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Willimantic a comfortable environment for Costello

Part Two

Most of Walter Costello's long life was spent in Willimantic. He had arrived in the city in the early 1880s with his widowed mother and siblings. The Thread City was a comfortable environment for the Irish-American Costellos, thanks to the city's strong Irish identity.

Irish neighborhoods had been established in Willimantic on Carey Hill, Jackson Place and Jackson Street, and the Irish church, St. Joseph was at the center of the strong Irish-American community. Walter became an active member of the St. Joseph parish, and sang in the church choir for more than 50 years. He was an organizer of the St. Joseph's Boy Scouts troop in 1915, a life member of San Jose Council 14, Knights of Columbus, and a member of the city's famous bicycling club, the Thread City Cyclers. Walter was also a talented singer and performer and participated in numerous minstrel shows in the community, including many held in the famous Loomer



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Opera House on Main Street.

Walter Costello was married twice. He wedded his second wife, Mary Kyle, shortly after she had arrived in Willimantic to work for Arthur I. Bill. Mary began work for the Bills in 1907 as governess to their daughter, Beatrice Bill. She was also of Irish descent and came to Willimantic from Hatfield, Mass., where her father ran a tobacco farm.

Walter and Mary had two sons, John and Walter, and a daughter Alice, who was born in Willimantic in 1914. Walter's daughter Pauline, from his first marriage, made up the family. The Costellos originally lived on Valley Street, and then moved to Chestnut Street

before relocating to New London after the closure of the Turner Silk Mill in 1917.

The Costellos returned to Willimantic in 1920. Walter was hired by the Washburn Silk Co. to oversee their Valley Street and Chapman Street silk mills. The former mill was located in the area occupied today by Willard's Lumber. Abel Starkweather had built a steam driven saw and grist mill on that site shortly after the Civil War. This mill was subsequently expanded into a carriage manufactory operated in turn during the 1880s and 1890s by Messrs. Hatheway and Burnham. After World War I the old carriage shop was leased by the Coventry silk manufacturer H. R. Washburn.

On their return to Willimantic, the Costello family lived at 18 Oak St. When Washburn closed his Willimantic silk mills in the mid 1920s, Costello and a New York-based business partner organized the S. P. S. Silk Co., and leased the Winter Street factory built by the



Walter Costello, the superintendent of the Washburn Silk Mills in Willimantic, stands at the right of the group of mainly female employees. The photograph was taken in 1920 at the company's Valley Street silk mill.

Natchaug Industrial Co., to manufacture silk thread and silk fishing lines. In 1928, Walter Costello undertook journeys to New Hampshire and Vermont in an attempt to win orders. When he was away, his partner cleaned out the safe in the Winter street factory and disappeared. He was last heard of in South America.

Walter Costello was 53 years old with a family to support. The country was embarking upon a serious economic depression, but Costello was determined to pay off the company debts, and began working as a salesman for several local silk companies.

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