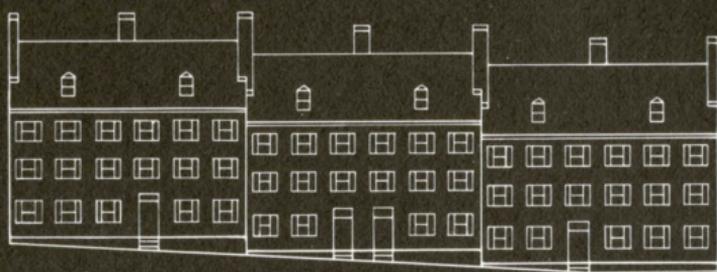


A LIGHT IN THE ATTIC: Treasures of City Hall

An exhibit by the Lowell Historic Board

PATRICK J. MOGAN
CULTURAL CENTER



May 30 - June 28
Tuesday - Saturday, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

June 30 - July 12, 1992
Sunday - Saturday, 9:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

40 French Street, Lowell, Massachusetts

A Public Building, "A Noble Monument"

"Grand, gorgeous, massive in proportion, perfect in details; such is our new City Hall."

Daily Sun, Lowell, Oct. 14, 1893

On a fair day the pure blue sky plays against red bricks from one end of Lowell to the other. Soaring smokestacks, a golden shuttle crowning a bell tower, and the American eagle perched atop City Hall accent the skyline. The buildings are sturdy. People fill the streets. History can be read in each face and in every window.

Where do we usually look for the history of a place? We find it in stories and study the historian's account. But it can also be pieced together from other sources: annual reports; daily memos; and facts scratched into old ledgers. Each of us generates a public paper trail with a life: birth certificate, tax bill, marriage license, building permit, dog license, military record, death certificate. For the life of a city, the record includes street surveys, cash books, contracts, payrolls, and more.

"City Hall is the one place where you will find evidence of the significant events in people's daily lives along with the important events in the city's life," says Kathleen Brooker, the former Administrator of the Lowell Historic Board and now the President of Historic Denver, Inc. She says the Lowell Historic Board was pleased to be asked by Assistant City Manager Brian Martin to help sort through a small mountain of documents that had come to light during a recent cleanup of the attic in City Hall.

When he began serving as Assistant City Manager in 1989, Brian Martin assumed responsibility for the City Hall building among others. On an inspection tour, he headed up to the attic. "I couldn't get off the elevator. Files and debris were piled to the door. I had to climb over everything," he says. Concerned that the historic materials were at risk and recognizing a fire hazard, Martin set out to save the papers and artifacts. "It would be a shame to lose those treasures," he says.

Soon, a staff member from the Massachusetts Archives was in Lowell helping to tag important documents. Each City department worked with the Archives' staff to ensure that its record keeping complied with legal requirements. Several departments, including the City Clerk's Office and the Engineer's Office, have long maintained their own records in secure storage areas. The City now has a policy in place regarding record storage.

After sorting out what would be kept, Martin worked with the Historic Board to obtain a grant to begin assessing the wealth of material. As Kathleen Brooker says, "The attic had everything from Civil War veterans' records to 1960's Civil Defense helmets. It was tangible evidence of the city's interests over the years."

What is it like in the attic? Picture a cavernous space,

dark and mysterious, with light slanting in from high windows. In one corner you see 54 small metal boxes filled with City Farm Records kept by the Overseers of the Poor. One room is filled with shelving, which is lined with bound volumes. There are wooden ballot boxes from the Perfection Ballot Box Company in Worcester. You step around holiday lights and decorations. Inside a room marked "Laboratory" there's a beautifully framed Water Loan Bond from 1891, including the quill pens used by Mayor Charles D. Palmer in signing the first issue. In another room, you pick up a small ledger, its reddish-brown spine worn through. The date "1835" is stamped on the cover. You can smell the brittle, discolored paper. On page eleven, written in fine script, you see the name "Boott Kirk," and the amount "50.45," which was his total tax for the year. These are the treasures of the attic.

City Hall is a kind of "common" in the same way as public green spaces are available for all citizens to use. It is a place for everyone, and our shared heritage is kept in its vaults, storerooms, and new machines. It is the location of the City's memory.

