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Thread City Could Well Be Called Soda City (Part Two of Four)

Dennis Shea's Union Street soda bottling works and saloon are pictured in 1894. Note the horse powered delivery wagon.



Willimantic's well known Irish-American entrepreneur, Dennis Shea operated a soda bottling works in a large brick building located at the old junction of Main and Union streets. Shea dealt in ale, wines, lager and mineral waters from the late 19th century until 1905. The building was demolished in 1973. Soda manufacturing continued in Willimantic in the 1920s when the proprietors of the new Nathan Hale Hotel, unable to sell alcohol because of prohibition, formed the Nathan Hale Bottling Company in the newly built hotel in 1927. It boasted of its "high grade mineral sodas" and Nathan Hale brand beverages, but it became a victim of the Depression, and ceased operation in 1931.

In 1884, E. A. Frink began utilizing spring water to manufacture "temperance drinks." in Quinebaug, Connecticut. He moved his bottling plant from Quinebaug to the "Crystal Spring" at Chaplin in the early 1890s. The spring was referred to as "boiling" with "exceptionally pure, crystal-like water bubbling over a rocky ledge." Frink's Crystal Spring Bottling Company boasted "modern facilities" producing many "carbonated beverages" "His preparations are evenly excellent, and his famous speciality, Frink's Root Beer, has attained a widespread reputation. His transactions are at wholesale, supplying retailers throughout a large amount of territory. And though most of his shipments are made by rail, he has two teams in constant attendance on near-by trade" (The Willimantic Journal Souvenir, 1894).

The company had stopped trading by 1900, but it reappears in 1913, producing root and birch beer, hop beers, sodas and spring water, operating from the rear of 443 Jackson street. The proprietor was N. L. Frink, but this operation also ceased trading by 1915. Gertrude Frink was the proprietor of a soda company in North Windham in 1915 and 1916. John Latusek occasionally appears in the city directories as a dealer in soda water, from his 27 Ash street home, and a Timothy Sullivan manufactured root beer from his home at 190 Jackson street.

The "Cold Spring Bottling Company" operated in 1909 from 112 North street. In 1924, the D. J. Shippee Bottling Company of North Windham began operations. Duty Shippee

and his wife Ella operated the Rocky Spring Bottling Works in North Windham, bottling spring water and series of sodas, including ginger beer, root beer, lemon and lime, Howdie and Canadian Club, until 1935. From that year, the Hosmer Mountain Company became the lone soda manufacturer in the city.

Arthur Potvin was born in Willimantic in 1923, but his family moved out to North Windham when he was a teenager. He recalls: "My father and the family moved out to North Windham in 1937 or 1938, and purchased a house on a seven acre lot across from a Mr. Shippee. The house was located on the water side of old route 6, just past where the dike meets the road today. Mr. Shippee was an old man when I was a kid, and I never knew that he'd ran the Rocky Springs Bottling Company from there, because the spring was just a ripple by then." This early exposure to soda water must have made an impression on young Arthur, because he went on to work for many years for Pepsi Cola in Willimantic, and in 1957 he purchased the Hosmer Mountain Bottling Company, and ran it up until his retirement in 1985.

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