

# L O W E L L

A CONTEMPORARY VIEW BY JAMES HIGGINS

Foreword by Senator Paul E. Tsongas





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December 15, 1983



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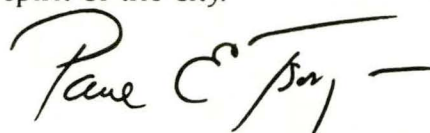
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## FOREWORD

Lowell is the story of proud, enduring and diverse people. The city's architecture is a testament to the genius of those who capitalized on the great potential they saw in the enormous hydro resource of the Merrimack River. Together today, the turn of the century architecture and the present day people form contemporary Lowell—still a city of diversity: ethnically, socioeconomically, and culturally.

Yet there is a commonality among Lowellians which is an emotional forte; and that is the desire to push ahead for progress. Collectively the result has been an innovative effort to redefine Lowell's place in contemporary times. The twilight that once paled the city is giving way to a bright new spirit of progress. The hope for opportunities that drew nineteenth century immigrants to Lowell now draws twentieth century immigrants to Lowell. Native Lowellians, whose rightful despair in the historical ebb of the lost textile industry cannot be denied, see the glimmer of rekindled hope and faith in the future.

Lowell today is a vibrant community of people who reflect the city's rich human heritage. *Lowell, A Contemporary View* frames the spirit of the city.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Paul C. Perry" with a horizontal line extending to the right.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their help and support I thank the following: Walter Hickey, Alex Kidaloski, Louis Karabatsos, Ed Dows, Carol Kierstead, the Lowell National and State Parks, Martha Mayo and Catherine Quinn at the University of Lowell, Sam Crayton, Jim St. Clair, Ray LaPorte, Leo Panas, and the Lowell Art Association.

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I wish to express my thanks to the good people on the staff of the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission for their continuing support of my work.

I am also grateful to Roland LaRochelle, my "passport to the mills", for his support and his genuine kindness and enthusiasm.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Lowell of U.S. history books is the city that was planned for the purpose of mass-producing cotton cloth through an ingenious combination of hydropower and the integrated factory system. Founded in the first half of the 19th century, Lowell quickly became world famous. After prosperity and growth came decline and despair. The future bleak, Lowell, like other old New England mill towns, was labeled "a depressed area". But a blend of inspiration, hard work, good timing, and political savvy transformed the community. Once again the city drew national attention as a model—this time an example of revival.

The most dramatic of recent events occurred in 1978, when the Congress established Lowell National Historical Park, declaring Lowell the most appropriate place to tell the story of how the Industrial Revolution began in America. Now the "new" Lowell overlaps the old. As a tour guide in a canal boat explains the tech-

nology of 1826, companies upstream imagine the technology of 1996.

A mill city whose fame is grounded in work, Lowell remains a city of workers. It's not a rich or fancy place, for the most part, yet it has a solid, no-nonsense kind of attractiveness. And a further look, lit with inspiration, shows the real beauty in its design. There is very little that is pretentious about this city. You have to *like* Lowell to love it.

In the 1800's thousands of new people came to Lowell to work, determined to make a living in America. That diverse pool created Lowell's personality. The cultures met and clashed and coalesced—a microcosm of the nation. The trend continues with Hispanic, Southeast Asian, and a mixture of European families. The faces in these photographs speak for themselves. The people are no more ordinary than they are spectacular.

*Paul Marion*

TO ELI, JESSE, AND ANNA

# L · O · W · E · L · L

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A CONTEMPORARY VIEW

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LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS

---

Location: Northeastern Massachusetts

Population: Approximately 93,000

Main Industry: Computer electronics



LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

---

"The first summer that we gave tours, one of the first questions a visitor would ask was, "where's the park?"—when they were standing in the park. There are no boundaries that are visible. In a very real sense the city of Lowell is the park. This is a difficult concept for people whose image of a national park is Yosemite or Yellowstone."

—Maude Salinger—



RESTORATION OF THE WANNALANCIT MILLS

This former textile mill is now the site of the Wannalancit Office and Technology Center. "You come in and see this thing in its grubbiest state, with the oil stained floors and cotton dust, and then turn it all around. It's much more satisfying than building new buildings."

—Mal Fryer—

*Dobroth & Fryer*





CULBERT'S VARIETY AND GIFT SHOP

---

"One of the best things about having our own store is that we're in contact with the neighbors. Some of the regular customers come in to talk and they talk in French, especially the older ones. We love Pawtucketville. We have a real neighborhood store and feel that the people like our being here."

—*Florette Culbert*—



### LOWELL BOYS CLUB

---

"It was founded in 1900 with the purpose of offering boys adult guidance while they were growing up.

The club felt that those kids, whose parents mostly worked in the mills and lived in low income housing, could use the assistance. Our focus today has not changed greatly from that.

We're primarily a jock image. But it's a big facade, a come on to bring the kids in. We have to be more attractive than the streets."

—Jack Glazebrook—  
*Executive Director*



BRIDGE STREET TO KEARNEY SQUARE

---

"It's kind of lonely, like an outpost out here at night."

—Arthur Petren—

*A&L Taxi*



RIALTO THEATER MARQUEE

---

A bowling alley now occupies the interior of the Rialto Theater. "I used to play the Rialto once a month. We had a trio called the 'Jivin' Joes', we impersonated the Ink Spots. I have three sons, they're all on the road now, playing in a band."

—Owen Matthews—







BEAUTY CONTEST, PUERTO RICAN FESTIVAL,  
NORTH COMMON

---

"We started the festival because we wanted to let them know  
who we are, what our culture is. We are U.S. citizens."

—Jose Nieves—



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SALONICA SOCIAL CLUB

"The club is important to the new immigrant who needs a place to socialize. We have over a hundred members. They come down to play pinochle, casino and backgammon.

On Saturdays we cook a meal.

It's a social club, a benevolent club."

—Tarsey Georges—

BELMONT STREET RESIDENCE

---

"The owner told us that a builder wanted to tear the house down, sell the mantles, sell everything and build condos here. She didn't want that to happen so she sold the house to us."

