

## **Blanche's Bowling Alley and the Princess/Palace Theater by Mel Montemerlo**

Everybody who remembers the old Main Street “downtown” area, remembers Blanche's Bowling Alley. It was on the North Side of Grove Street, just up from Main Street. Not everyone knows that Blanche was Blanche (Bianchi) Lavigne, whose relatives owned Bianchi's Restaurant, Sy Bianchi's Newsstand, and Mondo Bianchi's Shoe Store. Far fewer knew what had been on the top floor of the bowling alley. The goal of this article is to tell that story.

Blanche's Bowling Alley was a small affair. It only had four lanes, and it used pin boys because the technology of the bowling alley predated the development of automated pin setters. It was a fun place to spend some time and some energy. Blanche's Bowling Alley was antique, even by the standards of the 1950s and 1960s. Windsor Locks had the “Bradley Bowl” near Bradley Field, which brought the Professional Bowlers Association (PBA) Tour to our town. However, one didn't go to Blanche's for the same experience that one would go to the Bradley Bowl. One could walk to Blanche's, and one didn't need much money.

The only available photos of the bowling alley were ones taken of a person or a family, with the bowling alley in the background. See the photograph of Angie (Ferrari) Baron in front of the bowling alley. You can make out the word “BOWLING” on the sign.



**Angie (Ferrari) Baron,  
in front of bowling alley**

Unfortunately, the bowling alley burned on February 6, 1972. The building had been owned by Blanche Lavigne, but the alley had been shut down since 1960. See the photo of the fire. After the fire, the building remained closed up.



*Blanche's Bowling Alley Burns. Grove St.  
Princess Theater was on top floor.*

The top floor of the building used to be a theater which was originally called the Princess Theater, but was later known as the Palace Theater. My father, Leo Montemerlo, said that he could see two movies there and get a lollipop for seven cents.

The January 5, 1914 issue of the Springfield Republican had an article which read: "The two moving picture houses that have been operated in competition for some time, have been combined. Hereafter the pictures will be shown only in the Princess theater, and the show in the Burnap Opera House will be closed."

The October 20, 1929 issue of the Springfield Republican shed further light on the subject, saying: "The Palace Theater on Grove Street, closed for a few years, has been sold by the owners, (Leo) Viola and (Dominick) Alfano, to Harold Lavigne of Thompsonville, who will open a bowling alley when alterations are made. This building was built about ten years ago by a company of local Italian men who conducted it as a movie house for a few years, but did not make any money on it. Later it was tried a short time by people from out of town, without success. A few years ago, the owners of the Rialto Theater, Viola and Alfano, bought the Palace and closed it, ending competition that was making business unprofitable for both places for a while."

That provides an overview of the history of the building that was an early movie theater and bowling alley in Windsor Locks.

If you would like to read my other articles on Windsor Locks history, you can download them from my website at:  
[windsorlockshistory.com](http://windsorlockshistory.com)