



Volume 31

## Spring Newsletter

April 2010

### In Memoriam Denise Cailler 1959-2010

Since the last newsletter, Lowell and specifically the Lowell Historical Society lost a treasured friend and valuable resource. Denise Cailler died at the age of 51 of lung cancer. Denise served on the Society's Board for seven years, spending two of those years as Vice President and almost three years as President.

During many of her years with the Society she also served as the Archivist. The Archivist manages the artifacts that constitute the collections of the Lowell Historical Society. Her work as Archivist positioned her as the heart, soul, and memory of the organization. Each item from the simplest bobbin to the voluminous *Lowell Sun* photograph collection, needed to be documented and accessible. The *Sun* Photograph Collection was perhaps Denise's largest undertaking. When Mehmed Ali learned that the *Sun* Newspaper planned to eliminate their photographic negatives and prints dating from the 1950s to 1980s, Ali and Denise worked tirelessly to convince the *Sun* management to donate the images to the Society. Of course the donation was only the first tiny step.

Denise, Ali, and other Society Board members spent many hours in the the *Sun* building winnowing the *Sun* photo archive, keeping only photographs of significance to Lowell & surrounding towns. Then packing the photos into boxes and moving the boxes to LHS facilities. Next Denise spearheaded the cataloging of the photographs and negatives. She designed a catalog structure for the *Sun* collection. Then she and other board members began filing each photograph according to the catalog structure so that photographs could be found if needed. It is estimated that the complete collection will fill the better part of five large four-drawer filing cabinets. This task is currently far from completion. Denise contributed untold hours to this endeavor and it is only one of many tasks she was involved in for the Society.

We have much to thank Denise for but alas it is too late. In our own lives, before it is too late, we should remember to help those who need it and thank those who deserve it. Denise will be greatly missed, both for her contributions and her friendship.



### Honor Received by Lowell Historical Society Past President

Pauline Golec, past president and current board member, recently received a "Because of Her" Award, presented at the breakfast which begins Lowell Women's Week. She was recognized for her volunteer work, particularly in her role as Ethnic Chair for the Lowell Folk Festival.

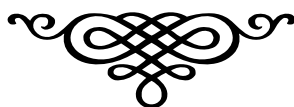


## ☞ Come See A Presentation Called ☞

### ☞ New Discoveries in Lowell ☞

☞ by Corey Sciuto ☞

The Lowell Historical Society is having its Spring meeting and public program on Saturday, May 15. The annual Society meeting will start at 2:00 and the program will start around 2:30 and feature Corey Sciuto. The Lowell Sun called Corey Sciuto "The unofficial Ambassador of Lowell." Corey is a young Lowell-based blogger and software engineer who has photographed and written about Lowell, past and present, over the last several years. Corey will discuss his interests in and approaches to documenting Lowell's historic places, influences on his work, and how he uses the Web to showcase the city's historical and cultural landscapes.



## Growing Up In Lowell XII

### Margaret Finn – Irish Life In Lowell

[In March 1986, Paul Page interviewed Margaret Finn as part of the Oral History Collection created as a joint project between the University of Massachusetts Lowell, and the Lowell National Historical Park. The following article represents a small segment of the information on Margaret Finn as edited by Cliff Hoyt. The full text 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 "Working People of Lowell."]



Margaret Finn Circa 1985

My name is Margaret Finn and I grew up in the Acre. My father was born in Brooklyn, NY and his family came to Lowell and lived in the Acre. My mother's parents were Irish but lived in England as farmers. My mother was born in England and came to Lowell when she was 18 or 19 years old. She was sponsored by my aunt, my grandmother's sister. You had to have a sponsor at that time. They couldn't get off the, the ship in Boston from

a foreign country without having a job and a place to live. My mother came to live in the Acre and met my father at a dance. They married in 1899 and I was born on Adams Street in April of 1900. After Adams Street we moved to Suffolk Street. I am the oldest of fifteen children. My youngest brother, Frank, is 25 years younger than me. In fact, my mother and I each had three babies around the same times. So my mother took care of me and I took care of my mother when we had babies.

