the lumber, nails, tiles, bricks, wrought iron railings and kitchen cabinets. The new house at 67 Pigeon Road became the Low family's pride and joy.

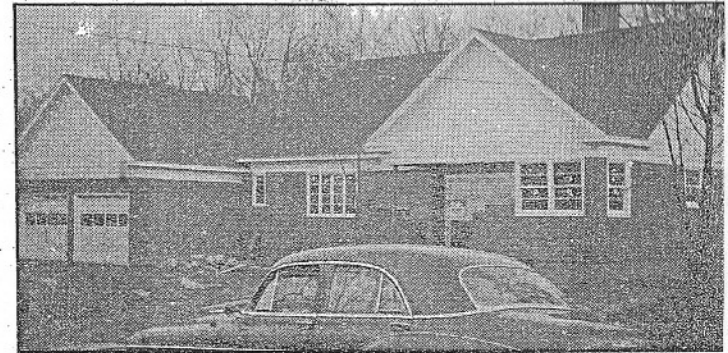
In the early 1950s, Pigeon Road was Willimantic's newest and finest suburb, consisting of "executive homes" built on a slightly larger scale than the widely popular postwar cape and ranch hous-

es.

Most of them contained the newer technologies. For example, the Low family's new house had forced hot air baseboard heat, a modern kitchen, circuit breakers instead of fuses, lots of insulation and Andersen windows.

In 1954, shortly after construction was completed, Low became Brand's advertising manager and for the next 23 years became responsible for the company's promotion and advertising programs. The Low family loved their life in Willimantic. However, the year 1959 signaled important changes ahead for the family.

*Continued next week*



Ernest Low's house at 67 Pigeon Road in 1953.

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