



Volume 46

## Winter Newsletter

March 2017

LOWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
AND  
JEANNE D'ARC CREDIT UNION  
PRESENTS

# LOUIS CYR: THE STRONGEST MAN IN THE WORLD

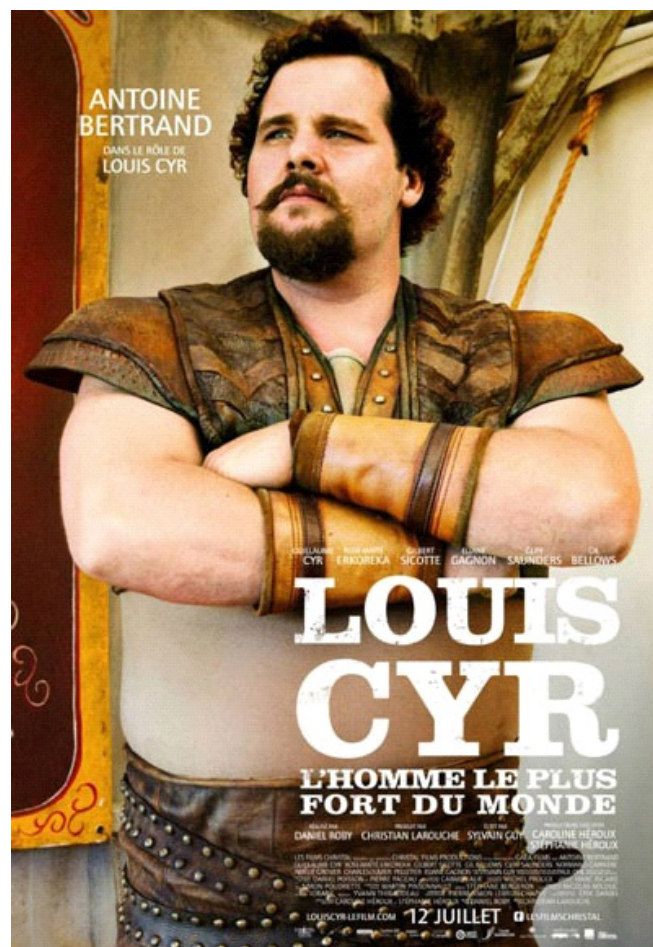
Did you know the Strongest Man in the World began his career in Lowell? Join us for a **free** screening of *Louis Cyr*! (French/English with English Subtitles.)

When: Monday, April 3 at 7:35PM

Where: The Luna Theater, Mill No. 5, 250 Jackson Street, 4th Floor.

Synopsis from [www.tribute.ca](http://www.tribute.ca):

"Lowell, Massachusetts, late 19th century. Louis Cyr, a French-Canadian laborer working in a textile factory, is convinced by an Irish promoter to leave his family in order to demonstrate his immense physical strength at fairs across the country. His girlfriend, Méline Comtois, also comes along on the trip that lasts six months and ends when the promoter takes off with all the money. Rolling up his sleeves, Cyr continues to travel as a strong man with Méline, whom he has married, and ends up in Montreal, where he meets Horace Barré, a strong man who becomes his most faithful ally, and Gustave Lambert, an agent who helps to revive his career on the Montreal scene. Louis becomes an overnight sensation. Encouraged by his success, Louis only has one goal: to win the title of the strongest man in the world."



## Lowell Trivia

By Martha Mayo

1. Who was the first female assistant city manager?
2. Lowell's Annie Richmond had an affair with what 19<sup>th</sup> century author?
3. What Lowellian was Undersecretary to the United Nations?
4. Who was the first American to swim the English Channel in 1923?





City Hall from *Lowell of To-day*, 1893.

Lowell Historical Society's Annual Meeting  
and Program

# **The City and Memorial Hall Architectural Competition**

by Joe Orfant

This talk is a refinement of an earlier talk first presented  
to the Lowell Historical Society in 1976.

Location: Community Room or Research Room, 2<sup>nd</sup>  
floor, Pollard Public Library

Time: May 18, 2017 @ 7:00-8:30PM

Article by Lew Karabatsos

The planned construction of a monumental new City and Memorial Halls, signaled Lowell's maturation from a corporation dominated town to a modern, independent metropolis with substantial ambitions. Shaking off the controls of the corporations was a new class of business and civic leaders drawn to the City by their ambitions and its abundant opportunities.

