

Pigeon Road's Lows

Second of two parts

New Yorker Ernie Low had arrived in Willimantic in 1950 to take charge of the Brand Co.'s business office. He also later became William Brand's publicist and speechwriter. In 1939, Brand had expanded his Gramercy Park, New York-based production of insulating tubing by opening a branch at Willimantic.

He rented a portion of the Electro-Motive plant located on South Park Street, operated by his friend Phillip Lauter. Brand then began operations in an old silk mill on North and Valley streets and in 1955, he built a new factory in North Windham, near the airport.

Low and his family originally rented on Jackson Street, but in May 1952, having become accustomed to his life in the Thread City, Low paid Mary Pigeon \$1,680 for a plot.

Construction got under way in July 1953 and when Low's new house at 67 Pigeon St. was completed by the following March, it had cost about \$9,000 to build.

It was one of the first houses built on the street. Charlie Ferris, Ray Pigeon and Phillip Fidel had built houses there before Low and Abe Sussman joined them when he built a house next door.

Thanks to Low's detailed record keeping, a unique history of the house's construction survives. For example, we know that Roger Barrett built the stairway, Murland Bradley did the brickwork and chimney, George Depathy installed the plumbing, Abe Sussman provided the oil burner, Ray Swift did the electrical work, Norman Blanchette did the tiling, Paul Myhaver painted the house, Milton Beebe laid the driveway and S.J. Ternullo completed all the exterior stonework.

The Low family lived in the house for the next five years until the William Brand Co. consolidated with the Rex Corp. of Acton, Mass. This period was a difficult and unsettling time for the Low family. As Low's son Steve recalls, "We were all immersed in small-town life and we didn't want to leave Pigeon Road ... saying good-bye to that house was the first time I had seen my father cry."

The Low family moved to Lexington, Mass., in June 1960 and Low worked in the Brand-Rex offices in Concord. The house that Low had built on Pigeon Road was sold to local physician Dr. Reuben Rothblatt for \$33,900. As Low's son recalls, it was a "special place."

The Lows enjoyed their time close to the cultural hub of Boston, but their stay in Massachusetts was relatively brief because in 1965, the Brand-Rex Co. moved its head office back to Willimantic.

On returning, Low considered buying a plot of land in Mansfield. Instead, he purchased a small Cape built by Al Gervais at 6 Obara Drive in Windham.

However, this temporary solution lasted for 29 years. The Lows rejoined the local synagogue and renewed their old friendships with families such as the Reiners,

Schupacks, Buchbinders and Sep-lowitzs.

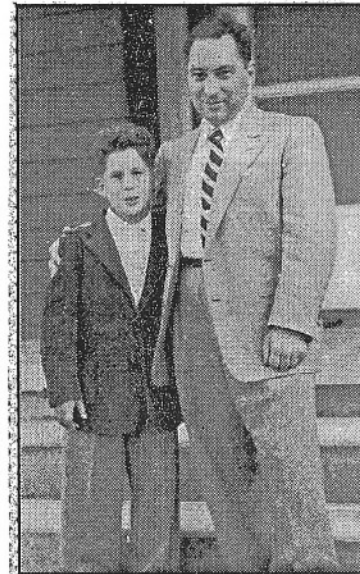
Low retired from his position at Brand-Rex in 1977, at age 62. The company organized a surprise party; 88-year old William Brand spoke.

Low continued at the company in a part-time capacity as a consultant, a position he held until the early 1980s. In 1994, the Lows moved from Willimantic into a condominium in Lincoln, Mass., where their son Steve lived. Mrs. Low died in 1999 and Low passed away in December at 88.

Many thanks to Ernie's son Steve Low, who provided the eulogy he prepared in honor of his late father, and the fascinating history of Pigeon Road's Low house. He also provided an interesting history of the Brand-Rex Co. written by Charlie O'Riordan in 1984.



Tom
Beardsley



Ernest Low and his son, Steve, in September 1955.

Sept. 22, 2005