I was christened at St. Patrick's, I went to St. Patrick's School and was married there. And my children were all brought up there and christened there. Our house on Suffolk Street had only one other house between us and St. Patrick's Church. When I was five or six years old, St. Patrick's Church had a terrible, terrible fire. I remember my mother bringing in the vestments from the church, to save them from the fire, and all the firemen running in and out getting coffee from my mother.

My father worked in the Saco Lowell Machine Shop on Dutton Street earning seven dollars a week. He went from there to the Locks and Canals because they paid ten dollars a week. Then he went to the City of Lowell and worked in the Water Department where he got twelve or fourteen dollars a week. He worked at the Water Department for years before he died. My mother also worked! My mother worked in the mills. She worked in the Appleton Mill, and she worked in a mill way out on the end of Broadway, Pawtucket Street. I can't think of the name of the place. But she worked in the mill there. She didn't work all the time, but when she had time in between having children and when I was old enough to mind the kiddos. She went to work to help my father out. They didn't make much money but, things were different. Things weren't as expensive as they are now, we all got by. When she wasn't at work she was always at home, she was there for us. Many times she got up early to put my father out to work, and get a big breakfast for the kiddos. You wouldn't go out without your breakfast. You had to sit down and have the meal. She also baked, my mother baked her own bread, seven loaves of bread a day she used to bake and made her own pies. My father would never even listen to the word bakery for baker's bread. He had to have his home bakery.

The Acre in Lowell when I was growing up was like a little city in itself. They had stores, they had markets, they had ah bakeries. They had everything in it. And work for people; there was plenty of work. Maybe they didn't pay much money. But it was work and everybody worked and went to work. And went to lunch. At twelve o'clock noon the people would come out to go home for their lunch and at one o'clock everybody was back in the streets going back to their work. There were so many people you'd think it was a circus coming through.



People seemed to get along. When the Syrian people and the Greek people moved into the Acre, they settled in Suffolk and Adams Street, and down through Marion Street, and up through Salem Street. But, we got along very well. There, there was no big fights, or you can't live there, or you can't live here, or I can't live there. Everybody was good to one another. Everybody helped one another out. If my neighbor was sick, and had little children, I'd go and help take care of those children, until you got well.

I met my future husband, Martin, at school. We were school companions and lived only a couple of blocks away from each other. He was one of nine children. His mother had seven boys and two girls. After high school, he worked days and went to vocational school at night to learn to be a carpenter. For entertainment we'd play cards or listen to the record player, you know, one with the big horn speaker that you'd wind up. After I married, we got a radio. There was a man in our neighborhood that put radios together. So then he sold them to us. So we all had radios. And then we went from that to the TVs. We were one of the first to have a TV. Everybody would come when there was a boxing match. We'd put the TV out on my porch and we would all sit there and watch the TV.



Margaret Finn Circa 1930

During Prohibition there were plenty of speakeasies and beer kitchens in the Acre. And everybody was making home brew. One time my husband came home and wanted to make home brew. We tried it once. We made it that time for our own use, but that was the end of it because the odor was so bad that you could smell your house a mile away. You started with a big copper kettle.

You then put some Hopson Malt and hops in a pillow case and you boiled it. The smell of your house would knock you out. Then you filled a wooden butter tub with the liquid along with yeast cakes, sugar and stuff, and you let that rise. Every day you skimmed it off the top every day until it got clear. And then you bottled it. As I said, I made it once and the house smelled so bad. That was the end of home brew, for me making it in my house. My husband drank that one batch. It was the only fault my husband had, that he drank. He was a beautiful carpenter and cabinet maker, but he took a drink and that was it. Thanks to God, I got two sons that never touched a drink in their life yet.