The architectural competition was a bold and controversial enterprise that pitted the two leading architecture offices of the City. One represented the older architectural tradition of the previous century while the second provided a contrasting newer, formal and cosmopolitan style. In some ways the firms represented the competition between the rising business class and the corporate interests. The decision was mired in controversy and intrigue involving some of the City's most influential leaders (Ben Butler perhaps).

Both the winning selection and the award of the commission surprised and shocked the community.

*[Joe Orfant is a Lowell native and a member of the last graduating class of Keith Academy. He retired last year as the Chief of the Bureau of Planning, Design and Resource Protection of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. He studied Architecture at Yale and Architectural Conservation at ICCROM in Rome, Italy as well as management at Harvard. During a more than forty-year career Joe has served as the Deputy Historic Preservation Officer for Massachusetts, overseen the reconstruction of the beaches along Boston Harbor, restoration of numerous historic parkways of Metropolitan Boston and many other major parks capital projects. He's also proud to be the author of the original National Register nomination for the Locks and Canals Historic District and later the proponent for the National Historic Landmark designation. He has served on the boards of ACT for Massachusetts, the Boston Preservation Alliance, The Boston Harbor Association and the Executive Board of the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission. He is currently one of the founding members of a new non-profit for Boston area parks and is the Chair of the Boston Conservation Commission.]*



Memorial Hall from *Lowell of To-day*, 1893.

# Growing Up In Lowell XXIII

Alexandra Freitas

*[In October 1985, Olga Spandagos interviewed Alexandra Freitas 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 Alexandra Freitas 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".*

Both my parents came from Macedonia, Greece. My father had no relatives in this country. He was allowed into the country under the quota system that limited how many people could come into the country each year. He was the oldest child in the family and times were hard in Greece. My father wanted to come to America to make money where the streets were paved with gold and then return to Greece. The money he earned was to create a dowry for his sister so that she could marry in Greece when she became of age. The trip, by boat, took two weeks and the conditions were deplorable, almost standing room only. Most of his fellow passengers were very, very ill and nauseous. He said it was hard to breathe. Also, many on the boat didn't seem to have a desire to come to America. They seemed to have been forced, or pushed, to come to America, to help out the families back in Greece. Nobody was excited about the trip.

Father arrived at Ellis Island in 1918 at the age of 18. He had just a few clothes and I think he said he had a gold medal with him at the time. Maybe it might have been worth five dollars, and that's all he came with. He arrived with a few other villagers and they traveled to Lowell because they knew other Greeks who had arrived earlier and obtained jobs at the Merrimack Mills.

My mother came to America a year after my father in 1919. She was 19. When she arrived my parents had not known each other in Greece. My father told me years ago that he noticed my mother in Merrimack Mills where she was a spinner. But according to Greek custom, he couldn't go up to her and say "I'd like to take you out" or "I would like to see you again." He had to talk to the person that was responsible for her and ask him if it was alright to meet with her. Father found that she had an uncle named Mr. Christos Sponantopulos in Lowell and that he had sponsored her coming to the United States. My father talked to her uncle and said that he would like to meet and possibly even marry her.

When my parents came to America they did not know a word of English. My father learned to read and write English very well because after working in the Merrimack Mills a few years and marrying my mother, he decided to open up a grocery store. He catered mainly to Lowell's Macedonian community. The business forced him to learn English so he could deal with salesmen, and the workings of a store. His first store was on Suffolk Street. After a few years he moved to the corner of Broadway and Suffolk Street. Later on he moved across to the other corner of Broadway and Suffolk, that was his last store.

When my parents married they settled on Lagrange Street [now Dublin St., ed.]. At the time it was strictly an Irish community. But as the Greek immigrants started coming in, they pushed out the Irish by renting these apartment houses on Suffolk, Lagrange, Adams, and Marion Streets [now Cork St., ed.]. It was called the Triangle. I was born in 1924, on Lagrange Street. I think it was 160, which was at the farthest end of the street which bordered Fletcher Street. Then when I was maybe five years old we moved further down the street to 9 Lagrange Street. I lived there five years. Then we moved next door to 13 Lagrange Street. So I was born and raised on one street for my whole existence until I got married at the age of twenty-one and left Lagrange Street. I remember as a child that most of the tenement homes on Lagrange Street were rented by Greek people. We also had a lot of Syrian people that lived in my neighborhood with only a few Polish, Irish, and French families.

