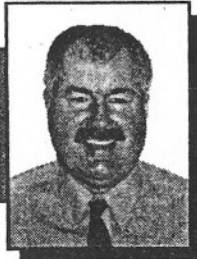


# History

## The Mazzola family: an Italian-American success story



Tom Beardsley

Part three of five

In 1892, Irish-born Daniel Flaherty erected the Thread City Café building at 931-935 Main St. Alphonse Gelinás, a local French Canadian businessman became the building's third owner in 1905. Gelinás was born in St. Guilleme, Quebec, in 1849. He owned a highly regarded livery stable and was the proprietor of a saloon at 953 Main St. In 1907 he established a real estate business in an apartment in his recently acquired building.

Gelinás hired Louis Belanger to operate the saloon in the old Flaherty block. It quickly became a favorite French Canadian watering hole. The Belanger Corporation was established on June 14, 1913, with capital of \$8,000. For more than six years, Gelinás' partner operated a saloon and beer bottling business in the old Irish saloon. Gelinás was president of the corporation, and

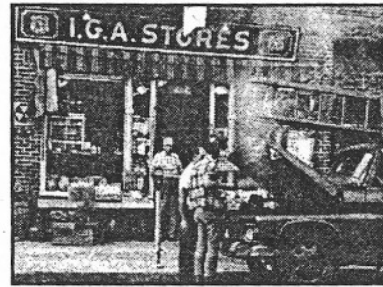
Belanger was secretary-treasurer.

Louis Belanger was born in Baltic on Aug. 11, 1871, and came to Willimantic as a child when his parents found work in the city's cotton mills. On leaving school, Belanger worked at American Thread and in Alphonse Gelinás' livery stable, and in 1907 Gelinás had no hesitation in hiring him to look after his new saloon. Belanger died in 1935. He was described as the "proprietor of a tavern on Main Street," who possessed "a quiet but engaging personality with many friends."

In pre-prohibition, years he operated a café here for a number of years. Previously he had been a dyer by vocation. Belanger was a devout member of St. Mary's parish and a member of the local Elks and Moose lodges.

Alphonse Gelinás entered local politics and became a city alderman, claims officer, and appropriations officer. He was also a member of the city's purchasing committee and highway commission. He died at home in Windham on Nov. 16, 1931, just three days before his 82nd birthday.

He had been one of the city's pioneer French Canadian businessmen, a member of the local



The small figure in the foreground is Michele Mazzola, pictured at the entrance of Mazzola's IGA Market,

St. Jean Baptiste Society, Knights of Columbus and a devout member of St. Mary's Church.

Other businesses in the Gelinás block included a bakery operated

by Mrs. Way, William F Pember's Thread City Laundry and shoemaker Isadore Heller's store.

On Oct. 15, 1919, with prohibition looming, Gelinás sold the building to an Italian immigrant, and it became known to three generations of Willimantic residents as the Mazzola block.

Michele Mazzola, was born at Castelbuono near Palermo in Sicily on July 14, 1884. He immigrated to the United States in 1905. On arrival in Willimantic, Mazzola lived with his brother Gaetano (Tom) at 27 Arnolds Lane.

Gaetano worked for the railroad company. Michele Mazzola first appears in the Willimantic city directory in 1913, working as a railroad laborer. By 1915 Maz-

zola was conducting a confectioners and fruit store at 949 Main St. He entered the old Flaherty building in 1916 when buying a share in the grocery store at 931.

Mazzola purchased the 36-year-old Flaherty/Gelinás Block in 1919. He became a leading Italian-American citizen in town and was a central figure in the Giuseppe Garibaldi Lodge 267, Order of the Sons of Italy in America, whose premises were located on Mansfield Avenue.

Mazzola was a passionate gardener and sold his fruit and vegetables in the store, as well as providing Italian cuisine for the city's growing Italian-American population.

Continued next week

## A fascination with Irish literature

By ROSEMARY MCKITTRICK  
Special to the Chronicle

Irish literature is rooted in a rich oral tradition going all the way back to the 6th century. Writers like Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, James Joyce, John Synge, and Samuel Beckett have become unforgettable names in history. In 1879, Wilde left Ireland for England. Natural wit, a biting sense of humor and a gift for exaggeration made him a welcome party guest, and it wasn't

write, the Irish are great storytellers. In the final analysis, stories about people standing tough in spite of a flawed church, famine, unfair landlords, social prudery, and political oppression.

A fascination with Irish history and culture and politics led to the first major American auction devoted to the Irish at Swann Galleries on Oct. 12.

The Irish sale included an important autograph letter signed by Oscar Wilde to Joseph Jefferson, asking for a box at the

might speak about the paintings of Corot once again. The two-page letter, framed with a portrait of Wilde sold for \$2,990.

A photographic portrait of Oscar Wilde, inscribed and signed, 10 by 8 inches, London, 1890 brought \$6,210.

A simple Oscar Wilde signature on paper, measuring 1¼ by 2½ inches, matted and framed with his portrait realized \$488. Some other highlights:

- Autographed note from George Bernard Shaw, sending

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with Chris Marot

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jacket, one of 100 copies, London, 1936, \$920.  
• Poster, "After work have a