EDWARD FRANCIS GALLIVAN: IRISH AMERICAN MILL WORKER

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Artifacts like this 50-year pocket watch, awarded by the American Thread Company (1898-1985) in Willimantic, CT, to its employee Edward F. Gallivan (c. 1868-1959), tell stories. The watch tells two stories, actually. The first is that companies like ATCO sometimes presented employees with awards, plaques, and even watches for many years of faithful service or for exemplary attendance. Such awards cost the Company little but were appreciated by the workers, for who does not like to told that they are appreciated — even if a raise in wages might have been a better token?

The second story is the story of the man who received the watch, Edward Francis Gallivan. He was born in 1868 (according to the form he filled out in 1917 for the World War I Military Census), only a few years after the American Civil War — or perhaps in 1869 or 1870, as is recorded in different years in the U.S. Census. He was born in Willimantic, CT and lived his whole life there.

However, Gallivan — like so many people in Willimantic — was of immigrant stock. His parents and all but one of his six brothers and sisters had been born in Ireland, possibly in County Kerry. John and Honora Galivan, Gallivan, or Galvin — like many other immigrants struggling to learn a new language, their last name ended up being spelled several different ways — came to America sometime between 1860 and 1865, during the Civil War. According to the Census, John and Honora's primary language was "Irish" (Gaelic), not English — which means that John would have Americanized his first name from the Irish Sean. With John and Honora came

twins Daniel and John (Sean), Jr.; Mary; Bridget; and Murty. Two younger children, Lizzie and Edward, would be born in America. John, Sr. worked as a laborer. Honora "kept home."

All the children worked. In 1880, Daniel was a tinsmith, and John, Jr., Mary, and Bridget each labored in one of Willimantic's several busy, chuffing cotton mills. Murty, too, was a laborer, like his father, while 15-year-old Lizzie and 10-year-old Edward each worked in one of the Thread City's silk mills. None of them was in school.

All the Gallivan children could read and write English, but going to work at early ages meant they had only grade-school educations. Unlike the 20th century, in the 19th century it was rare for immigrant children to attend high school. Their wages were needed. Not only did their earnings help the family to survive, they also spared Honora, their mother, from paid labor and permitted her to keep the family home.

The Gallivans moved around a lot, living in a series of low-rent, working-class tenements. According to city directories, for a while they lived at No. 9 Hookers Lane. In fact, though, the textile mill city of Willimantic had no street officially named Hookers Lane — but an 1897 map shows an unnamed "right of way" (a narrow alley) running between and connecting the parallel Main and Meadow Streets, not far from Seth Hooker's grand railroad hotel. The map shows only two small wooden residential structures tucked mid-block along the alley. It is likely that the Irish immigrant Gallivan family lived in one of them. Surrounded by taller brick buildings, it was very much the low rent district. Even with several incomes, the Gallivan family was poor.

By 1891, the family had moved out of the back alley and to 49 Winter Street, near the railroad tracks. Edward, now around 20, "boarded" at his parents' home, and had already moved on from the small silk mill to the much larger Willimantic Linen Company, which in 1898 became the American Thread Company, a massive cotton mill.

By 1896, Edward had left his parents' tenement and moved in with his older brother John, Jr., one door down at 53 Winter Street. The move seems to have been necessitated by Edward's recent marriage to Catherine (or Katherine) Murphy, another Irish American. Unsurprisingly, Edward and Catherine were Roman Catholic. (They are buried in Willimantic's St. Joseph's Cemetery.)

The new family grew, but life remained hard. The next year, in 1897, Catherine gave birth to the couple's first child, a daughter named Norene. A second child, a son auspiciously named Freeman, was born in 1900 — but sadly passed away only 14 years later in 1914. Illnesses were common, and many immigrant working-class children never made it to adulthood.

Like other members of the family, Edward continued to work at American Thread, a massive brick-and-stone complex at the other end of town, about a mile east of Winter Street. Over the years, he worked many different jobs, many of them unskilled or semi-skilled: spool turner, janitor, weigher, section hand, guide setter, and watchman. He became a watchman in 1936,

when he was 68, 67, or 66, a job often given to older men. His last year of work was 1944, when he was 76, 75, or 74.