When I started going to school, I had friends from many different backgrounds but I wouldn't say we were close friends. We got to know them by having contact with them in school. But we didn't really socialize with them. We kept pretty much within the Greek community and played with Greek children. While at the Bartlett School for instance, I do remember that I used to chum at recess with a few Irish girls. They would always say to me "You people look different, you look different than the rest of us." They felt that you could always tell Greek people by their looks, and I didn't think that our facial features were that different than anybody else's, but they would always mention that, "the Greek people have a different look." I felt growing up that we were supposed to be lesser than they were for some reason. Like the Irish and the English had been here longer than we had. They would call us grease balls. I guess from the country Greece. Even so, I think that the children of the immigrants got along better than the older generation. From what my father tells me, they had some pretty wild fights with the Irish when the Greeks first came here. By the time I grew up, to realize what was going on, I think the children had mixed in, and we got along I thought fairly well. But we would hear these stories about how the Irish felt that the Greeks had come in and taken over the Irish territory. Now it's just reversed. Now there aren't many Greeks left in the Acre because each woman got educated. They got professions, finally made money, and they moved out of the Acre.

They went into Belvedere and the Highlands. They bettered themselves. The Irish came back to the Acre only to be pushed out again, this time by Puerto Ricans.

The house I was born in was a six tenement house. We lived on the third floor. It was a cold water flat. The only heat came from our cooking stove. When we moved to 9 Lagrange Street, it was much nicer. We lived on the first floor and had hot water! It had a Volcan heater. When you needed the hot water you would turn it on and it would heat up so many gallons. Once you used that up you would have to re-light it again to get more hot water. When I was twelve years old we moved to 13 Lagrange Street. The landlord had just renovated this apartment and it was a real big house. We had a living room, and a dining room, and a kitchen, and three bedrooms, which was very unusual. Our other houses only had two bedrooms. We were six of us in the family at the time, six children. I shared the biggest bedroom with three sisters, with two double beds. I never had a bedroom to myself while I was single. My two brothers shared the smallest bedroom, my parents shared the middle-sized room. My sisters and I had a three drawer bureau with a mirror and one closet. My sister Cynthia had one drawer. My sister Dorothy had one drawer. I had to share a drawer with my sister Pat. We had minimum clothes. We had a good coat for church and a coat to go to school. Maybe two, three dresses, and possibly a nightgown. I remember my mother would do the wash every Saturday morning. She had no washing machines then. She used to soak all our clothes in the tub the night before in cold water, and then the next day they'd put this hot water into the tub, and use a scrub brush, a scrub board and scrub them all up. I remember that this third house didn't have this Volcan for hot water. Water had to be heated on the stove in the kitchen. After a few years the landlord did put in one of those Volcan heaters and it was a blessing. Now we didn't have to heat up the stove and the house to get hot water.

Ah, I had very pleasant memories growing up, very happy memories until the year my mother passed away. And then it was very sad for awhile. She died in 1938, and I think she was thirty-nine years old when she passed away. It was a very, very sad thing, my father was forty, I was thirteen and my brother Andrew ten. All from a gallbladder operation that she never endured. She just passed away. They operated on her on a Tuesday. Father went to see her and she seemed be all right. Then Wednesday morning he was notified at the store that he should go right away because she was failing. I think, by the time he got to the hospital she had passed away.

All her friends and all the people from the village that knew my mother came to the house right away. They used to wake the person for two nights. The first night, they would wake them at the funeral home and the second night they would wake them at the house. The funeral home was on Dummer Street. This street also had all of the coffee houses. On both sides of Dummer Street there

were all of these little stores, and coffee houses. I think there might have been forty-five to fifty coffee houses at the time. There was a coffee house for every, every village in Greece you could name. There was a Macedonian one, and there was like a Spartan one. No matter where in Greece you came there was a coffee house, and people would go to their own little coffee house. In between these shops was this funeral home. For the wake at our house, I remember they removed all the furniture from the front room to make room for the casket and chairs, and all these ladies would just sit there and wail or almost sing. They would talk to her or about her. Why did you leave us? And why did you leave your husband? When you left, you left him with the responsibility of six children. Wake up, get up, you have no business being there. During all of this I had to sit there. I sat there and bawled, because it was very sad. They believe that getting all this grief, and all of this sadness out of you, that it was good for you. I think that was the purpose of these songs. I used to call them songs.

