



## Winter Newsletter

Volume 18

February 2006

### Calendar of Events

#### **1936 Flood 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

March 25, 2006 - 2:00 pm

Viewing of historic 1936 Flood video  
National Park Visitor Center, 246 Market Street

✕

#### **Trivia Night**

April 29, 2006 - 7:00 pm

\$10 per person donation

Club Lafayette, 465 Fletcher St., Lowell

*[An inexpensive evening out with the family and friends playing Trivial Pursuit with Lowell Trivia mixed in with the regular questions. Bring a team of 2-10 people or come and be added to an existing team. Proceeds go to preserving the LHS collection and continuing our special programs. Call Tom Langan at 978-452-0897 if you have any questions.]*

✕

#### **Book Signing – Lowell Postcard Book Volume II**

(Date to be Determined),

Spalding House, Pawtucket St., Lowell

✕

#### **Annual Business Meeting & “Apothecaries of Lowell”**

May 7, 2006 - 1:30 – 4:00 pm

The family-owned drug stores of Lowell  
by a panel of local pharmacists

National Park Visitor Center, 246 Market Street

✕

All of our programs are free and open to the public.  
For more information or directions call 978-970-5180

### Sheila Hallissy – New Site Coordinator

In November, Sheila Hallissy assumed the position of Site Coordinator of the Lowell Historical Society. The job is part office manager, part referral service, and part museum curator. She is climbing the learning curve and making great progress.

Sheila was born and raised in Lowell and is a big fan of the city and its people. In 2003, she retired from a rewarding career as a Lowell High School English teacher. She taught a vast array of students who grew to be doctors and realtors, postal workers and politicians, entertainers and investment bankers, and journalists and lawyers. Many have chosen to remain in Lowell to raise their families. They enrich the city and provide her with familiar faces wherever she goes.

In anticipation of a second career after retirement, she attended Middlesex Community College and received an associate's degree in paralegal studies, but soon learned that she didn't want to embark on another serious career. She was delighted to learn of the opening at LHS for the chance to learn new skills and immerse herself in an interesting environment. She has not been disappointed.

Sheila salutes her predecessor, Janine Whitcomb. Janine has been more than gracious in providing training and is endlessly patient in answering questions. Janine knows the collection intimately and is a model of efficiency. Archivist Denise Cailler has been very helpful as well, especially with computer issues. The Officers and Directors of the Society have been most cordial in making her feel welcome.

# ***“Hangin’ Around in Lowell”***

## **New Series: Growing up in the Neighborhoods**

This is the first in a series of articles designed to seek LHS member input about their personal experiences growing up in the various Lowell neighborhoods. I’ll start off with my childhood memories of **Centralville** in the late 1950s and early 1960s. We want to publish your neighborhood memories in the next LHS Newsletter.

My inspiration for this series was a 2005 reunion of people who hung out or worked at the **Dairy Farms** ice cream parlor on Bridge St. during the 50s & 60s (formerly located on land next to the abandoned Shell gas station). My brother Jack and I organized the event but were initially unsure if there would be interest from people who may not have seen each other in more than 40 years. Not to mention, where are these people now? After a few hundred phone calls, emails, reunion notice in the Lowell Sun and a long spreadsheet of names, we picked a date, sent out invitations, booked the East End Club and a DJ to play “oldies”. Our list grew to about 200 names. Incredibly, nearly 150 people attended. Some came from as far away as Florida and Maryland. Our neighborhood reunion was not an original idea in Lowell. We’ve heard of other groups from Brunelle’s Drug store in the Highlands and Sweetland Garden in the Acre getting together to share memories of the old hangout. From the 1960s, I recall groups being referred to as either “hoods” or “society”. It all depended on how you dressed and combed your hair. For boys, pegged pants and greasy hair was the trademark for “hoods”. High water pants, madras shirt and hair parted on the side for “society”. Often, economic background had little to do with the designation. Other groups hung out at the Espresso, Vee’s Restaurant on High St., Shedd Park, the Streamliner, Fr. Maguire’s Park in Pawtucketville and back to our Dairy Farms neighbors, Carr’s Drug Store just down Bridge St. where a laundromat now exists. Did I forget any other hangouts? Yet, “hoods” and “society” met at the Keith, Immaculate, Holy Trinity or St. Joseph’s dances. Each group had their favorite location to dance in the hall. On rare occasions, the boys from rival groups settled disagreements, perhaps over a girl. Once settled, respect for each other was earned and a life of peaceful coexistence followed. The system worked despite the diverse backgrounds.

