



Volume 32

Fall Newsletter

September 2010

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 ☞ **Come To A Presentation Called** ☞
 ☞ ***Prelude to Civil War*** ☞
 ☞ **by Michael Pierson** ☞

It took less than a year for the United States of America to fall apart. In April 1860, the national Democratic party met in Charleston, South Carolina, to select a presidential candidate. Successful in the last two elections, the Democrats were an imposing national force, gaining votes from Maine to Texas. But this time things were ominously different, with Deep South delegates storming out of the convention to nominate their own man. The party split, and Abraham Lincoln and the antislavery Republican party won the election. By April 1861, Massachusetts troops had to force their way through Baltimore (at the cost of several lives, including Lowell's own Luther Ladd and Addison Whitney) to save the nation's capitol from troops belonging to a new country, the Confederate States of America (CSA).

This talk will chart this year of turmoil through the eyes of Lowell's own Benjamin F. Butler and his contemporaries. Butler served as a delegate to the 1860 Democratic convention. There he voted for future Confederate President Jefferson Davis to receive the party's nomination. A year later he lead Massachusetts troops as they crossed through Maryland, skirmished in Baltimore, and helped to save Washington, D.C. By watching Butler navigate the stormy events of the year (and seeing why many Lowellians opposed him), we'll get to see what motivated many Lowell residents in the year before the CSA opened fire on the United States flag at Fort Sumter and initiated civil war.

Michael Pierson is a member of the Lowell Historical Society and has served on its executive board. He has taught history at UML since 1999. His recent book, *Mutiny at Fort Jackson: The Untold Story of the Fall of New Orleans*, describes the largest mutiny of the

Civil War and offers fresh interpretations of Benjamin Butler's controversial rule over New Orleans. *Mutiny at Fort Jackson* has been awarded the 2010 Albert Castel Book Award, and has been praised for its lucid story-telling, humor, and importance. It will be available for sale at 33% off the cover price to LHS members after the talk.

This presentation is part of the Parker Lecture Series and will be held in the Hall of Flags -Lowell Memorial Auditorium, on October 3, 2010 at Noontime.

PUBLICATION NOTES

Pauline M. Golec, Publication Committee Chair

One of our more recent publication ventures was the writing of *Lowell: the River City*, a postcard book published by Arcadia Press. As the title suggests, the Merrimack River is important in this book. Indeed, the Merrimack has been mentioned, if not featured, in many writings.

As early as 1605, Samuel de Champlain, while exploring the St. Lawrence River, is said to have written of "a beautiful river to the south called the Merrimac." This river, once the fishing site of the native Pennacooks, inspired the Yankee "mill girls" to write poetry. Jack Kerouac, native son and famed author, who walked over bridges crossing the Merrimack and stared at the river's "ghost houses of foam," witnessed the great flood of 1936 and in his novel, *Doctor Sax*, would credit Sax with foretelling this terrible disaster. Tom Sexton, Lowell High Class of '58 and later Alaska's state poet, penned a poem extolling the strength of Mike Rynne, the late legendary swimmer of the Merrimack. Paul Marion, noted local contemporary poet, wrote of a new day for the river in his piece, "Salmon Ladders." Essays in *the Continuing Revolution*, published by the Society, inform the reader of how Lowell became an early industrial power because of the Merrimack River. In another Society publication, *Bricks and Bats*, a story of early professional baseball in Lowell, author Chaz Scoggins briefly detailed the tale of an owner of one of

those early teams who wanted to build a baseball park in 1933 at "an almost 90-degree bend in the Merrimack River." He needed to add fill to the river so that Laurier Park (now the site of LeLacheur Park) would comply with standard baseball park measurements.

Want to learn more about the Merrimack River, Lowell history? Three books mentioned above as being Lowell Historical Society publications are available for purchase. Society members are entitled to a 10% discount.