—Zen and Sue Mierzwa—



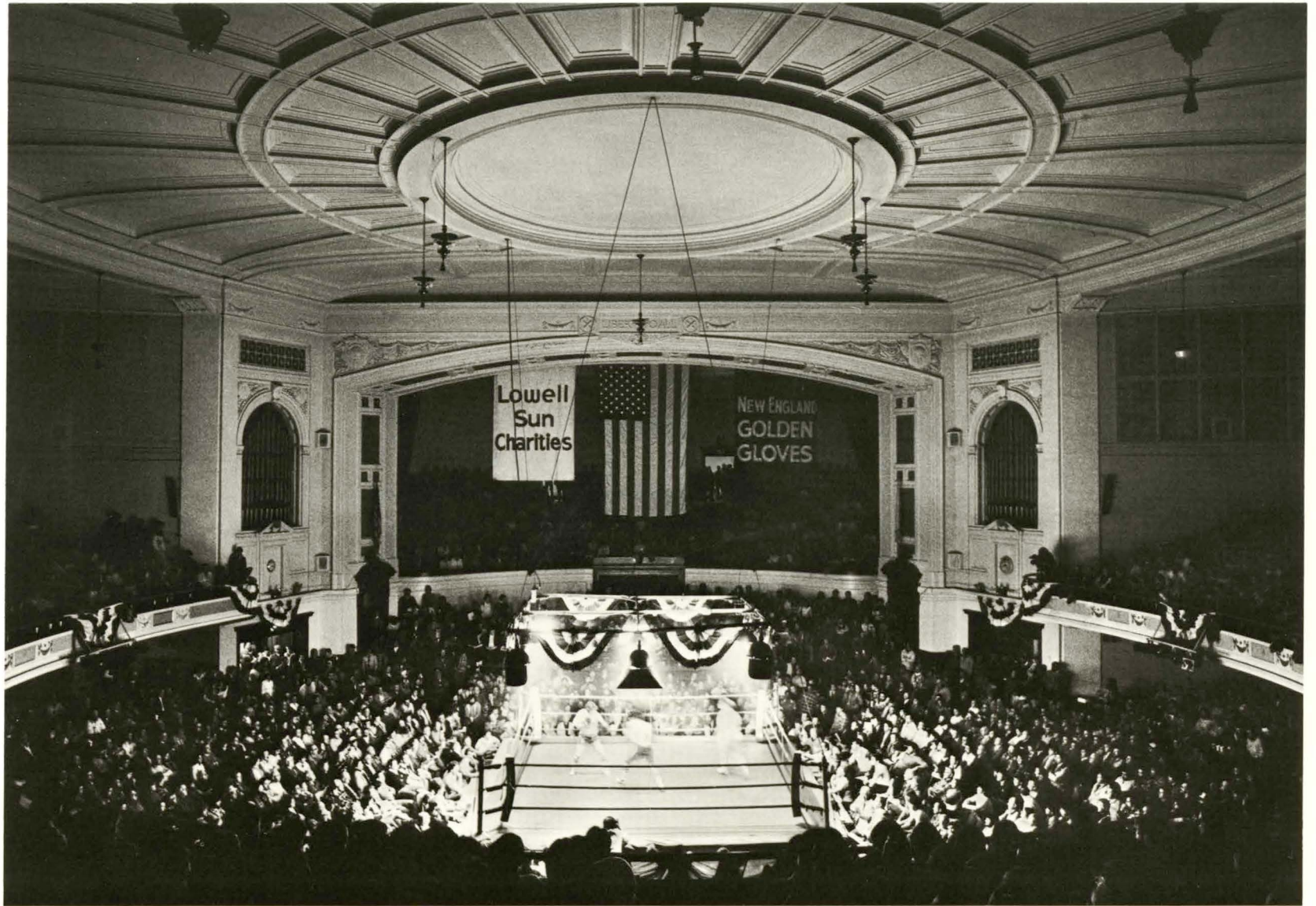
THE NEW ENGLAND GOLDEN GLOVES,  
LOWELL MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM

---

"There's not many places for these kids to go for amateur boxing and for a lot of them, it's their only way out. With the exception of Madison Square Garden, we're the largest amateur boxing show on the east coast. When a kid walks down the aisle from Liberty Hall and up that red carpet, he's got 4000 sets of eyes on him. When he walks into that ring, he's in the same ring as Marciano, Hagler, and Sugar Ray Leonard. They all fought here. The Gloves are a tradition in Lowell. It's lasted for 38 years and it'll last for another 38 years."

—Norman Lombardi—

*New England Golden Gloves Director*



#### THE SHARPE FAMILY

---

Ruth Ann is a member of the Board of Directors at Community Teamwork, Inc. and is president of their elderly program. "I've been working in Lowell for 41 years. I started in the Merrimack Mills and when they closed down, I went to the shoe factory on Jackson Street."

—Ruth Ann Sharpe—





RESTORATION OF THE MARKET MILLS

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"There were two fires there and the City Council had at one point a motion on its agenda to tear it down. It was like the phoenix that rose up from the ashes."

—Fred Faust—

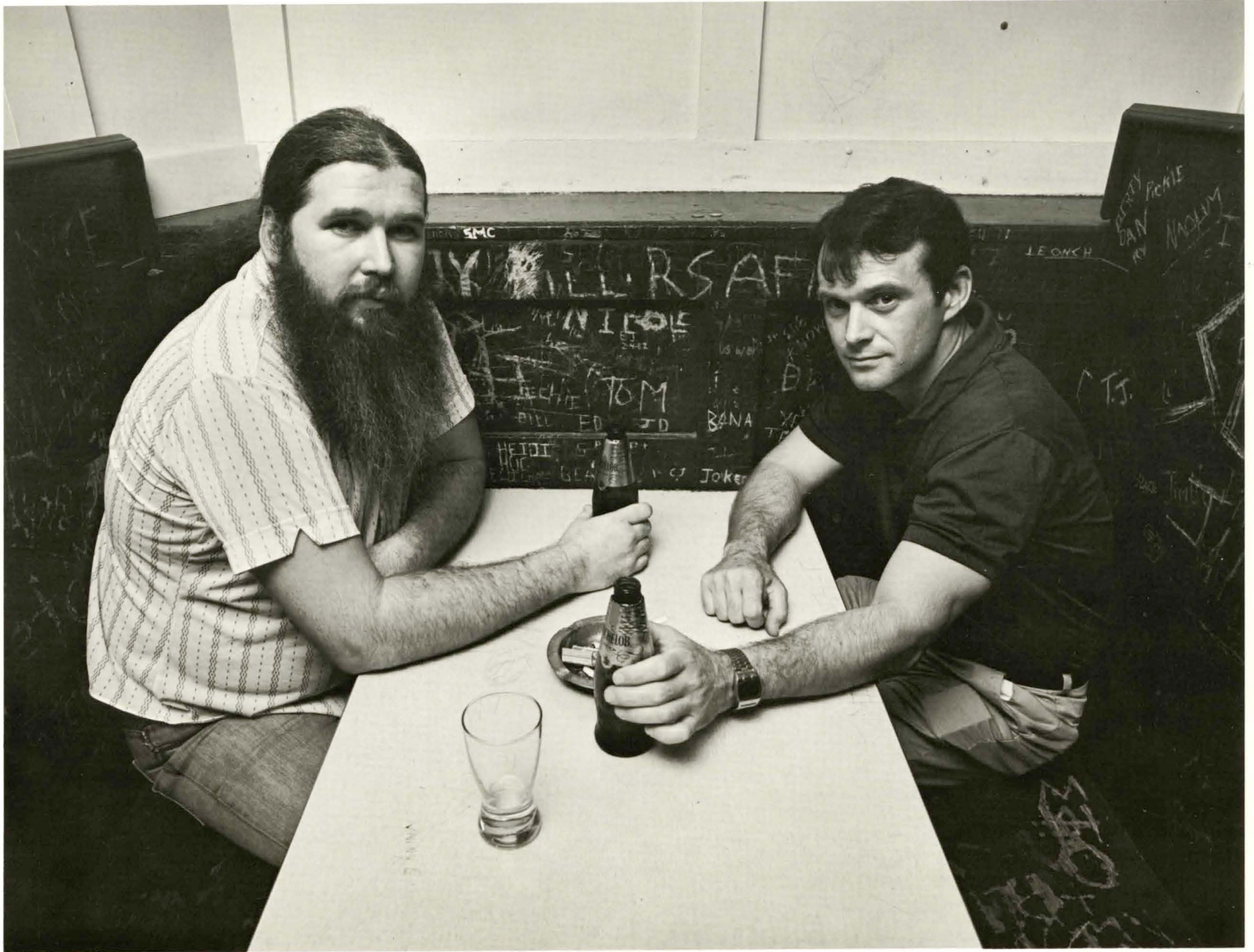
*Lowell Historic Preservation Commission*