During World War II, my mother had a nephew (her niece's husband) that was stationed on a ship in Boston. He used to come to Lowell every weekend and spend the

weekend with my mother. He used to buy things to take back home to his wife and kids. He would buy a slip or silk stockings for his wife that they couldn't get in England. He would wash them then put it in his trunk to take home. That way he wouldn't have to pay the big duty on everything he brought home from here. He bought a fur coat here one time for his wife from a store on Merrimack Street that used to sell these fur coats cheap. He took the buttons off it, and sent it back, you know. Again not to have to pay the duty.

I went to Ireland. I went with the Sacred Heart Church Band. The band went over there to March in the St. Patrick's Day Parade. Ellen Sampson was with us, she was Mayor of Lowell at the time. Coming in at Shannon Airport is the most beautiful sight you ever saw in your life. There's so many different shades of green in the grass. I'd love to go back, because I went to Shannon and Galway. I didn't get to Dublin. I would have like to have gone to Dublin. I have wished that I could get back to see Dublin, but I guess I won't get back. My family won't let me travel that far no more. They say, "Ma. no, too late now." If I can't travel there is still plenty to keep me occupied. I have my knitting and of course the kiddos. I currently [1986, editor] have six children, twenty-five grandchildren, and twenty-four great grandchildren, that's enough to keep me busy.

## Unheralded Building Linked to a "Swedish Pioneer" in Lowell

By Gray Fitzsimons

Although Lowell is well-known for the many historic buildings in its downtown, there are many other 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century stores in the city's smaller, neighborhood-oriented commercial centers that have received only passing attention. Rarely do we stop and consider the people who were connected to these architecturally unpretentious buildings. Yet, over time, generations of families shopped in these places or toiled long hours behind the counters while serving customers from all walks of life. Few of these business owners became rich or famous, and memories of their lives have largely faded with the years. However, if one probes into the past and explores the women, men, and children who were associated with these seemingly inconsequential commercial buildings, a richer and more complete picture of Lowell's social and cultural history emerges. One example of this "power of place" may be found at 557 Central Street, now an insurance agent's office, in Lowell's Back Central Neighborhood.

The man responsible for this small building was Anders Thomasson, a Swedish immigrant and pharmacist who settled in Lowell in the summer of 1872. At this time, the Spindle City was a prosperous textile center undergoing significant demographic and ethnic transformation with the influx of hundreds of

French Canadian families and renewed immigration from Ireland and the British Isles. Less pronounced was the arrival of Swedish émigrés, many of whom settled in the growing Back Central neighborhood and the area that would become known as “Swede Village” near the city’s fairgrounds. Undoubtedly Anders Thomasson chose Lowell because his fiancé, Adelaide Pihl, had relatives who settled in Back Central not long before Thomasson sailed from his native land. These Pihl family members were from Malmö, Sweden. Thomasson was born in Malmö in 1844. After serving as an apprentice to a druggist, Thomasson graduated, at age 24, from a pharmacy school. Evidently seeking greater opportunity Thomasson departed Malmö, journeying to America, accompanied by his fiancé.

Upon settling in Lowell, Thomasson spoke virtually no English, but quickly found a job in Stott’s Mill, a small, family-owned woolen mill along the Concord River on Lawrence Street, where he worked about two years. His English improved while working in the mill and in 1874, with a small amount of capital, he opened an apothecary on the corner of Central and North streets. At that time the city had over twenty other drugstores, but Thomasson was the city’s lone Swedish pharmacist. Initially, he was assisted in the business by F. L. Braconier, of French or French Canadian ancestry, but Thomasson became sole owner after Braconier departed in 1878.

Thomasson prospered and after four years of running his drugstore, he recruited a fellow Swede, Johan August Ekengren to emigrate from Stockholm and join him in a venture to manufacture an elixir called “Amykos.” Popular in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries, Amykos was imported to the United States,

largely for the Swedish population. A high duty on this item, however, led Thomasson and Ekengren to believe they could produce it in Lowell and sell it for less money than the imported article. By 1883 ads for Amykos appeared in Lowell’s newspapers. Thomasson called it a “preparation” and claimed that it was “a reknowned preventative of infectious diseases, particularly diphtheria.” As sole producer and vender of Amykos, Thomasson sold each bottle for 75 cents, which, at this time, was more than half the average daily wage of a Lowell textile worker. In addition to making elixirs and running his drugstore, Thomasson served as steamship agent for the Thingvalla Line, which brought many Swedes to the United States, as well as back to their homeland.