Growing Up In Lowell XIII

Roland Larochelle

[In December 1985, Olga Spandagos interviewed Roland Larochelle 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 Roland Larochelle 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." Information in the square brackets is additional information published in the *Lowell Sun* from October 10 to October 11, 2007]

My grandparents were French Canadians. However, my father [Omer] was born in Lowell, and my mother [Emma, *nee* Chagnon] was born in Worcester, Massachusetts. My father was a boiler maker for the Boston and Maine Railroad. He worked out at the car shops at North Billerica. I was born in Lowell [February 18, 1921] but I grew up in South Lowell. We moved to South Lowell in 1928 where my parents bought a home. My father was a hard worker but he still had time for the family. On Sundays they would throw us in the back of the truck and take us to a lake for swimming and a picnic. We'd go on outings from the Boston and Maine Railroad, the grand outings to Pine Island Park in Manchester, New Hampshire. I attended St. Marie's School up to fourth grade where I learned French. It came in handy at Christmas time. My parents would talk to one another in French as to what they were getting us. I used to pick up some of their secrets a little bit.

Everything was going well until 1931 when my father became ill. He went to the hospital on a Friday evening. On the Monday morning he passed away, a week after he was age thirty eight. He had left my mother with eight children. A week after he was buried, my mother had her ninth baby. We were really up against it. I was the fourth oldest kid but there wasn't anyone old enough to go to work. Several months after my father died, my mother wasn't able to make any more payments on the house. So they took it away from her. My mother had to go on Relief (now called welfare.) We packed up and moved to a three-floor

tenement house on Nichols Street at the intersection of Branch Street. They allowed us to occupy all three floors because of the number of people in our family. We had six boys and three girls, the girls slept on the second floor and the boys all slept on the top floor. Course there was no furnace. We had a regular wood stove in the kitchen. There was no heat upstairs at all in the two top floors, and the only heat that would go up there is by leaving the doors opened, just let the air go up.

They had a French school at Notre Dame de Lourdes near our new home, but instead they sent me to the Franklin School. It was a little school there on Branch Street, and I was in the fourth grade. The kids were mostly French and Irish. I played baseball and football so I knew lots of different kids but my friends were mostly French. We used to look forward to playing the Greeks from the North Common on Washington Park, but there was still animosity. Partly because we lived in separate neighborhoods. I think it was because us kids exchanged stories. Like watch out for the Greeks, they play dirty or talk differently. My parents never did anything to encourage friction between ethnic groups. No, no, not that I can remember, it was just us kids.

I grew up during the Depression, it was bad. I would come home from school and get a slice of bread and put it under water, moisten it a little bit and then put a little sugar on it. I'd have just one slice of bread and that would be my dinner. I remember on one occasion at the Lincoln School, the teacher kept me after school. I forget what grade I was in, probably the fifth grade. Miss Owens kept me after school and I wondered why she did that, cause I hadn't done anything bad, or anything wrong. She says, "I have something for you. I bought you a pair of rubbers. I noticed that your sneakers were all wet when you came in."

We'd get little jobs wherever we could to help mother out. Working in stores, markets. Sometimes we wouldn't get paid for it, I mean in money, we would get paid in groceries. Say we would probably get five dollars a week in groceries, which was quite a bit, quite a bit of groceries. I remember doing errands for an Indian lady on Grand Street. On Sunday morning she would ask me to go up and get her a half pint. I was, probably about eleven, twelve, she would give me fifty cents and I would go up and get her a half pint of moonshine. I used to look forward to that every Sunday morning. She was the mother of a friend of mine that I chummed around with for quite awhile, but she would never ask him to go after it. She would give me ten cents for going. That ten cents would allow me to go into just about any theater in the city, well not any theater, but the Crown Theater, or Rialto Theater, or one of those. I would be in the theater for four hours.