### THE OLD WORTHEN

---

“ . . . this creaking tavern scribbled with slogans of mill rats,  
rock 'n rollers, mind guerillas, unknown poets, love-nuts,  
wild card jokers, the whole shootin' match—and there near  
a window scratched big with flair, 'Edgar Allan Poe loves Mary  
Carr,' no doubt scrawled the night El Raven allegedly slept in  
the back hall, a legend session like the day Kerouac held court  
or the secret time Dylan's party locked the door or last week  
when some guy waved a pistol . . . ”



JAR STATUE & DRAPE SHOP

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"I go to New York to buy the dolls. They're all handmade  
and I sell every one."

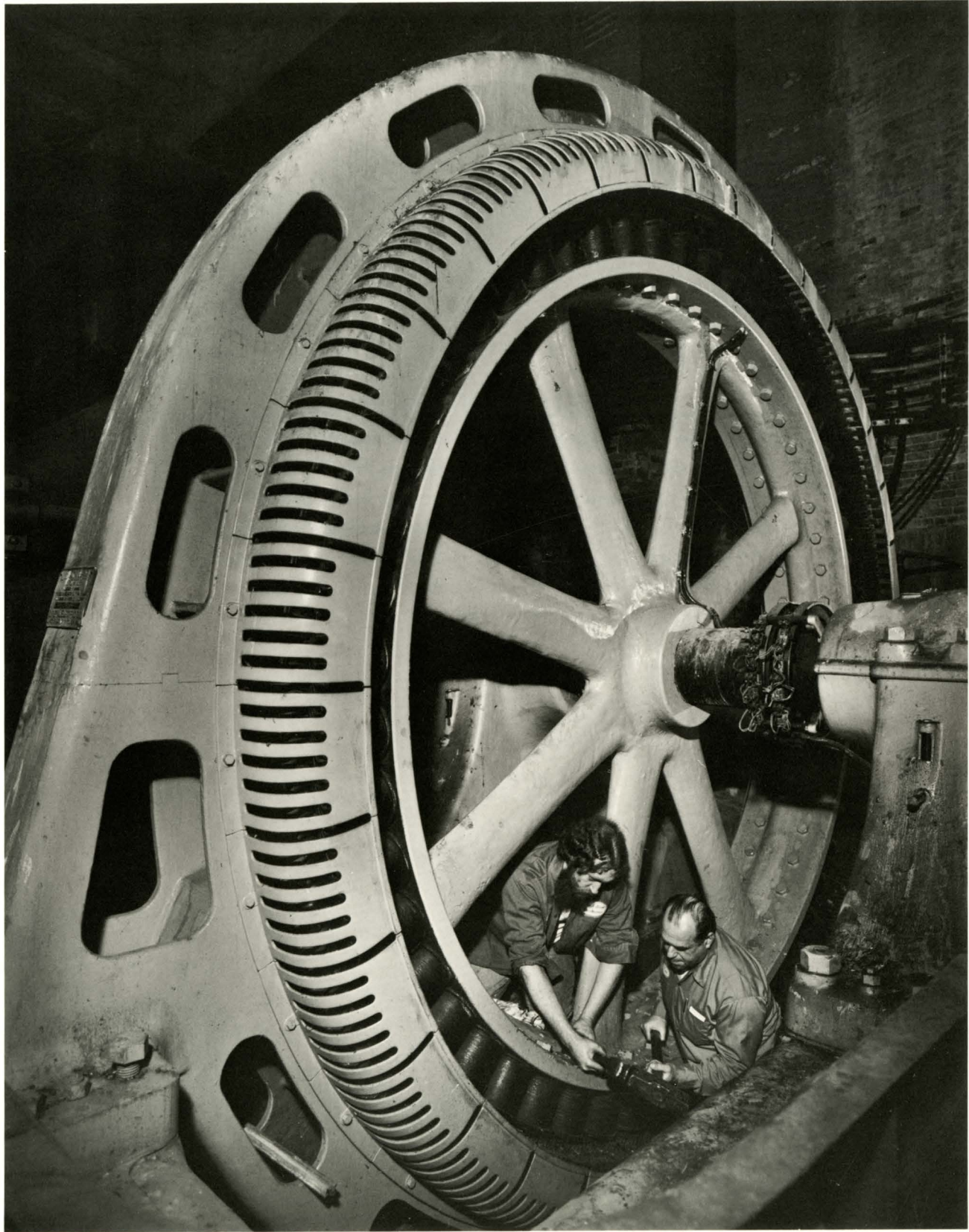
—*Louis Ayala*—



HYDRO GENERATOR, MAIN POWER, BOOTT MILLS

Canal powered hydro generators still contribute to Lowell's power supply. The power used to go directly to the mills but today it's fed into a common grid for distribution throughout the city.





