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On Nov. 9, 1922, Mildred Aspinwall pasted the first item into a diary and scrapbook that recorded the main events in her young life since 1919. The memorabilia included dance



Tom Beardsley

cards, tickets to football and basketball games, napkins from various functions and tickets for Windham High School and Connecticut Agricultural College activities. Aspinwall's unique album provides us with a rare view of life in Willimantic during the early "Roaring Twenties."

Who was Mildred Aspinwall? I hope the articles published this and next week will jog memories, ultimately reveal her identity and help her family retrieve this invaluable family history source.

The 1921 Willimantic City Directory reveals an Aspinwall family in Willimantic. James Aspinwall was a jeweler who lived at 84 Spring St. and James H. Aspinwall was an American Thread Co. overseer who lived at the same address. It may be a fair assumption that one of these two individuals was Mildred's father.

The numerous dance cards pasted into Mildred's album reveal that the young lady had an active social life. The pages of these dance cards, which were actually small booklets, include lists of chaperones, class officers, the dance committee, dinner menus, the names of bands and a list of around 20 dances. Mildred and her friends danced the fox trot, the one step and the waltz to the strains of popular, contemporary music performed by local bands such as Willimantic's Peerless and Majestic orchestras, which played

## Mildred Aspinwall's diary

the new forms of jazz music.

After World War I, ragtime music gave way to newer jazz forms and recorded dance music of the time reveals its speed and rhythms.

The pre-World War I one-step dance survived into the 1920s in a simplified form because it suited this new energetic jazz.

The flexible fox trot introduced in the teens eventually replaced the one step. Its variable combinations of steps made it suitable for slow, moderate or fast dance tempos for young dancers such as Mildred.

By the time Mildred started recording her dance hall experiences, the waltz was decidedly old fashioned and her dance cards reveal fewer and fewer examples.

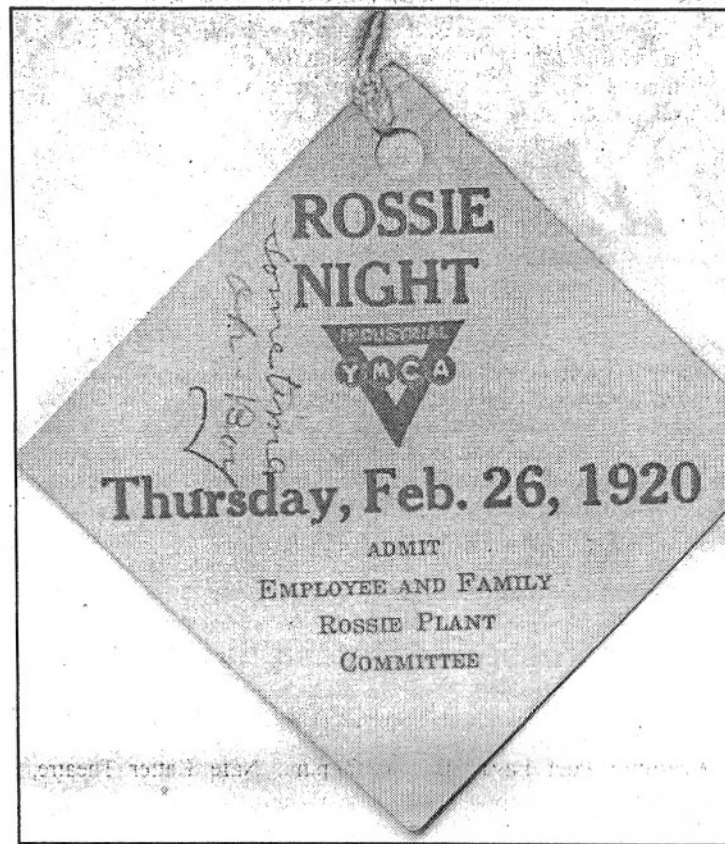
By the early '20s, Mildred's generation had taken up the toddle, shimmy and collegiate fox trot variations, that paved the way for the Charleston and Black Bottom.

Mildred danced all these at the Willimantic YMCA, the Windham High School auditorium, the town hall auditorium and the Hawley Armory at the Connecticut Agricultural College in Storrs.

On Feb. 26, 1920, Mildred took a shorthand class at the YMCA and later attended a dance there organized in the building by the Rossie Velvet Co., which operated out of mills on John Street.

She obviously had a good time, because on the ticket she wrote "Some Time. Oh Boy!"

Soon after the dance at Rossie, an undated piece in the scrapbook mentions Andrew Ottenheimer, a member of Mildred's Jackson Street crowd, who had always



Mildred Aspinwall's ticket to the 'Rossie Night' at the Rossie Velvet Co.

referred to her as "Toots." Ottenheimer was now a saxophonist with a Lynn, Mass., jazz band and Mildred had pasted a photograph of the musical group opposite the diary entry.

Precisely a year after the YMCA dance, on Feb. 26, 1921, Mildred traveled to East Hartford to watch Windham High School play East Hartford High School in basketball.

She wrote that she met Ted Gilbert and many other East Hartford boys there, but only Gilbert interested her.

She wrote to him for a year,

until he left to attend the Williston Seminary in Easthampton, Mass.

Three weeks after the basketball game, on March 14, 1921, Mildred went to the Wood Cafeteria after watching a performance of the Windham High School Minstrels with a group of friends who included Esther Clark, Joe Fitzgerald, Jean Howie and Ralph Gates.

This was Mildred's first experience of eating in a public place after midnight and she thoroughly enjoyed it.

Continued next week

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