

NEW BRITAIN

Fire house played many roles, including strike headquarters

MYSTERY PHOTO

By Arlene C. Palmer
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

Next weekend we will once again celebrate one of our most important national holidays — Memorial Day. Although we should often remind ourselves of the men and women who have fought to keep the country free, it is perhaps on this day, more than any other, that we take the time to remember the war dead.

Last week's photograph serves a dual purpose. On one hand, it was originally a "public service" building, that is, a fire house. Just looking at the photograph, one can see where the bays were located as well as the prominent number four attached to the wrought iron balcony. Today this building serves a much different purpose, as home to a veterans' post.

"The building, which is still standing, is located at the corner of Myrtle and Curtis Street," wrote William Sarra. "It was remodeled and is now the home of The Northwestern T.G.M. Post."

June Norton of Kensington is familiar with the building because of its proximity to her former job.

"When I worked at Stanley Works in the late '40s, early '50s, I would wait at the bus stop at Booth and Myrtle Streets for my bus to go home to Osgood

Heights and would pass the station everyday. In the early '50s, the fire station was not in use anymore and became the home of the Northwestern T.G.M. Post. The T.G.M. Memorial Post was named in honor of Stanley Todzia, Edward Giramonti and Francis Majewski, all residents of the northwestern section of the city, who were killed in the line of duty in World War II."

And speaking of Stanley Works, Rose Wiczorek added, "This photo goes back a good many years when the TGM Post building was a firehouse. It then became a club and afforded much pleasure to all of its members. It has seen many changes in its makeover — a beautiful large hall where countless testimonials were held honoring veterans and public figures.

"It brought back to mind January 1968 when the members of Local Lodge 1433 and 1249 initiated a strike at the Stanley Works which was to last far into the winter and well into spring with a settlement reached on May 5, 1968. The post was only one of our strike headquarters where members would report for picket duty. Food was collected and distributed and hardship cases were helped to those who needed it.

"A huge coffee urn was always ready to warm up people who came in out of the cold. It was the coldest winter in many



Where was this photo taken? If you think you know, send your response to Mystery Photo, One Herald Square, New Britain, CT 06050.

Your recollections may be published and all correct answers will be entered into a drawing for a replica of this page.

years. Once a week on Thursday, checks were distributed in the amount of \$25! This was the amount our Grand Lodge of I.A.M.A.W. had established. The Machinists were always there to help our members through this difficult time. There was much

happiness when a settlement was reached and slowly members returned to their jobs."

Another reader, Raymond J Popielarsz, also remembers passing the old firehouse.

"To the left is Myrtle Street and Stanley Works which I worked at in different capacities: postal packer, hurry clerk and apprentice draftsman. I had to move on because of an increase in my family size."

John Gubbins noted that "years ago the New Britain Fire Department companies 1-2-3-4 were all within a quarter mile of each other; now they are more spread out and therefore have a much better fire coverage for the city of New Britain."

Helen Lizon recalled some of those who were involved in converting the firehouse over to the Memorial Post.

"It was sold to Northwestern T.G.M. after World War II and was renovated to its present building in 1959 which still serves veterans. It was renovated and remodeled by a member, Edward Brusek, who was a building contractor and designed by Mendal Baldasarri."

Ernest Horvath wrote a little about both the building as a firehouse and as a veterans' post. "Now Engine Company #4 is located at 1085 Corbin Ave. The Northwestern club used to be at 384 Broad St. but when Engine Co. #4 moved to Corbin, Northwestern moved into their present location. With the factories in the neighborhood thriving in days gone by, it was a handy place to have a nice meal and to quench your thirst. Getting back to the old firehouses, they were kind of small, especially with the newer equipment — they needed larger quarters, so you can see abandoned fire-

houses throughout the city.

"In the 1940's there were seven firehouses and about 200 fire alarm telegraph boxes scattered in various locations of the city. I have to really admire the Fire Department and their men who fulfill the dangerous jobs, especially the fires at night."

Returning to the subject of the veterans' posts, Horvath added, "There were many, many clubs and societies in the early 1900's because of the various ethnic groups and because people didn't travel much. But with the advent of the auto, trains and airplanes and with the diversity of people, the clubs and societies have disappeared or have been reduced in one way or another. Television in the home has also contributed to the demise of some clubs. Boy! This century certainly has shown some amazing changes in the life style of America. From the horse and buggy to web sites on-line. From cowboy pictures to Star Wars — good or bad? Only the future will tell us."

A little background on the T.G.M. Post is in order. According to the fortieth anniversary pamphlet, issued in 1986, the post received its state charter in 1936. Up until 1941, it was primarily an athletic club. During the war, the post was deactivated, although Raymond Sarra held the charter in custody. The end of the war in 1945 brought forth the idea of converting the club to a veterans' organization and memorializing those who had died fighting for their country. Twenty-five veterans became life members. The name T.G.M. was adopted in 1947 in honor of Private Stanley P. Todzia, Private Edward J. Giramonti and Technical Sergeant Frank L. Majewski who

were members of the 169th Regiment, 43rd Division.

According to the history, serving their country is only a portion of what members achieved. "...many of our members have distinguished themselves in fields of civic endeavors and have contributed so much to the community. Among these leaders have been mayors, state senators, state representatives, college deans and professors, industrial managers, union leaders and entrepreneurs. In addition, the club has also seen several of its members rise to prominence in the fire and police departments, the common council, the veterans commission and the military."

Members of the post continue to help New Britain grow. They have contributed to organizations such as the Hospital for Special Care, the Klingberg Family Center, the Polish Orphanage, and offered scholarships to local students. In short, the members of the T.G.M. Memorial Post maintain the tradition of serving the community and lending a helping hand where needed. As you read this column and view the old firehouse/clubhouse once more, remember we are approaching the Memorial Day weekend. We should doff our hats to those who gave their lives serving their country and to the firemen that we all too often take for granted.

One late letter arrived from Philadelphia, Pa. Luther Willis Jr. wrote, "The Mystery Photo that you have in the Herald is a picture that I am very much familiar with because I am the Negro High School child that is in the picture. My name is Luther Willis, Jr. and my baseball uniform number was 13. This picture was taken of the 1946 High School Baseball team at the corner of Glen Street and Main Street. Today I believe the place is the Texas Lunch.

"The days were very memorable for me and I always had a great love for the city of New Britain, Connecticut. Our family lived on Lowell Street, Church Street and Howard Street while our father, Luther Willis, Sr. and mother, Rosie Belle Willis were living. Our father died in 1975 and our mother died in September 1985. For myself, I am now living with my sister, Ruby M. Willis Mitchell of Philadelphia, and before I came to Philadelphia I was living with my brother in Baltimore, Maryland. At the present time I have been in Philadelphia a little more than four years."

Mr. Willis then went on to name every member of the ball team. That information was published in last week's column. Our thanks to Mr. Willis for taking the time to write all the way from Philly!

This week's winner is William Sarra of New Britain



Last week's Mystery Photo