

LOWELL CULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY

IDENTIFICATION 166 CENTRAL STREET MAP SHEET # 12  
1) CURRENT OWNER Joseph Skinner, trustee of Lowell Professional OWNER OCCUPIED no  
Center Trust  
2) HISTORIC NAME Appleton Block  
3) CURRENT NAME same  
4) PROPERTY TYPE commercial 5) ZONING CLASSIFICATION B3  
6) TAXES: PAYMENTS current STATUS clear  
7) WITHIN BOUNDARIES OF LHPD

HISTORICAL ABSTRACT

1) CONSTRUCTION DATE 1879  
SOURCE document: inscription on building facade  
2) ARCHITECT OR BUILDER unknown  
3) HISTORIC OWNER Appleton National Bank  
4) ORIGINAL USE: GF commercial UF commercial  
5) PREVIOUS BLDGS ON PROPERTY yes DATE ca. 1830-1878  
SOURCE document: 1830 map, 1878 drawing

DESCRIPTIVE DATA

1) ARCHITECTURAL STYLE High Victorian Gothic  
2) PRESENT USE:  
GF commercial  
UF commercial  
3) NO OF STORIES 4  
4) PROP SQ FT 13,727  
5) PLAN rectangular  
6) ROOF flat  
7) STRUCTURAL SYSTEM  
load-bearing masonry  
8) OUTBUILDINGS  
none  
9) MATERIALS:  
FOUNDATION  
granite stone

VIEW FROM north PHOTO TAKEN May 1979



FACADE all sides: red brick w/stretcher bond, front & sides: screen hides 2 sides  
TRIM cast iron, granite sills etc., red and black brick

10) NOTABLE SURFACE & LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS none

ADDRESS 166 CENTRAL STREET

VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 1) CONDITION OF BUILDING FABRIC needs minor repair
- 2) IF DETERIORATED, CAUSES not applicable
- 3) INTEGRITY OF HISTORIC BLDG FABRIC: GF major but reversible changes  
UF major but reversible changes
- 4) SURROUNDING LAND USES commercial
- 5) INTEGRITY OF PROP'S HIST SETTING moderately disrupted historic setting
- 6) IMPORTANCE OF PROP TO HIST SETTING focal point in area ( see Add. Info.)

ADDITIONAL DESCRIPTION

See Research Report.

ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL INFORMATION

See Research Report.

ARCHEOLOGICAL COMMENT

While this property was the site of a major brick block and several smaller structures (along Hurd and Warren Streets) as early as the 1830s, the present building covers the whole lot and has probably obliterated any remains of earlier uses of the site.

Research Report  
166 Central Street  
Appleton Block  
1879

On the eastern side of Central Street, between Warren and Hurd Streets, is the Appleton block. This brick, late nineteenth century, commercial structure is four stories tall and is of a rectangular plan. On the south, west and part of the east sides of this building, a modern projecting metal screen obscures the high Victorian Gothic structure. The same portions of the building have been quite altered on the ground floor with tan brick facing, and have been painted white on the upper floors, including the fourth story which is not hidden by the screen.

The Warren and Hurd Street facades express something of the original exuberance of their structure. The Hurd St. wing beyond the screen is only two stories tall, but the Warren St. side is a full four stories with polychromatic decoration in brick and stone, cast iron detailing, and a lively pattern of projecting verticals and horizontals.

While the screen veils the main facade, its basic organization can be discerned. The corners of the building at Hurd and Warren Streets are chamfered, and the main entrance is off-center to the right along the Central Street facade. Both the chamfered corners and the entry bay project above the corbelled cornice. The date of the building, 1879, appears above the fourth floor window on the Hurd and Central Streets corner.

The original detailing of the building is most visible along Warren Street, where neither paint nor screen hide the building. The ground floor of the Warren Street facade has a small storefront at the left (east) end of the facade. The storefront windows and recessed central entrance are enframed in cast iron. Of particular note are the attenuated cast iron columns with foliated capitals in either side of the storefront entrance.

A range of six small square windows situated high on the ground floor wall appear to the west of the storefront. Interspersed with the windows are ventilator screens, featuring delicate cast iron detailing. Above the windows is a band of black brick decoration.

The upper floors have been divided into four vertical portions by a range of corbelled brick piers. The piers project slightly above the flat roof. Each floor is fourteen window bays long. The windows of the second and third floors are capped by low pointed

arches of red brick with white stone impost blocks and keystones. Running between the brick piers above the third floor is a deep corbel table. The windows of the fourth floor are rectangular in shape. A continuous lintel course of granite appears between the piers above the top floor windows, and the wall is capped by a corbelled cornice.

Like the nearby Fiske Building and old Boston and Maine Railroad Depot, the Appleton Block is a High Victorian Gothic structure. The Warren Street facade displays such High Victorian Gothic characteristics as windows with pointed arches and polychromatic surface treatments.

The Appleton Block is flanked by a parking lot across Warren Street to the north and low one and two story structures across Hurd Street to the south, and to the west. The Block should dominate this whole portion of Central Street with its four-story height and great bulk, but the bland metal screen negates the potential impact of the richly decorated building.