The house was full of all her friends and they would all bring food, because they felt that the family was grieving, and they just wouldn't think about food. I remember that we stayed up all night, and at midnight they covered her face with a silk handkerchief, because now she's supposed to be sleeping. Early in the morning, I believe it was six or seven o'clock, they took off this handkerchief and they proceeded to continue these song/wailing until the body was taken to the church, and then on to the funeral. Another thing that always stayed with me was the Greek Orthodox people open up the casket at the church. This was the first funeral that I had witnessed and when we went to the cemetery I did not expect that they would open up the casket again just before it was lowered into the ground. At the open casket the priest put the handkerchief on her face again, and he took some dirt from the ground and sprinkled on her, on her chest. Then he took some oil and he dropped it on to the handkerchief. In the meantime it was windy and I remember the handkerchief flying away from my mother's face. The last thing I remember is my mother's face in this casket. The priest placed the handkerchief back again, closed the casket, and then lowered the casket into the ground. The mourners then threw flowers from the wreaths, or from the bouquets from on the casket. For a long, long time after that, that scene stayed with me. It is a very, very emotional thing to go through.

After the funeral we stayed home (except for school) for the next forty days. After school we'd come straight home. We could not play a radio. We avoided anything from which we could derive any pleasure. We couldn't go to a movie, dancing or any social functions. Every night someone would come over to the house and bring a full course meal. So every night for forty days we ate diner with a different family. For a year after mother's death we all wore only black clothes. When I say black, I mean literally black. Like black stockings, black shoes,

everything black for a year. It was expected of us, but I didn't object to it. Maybe because somebody told me I looked good in black so I always liked black. But I remember that my sister Pat was in ninth grade and I a year earlier. She was supposed to have graduated that week my mother died. She did graduate but because the girls used to all wear white during graduation exercises she could not participate. I remember when I graduated the next year, my sister Pat came to my graduation, and she came to my prom because she had missed her prom.

I dated mostly Greek boys until I met my future husband. We met at a dance at the Commodore Ballroom. When we met he told me he was Portuguese. "Portuguese" I said, "Where do they come from?"

He says, "From Portugal." Then I remembered that while I was in high school there were a lot of students in my class with different names, I thought they were Italian. I mean if the names did not sound Greek, Irish, or French they must have been Italian. After meeting Joe Freitas I went to a lot of Portuguese functions and realized many of the other students in my classes had been Portuguese.

## LHS Corporate Memberships

The Lowell Historical Society proudly acknowledge our 2016 Corporate members who demonstrated their organization'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:

**Blue Taleh Restaurant**  
**CARSTAR Atlantic Collision Ctr.**  
**Dr. Evan Coravos, DMD**  
**D'Youville Senior Care Inc.**  
**Enterprise Bank & Trust Co.**  
**Fred C. Church Insurance**  
**Fuse Bistro**  
**Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union**  
**Lowell Five Cent Savings Bank**  
**Lowell Sun Charities, Inc**  
**Morse-Bayliss Funeral Home**  
**Sage Bank**  
**Washington Savings Bank**  
**Watermark**

We would like to add the listing of your company here in the future. Join on-line at:

[lowellhistoricalsociety.org](http://lowellhistoricalsociety.org).

For information call Cliff Hoyt at 978-458-6575 or at [choyt48@comcast.net](mailto:choyt48@comcast.net).

## FROM THE BOOKSHELF

by Pauline M. Golec

Richard P. Howe, Jr. is the register of deeds of the Northern District of Middlesex County, a knowledgeable host of Lowell Walks, and a longtime researcher of the Civil War. He is also an author.