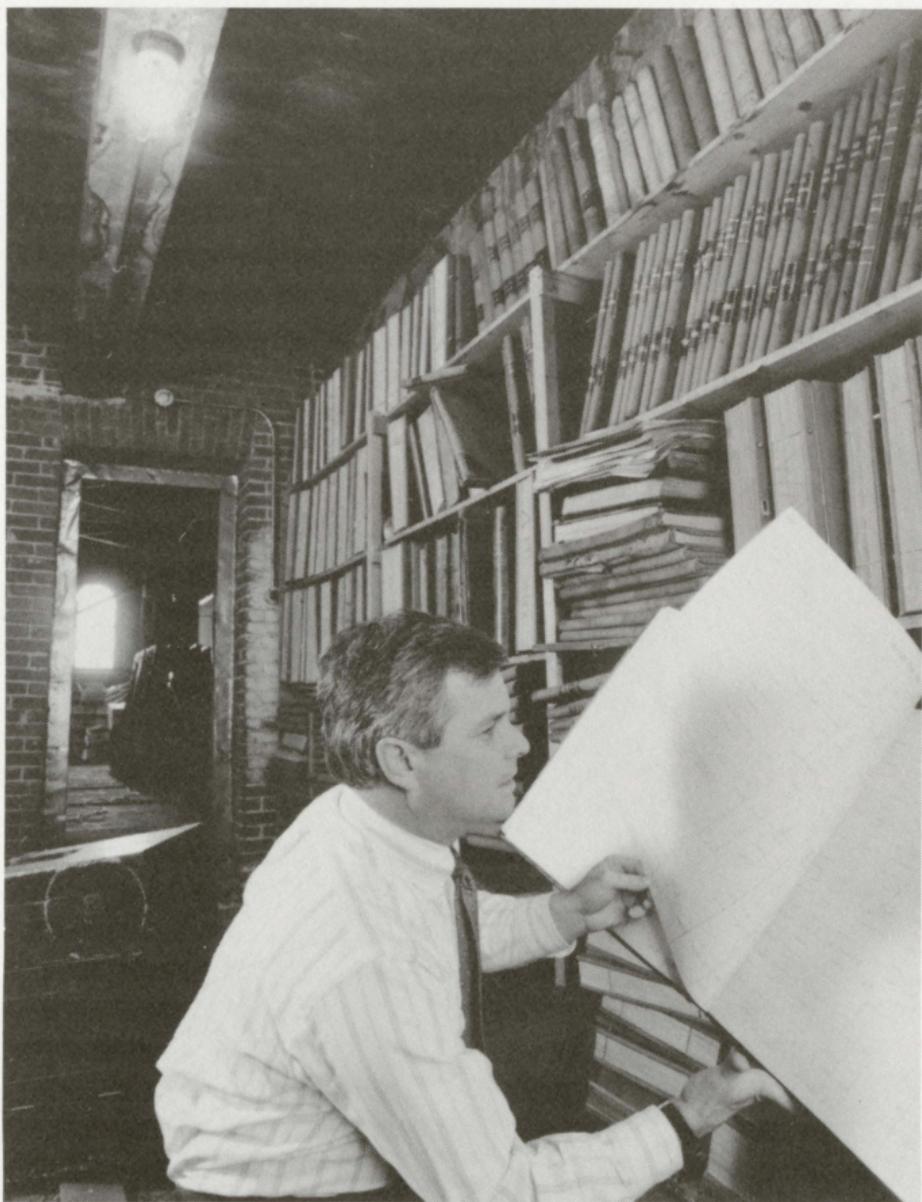


Photo: James Higgins

Assistant City Manager Brian Martin examines an early 20th century tax ledger stored in the attic.

The Preservation Agenda

"This is a slow moving motion picture of life in Lowell."

Mark C. Robinson

"The holdings of private and public institutions in Massachusetts represent one of the richest information resources in the United States." So begins a recent report, "Preserved to Serve: The Massachusetts Preservation Agenda," issued by a task force concerned with the preservation of the state's most valuable documents. One of the main goals of this group is "to identify and preserve critically important library and archival materials," which is exactly what is happening at City Hall.

