

# History

## The people of ATCO: three new families

Part two of three

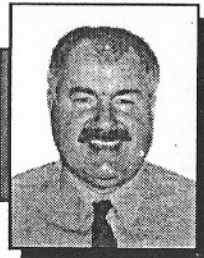
Commencing in February 1955, the American Thread Co. launched an advertising campaign entitled "The People Behind the Products." Over a two-year period, Willimantic's major employer ran an occasional full-page feature in the monthly magazine Connecticut Industry.

It featured individuals and families employed at American Thread's Willimantic mills, under the byline, "Probably the most important factor in the quality of any product is the people who make it."

"This series is designed to let you meet some of the citizens of Willimantic who have been asked to help make the thread and yarn products which are considered among the finest made anywhere in the world."

Almost half a century later, the series provides an interesting social and industrial history of the city.

Last week the Colerado, Augur and Hooper families were featured. This week we take a look at the Turcottes, Oldershaws and Johnsons, who were featured in the ads between October 1955 and March 1956. Jeanette and Oscar Turcotte both worked in American Thread's wool department.



Tom Beardsley

They came to Willimantic in 1952 from the Corridale Mills at Moosup. During World War Two, Jeanette had worked on Moosup at American Woolen while Oscar was in the army. His unit had fought in the North Africa, Italy and Normandy campaigns, and Oscar won a Presidential Citation. Jeannette Turcotte worked as a winder, winding single wool yarn from a spinning bobbin to a paper cone.

Oscar Turcotte was a twister tender who ran a set of twister frames in the wool department. His job was to repair any breaks in the yarn. In their spare time the Turcottes raised chickens, rabbits and pigeons in their farm at Frost School Road at Canterbury. Oscar Turcotte was also a member of the Canterbury Volunteer Fire Department. Photographs included the Turcottes at work and ending their livestock on the farm.

Durward Oldershaw was born in Willimantic in 1906. In 1955 he was working as a carpenter,

millwright and belt-splicer at American Thread, a job he had held since 1934. Oldershaw had trained as a carpenter at the Manchester Technical School, and a photograph in the feature showed him at work on a power saw at ATCO. He lived in the Ridges housing development with his wife Myrtle and 24-year-old son Howard, who was also a carpenter at ATCO.

A family photograph also showed his daughter, Betty May Gordon, who worked in ATCO's printing department office. Myrtle Oldershaw raised African violets and had more than 300 plants under cultivation. Durward's major hobby was breeding thoroughbred cocker spaniels, and he had also raised canaries and had been a 10-year member of the Eagleville Voluntary Fire Department.

The March 1956 issue of Connecticut Industry featured 34-year-old Rogers L. Johnson, a research technician at ATCO. He was born at Newport, R.I., and had gained a master of science degree in mathematics at Brown University. He came to ATCO straight from college and had studied on textile courses at Clemson College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was employed supervising ATCO's "Seam Engineering" program. He recommended the best



Scoutmaster Rogers Johnson, an ATCO research technician, hands out awards to Willimantic Boy Scouts Jack Hardwick, Rudolph Lekerzyk, Frank Lincoln and Alfred Beauregard.

thread and number of stitches needed for various types of seams in clothing submitted by manufacturers.

He also supervised ATCO's testing program to improve current products and develop new ones. In his spare time, Johnson was an assistant scoutmaster of Boy Scout Troop 32, a position he had held since 1943. He was also a keen philatelist, and the director of the Willimantic Junior Chamber of Commerce. Johnson lived with his mother at 33 Pennywood Lane. Photographs in the article

showed him at work at ATCO, awarding merit badges to Boy Scouts, and at home with his mother, Ethel Johnson.

If you're interested in copies of any of the 32 photographs that accompanied the 1955-56 Connecticut Industry series, e-mail me [www.tom@threadcity.com](mailto:www.tom@threadcity.com) or phone 450-1604.

*Continued next week*

Log onto [threadcity.com](http://threadcity.com) to discover more about Windham's rich heritage.

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I was really excited the first He never exploited the female cate pleasure. Beautiful women inspired many of his works and some of the brown-spotted condi-