



Volume 27

## Winter Newsletter

February 2009

### Politics, Prominence, Painting and....Pooches! Will The Real Charles Herbert Allen Please Stand Up?

On March 29 at 2:00PM, join the Lowell Historical Society and UMass Lowell Professors Mary H. Blewett & Lisa Edwards at the Terraces, Allen's historic home, as we explore the life of this multifaceted individual. We'll follow his rise from the son of a Lowell lumber dealer to Republican Party activist, early Indian rights supporter, Teddy Roosevelt replacement at the Navy Dept., first civilian Governor of Puerto Rico, impressionist painter & cellist, NY investment banker and corporate board member to his being a dog fancier and local *Bon Vivant*.



Allen House is located at 57 Rolfe Street on the UMass Lowell South Campus.

*[In January of 2000, Gray Fitzsimons interviewed Helen Boyajian as part of the Oral History Collection, a joint project between the University of Massachusetts Lowell, and the Lowell National Historical Park. This is a small segment of the interview as edited by Cliff Hoyt. The full interview is on the website for the Center for Lowell History, University of Massachusetts (<http://library.uml.edu/clh>). It can be found under "Oral History" then "Eastern National Oral History Projects", and finally "After the Last Generation I."]*

### Growing Up In Lowell VIII Some Early Experiences of Helen Boyajian

My name is Helen. I was born at home in April of 1922, the fourth child of Patrick and Mary Kiernan. Our home was located in the Centralville section of Lowell. In all, my parents would have nine children, all born at home. My father started work in Lowell on the trolleys. My father had a lot of problems and he was a heavy drinker. He didn't hold a job very long. He went from being a conductor to working in the mills. And he went from mill, to mill, to mill, because of the drinking. He did weaving and what else I don't know. I can well imagine that as time went on he took just about anything that he could get. But I do remember that he never kept a job very long.

Mother never, never worked outside the home. She had one child after another. We averaged a year and a half between births until the very youngest of them. My brother and sisters (from oldest to youngest) are Edward Francis, Margaret Veronica, Raymond, Helen [oh I'm sorry, I'm not my own sister am I], Cormick, Kathryn, Mary, Richard and John.

My brother Cormick was born just less than a year and a half after I was born and never lived at home. My father's people had him baptized and he was never brought home. We always thought that he was much better off than we were. Of course there wasn't nine children there, you know, they could take care of him.

My grandmother raised him. I'm sure he was loved. I didn't see much of him until I got a little older and could visit on my own. When we were grown and seeing a lot of Cormick, we just got together and became good friends. But one day we mentioned that he had a better life than we did.

He asked "Why do you say that?"

I told him "Because there were so many of us and you know, you had the roller skates and the bicycles and good clothes."

He said to me, "Helen, you had one another."

So it wasn't so great for him.

When my youngest brother John was born, I was the only one home with mother. I ran next door to the rectory on Sixth Street and Father Heagheney came over with me to my mother. Father Heagheney called a

doctor to come to the house. My mind is fuzzy about what happened for the next hour or so because I, I was sent out of the bedroom. Nurses used to come around to the house after the birth of the child. The first visit I remember was with a basket of things that were needed. Very much like what they do in the hospital now. I imagine small containers of powder and fabric diapers and things of that sort. But I remember being second mother to brother John.

My sister Margaret is three and a half, almost four years older than I am. She was very close to my father's mother, and in her very young years spent a lot of time there with my aunts and uncles. Her stories are all of family, my father's family. I don't have those stories. My stories are of food shopping and taking the wagon to Brockelman's in downtown Lowell to pick up the specials Friday night. Taking my brother John to the nurse on W. Sixth Street. Changing him and looking after him, and being responsible for him. I don't remember doing the same thing for my brother Richard who was a little more than a year older than John, but I can remember doing it for my sister Mary who was six years younger than I. I can remember looking after her. So it meant that I was six and seven years old when I was babysitting her. Well now that I look back at it I feel that I was a caretaker.

I went to St. Michael's school at age five in September 1927 and spent nine years there. I always loved it. I always loved school. I loved books and taking walks with my friend Gertrude Ready up to Christian Hill Reservoir to sit and read.

My family was Irish. St. Michael's was predominantly Irish. In grammar school, for the nine years that I was there, the nuns went through the same procedure. I imagine it's something they had to do.



Circa 1940: Left to right – Mary, Richard, Helen, John, and Kathryn.

They would ask if there was anyone in the class that had a parent or two that was anything other than Irish. I was always embarrassed for them. I never talked about it to any of them, even my friend Gertrude Ready that I spoke of that enjoyed books and our little walks up to the reservoir. Her mother was French and Gertrude had to stand up and say that her mother was French. And there was another girl that always had to stand up, Virginia Bowers. I was embarrassed because they were embarrassed. I think it was because every parish had a catholic school, but throughout the city there were also Polish schools, French schools, and St. Louis. The Diocese probably would have liked it if they went to what they referred to as their own parish, rather than being their parish because they lived there within the confines. But it was mostly Irish.