Ensuring proper maintenance of and access to archival materials should be standard operating procedure. Lack of funds sometimes makes this difficult. It will take additional support to process and protect the documents uncovered in the attic of City Hall, particularly those from the nineteenth century. "The City needs to catalogue everything to assess what is here, then proceed with conservation," advises Mark C. Robinson of the Northeast Document Conservation Center, who examined the material in the spring of 1992. "Some material should be microfilmed, but the bulk of it will exist for some time if it is stored properly."

"This is invaluable information about how the City operated. You can't separate the documentary and physical history," says Diana Prideaux-Brune, Administrator of the Lowell Historic Board. "This type of preservation activity makes people think long term."

Martha Mayo of the UMass/Lowell Center for Lowell History, a research library, was one the first people to advise the City to conduct a systematic assessment of the materials. In 1991, the Center processed a collection of photographic prints and negatives from the City Engineer's Office. The original materials are secure, and some 6000 items are indexed and on line in the Center's computer system.

To All Whom It May Concern

"State the nature and extent of applicant's disability.

- Disease of eyes, gun shot wound in left hip."

Certificate of Reasons for Disbursing
State or Military Aid (1889)

Veterans' records are filled with details that can help us draw a picture of a time and place. A veteran's discharge certificate often carries the address: "To All Whom It May Concern." This proof of honorable service is one type of official document found in the files of the Soldiers' Relief Fund, which constitute a large part of the veterans' papers found in the attic.

"I've never seen a similar collection of veterans' records segregated from other municipal documents. It is an



Photo: James Higgins

Leo White, Civil Engineer, reaches for a plan in the document room of the City Engineer's Office.

information bank on veterans," says Mark C. Robinson. The case histories of veterans include enlistment dates, battle records, wounds received, medals and citations, discharges, and anecdotes on personal and family history after their service. They are a valuable source for studying military, social, and economic history.

"These are precious records," says William M. Zounes, Deputy Director of Veterans' Services. "I've seen an increased interest in history since the National Historical Park was established. We'll often have people come to our office looking for information when they're researching their family history."

Another important collection of veterans' records exists in the files of the Veterans' Grave Registration Project of 1941. Among these file cards one will find familiar names such as Addison O. Whitney, who is buried in the "cemetery" in Monument Square in front of City Hall. The Ladd & Whitney Monument marks his grave. Another card reveals that Sgt. Joseph B. Varnum of the 2nd Massachusetts Regiment was killed in action in Centerville, Virginia on August 24, 1863. He was 39 years old and had been in the army less than six months. The files cover veterans from the Revolutionary War through World War I. The veterans' records are expected to be transferred to the UMass/Lowell Center for Lowell History in the Patrick J. Mogan Cultural Center, where they will be processed and made available to researchers.

The New Records

With the introduction of computers into City Hall, many of the records began to be stored on disks, and recently Wang Laboratories worked with the Clerk's Office on a pilot program for municipal record keeping using a state of the art imaging system. On April 14, 1992, Lowell Cable Television began live broadcasts of City Council meetings. Mayor Tarsy T. Poulios says, "This is a good step. It will let people see their government at work." The attic contains reports of Council proceedings dating from 1836. The next generation of scholars will study videotape.

Selected List of Documents at City Hall

Annual Reports (1836-1924)*

Auditor's Reports (1837-1967)*

City Department Reports (1850-1885)*

City Marshall Reports (1830-1850)*

Journal, Board of Aldermen (1852-1857)*

Militia Reports & Records (1837-1873)*

Moth Assessment Ledgers (1906-1944)*

Municipal Registers (1891-1910)*

Payroll & Daybook (1883-1970)*

Petitions and Communications (1836-1914)*

Records of Married Women in Business (1881-1893)

Reports of the Common Council & Election of Officers
(1836-1945)*

Roster of 30th Regiment MVM 1862-65 Mass.

Sidewalk Assessments (1869-1915)*

Street Sprinkling Assessments (1905-1929)*

Street Department Letter Boxes (1901-1951)*

Soldiers and Sailors in War of Rebellion from Lowell, A-Z

Soldiers Benefits (1891-1943)*

Town of Lowell Papers (1826-1836)

Treasurer's Journals & Ledgers (1836-1970s)*

Writs (1826-1865)*

* Incomplete



Photo: James Higgins

The attic entry to the workings of City Hall's famous clock is unmistakable.