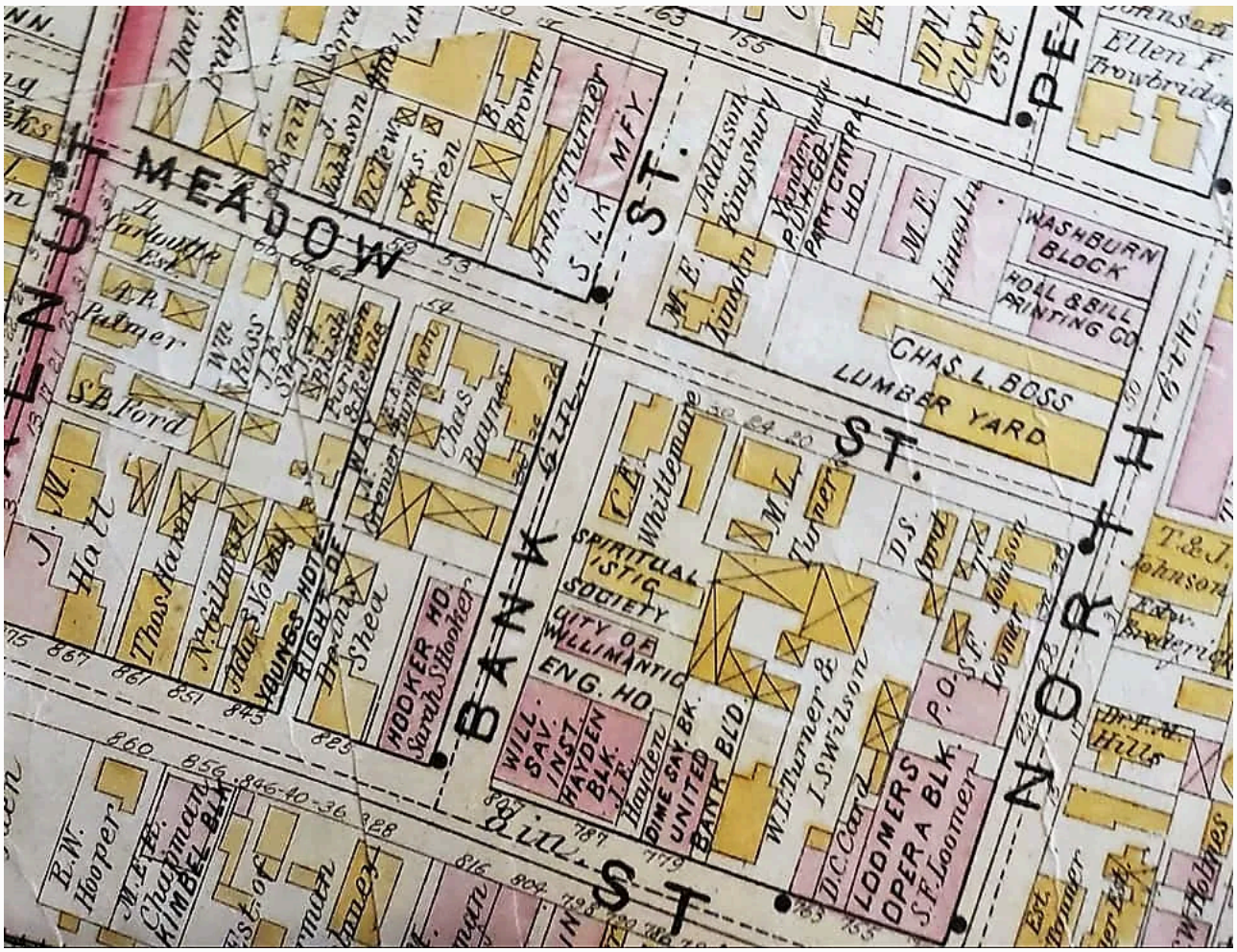
Edward Gallivan lived a long life, full of toil and sorrow. Along the way he and Catherine moved out of his brother's home and into a rental of their own at 20 Meadow Street, not too far from Hookers Lane. The building is long gone, razed during the 1970s for urban renewal and now the site of a parking lot. Most working-class immigrants and children of immigrants died young. Edward and Catherine lost their son Freeman in 1914, and Catherine died in the 1920s, only in her 50s.

But there were successes, too. Around 1920, Norene got married, to Walter R. Young, a shipping clerk at American Thread, and moved into Willimantic's growing middle class. Norene and Walter lived at first with Edward and Catherine, but then moved into a small, single-family, middle-class home at 44 Hayden Street, away from the city center, the mills, and the railroad tracks. After Catherine died, Edward moved in with his daughter and son-in-law. Norene and Walter had no children.

One-by-one, Edward's many brothers and sisters died or moved away, but he kept on. Edward's brother Murty died in 1937 and is buried in St. Joseph's Cemetery. In 1959, Edward died, too, and is also interred at St. Joseph's.

The person who donated the watch to the Mill Museum found it among her late parents' possessions. She hypothesizes that her parents may have known Edward Gallivan or his daughter Norene (who passed away in 2012, still at 44 Hayden Street), who — with nobody else to whom to give it — passed it along to friends. However it got to us, the Museum is glad to have it, for it tells a story, a story of poor Irish immigrants who spoke Gaelic, of their children who left school to toil in the textile mills, of a lifetime of hard work and humble homes, of too-early deaths, of a mill that dominated a city for more than a century, of an heirloom, of years of living in tenements, and of an upwardly mobile daughter who owned her home.


HAMILTON
60
10
20
30
40



Detail from an 1897 street map of Willimantic, CT. The right of way that may have been Hooker's Lane connected Main and Meadow Streets and ran parallel to Bank Street. The Seth Hooker Hotel is the large brick building on the corner of Main and Bank Streets. Yellow-colored building were made of wood; pink structures were brick. Structures with "x's" on the roofs were barns, garages, and other similar buildings. The map seems to show a small house on the right of way, probably #9 Hooker's Lane. 20 Meadow Street is also on the map.



49 Winter Street