His first book, **LEGENDARY LOCALS OF LOWELL**, was co-authored with Chaim Rosenberg. The introduction, a brief history of Lowell, foreshadows the finely captioned photo album that follows. Five broad chapters - Mills, Business, Community, Service, and Culture - highlight "local legends" of the mill city. Past and present civic leaders share space with visionaries, sports figures, business folks, educators, writers, artists, and community activists; some very well known, others less so.

A few years back, the anticipation of this book's publication caused quite a buzz. Rereading it is still informative and enjoyable.

Dick Howe's second book is simply titled **LOWELL** and is part of the Images of Modern America Series. While acknowledging Lowell's leadership in the Industrial Revolution but also its brief dominance in this role, the book's focus is on a city that recovered from a long period of hard times to become vibrant once again. Photos and text recognize the role of Lowell National Historical Park, University of Massachusetts Lowell, and other city institutions in Lowell's recovery and growth. Rich in images of people, places, and events, this book is proof of the energy, diversity, and culture of the city.

The books may be purchased at Lowell National Historical Park book stores.

## Lowell Historical Society Board Members

The current Board members includes:

Kim Zunino, Pres.  
 VP vacant  
 Lewis Karabatsos, Treas.  
 Eileen Loucraft, Clerk  
 Janine Whitcomb, Librarian  
 Anthony Sampas, Archivist  
 Walter Hickey, Genealogist  
 Stephanie Donahue

Phil Belanger  
 Pauline Golec  
 Marie Sweeney  
 Steven Daly  
 Aurora Erickson  
 Corey Scuito  
 Cliff Hoyt  
 Gray Fitzsimons



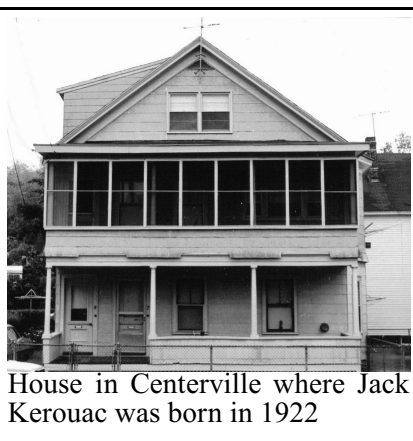
# Best of Local Richard Howe's Internet Blog Coming in Book Form

by Marie Sweeney

Late this spring, Loom Press will published a collection of the best writing and images from ten years of the popular richardhowe.com blog. Titled *History As It Happens: Citizen Bloggers in Lowell, Mass.*, the collection features blog posts, photographs, poems, and artwork by some 40 contributors. At more than 500 pages, the book presents a full spectrum of life in the city from 2007 to 2016, emphasizing politics and history but ranging across the spectrum of Lowell life. From in-the-moment accounts of local happenings to reflections on larger issues and appreciations of major figures, this anthology gives us a documentary of Lowell times at the start of the 21st century. It is a singular volume that will stand as a case study of citizen journalism and community writing. Watch for details about the book's availability and a book launch event.

## Photo Digitization Grant from Lowell Cultural Council

This past fall the Lowell Historical Society was awarded a Lowell Cultural Council Grant to fund the digitization of photographs drawn from our Lowell Division of Planning & Development Collection. From this large store of building surveys, carried out by the City of Lowell in the mid to late 1970's, we selected mostly Lowell's Acre section. This collection captures a specific period in time when the importance of historic building preservation was being elevated to a new level by the arrival in the city of Lowell National Historical Park. The black and white images are of high quality and the field notes detail both the residential and commercial properties of this rapidly changing neighborhood. The collection will be made available for study to academics, students, local