Getting back to Centralville, “The Farms” was not the wholesome place Monsignor Keenan had in mind for good, Catholic kids from St. Michael’s School. (Tuition was \$3 per year). Many of Pastor’s sermons denounced the evil gathering of those who sipped vanilla cokes, listened to the Everly Brothers on the jukebox, or began a first romance. How terrible. At the reunion, Fr. Keenan’s name often came up in conversation, as you can imagine. Perhaps, he had forgiven “The Farms” reunion kids after they donated \$600 to the new school building addition on Read St? How ironic. He’d be proud to see some of us went on to be doctors, teachers, building contractors, social workers, nurses, high tech managers and a former LHS President to name a few success stories from this questionable lot. Perhaps, the Nun’s heavy-handed discipline was instrumental?

Many Lowell kids lacked financial resources then but that didn’t matter as much as it does today. Life was simpler. Entertainment consisted of a weekend movie at B.F. Keith’s, the Strand or Rialto. You could even catch a double feature for nothing. What a great place to meet girls and it helped to know the ushers. You could spend a whole afternoon at the Rex even if you had no money in your pocket. Lowell High football games were a “must see” and if necessary, we “hopped” the fence to get in due to lack of money. McPherson’s Playground and Gage Field were filled with kids. Imagine playing tackle football, today, without any equipment! We did. Who owned equipment then, anyway? Except for an occasional sprained ankle, there were few injuries. We cheered for the New York Giants before the Patriots came to town. Roller skating at the Hi Hat was popular, especially on Sunday afternoon. We walked everywhere in the City. We even walked back to Centralville after a Keith Dance at 11:00 pm on a Saturday night, stopping at either Santoro’s, the Espresso or Pioneer for a late night snack. What parent of a freshman would allow that today? Remember going Downtown on a Monday or Thursday night in the late 50s? The sidewalks were packed with shoppers. For a young Centralville kid, Downtown was like an amusement park and full of colorful characters like “Depot Annie”. Remember, “Joe” the ragman? Not having cell phones, we “Called” friends from outside of their homes back door entrance. We drank “tonic”, not soda. Who can forget Centralville’s Blue Dot Candy store on Bridge St. and their home made chips? I won a 26” bicycle at Plunkett’s Drug Store by asking for customer votes during their annual giveaway contest. For one of six children, there

was no such thing as an allowance. To earn money, we delivered the Lowell Sun (I dreaded the heavy “Dollar Days” paper). The Sunday edition had to be delivered by 8:00 am and our parents didn’t drive us in a snowstorm. We also shined shoes, picked vegetables on Dracut farms and of course, shoveled sidewalks and driveways in the winter on Christian Hill. Today, homeowners would love an opportunity to negotiate the price of a shoveling job with a kid. “Shoveling” is a lost art with kids. We rode our sleds right down the middle of Third, Fourth and Fifth Streets. How scary that would be today. Don’t tell anyone that we swam in the reservoir on Beacon Street. We hitchhiked to Lakeview or Corbett’s Pond in Windham from Centralville. I even hitchhiked to Cambridge to visit a girlfriend. To us, the parental guideline was, “just be home for supper”. Do 8<sup>th</sup> graders do that today? God forbid! We loved to campout by the stream in the woods near the Ski-tow in Dracut, without parents. In grammar school, we passed out political leaflets for City Council candidates at the 4<sup>th</sup> Street firehouse on Election Day. The sandy beach behind the Coca Cola plant on First St. was lined with boys hoping to catch a large carp in the polluted Merrimack. There was always something different to do and we didn’t need electronic games. Oh yes, did I mention the “Drag Races” on the VFW Highway? Growing up in Lowell was fun. Don’t you agree?

Call me at (978) 452-0897 or email [tlangan@nortel.com](mailto:tlangan@nortel.com) to publish your memories of **“Hangin’ Around in Lowell”**. –Tom Langan

## Lowell Trivia

By Martha Mayo

1. What early uses did the large gray stone condominium building on Thorndike Street have?
2. Lowell's Annie Richmond had an affair with what popular 19th century author?
3. What natural disaster occurred in 1936 that destroyed sections of Pawtucketville and Centralville?
4. In 1848, which well-known Illinois Congressman visited Lowell?

