

History

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Remembering the old post office

Part Two

In 1932, Lillian McSweeney left the Harris Co. in North Windham and worked in the Willimantic sub post office, located in a corner of the Bay State Drug Store, which was in the Loomer Opera House block on Main and North.

The postal work was all mental arithmetic. The sub office had no adding machine. It closed each day at 5:30 p.m. and the staff had to add up long columns of figures. A carrier came over from the main office at 6 p.m. daily to pick up the receipts, and no one could leave until everything balanced.

Lillian was there during the 1938 hurricane, and recalls that the Bay State store's windows were blown in, but the staff remained at their posts. It was business as usual for the post office staff, despite one of the worse hurricanes in Connecticut history. Lillian recalls that she had to climb over all the debris on Main Street to get home to High Street.

It was at the sub post office that Lillian met her husband, Phillip Tremblay, who worked in the Bay State Drug Store. He was the son of Joe Tremblay, a local butcher who lived at 469 Pleasant St. Joe delivered his meat door-to-door, and Lillian recalls that her father-in-



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law had a smokehouse where local people, and other butchers, came to smoke their meat.

Lillian worked at the post office for eight years as a postal clerk until the Loomer was demolished in 1940 to make way for the new Woolworth store. She took a civil service test, and was transferred to the main post office in 1941. For many years, Lillian was the only woman employed at the Willimantic Post Office, and she had to use the assistant postmaster's bathroom, since there were no facilities for ladies. Inside the postmaster's office was a small door, which gave access to a catwalk high in the building, where federal postal inspectors placed themselves to observe the workers, trying to spot cases of pilfering.

Lillian worked at the main post office as a postal clerk for 20 years, 1941-61, and remembered that there were two postal deliveries daily in those days. There were two public sections in the old post office, one for selling stamps and one for savings and money registering.

People tended to trust the post office over the banks, to look after their money, even though the interest was low. Below Lillian's desk was a gun in a holster — just in case!

Lillian worked at the main post office when James Lee was the Willimantic postmaster. Lee was a friend of Thomas Dodd, the father of Sen. Christopher Dodd, and often came to the post office to visit Lee. She recalls that the Dodds lived in Lebanon, and worshiped at Willimantic's St. Joseph's Church.



Lillian, pictured during her days as the Willimantic post office's only female employee.