House in Centerville where Jack Kerouac was born in 1922

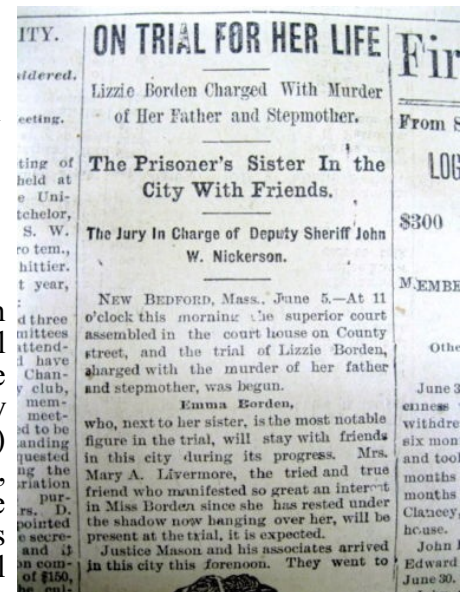


scholars, and genealogists, but will also hold a special interest to those Lowellians who now reside or previously worked or lived in the buildings represented in the survey. The collection is an essential addition to the record for those interested in "Lost Lowell," as many of these buildings no longer stand. The photographs and their accompanying texts are shared in the hope of keeping Lowell's rich history alive and relevant. LHS Board members Janine Whitcomb and Tony Sampas initiated this digitization project, while Janet Pohl created the high quality scans.

## EBAY Auctions of Lowell Interest

**Sixteen 1893 LOWELL Massachusetts newspapers with coverage of the entire LIZZIE BORDEN MURDER TRIAL:**

Lot of sixteen complete original newspapers, the Lowell Daily Courier (MA) dated June 5-22, 1893. These newspapers contained local coverage from beginning to end of the Lizzie Borden murder trial, held in New Bedford, MA. Sold for \$1,000 plus \$15 shipping.



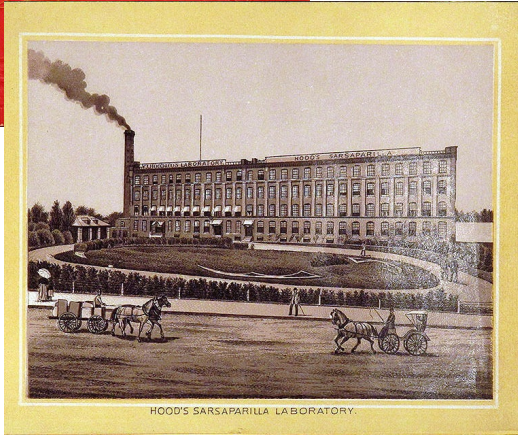
**Boy Scout Print:** Compliments of United States Cartridge Company, Lowell, Mass. Makers of Boy Scout Cartridges. Sold for \$46.99 plus \$3.65 shipping.







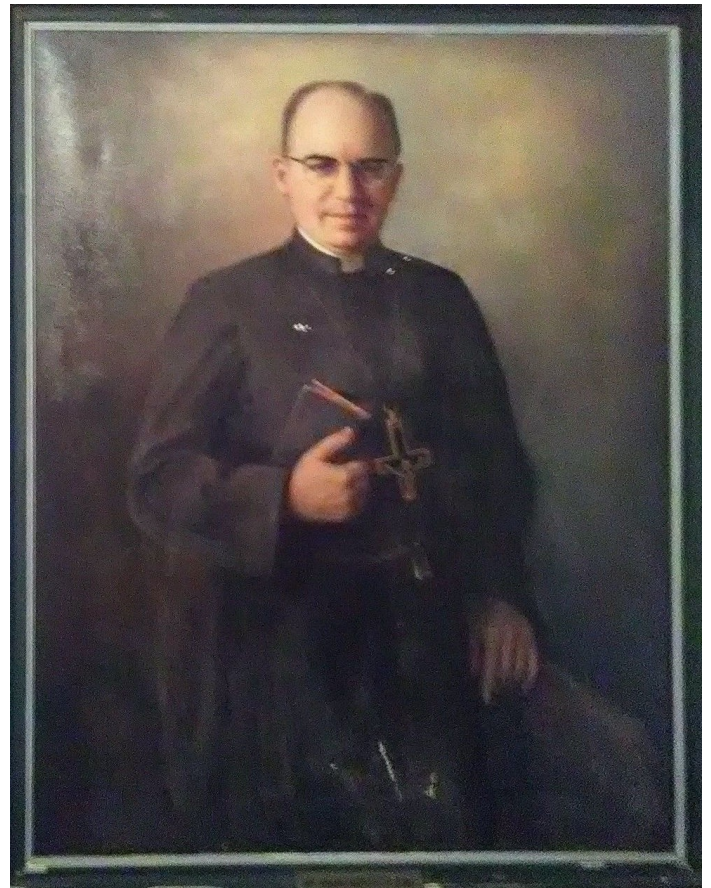
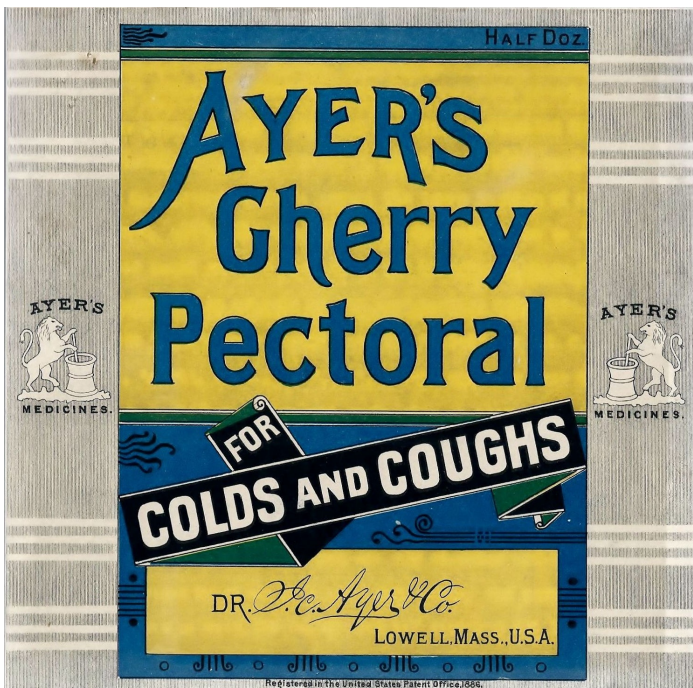
**1880's  
Scarce  
Lowell  
Mass.  
Souvenir  
Photo  
Book:**