By the early 1830's, the Central Street frontage of this property was occupied by a substantial brick building. The 1841 map shows two buildings along Central Street and another substantial one on Warren, forming an L-shaped group. The small square building at the corner of Hurd and Central Streets is labeled "Wade's Building" on that map. John Wade is listed as a counsellor in the Lowell Directories from 1838-1841.

By 1847 the Appleton Bank occupied this lot (1). The 1850 map shows it to have been a U-shaped structure. A drawing which dates from 1878 (Fig.1) shows the old Appleton Block just before it was demolished. That view is of a typical Lowell brick building, with flat stone lintels and sills and an end-wall gable roof with dormers. The floor storefronts were probably of granite pier and lintel construction. The building had paired end and central chimneys, and a square cupola above the northeastern (left) part of the building.

In 1870 Putnam and Sons clothing store had moved into the old Appleton Block. Putnam and Sons, along with the Appleton Bank became the first tenants of the new Appleton Block which was built in 1879. A view of the new building (Fig.2), shows the name "PUTNAM" over the fourth floor window at the Warren and Central Streets corner, as well as "PUTNAM & SON" on the storefront below. That clothing store remained in the Block until 1922. The Appleton Bank was located in this building until the mid-1920's.

The Lowell Atlas of 1879 shows the new Appleton Block to have been L-shaped in configuration. The two story wing along Hurd St. was added between 1896 and 1906.

Since the 1920s, the Appleton Block has housed various banks along with lawyers, dentists, physicians and real estate agents on the upper floors. A Sears Roebuck Department Store was housed in the building during the 1930s (Fig. 4). From the 1940s until the early 1970s the tradition of a clothing store being located on this site was continued by Harry Bass, Inc., a women's clothing store.

Historic views (Fig. 2 & 3) show not only the details of the present structure hidden by the screen, but also the pinnacles, cresting, and pediments now lost from the roofline. These details were gone by the 1930s (Fig.4). Also of interest is the cast iron storefront treatments of the Central Street facade.

Despite its altered roofline and hidden by its screened-over facade, the Appleton Block retains much of its original exuberant, High Victorian Gothic surface treatments. Its site is a key one, at the mid-point of commercial Central Street, and it cries out for an Appleton Block made visible again.

#### Footnotes

- 1) D. Hamilton Hurd, History of Middlesex County (1890), v.II, p. 66

#### Other Sources

1832, 1841, 1850 Lowell maps.

1879, 1896, 1906, 1924 Lowell Atlases.