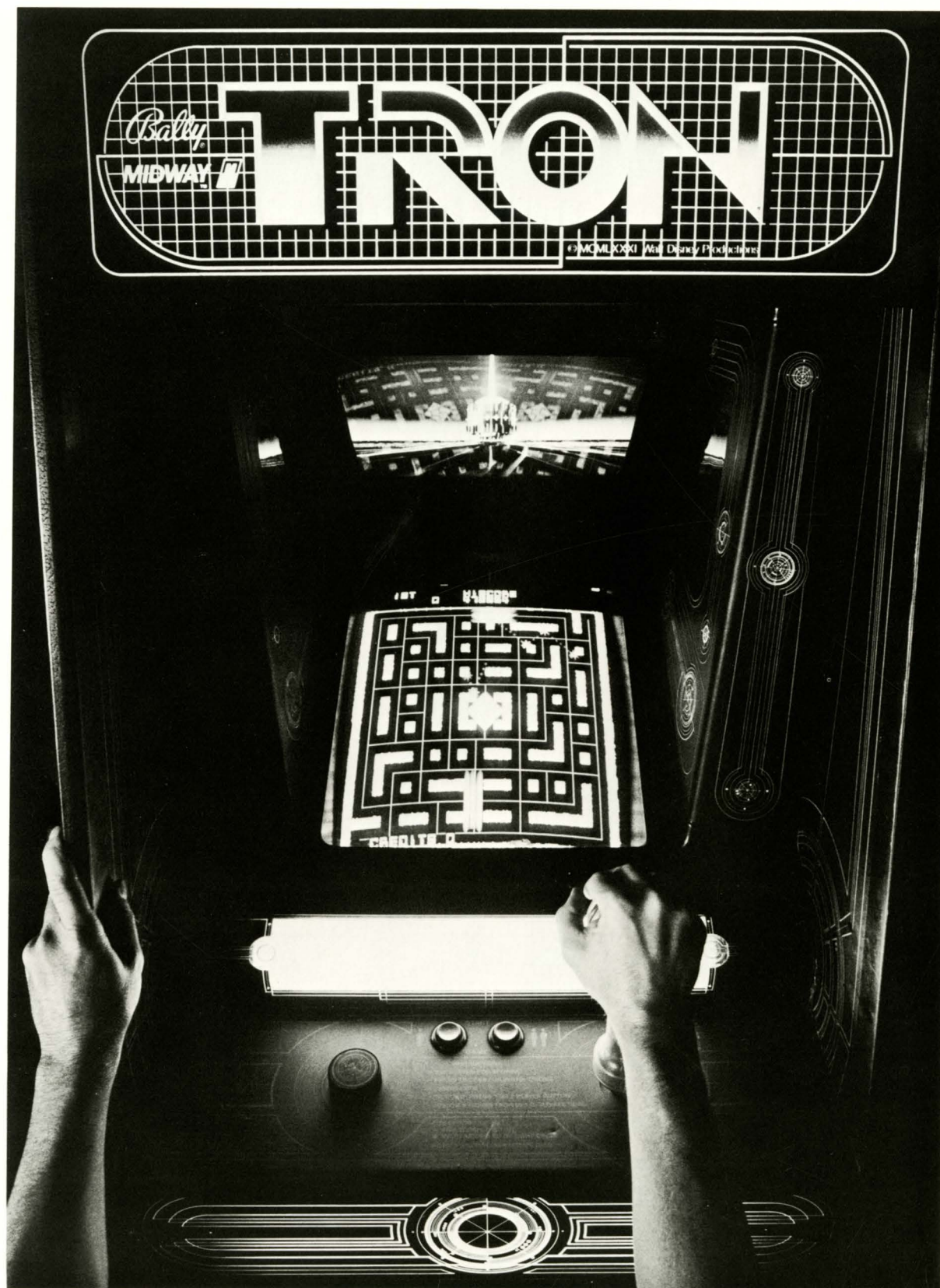
W. J. HOARE SEAFOODS

---

"Years ago everybody ate fish on Fridays. Now they eat meat. It's hurt the business. In some rich districts, like Belmont, the business has stayed the same because they know that fish is beneficial to their health. But places like Lowell and Lawrence, the mill towns, people have been eating fish for so many years on Fridays that when they had a chance to eat meat, they stuck with it."

—Bill Hoare—





WORLD OF GAMES VIDEO ARCADE



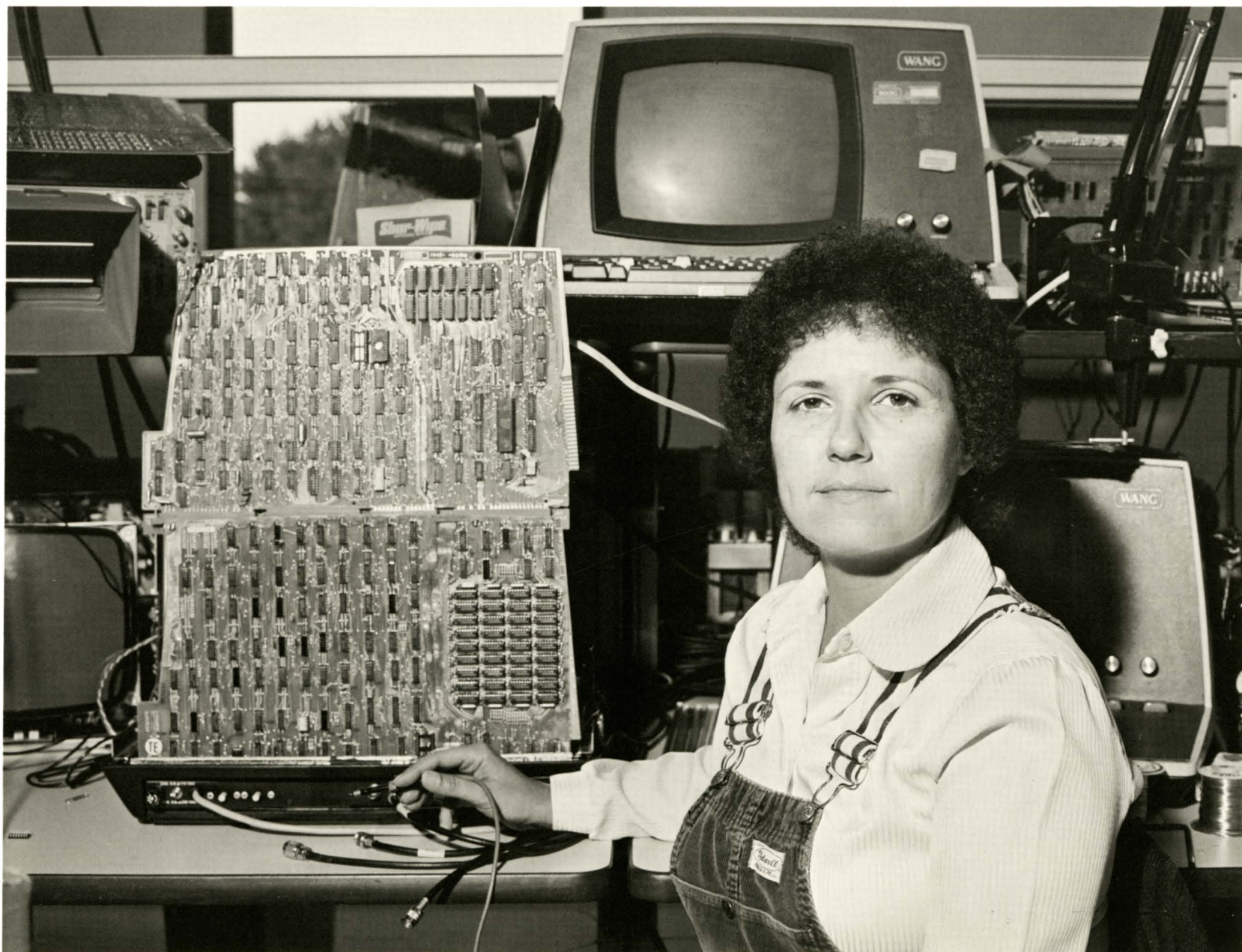
ENTRY TO THE NOW VACANT SUFFOLK KNITTING COMPANY

WANG LABORATORIES

---

"I came from an area with not much future in this kind of work. When I started at Wang, I enrolled in in-house training and graduated from the twilight tech program. There's a lot of opportunity here."

—*Elaine Vohar*—



FISHER RECITAL HALL, UNIVERSITY OF LOWELL

---

"I would like to see a program that deliberately attempts to wed high technology to the study of music at this college. Nowhere are we taught the complete concept of technology and the Arts to prepare us for beyond the year 2000.

In a sense we could become pioneers."

—Gerald Lloyd—

*Dean, College of Music*





CARMELA TYMOWICZ

---

Carmela standing with her Mother's Day present from her husband Joe. "I brought Carmela over from Italy in '51 and three months later she was working in the mills. Everything was rough but nobody was sad. Just like on TV with our old friend 'no welfare' Archie Bunker."