We didn't know other cultures. You would think that we would because there were so many of us. I guess we didn't wander far from home. We just knew what we were brought up with, what we learned in school and references you know, made with one another. We were Irish and, and that was it.

My oldest brother Edward left home at sixteen while I was still at St. Michael's. Before he left, I remember going after school to work with him at the First National at Seventh and Bridge St. First National was a grocery store, but this was way before self-service. You would come into the store, stand at the counter and give your order, and employees would scurry around and load up the bags. My brother and I bagged potatoes and put the can goods on the shelves. There was a counter to the left as you walked into the store. And you were surrounded by wall shelves with packaged and can goods. At one extreme end of the store, set into the wall, were covered wooden tubs of butter, cheese, and peanut butter. The peanut butter was oily and the oil floated to the top because it was not homogenized. It was ladled into waxed cartons. There was an enormous wooden box that they kept outside the store. And in the very early hours of the morning the baker would come and put the loaves of bread inside that box. And then when the Manager opened the store at 7:00 he would take the bread inside. The milk was left in containers and he would take the milk in also.

I went to Lowell High School starting in 1936 at age fourteen. My first two years in High School were uneventful. I went to school, I went to work housekeeping for Mrs. Quinn and I did my homework in the evening. Then I repeated it the following day. I would go to an occasional movie with my girlfriend Katherine Kane. Once in awhile we went roller skating



in the evening. That was big. I enjoyed that. And I occasionally roller skated with a boy!

Every day at 2:00 after school I went to Mrs. Quinn's. Mrs. Quinn had a heart problem. I thought she was quite elderly, but she wasn't. She perhaps was in her early fifties. But she spent most of her time lying down on a couch. She had three children. Her husband did not live there. They were separated at that time, but he visited. I did all the housework, scrubbed floors, laundry, ironing, the beds, and cleaning. I cooked, baked and made the supper. I ate with them, and I cleaned up dishes. I worked until about 6:30.

I did not talk about doing housework while at High School. I was embarrassed. I was teased about it, but I did it because I wanted the money. I got paid \$2.00 a week and if I went on Saturday I earned another 50 cents. I contributed some of my earnings to the family when needed but I used most of the money on myself. I spent it on clothes. My first purchase was a winter coat. I bought a camel hair, and it was an English camel hair. I remember buying it downtown in McQuade's. It was a very good store. And they had transferred it downstairs where they had the sales, but I did buy it at McQuade's. It was a gorgeous coat. I had it for years and I appreciated it and enjoyed it. I had never had a new coat.

Things changed a bit in my junior year in high school. It was a significant time because I was discovering boys. The pleasantness of dating, going to a movie, and holding hands and walking after the movie and stopping off for an ice cream or a bag of candy, or whatever. In the summer between my junior and senior years, my sister Margaret started to take me with her out to the Lakeview Ballroom to the dance that they had there every Saturday night. It cost ten cents to get in and they had ticket dancing where you had to have a ticket to go onto the dance floor. The boys had to pay five cents a ticket, so we didn't have to worry about that, the boys had to worry about it. They would buy a roll of tickets or however many they wanted. But the band would play three numbers and then stop for a few minutes. And we would go off the floor and a new partner would ask the young ladies, or wave, wave their hand and they would go on. We took the bus on a Saturday night but I don't remember ever buying a ticket. We would go around the neighborhood asking our neighbors if we could have their weekly pass that they had used all week long, and were more or less getting rid of. And we would use that pass for our ride to the lake. Though we could get the bus back home, the last bus back home, we very often had a ride back, because my sister had a number of friends, girlfriends that she went with. They in turn knew boys that had cars, and they would take us home. Lots of times we would go for an ice cream and that was a big treat. And they'd take us home.

I met Bill Boyajian, my future husband, between my junior and senior year of high school, '39. My sister

Margaret introduced him to me. A month or so later my mother told me that Bill had been to the house. He wanted to know if I would go to a party with him. And I said to my mother, "no way! No, that's Margaret's friend!" I looked at him as being older than the boys I was used to going to the movies with. He's seven years older than I am. Margaret convinced me that he was not her boy friend, or you know, a boy that she was going with. She really was going steady with a boy from the Methuen area. So anyway the next time he called I told him yes, I would go out with him. But I didn't see much of him. And through the years up until he went away into the service I didn't see him many times through the year. I probably, if he showed up at Lakeview, I would dance with him. Bill joined the Air Force soon after World War II started. Bill and I had no formal relationship before the war. I wrote to Bill and a half-dozen other boys from the area all during the war.