**Hood's Sarsaparilla Factory**

Images of Lowell, Mass on a single long strip of fan-folded paper with bright red hard covers (6" x 5"). It was published for the Bon Marche. Sold for \$80 including shipping.

**Ayer's Cherry Pectoral 1886 Shipping Box Label:**  
This Lowell, MA label is 7 1/2" x 7 1/2" in mint condition and was for shipping a Half Doz. bottles of Cherry Pectoral. Sold for \$152.50 plus \$2.50 shipping.



**Antique Lowell Mass. Painting:** Image of Father Morisette painted by Wallace Rugg of Lowell MA. Sold for \$125.

**Connecticut Yankee  
Lager Beer Flat Top  
Beer Can-Lowell,  
MA:**

A 1950's 12 oz. flat top beer can brewed and packaged by Merrimack Brewing Co., Lowell, MA. All-original, top-opened indoor can has minor surface imperfections including scratches, spotting, slight discoloration and several dents near the bottom rim. Sold for \$225 plus \$6.95 shipping.





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, 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 currently moving the Historical Society's collection out of the Boott Mill as requested by the National Park Service. A permanent home is yet to be determined. We can still be reached via email at:

[contact@lowellhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:contact@lowellhistoricalsociety.org)

or visit our web site:

<http://www.lowellhistoricalsociety.org>

## Center for Lowell History

The Center for Lowell History, 40 French Street, currently is open Tuesday through Friday 9-5.

The contact point for information is Janine Whitcomb, 978-934-4998. The Center's web address is: <http://library.uml.edu/clh/>.

## Calendar of Events

**Program:** Movie - Louis Cyr: The Strongest Man in the World

**Date:** Monday, April 3<sup>rd</sup> at 7:30PM

**Location:** The Luna Theater, Mill No. 5, 250 Jackson Street, 4th Floor.

**Program:** Lowell Historical Society's Annual Meeting and Program -- The City Hall Architectural Competition by Joe Orfant

**Time:** May 18, 2017 at 7:00-8:30PM

**Location:** Community Room or Research Room, 2nd floor Pollard Public Library

**Program:** Doors Open Lowell

**Time:** Friday May 19, 6-9pm and Saturday May 20, all day. See

**Location:** [www.doorsopenlowell.org](http://www.doorsopenlowell.org) for details. Various building around Lowell. Note: the Fairburn Condo unit of LHS members Cliff & Linda Hoyt will be open Friday night displaying Lowell medical memorabilia.

### Answers to Trivia Questions

1) Rosanne Riddick, 2) Edgar Allen Poe, 3) F. Bradford Morse, and 4) Henry Sullivan.