Thomasson lived with his wife Adelaide in the same building that housed his apothecary. They had married in Lowell on October 26, 1872, shortly after they arrived in the Spindle City. The following year a son, Anders Frederic Christian Thomasson, was born. Their boy died from diphtheria at age four, a sad event that may have prompted Thomasson to seek out Ekengren in the production of Amykos. The Thomassons would have no other children.

The extent to which Thomasson profited from his sales of Amykos is not known, but by 1889 he had saved enough money to purchase a property on the opposite side of Central Street, one block south of his apothecary. This property included a wood-frame, two-family house. After acquiring the property, Thomasson built a small one-story brick addition, extending toward the street, which would house his store. He hired C. H. Bangs of Boston, a manufacturer of druggists’ fixtures to outfit his new apothecary. A contemporary



Photographed around 1900, Anders Thomasson is seen relaxing with his wife Adelaide and dogs, in a small flower-filled patio behind his drugstore on Central Street. The Thomassons lived in the two-family house attached to the drugstore.



The former Thomasson pharmacy stands today along Central Street. Built in 1889, it is attached to an older wood-frame, two-family house, the right-hand side of which was occupied by the Thomassons until they moved to the Highlands neighborhood in 1908. (Photo by John Wren.)



description of the shop noted its finer features including a maple floor, and mahogany counters, showcases, and a prescription desk which were “carved around the borders and finished in a high polish.” Except for four years in 1907-11, Thomasson worked in this apothecary from 1889 until 1916.

Thomasson’s standing within Lowell’s Swedish community was enhanced not only by his longevity, but also by his involvement with the Swedish Evangelical-Lutheran Church. The largest of the city’s four Protestant Swedish denominations, the Lutheran congregation was incorporated in 1882 and met in homes and at various locations until 1885, when a new church was built on Meadowcroft Street. Thomasson was one of seven Lowell Swedes to promote the establishment of this church in which services were conducted in their native tongue. Devoted to the church, Thomasson served for many years as organist and leader of the singing society. In 1889 he and his wife donated an altarpiece “The Resurrection” to the church. Like other churches of immigrant people, the Swedish Lutheran church was a center for social activity and assisted parish members who found themselves in personal and financial difficulty due to sickness or death of the head of a household.

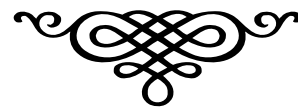
It seems that outside the pharmacy, Anders Thomasson’s life remained centered around the church and his organ music. Although a number of Swedish fraternal organizations sprang up in the early 1900s, Thomasson was not among their members. Nor, it appears, did he join the short-lived Swedish Independent Political Club. He and his countrymen did not seek political office in Lowell, nor did they vote as a bloc for either the Democrats or Republicans. And like many of his fellow Swedes, Thomasson was naturalized and owned property.

Thomasson’s drugstore was steadily patronized by Scandinavians as well as by many others. When he looked to sell his business in 1907, Thomasson presumably could have passed it on to any number of non-Scandinavian businessmen. Instead, he turned to a fellow countryman, Hilding Petersson, whose wife Amelia purchased the two-family house and attached pharmacy. Hilding Petersson then took over the business. After the sale, Anders and Adelaide Thomasson moved to Westford Street in the suburban Highlands neighborhood. For a few years Thomasson worked for Olie M. Conklin Jones, the city’s only female pharmacist. In 1911, when Petersson failed in his business, he apparently defaulted on the mortgage held by Thomasson. The elder Swede again assumed ownership of the property on Central Street. Thomasson ran the pharmacy until 1914 when he sold it to Catherine Devno, the wife of Charles F. Devno, who had been running a grocery on Central Street near the Thomasson pharmacy. Their son, Charles D. Devno, worked as a clerk for Thomasson before taking over the

pharmacy. Thomasson, who was nearly 70, continued to work alongside Devno. The elderly Swede died in 1919, at the age of 74. While he was remembered for his many years in the city’s pharmacy business, he was celebrated for his role in establishing Lowell’s Swedish Lutheran Church.