After Bill went to war, I met Andrew Grogan, an Irish lad. We became engaged at the end of '43, into '44. That was what I was brought up to do. He was from Dracut and at the time was an office worker in Boston area shipyards. He went into the Navy later on.

When Bill came home on leave I realized that I was in love with him. It was a weekend, and I was due to go to a movie with my friend Florence Valkavitch. I was on the bus going up to her house on Westford Street here, when a car pulled along side of the bus. And I heard the words "Choppy, Choppy". It was Bill in a car with a friend of his, calling me by the name that he always referred to me as. Choppy. I don't know why he called me that. He always called me Choppy. Anyway when I stopped at Florence's bus stop and he was waiting there for me. And I couldn't, I couldn't move from the seat. I physically couldn't get out of the seat. And then when I got out I was crying. I was really hysterical. After awhile we went to Florence's house. We talked a bit. Florence and I went off to the movies, but when we got to the theater I was beginning to get physically ill and I threw up a couple of times, and you know, we had to leave and come out. I didn't sleep that night. I wrote to Andy and told him that Bill had come home, and I was surprised to see him and all. But then I wrote to Andy the next night and told him what I was thinking, and what I was feeling. And he wrote back and told me that he was putting in for leave and he knew he wanted to talk to me. And a leave is what he got. He did come home. And in the meantime I had called Bill and we talked. And I think I knew the way he felt. And my mother knew, I think, from the beginning how Bill felt, but I didn't. I think with Andy, I thought that I was in love with him it was because he was Irish, he was good, he was easy to be with. He was a wonderful person. Yeah, but it happened. And I didn't know it was going to happen. I didn't even know when it happened that it happened. Honestly I didn't. Prayed all night that it wasn't happening. Andy came,

he came home for that reason. In the end, I gave back the engagement ring to Andy.

Bill and I were married in April of '46. At that time, a non-Catholic person could not be married in the church and Bill was an Armenian Orthodox. They were Christian before we were Christian, but he couldn't be married in the church. I went to the rectory and spoke to Father Heagheney, who knew me very well. When he opened the door and I told him what was happening. He said, "what is wrong with you? Isn't there a Catholic



Bill and Helen three months after the wedding.

boy in this parish that you could be interested in?" And with that he closed the door. Really! He closed the door.

Shortly after that, Bill and I were walking along Bridge Street downtown going to the Keith Theater. We met Fr. Chadbourne, a Curate at St. Michael's. He was relatively new to the parish. I knew he was a convert, and he stopped because he recognized me. We talked about what was going on. And I mentioned my visit to the rectory. He set up an appointment for us. He was very charming to Bill, and very pleasant and understanding. But there was no problem after that except that we had to go by the rules.

Bill did attend the classes and we had to be married in the rectory.

Bill's mother took all of this very hard. She was insisting that I be married in the Armenian Church. But I couldn't, to me it was a mortal sin, it was just something I couldn't do. I had to say no. And then to be married in the rectory and not in church, that, that was another blow to Mrs. Bjoyajian. She took it very very hard. Being married in the rectory is very much like going to the Justice of the Peace. We just went into his office and over the desk, you know, we were, we were married. Only my mother attended the wedding. My sisters were very angry with me for marrying outside the Catholic Church and would not come to the ceremony. My mother never said anything about marrying somebody outside the faith. Of course I know she liked Bill. My mother always liked him.

As young newlyweds, we moved in with Bill's mother. She resented me terribly. It was not easy. Eventually we were able to rent a small place in Lowell

and we moved on from there. I worked much of our married life even though Bill would have preferred that I stay at home being a full time housewife and mother. I liked working and being a mother and had the energy for both of them.

## Notes from the Publication Committee

by Pauline M. Golec, Chair

It's time again to present some material from the Old Residents' Historical Association's published papers. (As you may recall, this association, started in 1868, was reorganized and incorporated in 1902 as our own Lowell Historical Society.)

What can we learn from *Contributions of the Old Residents' Historical Association*, Volume I, published in June 1878? An article entitled, "Navigation on the Merrimack River," tells us that, in the 1800s, there were 21 steamboats on the river sailing from Lowell, Lawrence, and Haverhill. The article also states that, "To be sure, it's a matter of no great importance whether the steamboat "Herald" or any other ran on the Merrimack River as early as 1834, or what became of the proprietors; but in years to come it may be a matter of interest, or curiosity at least, to some, to know that when Lowell was in its infancy and Nashua was a little village-before railroads were used- a fine little steamer made regular trips between these places."

Flash forward to those referenced years to come. In the Society's recently published postcard book, *Lowell: the River City*, we are treated to more information about the Herald (captioned under an attractive colored image of the steamboat, "The City of Lowell," a passenger steamer named after our fair city). Indeed a new steamboat in 1834, the "Herald" did carry passengers on the Merrimack between Lowell and Nashua. Later enlarged, she was used as a summer excursion boat until she sank in 1838. The "Herald" was raised for one last trip down the Merrimack before becoming a ferry boat on the Hudson River.