Lowell Directories

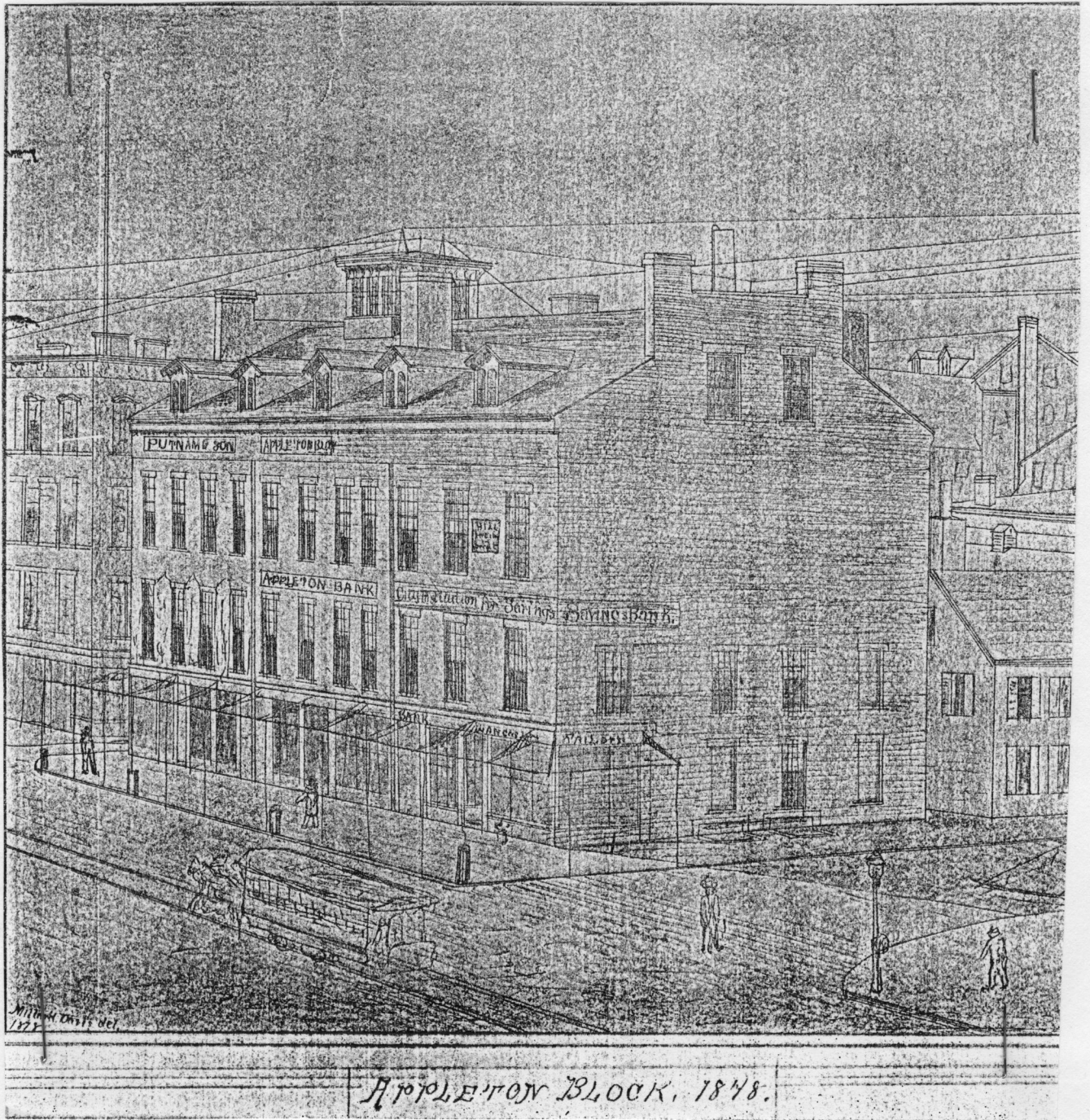


Figure 1

University of Lowell Library, photo file.



Figure 2

Lowell of Today, p. 16.

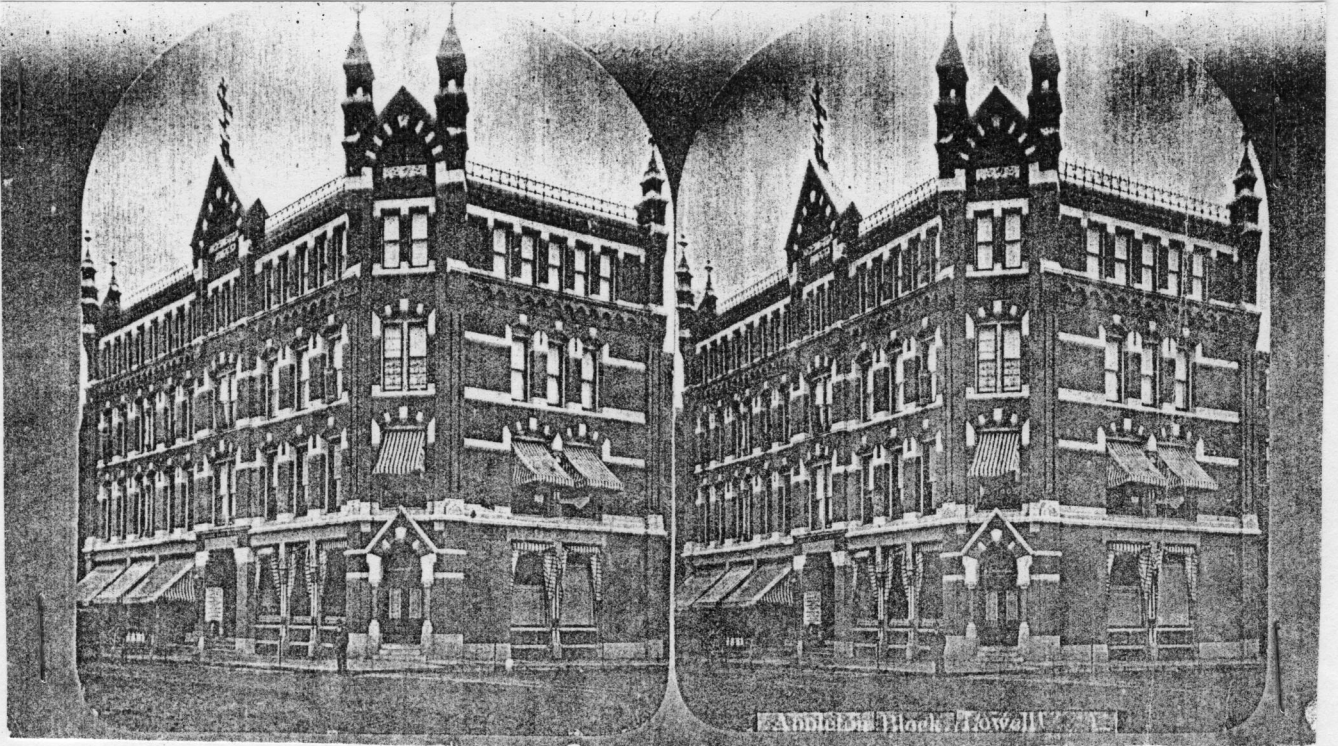


Figure 3

University of Lowell, photo file.





Figure 4

University of Lowell, Locks & Canals photo file #2655.