At the age of fourteen I began traveling with a carnival. This man came over to the house. He asked my mother for permission to take me with him. He was a friend of the family and had a concession of little slot

machines, penny slot machines. So she said, "Sure if he wants to go." So I went and that's where I started my working career at that time. The rest of my brothers and sisters continued going to school. I went as far as the ninth grade [at Lowell High School] that was it as far as my schooling went.

Well I didn't work with him very long, he wasn't paying me because he wasn't making any money. I left him up in Vermont and I came back to Lowell. I was in Lowell for less than half a day when I was hired by the, by a local man here, John F. Carney. He had several concessions, carnival work again, but it was mostly like a circus carnival after awhile, because we had circus acts with us. They traveled all around. Carney hired me to clean out the concessions. I was making a few dollars, and my mother was happy about that. I stayed with him off and on for quite awhile. I also had other jobs while I periodically worked for Carney.

You could take your working papers out at age fifteen. My mother found me a job in the Boott Mill. I was playing baseball at the time down in Washington Park, and she called me over and told me she had found a job for me in the mills. I went down to the mills and I walked into that noise, and the odor, it just gave me a negative feeling about going to work in this place. I went over to the boss and I said, "My name is Roland Larochelle and I was asked to come down here."

"Oh, I'm glad to see you," he says. "This is what I want you to do." And he handed me a pail of oil and a brush. He wanted me to go into this machine that looked like a loom of some sort. It was going whickity whackity and making all kinds of noises and weaving this material. And so he says, "I want you to take the lint out, keep the lint off from underneath the machine. Keep it clean, nice and clean underneath there." So I says to myself, "No way." You know, I don't even know exactly what I said, but I made up my mind that I wasn't going to work here. I said, "You'll have to have to show me how to do it sir." So he got underneath there and he started to show me how to do it. I called him, and I kept calling him. The noise in there was terrible. I had to yell. I said, "Sir", and finally I got his attention. I said, "I got to go to the toilet."

I just went right out the door and up to the baseball field again. My mother spots me down there playing baseball and she called me over and says, "I thought I got you a job?"

So I lied to her. I said, "I'm sorry mom, I went down there but the job was already taken."

"Oh", she says, "you're going to have to find something else. You just can't be playing baseball all the time, you know?" She was really upset that day.

Things were rough in Lowell. Things were bad, there was no employment around. When I was seventeen I went into the Civilian Conservation Corps. I was in there for one year, from September 1938 to September 1939. These C.C.C. Camps were setup for guys from families on relief. They set me up in

Vermont. They give me five dollars a month and they sent twenty five dollars home for my mother.

I then worked for what they called the N.Y.A. National Youth Administrator, but you're limited to so many hours a month, because they had to accommodate so many kids I guess. They would only allow around twenty five or thirty hours a month. They'd put you in the back of a truck and send you up to Fort Devens to work in a warehouse, or whatever, you know. I also still worked for John F. Carney at the time.

When I was nineteen and I joined the Navy [January 1, 1941], and was in there for six years. There is kind of a little story about joining the Navy. I was on Branch Street there near the fire house, and like "Crazy Guggenheim" used to say, "minding my own business" doing nothing, just hanging around. Two friends decided to go down to the recruiting office. They asked me to go down with them. I said, "I don't want to go down to no recruiting office." And they says, "Come on, keep us company anyway." So I went down. Well as it was, them two fellows were rejected and I was accepted. I went home and told my mother that a Chief Petty Officer from the Navy was coming to see her about getting her permission for me to go into the Navy. She really didn't like the idea. There was a war going on in Europe, and eventually we would become involved. The Chief finally talked her into signing the paper.