—Joe Tymowicz—



MASSACHUSETTS MILLS STAIRWAY

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Workers have been treading these stairs for more than 140 years. "They were all beginning to sag. I had to reinforce them with channel irons running top to bottom and an angle iron for every stairway."

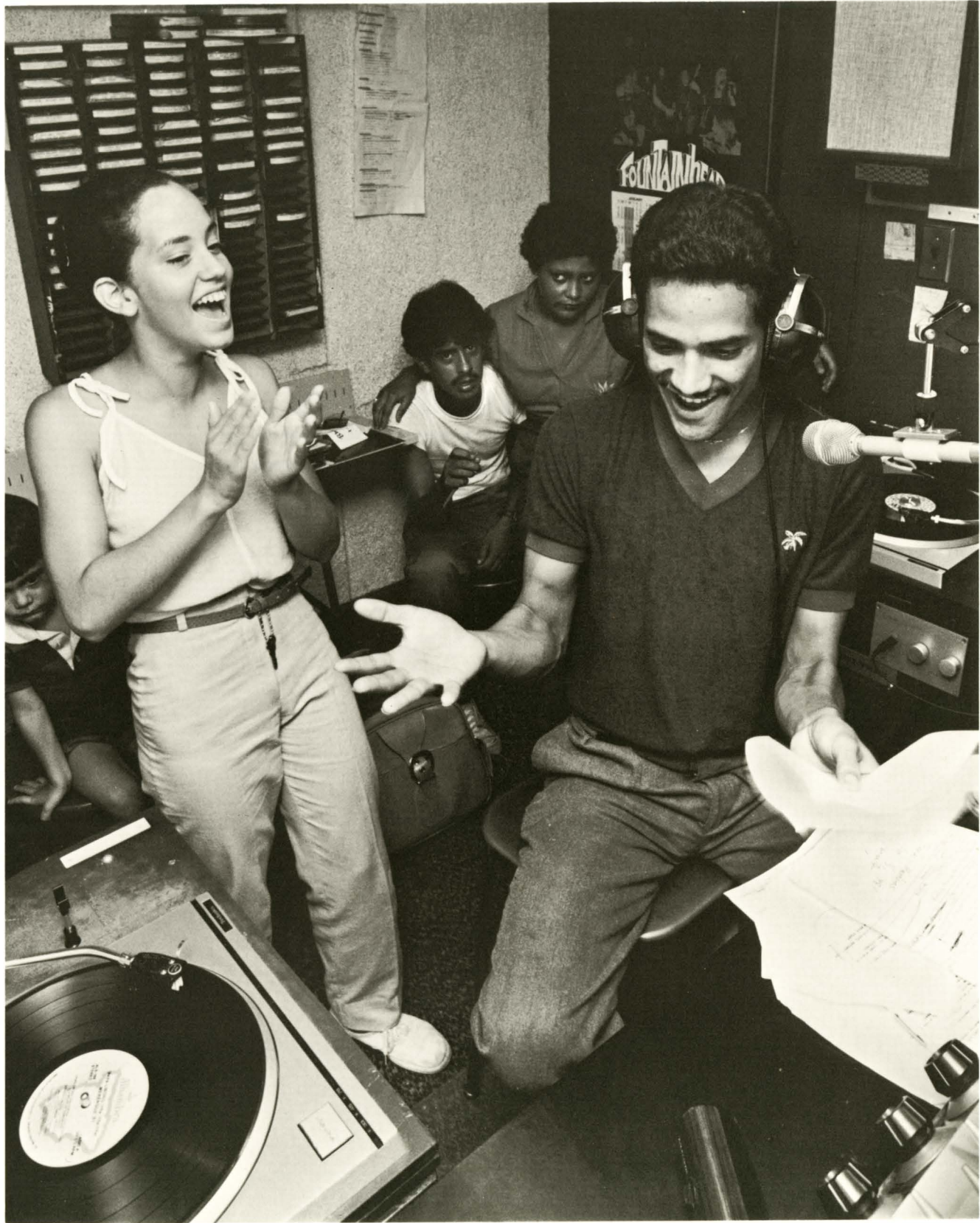
—Walter Coan—



EL SHOW SIN NOMBRE

---

The show without a name airs weekly on Sunday afternoons,  
sponsored by WJUL, Unitas, and the Lowell Arts Council.



SOFTBALL UMPIRES, HENRY ALLEN PARK

"We have rules and interpretation meetings, clinics, and annual test. We're a professionally run organization. It's a lot better for the umpires to know the rules than to play the game over."

—Charles Shlimon—





ELENI BLETSIS

---

"She doesn't speak any English. She came over from Greece after her husband died because the rest of the family were here. Her two sons own Star Pizza downtown."

—*Eleni Bletsis-Pitarys*—

*Niece*





CARDOSO'S DENTAL LABORATORY



ALEX'S SHOE SHINE PARLOR

THE MERRIMACK RIVER

---

"The river is a lot cleaner today than 10, 15 years ago. A lot of these murky streams that were contributing their mess into the Merrimack have been diverted to waste water plants. Trout and salmon are being stocked in the river now. Before, they never would have survived."