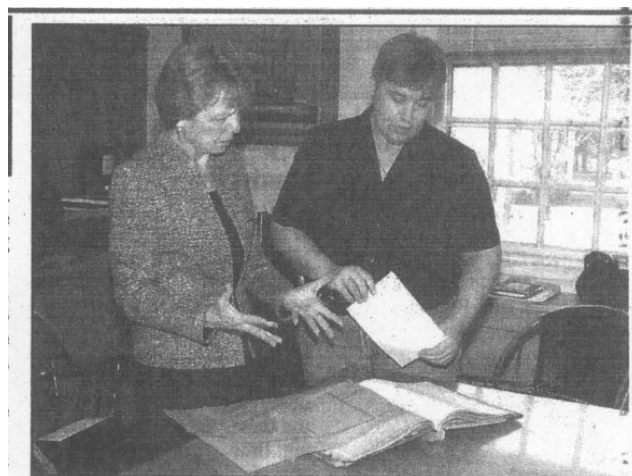
(Answers on Page 4)

## Archivist Column

By Denise C. Cailler

It is important for the Lowell Historical Society to preserve the history of our city, it is equally important to us that surrounding cities and towns do the same. With this in mind, the Society has donated items to the Billerica, Chelmsford, and Wilmington Historical Societies. To the Wilmington Historical Society we donated a property deed book. This book contains the history of many properties (title searches) in Wilmington during the 1920’s. The information contained dates back to the late 1800’s. We have also donated a similar book to the Billerica Historical Society which contains the same information for the town of Billerica in the same time period. We found a unique donation for the town of Chelmsford. In our collection was an American flag that flew at Anzio. It is tattered from the shelling that took place on Anzio beachhead. The flag was brought home by Chelmsford native Lt. Frank E. Hulslander. We thought it befitting that the flag be a part of the Chelmsford Historical Society’s collection.

The Society would like to thank all those who have donated artifacts, photos, papers etc. since our last newsletter. Thanks to their donations, our mission continues: James Baird, Ray Hoag, Eleanor King, Marion Hancock, Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Eno, Donna Fontaine, Linda Coupal, William Bartlett, Helen Dixon, Alice Foley, Dorothy Reed, Mehmed Ali, Keith Arbour, Nancy Hallock, Rev. Amy Alletzhauer, Martha Mayo, Jennifer Carroll-Plante, Jonna Ellis Holston.

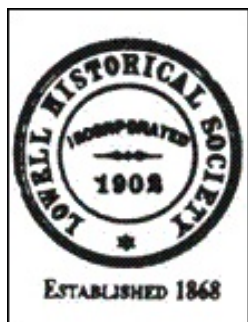


Library Director Tina Stewart and Denise Cailler, of the Lowell Historical Society, explore the book of Wilmington property deeds donated to the Town by the Lowell Historical Society.

(Paul Chinappi photo)

Lowell Historical Society  
P.O. Box 1826  
Lowell, MA 01853

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**The preservation of Lowell history depends heavily on YOUR membership. If you have not yet sent in your membership renewal for 2006, please do so as soon as possible.**

### *Lowell Historical Society*

*The Lowell Historical Society's mission is to collect, preserve and publish materials related to Lowell and to promote the study of the history of the City.*

We are located at the Boot Cotton Mills Museum  
115 John Street, Fourth Floor  
Downtown Lowell Massachusetts 01852

The office is open on Wednesdays and Thursdays,  
from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The telephone number  
is 978 970-5180

On the Web at: <http://ecommunity.uml.edu/lhs>

#### ***Answers to Trivia Questions:***

- 1) First – Middlesex County Jail; Later – Keith Academy boys school,
- 2) Edgar Allen Poe,
- 3) A Flood,
- 4) Abraham Lincoln

### **New Postcard Book Due Out In May**

Lowell, The River City, the second of a series of postcard history books is scheduled for availability in May 2006. The book includes many images of vintage postcards from the LHS collection as well as from collectors around the area. Some of the topics covered this time around will include: churches, parks, monuments, cemeteries, waterways, schools, residences, and neighboring towns. Watch your mail for future announcements for availability and book signing opportunities.