Because the Thomasson’s only child died quite young, an assessment of the social and cultural changes of subsequent generations of Thomassons is not possible. Yet in a number of ways, their lives reflect the experience of Swedish immigrants in Lowell. First, the city’s Swedes tended to have smaller families than either the Irish or French Canadians. Second, the male children, as they grew to adulthood, frequently followed in their father’s occupational footsteps. While Thomasson had no adult son, he may have developed a fatherly relationship with Hilding Petersson, who took over the business from the older Swede. Third, like Thomasson, many Swedish émigrés became naturalized citizens and owned property. Yet, unlike other immigrants, especially the Irish and the French Canadians, who became property-holding United States citizens, Swedes in Lowell never developed into a political force. Fourth, although Swedes could be found living in close proximity to one another, particularly in the area known as “Swede Village,” their neighborhoods were ethnically heterogeneous with Yankees, Irish, and some French Canadians living alongside them. Finally, when the Thomassons moved to the suburban Highlands section of Lowell in 1908, they blazed a path that many other émigrés who achieved middle-class status would follow, namely the relocation from the center city to outlying neighborhoods.

[Note: This article is adapted from the essay on Thomasson written by Gray Fitzsimons and appearing on the “Ethnicity and Enterprise” Website. See [http://ecomunity.uml.edu/eth\\_ent/addr/Cen\\_557/Central\\_st\\_557.htm](http://ecomunity.uml.edu/eth_ent/addr/Cen_557/Central_st_557.htm)]



## Lowell Trivia

By Martha Mayo

1. Where was Shaw Hospital?
2. What was the “Great White Way”?
3. What organization was formerly the Old Residents Association?
4. What is the oldest day care center in the country?

Answers are on the Page 8.

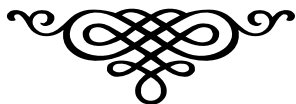
## Recent Donations

The Society is fortunate to continue to receive some amazing, unsolicited donations from a variety of individuals who are passionate to preserve Lowell's history. Two recent additions to the collection include:

**1. General Benjamin Butler's military dress hat box** -- Although it looks like something Napoleon may have had for his hat, this metal hat box belonged to Ben Butler and came to us from Leonard and Rosemary Colt of Little Compton, RI. General Butler was Leonard Colt's maternal great-grandfather. The box is an amazing artifact that is a wonderful addition to our Butler collection. In fact, the Society has a cardboard version of the box. We are very grateful to the Compton's for thinking to contact us.



**2. Colonel George Hobson's World War I uniform & sword** -- the uniform comes to us from the Maine Historical Society, which was deaccessioning the items and wanted them to be in a place that was more appropriate. The uniform includes the dress coat with military decorations (including the Legion of Merit medal, pins and straps, dress pants, a shirt and tie, hat, gloves, sword belt and sword. The uniform was donated to the Maine Historical in 1957 by Mr. Hobson, who lived in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. Mr. Hobson was born in Lowell in 1885 and was a graduate of MIT. He served during World War I in the Army of Occupation, on the staff in the War Department, and retired from the military in World War II. He moved to South Portland, Maine, around 1947 and shared a house with his sister, Sarah Hobson. He died in 1962 and is buried in the Lowell Cemetery. The uniform comes with a family genealogy. The Society thanks the Maine Historical Society for its interest in preserving this wonderful example of military history with a Lowell connection.