—Charlie Panagiotakos—  
Water Chemist



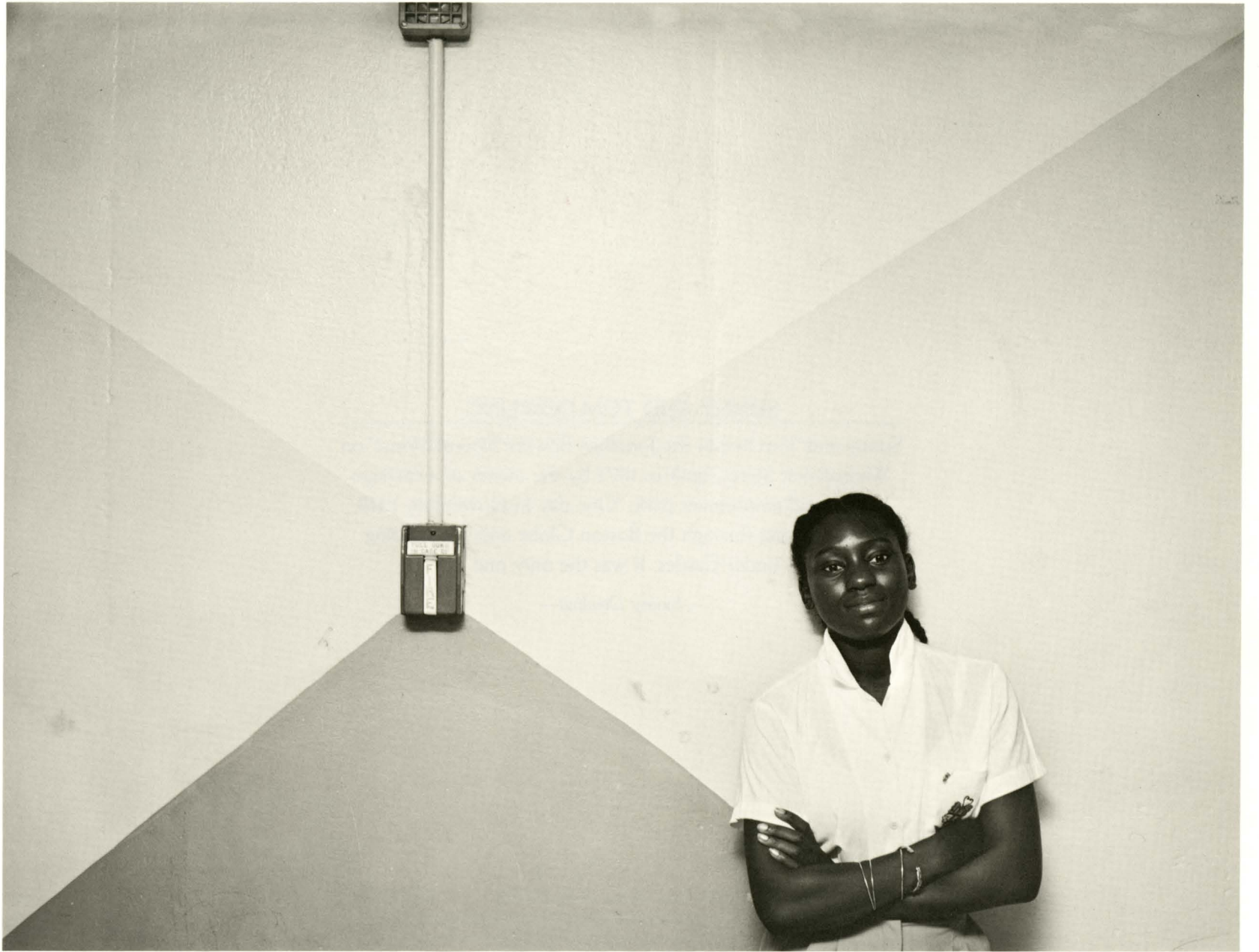
DAY CARE VOLUNTEER, SALVATION ARMY

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"It's not common for us to get many teenage volunteers."

—Major Robert Dries—  
Salvation Army





SUNNY AND TOM DOWLING

---

Sunny and Tom live in the Jonathan Bowers 'Round House' on Wannalancit Street, built in 1872 by the owner of a carriage factory and amusement park. "One day in November, 1970, I was looking through the Boston Globe and saw a listing under Castles. It was the only one."

—Sunny Dowling—



### NATIONAL PARK TROLLEY

---

"When I applied for this job, one of the questions on the application was, "why should we hire you?" I told them that I was interested in trains ever since I was a kid. I used to go to Lowell High and every time the switch engine came down the track, I'd go sharpen my pencil by the window and watch the train go by."

—*Moose the Motorman*—





DUBLINER ROAD RACE



TOUR DE LOWELL BICYCLE RACE

THE HUL FAMILY

---

"The Communists took away our culture, turned it into a pagan culture. If we stay outside of Cambodia nobody will starve us, cheat us, or force us to lose our freedom. We think about what happened. We think about our future."

—*Narung Hul*—





MERRIMACK VALLEY VIETNAM VETERANS, INC.

"There are 9 men from the Merrimack Valley area that are still missing over there. This war will never be over until all American personnel are accounted for."

—Ron Gleason—



LUNCH TIME AT THE GRACE SHOE COMPANY



YWCA

---

"We do advocacy work, outreach work into the neighborhoods. People who don't have much money to teach their children how to swim can come here. It's affordable. This is a whole new direction for the YWCA. Before, we were always considered upper middle class."

—Virginia Burchell—  
*Program Director*



DON'S BARGAIN CENTER

---

"I'm honest, I won't sell a piece of junk. I specialize in religious merchandise. I'm a born again Christian. Sometimes I witness to people, if they want to hear it. My attitude is live and let live."

—Donald J. Snow—





HALLISSY CHEVROLET

---

"We've built our business on owner loyalty and trust."

—Peter Hallissy—





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PRINTED PRODUCTS, BOOTT MILLS

---

"We do silkscreening on tee shirts and children's clothes.  
A lot of kids' stuff like 'Strawberry Shortcake' and 'Care Bear'  
are big right now."

—Mike Baratta—



---

MASSACHUSETTS COTTON MILLS PAY TAG

Found in the Massachusetts Mills by a night watchman.

#### THE PEARSON FAMILY

---

John Pearson Sr. (far left) and his son, John Pearson Jr. (far right) are partners in both a downtown law practice and the B.F. Butler Cooperative Bank. These are among the few family businesses left in Lowell that are third generation.



ELEVEN EIGHTY-ONE MIDDLESEX STREET

---

"It was known as 'Honolulu Brown'. There's seven apartments in there now. I've tried to hold onto the decor and the woodwork inside but it has been difficult. It's not the best economic set-up because of the high ceilings but it's a beautiful example of America's history."

—Leon Lavalée—  
*Present Owner*





FLORENCE AND RICHARD MARION

---

"The Arts should be part of everyday living, but  
today you can't even promote Art education in  
school because it's expendable."

—Richard Marion—

*Painter*



### THE HAMILTON CANAL

---

The Courier Corporation located its corporate headquarters here in the former Hamilton Cotton Mills. "The canal provides a nice backdrop. It's part of the flavor of Lowell and is one of the reasons why companies decide to have their headquarters in a mill building."

—Mary Gail McCarthy—  
*Courier Corporation*



JERRY'S ARMY & NAVY STORE

---

"When we opened in 1955 there were lines of people waiting to get in, and police out front for the crowd. There were no shopping centers then. It's not like that today of course. If it wasn't for the jean trade, we might as well give it up.

Thank God for jeans."

—Myron Eisen—  
*Manager*



CASA / RADIO GIFT SHOP

---

"Most of the records are modern Portuguese and Brazilian, but they have that American beat in there."

—*John Goes*—  
*Owner*





MILL AND CANAL TOUR AT  
PAWTUCKET GATE HOUSE

---

"State rangers that play the part of interpreters, dress in period costumes. We take people out of history and draw them back to tell their story. It's living history."

—Dorothy Zug—

*Lowell Heritage State Park*



SAMPAS PAVILION CONCERT, OCTOBERFEST

"More than ten organizations got together to bring this cultural event to the community. It's the epitome of cooperation between the public and private sectors. They're all volunteers.

None of these people got paid except the two guys who lugged the piano over there."

—Dick Taffe—

*Lowell Regatta Foundation*



ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH AND  
HOLY TRINITY CHURCH

---

A rare juxtaposition of Romanesque and Byzantine  
architecture.



GIAVIS MARKET

---

"We get a better mixture, a healthier mixture of people coming in here now. We specialize in Greek ethnic foods but more non-Greeks are buying them. They come in and ask for items that only Greeks would ask for years ago, like pignolia nuts, chestnuts, or rose water."

—Bill Giavis—







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### MOTORCYCLE RIDERS

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"We don't belong to any group. That's the beauty of being independent riders, you don't get harassed every time you turn a corner."

