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The Spellman Meat Market, Church Street, Willimantic, 1902-1958 (Part Two)

The Spellman and Co. Sanitary Meat Market was located at 27 Church Street from 1902 until 1958. The building in which it was located, the rear section of the 1877 Turner hotel block, still exists. The main section of the building, which fronted Main Street, was destroyed by fire in 1968. The store was vacant from 1959 until 1961, and in the years leading up to the fire Andrejs Bachmuts European Bakery occupied it.

Alonzo Dwight Spellman's successful business enabled him to purchase a fine house at 219 Pleasant Street in 1904, just two years before the area became the entrance to the new Willimantic footbridge. Spellman was a talented roque player, a game similar to croquet, and he became president of the Willimantic Roque Club. He built a fine roque court at his house, which became the scene of many local contests over the years, and enabled Alonzo to polish his skills at the game.



The Spellman family has a fine collection of historic photographs. In the top photo a youthful Alonzo Spellman poses with the North Street meat market wagon outside Youngs Hotel on Main Street in 1895 (The site of the Nathan Hale Hotel). In the bottom picture, the staff of the Spellman Company poses outside the Church Street premises, circa 1920. Left to right, Ed Hurley, Wales Thompson, Albert Spellman, Charles Thompson, Maggie Maxwell, unknown, Alonzo Spellman, Philo Atwood.



Alonzo's son, Albert Erskine Spellman (1886-1966), started work in his father's store in 1905, even though he wanted to become a carpenter. Alonzo's partner, Charles Merrick Thompson, died in 1934, and Albert took his place as the Spellman Company's junior partner. Alonzo died, aged 91, in 1953, and Albert took over the business officially, although he'd been running it since his father's retirement. The Spellman Meat Market closed in 1958 after 52 years of service to the Willimantic public. Small family business was unable to compete with the growing supermarket chains, such as the A & P (Atlantic and Pacific Grocery Stores).

Albert's son, Richard Ferry Spellman, born in 1917, was the third generation to enter the family business, after graduating high school in 1935. Richard recalls that the family had a secret recipe for pork sausage, which was a Willimantic area favorite. It consisted of hand rubbed white sage, salt, pepper and pork meat. Other than to help prepare the sausage meat, it was Richard's job to cut the pork fat to manufacture lard, and to take hams up to the Bridge Street smokehouse, where they were flavored with beech/walnut smoke.

Butcher's blood did not run in Richard's veins, and he left the family business to work for the new Coca Cola bottling plant (Blockbuster Video building), which opened in 1940. His stay there was short, as production of Coca Cola was curtailed because of the wartime shortage of sugar. Richard recalls that Abraham Beller, who then owned Willimantic's Hosmer Mountain Soda Company, turned down the local franchise for Coca Cola, because he did not think it would sell. The younger Spellman went on to work for American Thread, Hamilton Standard (East Hartford), Electro Motive, and Smith Winchester in South Windham, and the Mansfield Training School. He now lives in retirement in Willimantic.