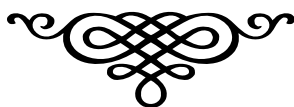
I was stationed aboard a battleship for a very short time, the *Arkansas*. Then I went aboard the *Sumner* as a Signalman, and we went down to South America for about eleven months. We then went through the Panama Canal along to Hawaii. I was at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese bombed. My ship was very fortunate that it came out of the attack. I happened to be up that particular morning and I saw the planes coming over. It didn't register to me that the red ball in the plane was a Japanese plane. They were strafing the dock, and they were going right by my ship that was tied up at the submarine base there in Hawaii. They came right by heading right for the battleships. I couldn't believe it even though we had been shown silhouettes of Japanese planes, and the German and we knew war was inevitable. When the Japanese did strike at Pearl Harbor we ran out of ammunition after the first ten or fifteen minutes of firing. So we had to get somebody to open up our magazine so we could resume firing. I stayed on that ship for about thirty-eight months going to some thirty-nine islands in the Pacific, on Australia, and, oh, all around the Pacific. I was finally discharged on April 1, 1945.

My future wife [Rita Hamel] came from Centralville, and her Uncle lived in the same neighborhood as I lived in, around the Notre Dame de Lourdes Parish off of Branch Street. He owned a variety store near the corner of Queen and Branch Street. She worked for him. While I was on leave from the Navy, I saw this little girl working in the variety store. And I just found reasons to go up there a little bit more than

normal. I asked her if she would write to me if I wrote to her and she said that she would answer my letters. As a matter of fact, she was writing a letter to me at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. She said she was all shook up at that particular time. We kept writing to one another. When I came home on furlough, which was only twice during the whole war, I would spend all of those thirty days with her.

When I came out of the Navy, I went back to what I liked doing best. The only thing that I knew was the circus carnival. I worked with the shows for quite awhile just traveling around and working in all sorts of different concessions or all sorts of odd jobs. John Carney used to run bingo here in the City of Lowell down at the Memorial Auditorium, and for the East End Club here in Lowell. My job was to provide cards, when the people were coming in the door. I remember they did a lot of good things, the East End Club, and I remember they made our Christmas. John F. Carney was the owner of the bingo equipment and ran it for the East End Club. He would see that we got Christmas baskets from the East End every year, every Christmas. They had a turkey in there. They had apples and oranges, and vegetables. That was a Godsend. And I remember a couple of times when I brought one home, or John Carney would bring one up to the house and give it to my mother. She would start crying.

Then I got married and my wife told me that I had better get me a real job where I would stay right in Lowell. I got a job at General Electric. I was a wire maker there, but I was being laid off so often, because of lack of material. A friend of mine suggested that I take the civil service test and get a steady job at Bedford Hospital. So anyway I took a civil service test and I passed. And I was called up there. While there, I studied nursing on my own and took the Practical Nurses Exam in Massachusetts. I passed the exam and worked at Bedford Hospital for twenty four years.



Lowell Trivia

By Martha Mayo

1. Who wrote *A Week On the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* in 1849?
2. What is the Indian name for this area?
3. What was the first transportation canal built in the U.S.?
4. What is the oldest incorporated company in the U.S.?

Answers are on the Page 6.

LHS Corporate Memberships

The Lowell Historical Society proudly acknowledge our 2010 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 & A.C.
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 General Hospital
Mazur Park Apartments
Washington Savings Bank
Watermark Environmental, Inc.
Wyman's Exchange

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



Annual Trivia Night Trivial Fundraiser

An evening of Trivial Pursuit with additional questions related to Lowell plus a free raffle. Bring your family, yourself, or a team of any size to the Club Lafayette, 465 Fletcher St. on September 25 - 7:00 - 10:00 pm. (\$10 per person.)

Pyro Milk Bottles

From Lowell and Billerica

Using bottles to deliver milk to homes started as early as 1878 but became popular around 1895, coinciding with the use of pasteurization to extend the storage life of milk. By the very nature of milk, the dairy business was local. Early dairies provided their products to a very limited area. Local, milk bottles could be collected after use, cleaned and reused. Early milk bottles were cylindrical rather than square. Early manufacturers attempted to make square bottles. However, square bottles tended to be weak in the corners and could not stand up to the rough handling required of bottles that dairies had to reuse. Dairies often had bottle molds personalized with the name of the dairy embossed (raised lettering) on the bottle. With this personalization the dairy took the chance that users would not return the bottle. If you lost your bottle you lost your profit.