On a related note, on the opposite page in *Lowell: the River City*, the reader is treated to a postcard image featuring the "Willowdale," a little lake steamboat which carried passengers across Lake Mascuppic in Tyngsboro and Dracut.

Want to know more about the "Herald" or much more about Lowell in its earlier days? Visit the UMass Center for Lowell History located in the Mogan Cultural Center where you can read for yourself copies of the *Contributions of the Old Residents' Historical Association*.

Of course, you might like to own a copy of *Lowell: the River City*, a book rich in postcard images (circa 1890s -1940s) informatively captioned. Visit the Society's website for more information about this and other publications. Remember, Society members are entitled to a 10% discount.

## Lowell Historical Society Seeking Increased Participation

The Lowell Historical Society is seeking to establish a list of members interested in serving on the Board and/or on Board sub-committees. If interested please send a brief resume highlighting your particular interests and experience to: LHS PO Box 1826 Lowell, MA 01853 Attention: Marie Sweeney. The Board of the Historical Society includes:

Denise Cailler, Pres.  
Cliff Hoyt, Vice Pres.  
Lewis T. Karabatsos, Tres.  
Marie P. Sweeney, Clerk  
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Jack Perry  
Stephanie Donahue  
Gray Fitzsimons  
Pauline Golec  
Tom Langan  
John Goodwin  
Matthew Sepe

## EBAY Auctions of Lowell Interest

### 1876 United States Cartridge Co. Trade Card --

This United States Cartridge Company trade card was published in 1876 to celebrate the centennial of "The Declaration of Independence" is both early and rare. It measures 6 ¼ x 3 ½ inches. The image on the left is Liberty dressed as an Indian maiden. The text is a combination of German in the middle with the rest of the text is in English. The back of the card has an image of the Company's Trade Mark inside a circle of cartridges with a rifle on both the left and right. The card is in excellent condition. Cost \$174 plus \$2. Shipping.



## LHS Corporate Memberships

The Lowell Historical Society proudly acknowledge our 2009 Corporate members who demonstrated their organizations's commitment to the preservation of Lowell's past and the dissemination of information to keep Lowell's heritage alive in the future. The following organizations have made this commitment:

Anstiss & Co. PC  
CarStar Atlantic Collision Center  
Dr. Evan Coravos, DMD, PC  
D'Youville Senior Care  
Enterprise Bank  
Lowell General Hospital  
Mazur Park Apartments  
Watermark Environmental, Inc.  
Wyman's Exchange, Inc.

We would like to add the listing of your company here in the future.

### 2008 Corporate Membership

Enclosed is a \$100 tax deductible gift for a Lowell Historical Society Corporate Membership.

Name of Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate Number of Employees: \_\_\_\_\_

Send to Lowell Historical Society, PO Box 1826, Lowell, MA 01853

## Lowell Trivia

By Martha Mayo

1. What was the Rex?
2. Who was the only King to visit Lowell?
3. What popular beverage was invented by Dr. Augustine Thompson?
4. What is the oldest incorporated company in the U.S.?

Answers are on the Page 6.



The preservation of Lowell history depends heavily on your membership. If you have not yet sent in your membership renewal for 2009, please do so as soon as possible.

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### **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 Boott Cotton Mills Museum, 115 John Street, Fourth Floor, Downtown Lowell Massachusetts 01852.

The office is open 9:00 am to 12:00 Noon on Monday and Wednesday. The site telephone number is 978- 970-5180 or on the Web at:

<http://ecommunity.uml.edu/lhs>.

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### **Center for Lowell History Hours Reduced**

Due the fiscal cut backs at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, hours for the Center for Lowell History, 40 French Street will be significantly reduced. Effective February 9, 2009, the Center for Lowell History will only be open on Tuesdays from 9 am to 9 pm and by appointment. To arrange an appointment outside of these scheduled hours, please contact:

Martha Mayo, 978-934-4998 or

Patricia Noreau, Director of Libraries, 978-934-4556.

### **Calendar of Events**

**Program:** **Will The Real Charles Herbert Allen Please Stand Up?** Join the Lowell Historical Society and UMass Lowell Professors Mary H. Blewett & Lisa Edwards at the Terraces, Allen's historic home, as we explore the life of this multifaceted individual.

**Date:** Sunday March 29 at 2:00PM

**Location:** Allen House, located at 57 Rolfe Street on the UMass Lowell South Campus.

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

1) Entertainment Center, 2) King Kalakua of Hawaii, 3) Moxie, 4) Proprietors of Locks and Canals on Merrimack River – June 27, 1792.