The Exhibit

James Higgins created a photographic essay on the daily work of City Hall today. His images of the public employees and officials who are responsible for the workings of local government are juxtaposed with facsimiles of historic documents from the attic of City Hall. As Historic Board Administrator Diana Prideaux-Brune says, "It is important to realize that we are making history right now." One panel includes views of the exterior and interior of City Hall along with information about the building.

Lowell Historic Board

The Lowell Historic Board (LHB) was established to promote the educational, cultural, economic, and general welfare of the public through the preservation, protection, and enhancement of the unique historic values of the city of Lowell. The LHB helps preserve buildings and places significant in the history of the city and of the Commonwealth and the United States. It encourages design compatible with historic settings and ensures appropriate and coordinated development in the city's historic districts.

Acknowledgments

Kathleen Brooker	Juliet Mofford
Joseph Burns	Anne O'Brien
William Busby	Brandon Oliver
Angela Coupal	Donna Oliver
Priscilla Farley	Ruth Page
Bob Fitzpatrick	Mayor Tarsy T. Poulios
George Georges	Diana Prideaux-Brune
Frank Grady	Mark C. Robinson
Crystal Jolicoeur	Joan Ross
Paul Jolicoeur	Mary Sheehan
Stella Kosartes	Martha Swett
Guy Lefebvre	Leo White
Brian Martin	William M. Zounes
Martha Mayo	

Lowell Historic Preservation Commission
City Offices: City Manager, Clerk, Engineer,
Treasurer & Tax Collector, and Veterans' Benefits
Pollard Memorial Library
Lowell Office of Cultural Affairs
Northeast Document Conservation Center
UMass/Lowell Center for Lowell History
Lowell Historical Society
Lowell National Historical Park

Exhibit Plan and Brochure Text: Paul Marion
Research and Document Inventory: Richard Leach
Photography: James Higgins
Exhibit Design: Richard Marion

THE PATRICK J. MOGAN CULTURAL CENTER

The mission of the Patrick J. Mogan Cultural Center is to "tell the human story found in the history of the United States as an industrial nation, especially by concentrating on the lives of the working people of Lowell, Massachusetts." The Center, which opened in 1989, is named in honor of Lowell's former Superintendent of Schools who developed the concept of an urban park focused on Lowell's unique heritage.

This former Boott Mills boardinghouse, built around 1837, was rehabilitated by the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior. It is an appropriate setting for the Lowell National Historical Park's interpretive exhibits on the theme of the Working People: Mill Girls, Immigrants, and Labor. A wide variety of cultural programs is offered here throughout the year. The Center also houses the University of Massachusetts at Lowell Center for Lowell History, and the University's Downtown Center for Continuing Education.

LOWELL HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

The Lowell Historic Preservation Commission was authorized in 1978 "to tell the human story of the Industrial Revolution in a 19th century setting by encouraging cultural expression in Lowell." Its historic preservation program works to preserve historic buildings and create a recreational trail along Lowell's canals. Its cultural programs interpret the Commission's themes through public art, performing arts, cultural grants, exhibits, conferences, publications, folklife, oral history, ethnic heritage and labor projects. For further information, call (508) 458-7653.

LOWELL OFFICE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Lowell Office of Cultural Affairs co-sponsors temporary exhibits at the Mogan Cultural Center through its Cooperative Agreement with the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission.

The mission of the Lowell Office of Cultural Affairs (LOCA) is to identify the ways and means to expand cultural opportunities and choices; to increase participation in cultural activities by visitors and residents at every level in the community; and to provide adequate financial resources to those who create, present, and preserve the culture of the city. For information or to receive The Local, a bi-monthly calendar of Lowell events, call (508) 459-9899.

TEMPORARY EXHIBITS

Any organization, group, or individual interested in developing an exhibit at the Patrick J. Mogan Cultural Center on its themes, should contact the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission at 222 Merrimack Street, Suite 310, Lowell, MA 01852, (508) 458-7653. A staff member will send you an application and if approved, your proposal will then be recommended to the Mogan Community Advisory Board.