In 1933 manufacturers developed a new method of placing the name of the dairy on the bottle. The popular name for this process is called pyroglazing or simply pyro. Manufacturers would "paint" the label on the bottle using a metal screen and then bake the bottle in a furnace to form a durable "painted label." The usually single-colored pyro label could stand up to the multiple use requirements of the milk bottle. Also a more distinctive label could be created with graphics (cows, barns, flowers, etc.) and by applying multiple colors.

As bottle making methods improved the square bottle reappeared in the mid-1940s. The square shape, now with stronger corners, could be stored better in both the delivery truck and home refrigerator.

When transportation and refrigeration methods improved, the local dairies started to disappear. Large milk corporations took over distribution of milk. Now only the bottles remain to remind us of that simpler time. Lowell itself had over 100 different dairies.

Collecting milk bottles has become a large portion of the bottle collecting hobby. At the meetings of the Merrimack Valley Antique Bottle Club over half the members collect milk bottles. The interest in milk bottles generally derives from the local nature of the dairy business. One can collect milk bottles from just about every town, county, or state. Bottles come in

different sizes: gallon, half gallon, quart, pint, and half pint. There are specialized shapes such as cream tops (bulbous area at the top of the bottle where cream would collect.) Collectors delight in finding bottle variations within their collecting area.

Tom Paskiewicz, a member of the Lowell Historical Society, started collecting bottles in the late 1970's when he found a Moxie bottle sitting on the ground. He started buying bottles at flea markets. Collecting all bottles became hard to manage and he started to specialize by collecting Lowell and Billerica bottles. One major subset of this collection is his pyro milk bottles from Lowell and his hometown of Billerica. In 1978 he attended his first bottle show, which was sponsored by the Merrimack Valley Antique Bottle Club. Tom became a member of the club around the same time. Tom has provided a short list of some Lowell dairies represented in his collection:



Lavoie Dairy, at the corner of Shaw and Wilder St., was family owned between 1912 and 1969.



Tom Paskiewicz with a few of his Pyro milk bottles from Lowell and Billerica.

Belvidere Dairy
Sager's Dairy
Larose Bros.
North End Dairy
NJ Lavoie
Cream Top Dairy
Kydds Dairy
Hill Top Dairy

Burbecks
Holland Farms
Lowell Dairy
H.R. Gourley Dairy
Arthur Parker
Descheneaux Bros.
A.R. Guimond
Catherwoods Milk

Tom has agreed to provide a display of his local pyro milk bottles at the Merrimack Valley Antique Bottle Club's show at the Lowell Elks Club from 9:00am to 2:00pm Sunday, September 26, 2010. Come to the show and see if you can find the dairy that delivered milk to your house while you were growing up in Lowell. Perhaps you could even buy a bottle from your dairy at one of the show's 70 dealer tables.



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.

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.

Answers to Trivia Questions

1) Henry David Thoreau, 2) Wamesit, 3) Middlesex Canal, 4) Proprietors of Locks and Canals on Merrimack River.

Calendar of Events

Program: **Trivia Night** - Annual fundraiser.
An evening of Trivial Pursuit with
Lowell Trivia mixed in. (\$10 each)

Date: September 25 - 7:00 - 10:00 pm
Location: Club Lafayette, 465 Fletcher St.

Program: **Prelude to Civil War** - Michael Pierson presents the beginnings of the Civil War starting with the 1860 Democratic convention. In conjunction with Parker Lecture Series.

Date: October 3, 2010 - Noontime
Location: Hall of Flags -Lowell Memorial Auditorium

Program: Merrimack Valley Antique Bottle Show

Date: September 26, 9:00am to 2:00pm
Location: Lowell ELKS Club, 40 Old Ferry Rd. Lowell MA.