—Vinnie Boulanger—



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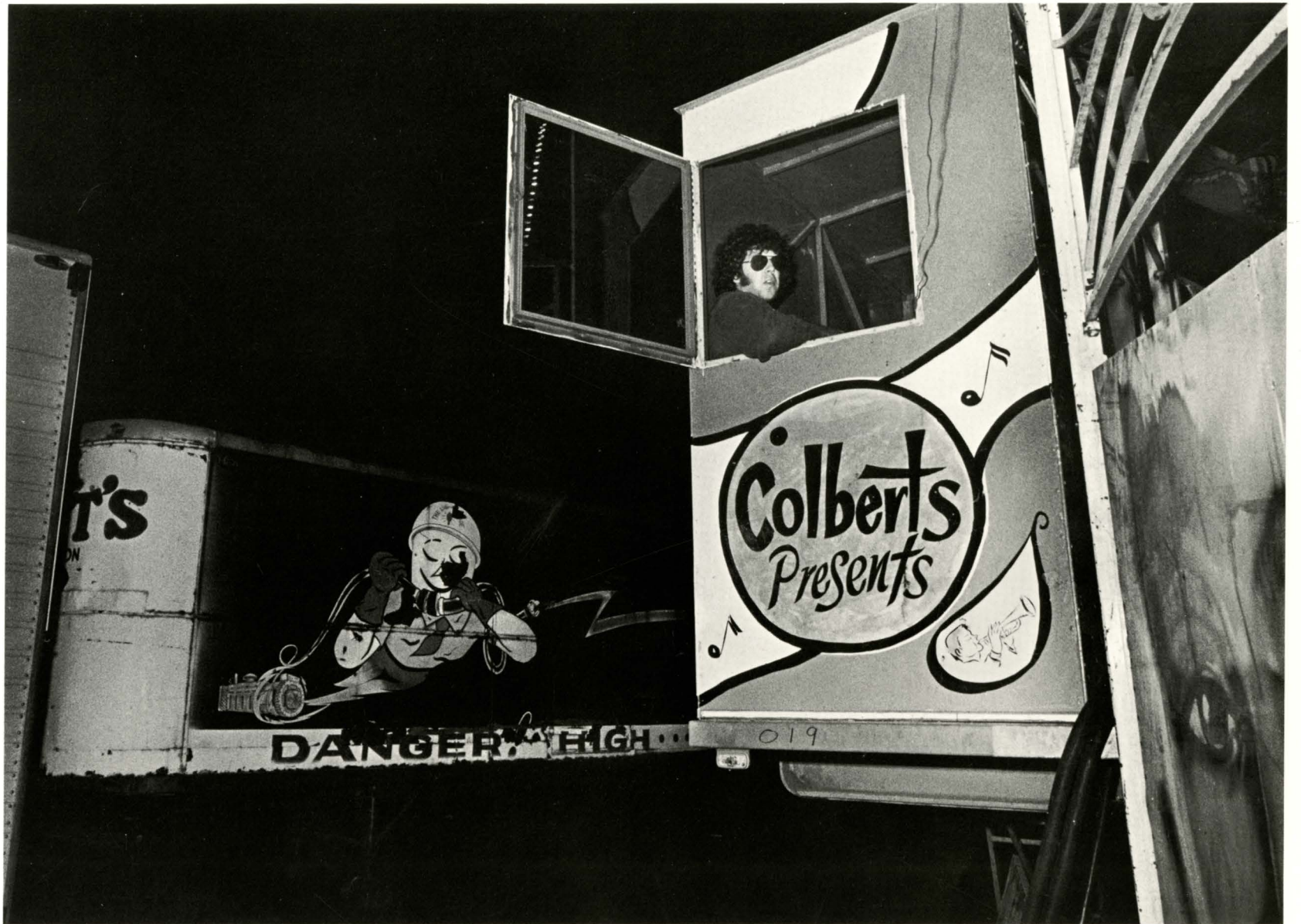
#### DERBY PARK RESTAURANT

"The glass rack and bar bottom were made out of 90 year old doors, 175 of them, that came from old tenement blocks in Lowell. We tried to use as much historical stuff as possible to create a rustic look, a mill town look."

—Larry Beland—

MIDWAY, PAWTUCKET BOULEVARD

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THE GILMORE TRUST BUILDING

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ZBEIDE'S MIDDLE EASTERN DANCING

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"There's not many people doing sword dancing, it requires a lot of skill. People think we have them glued on our heads."

—Helen Perry—



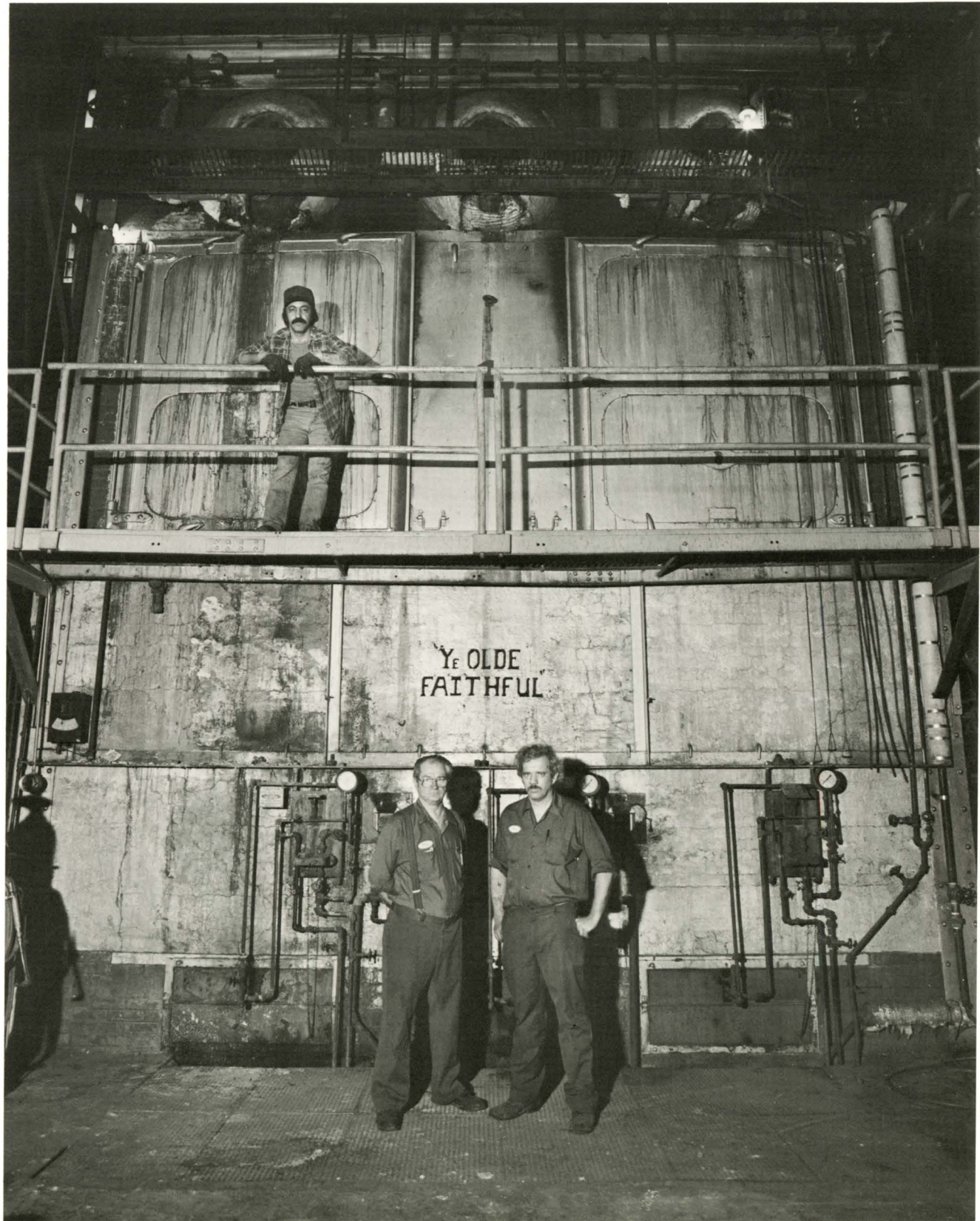


BOILER ROOM, BOOTT MILLS CORPORATION

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"In the summertime it gets up to 120, 130 degrees in here.  
But you got to get the job done. If the boilers stop working,  
the company's out money."

