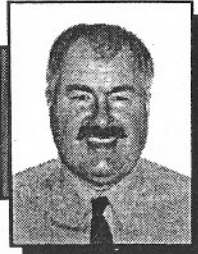


## History

# Ted Marrotte and his jumpin' jitney



Tom  
Beardsley

Theodore (Ted) A. Marrotte was born in Willimantic in February 1894, the son of a Quebec immigrant and Yankee mother. The family originally lived on Valley Street, and then moved to High Street. Ted's father George worked as a baker and mill hand. On leaving school, Ted served an apprenticeship as a plumber. At this time, around 1912, Willimantic was home to the Vanderman Co., one of the most well-known and highly-respected plumbing companies in New England, the creators of many patents for pipe bending and the company that had installed the pipe work for many of Willimantic's Victorian mansions. Although the family is not sure, it is possible that Ted was apprenticed with William Van-

derman.

At age 19, Ted Marrotte married Eva Trudeau, the daughter of Armand Trudeau (1863-1928), a leading grocer in town, who from 1892 until 1897 operated his grocery store in Willimantic's brand new "Flaherty Block," which later became known as the Gelinis, then the Mazzola Block. The building is better known today as the Thread City Café.

In February 1915, on Ted's 21st birthday, his father-in-law loaned him the money to buy an automobile, and thus was born Willimantic's first jitney service. "Jitney" is a term rarely used today, but it is defined as a means of passenger transportation. In Ted's case, the new automobile was the city of Willimantic's first taxi service.

Ted's jitney became a city fixture between 1915 and 1938, in a period where automobile ownership was not widespread. It was a domain of the wealthy until Henry Ford introduced his "tin lizzies." Furthermore, only the bravest automobile drivers would brave the shocking state of Connecticut's roads. Ted Marrotte



Ted and his first taxi on Valley Street, 1915.

provided a speedy and convenient service not matched by the rigid trolley car service in town, and the slower horse transportation. The early automobiles were infamous for breaking down. His original rubber-tired vehicle had to negotiate rutted roads, and unpaved city back streets, which

were little better than tracks. Ted was one of nature's born mechanics, and the taxi was soon fixed. He became widely known for his uncanny ability to fix anything mechanical, and soon became known as "Tinker Ted."

Ted's successful taxi venture, and his ability to fix things,

allowed him to buy a summer home at Coventry Lake, where family and friends often gathered to enjoy boating and swimming. In the winter, Ted and his father-in-law, Armand, would often go ice fishing on Coventry Lake, and at their second favorite spot in Windham, on the Frog Pond.

From 1927, Ted and his family lived at 100 High St. in Willimantic. Much to Ted's chagrin, the family home was purchased by the state in 1949 and demolished for the rebuilding of the Willimantic State Teachers College. The home stood opposite to the entrance to Spring street, and was the headquarters of the "Original Jitney: phone 327-2," where Ted was available "at your service at all hours," for either "long or local trips."

*Continued next week*

Thanks to Rose Marrotte and Richard Curland for their assistance with these articles. For more pictures of Ted and his taxis, log onto [threadcity.com](http://threadcity.com) and go to picture gallery 19.

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