## 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**  
**Ayotte Plumbing, Heating & Air Conditioning**  
**CarStar Atlantic Collision Center**  
**Dr. Evan Coravos, DMD, PC**  
**D'Youville Senior Care**  
**Enterprise Bank**  
**Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union**  
**Lowell Co-Operative Bank**  
**Lowell Five Cents Savings Bank**  
**Lowell General Hospital**  
**Mazur Park Apartments**  
**Washington Savings Bank**  
**Watermark Environmental, Inc.**  
**Wyman's Exchange, Inc.**

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

### 2010 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



## CITY HALL AND MEMORIAL HALL

by Pauline M. Golec

In our last newsletter, there was a review of one of the Society's more recent acquisitions, an 1894 publication which told of the planning of the construction of City Hall and Memorial Hall by a commission of 8 prominent Lowell men.

As Lowell prepares to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, it is striking to note the many references to the war found in this volume. It details the story of Memorial Hall as a monument to the Civil War dead and as the site of the public library.

We learn that some of the commission members knew only too well the battlefields of that war. John Welch enlisted in the Union Army as a drummer boy when he was but 12 years old and witnessed tragic Gettysburg and Lee's surrender at Appomattox. Dr. Francis Plunkett served as an army surgeon before joining the first staff at St. John's Hospital.

The book transports us to 1890 when members of the Grand Army of the Republic laid the corner stone of Memorial Hall and Mayor Charles Palmer eloquently stated that "the men of Lowell were the first to shed their blood, their lives were the first sacrifices; yonder shaft will tell the story to generation after generation and the names of Ladd and Whitney of 1861 will be coupled with Davis and Buttrick of 1775."

We are further informed that on October 14, 1893, Memorial Hall's dedication "according to the ritual of the Grand Army...was simple, brief, and impressive." The American Quartette sang "Soldiers Farewell." Major Charles Stott, former mayor, gave an address noting that Lowell had an impressive record of men (estimated 5000) who served in the Union Army or Navy, the first men leaving with 4 companies of the Sixth Massachusetts Regiment. He did not forget to mention other units including the "Abbott Grays," named after Judge Abbott, whose sons, Edward and Fletcher, were part of its history.

A moving part of the ceremonies on that autumn morning was the presentation to the city of a bust of Gen. Benjamin Butler by a delegation of "Colored Citizens from Boston." Luther Dandridge, their spokesman, told the audience that Butler defended the right of colored citizens to be in uniform in the Civil War. He further remarked that, "we fully believe that he did not favor us because we were colored....his mind was strong enough, his heart was large enough, to take us in as members of the great human family."

To be able to read these words spoken in 1893 from a book published in 1894 is to appreciate Lowell's history firsthand. It explains why the Society collects Lowell material, and why it was pleased to receive this donation from Pat Hornby, in memory of her husband, Bill.

## EBAY Auctions of Lowell Interest



1910 Calendar Plate. Compliments of JH Corbett, meats and groceries, 533 Gorham St., Lowell, MA. It was 8.5 inches in diameter, made by Dresden China, and had some crazing. Sold for \$38 including shipping.



12 Gage Climax Shot Gun Shell Box made by the United States Cartridge Co. Lowell, Mass, U.S.A. The Box was empty and had a number of rough areas. Sold for \$50 including shipping.

Lowell Historical Society  
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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 2010, 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://ecomunity.uml.edu/lhs>.

### Center for Lowell History

The Center for Lowell History, 40 French Street, currently is open on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday from 9 am to 5 pm and Saturdays from 10 am to 3 pm, or by appointment. To arrange an appointment outside of these scheduled hours, please contact:

Martha Mayo, 978-934-4997 or

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

### Calendar of Events

**Program:** Lowell Historical Society Annual Meeting and Presentation *New Discoveries in Lowell*

**Date:** May 15, 2:00-5:00 pm

**Location:** Pollard Library Meeting Room

**Program:** Doors Open Lowell will include one of our members - Cliff & Linda Hoyt who will open their condo doors and display their collection of Lowell patent medicine memorabilia.

**Date:** May 14, 6:00-9:00 pm

**Location:** 10 Kearney Sq, Lowell, MA

### Answers to Trivia Questions

1) East Merrimack St., 2) Red Light Zone on Moody St., 3) Lowell Historical Society, 4) Lowell Day Nursery.