—Ernie Boudreau—





BUDDHIST CEREMONY, INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE



SHAUGHNESSY TERRACE HOUSING PROJECT

MEMORIAL HALL, POLLARD MEMORIAL LIBRARY

Lydia Howard has served as a catalyst and chief fundraiser for the restoration of Memorial Hall. "I got into this because of Urban Renewal. People in Lowell were being put out of stores and homes. It was terrible, they were tearing down everything."

—Lydia Howard—



CITY OF LOWELL WORKERS

---

"Franky and I were brought up together, we chum together. I was on a dozer for 19 years before I went on the sweeper. Franky's been here 24 years. We used to do the streets downtown after midnight, but not anymore. We used to see some *beautiful* things at night."

—Tom Brady—





### THE FRENCH CONNECTION

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Armand Mercier, Armand Lemay, and Norman Ayotte,  
prominent in Lowell's politics, business, and development.  
"We're three good friends. We played on the same semi-pro  
baseball team in '51. Our roots, our family ties are in this city.  
We'll be here for awhile."

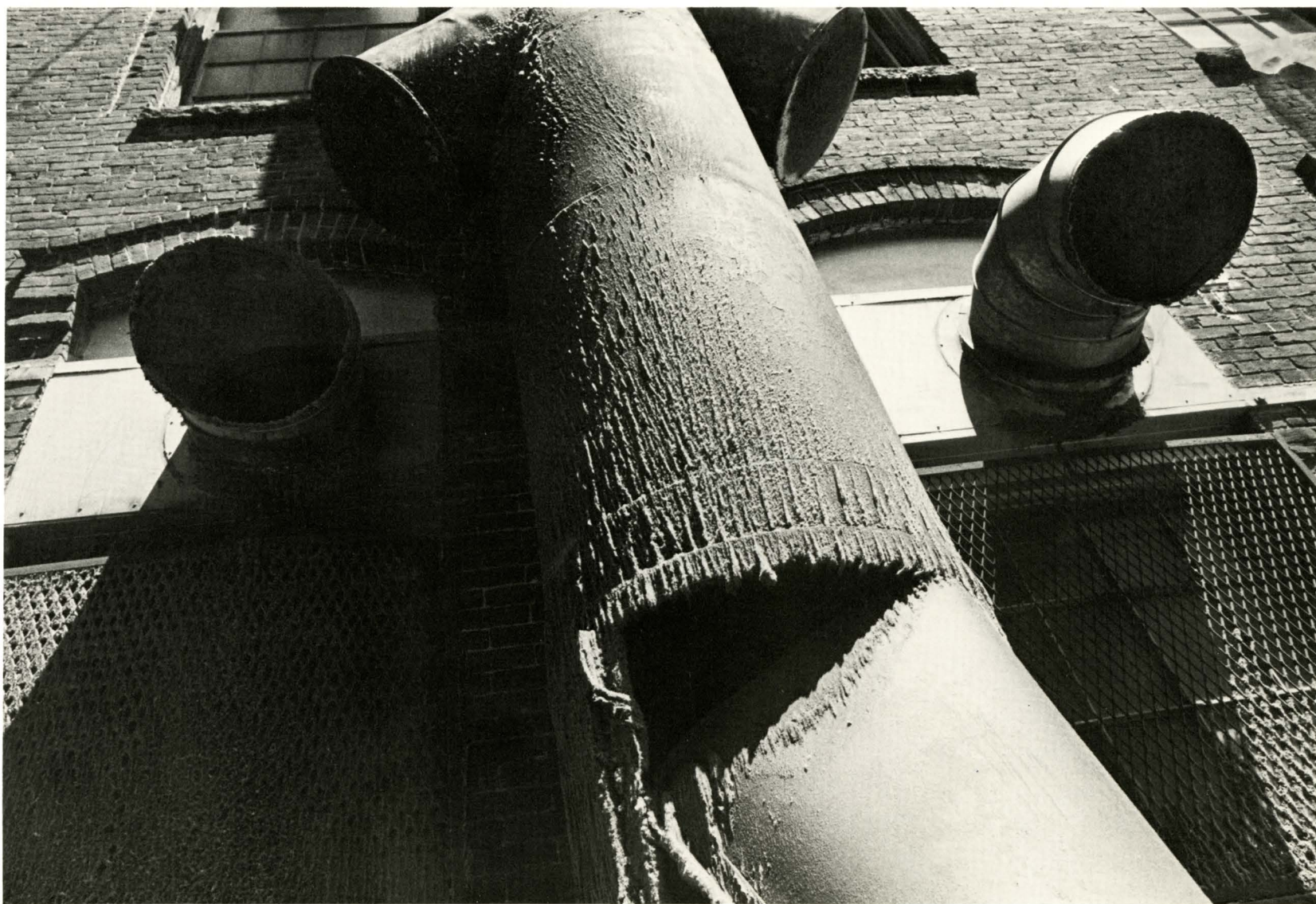
—*Armand Mercier*—



### BOOTT MILLS

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The superstructure of Lowell's heavy industrial period is everywhere, evidence of the once massive scale of production.



JACKSON STREET MILL

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child labor  
peasant pay  
deadly air  
slave hours  
sweatshop

that's what mills  
will always mean  
to some of us,  
no matter how many  
postcards sell



### HARVEY'S BOOKLAND

---

Harvey Bisson worked ten years in the Lawrence Manufacturing Company mill before turning his hobby, books, into a livelihood. "I've seen so many businesses come and go on this street, but little Harvey is still here. Just say that I've been here 22 years and will be here forever. I'm a survivor . . . the secret is to think great dreams, even if you can't reach them. I figure when we go to heaven, I'll have the biggest bookstore there."

—*Harvey Bisson*—





THE LAURENCIO FAMILY

---

"In Portugal, my father made medicine out of seaweed and sold it to the hospitals. Here he makes his own wine and cider. He works in the Lowell Cemetery during the week and fishes on weekends. He worked hard to bring all of us here."

—Freddie Laurencio—



PAWTUCKET FALLS

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It all comes back to this . . .









#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim lives in Lowell and works professionally as an architectural and documentary photographer. His work has included commissions to document many major development projects in the area. Through a grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior, Jim has published a series of photographic posters about Lowell. He is currently finishing work on a book illustrating the cultural aspects of Ulster and the Republic of Ireland.

