

LOWELL CULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY

IDENTIFICATION 321 CENTRAL STREET MAP SHEET # 12
 1) CURRENT OWNER Richard and Louise Harmon OWNER OCCUPIED no
 2) HISTORIC NAME A Reed & Mansur Building
 3) CURRENT NAME Lowell Pet Shop and Congress Insurance
 4) PROPERTY TYPE single family dwelling 5) ZONING CLASSIFICATION B3
 6) TAXES: PAYMENTS delinquent since 1978 STATUS tax title
 7) WITHIN BOUNDARIES OF LHPD

HISTORICAL ABSTRACT

1) CONSTRUCTION DATE ca. 1830
 SOURCE circumstantial: 1832 Lowell map
 2) ARCHITECT OR BUILDER unknown
 3) HISTORIC OWNER Alvah Mansur and Ransom Reed (1850)
 4) ORIGINAL USE: GF commercial or residential UF residential
 5) PREVIOUS BLDGS ON PROPERTY no DATE _____
 SOURCE _____

DESCRIPTIVE DATA

1) ARCHITECTURAL STYLE Vernacular Federal
 2) PRESENT USE:
 GF commercial
 UF vacant
 3) NO OF STORIES 3½
 4) PROP SQ FT 3784
 5) PLAN L-shaped
 6) ROOF endwall gable
 7) STRUCTURAL SYSTEM
wood frame
 8) OUTBUILDINGS
store add. on s. side
 9) MATERIALS:
 FOUNDATION
not visible
 FACADE all sides: wood clapboard
 TRIM ground floor: metal facing and tan brick facing
 10) NOTABLE SURFACE & LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS none



ADDRESS 321 CENTRAL STREET

VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 1) CONDITION OF BUILDING FABRIC needs major repair
- 2) IF DETERIORATED, CAUSES lack of maintenance
- 3) INTEGRITY OF HISTORIC BLDG FABRIC: GF major and irreversible changes
UF intact original fabric
- 4) SURROUNDING LAND USES commercial, residential
- 5) INTEGRITY OF PROP'S HIST SETTING moderately disrupted historic setting
- 6) IMPORTANCE OF PROP TO HIST SETTING integral to character

ADDITIONAL DESCRIPTION

See Research Report.

ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL INFORMATION

See Research Report.

ARCHEOLOGICAL COMMENT

This ca. 1830 house, its rear ells, and its storefront additions cover most of this property. However, the unpaved parking lot to the south of the building was the site of a carriage factory from the 1840s through 1860s, and of a smaller frame stable from the 1870s through the 1920s. Remains of those buildings could survive in that area, though none have been observed on the surface.

Research Report
321 Central Street
A. Mansur & Reed Building
ca. 1830

At ground level, this building is an ordinary brick and metal-faced storefront. Only by stepping back and looking above the stores does one recognize a much earlier, wood frame house, with an end-wall gable roof and symmetrical five bay facade.

The main portion of the original building is three-and-a-half stories tall. Behind it is a two-story, gable-roofed ell, positioned off-center to the north. The main block is sided with worn, unpainted clapboards, and its windows are boarded up. The rear ell is tarpaper covered and has two second floor windows.

The brick and metal storefront extends across the first floor of the house, and extends beyond it as a one-story addition to the south. The clapboarded south wall of that flat-roofed addition indicates a wood frame structure, with the exception of a small, cinder block portion at the rear southwest corner. Like the main block of the house, the addition's clapboards are bare and worn, and its windows are boarded.

The upper floors of the building are trimmed with narrow corner boards, and have simple window enframements. The roof has slightly projecting eaves, and short eaves returns. The side windows of the main facade are paired, setting off the central bay. The main block has two chimneys set near the end walls on the ridge of the roof. The rear ell has a third chimney.

Stylistically, this is a simple, vernacular building. Its end-wall gable roof, five-bay facade, and three-story height are generally Federal style characteristics. The present setting of the house is quite disrupted, particularly by the large shopping mall parking lot across the street, and the vacant lot and low, modern commercial buildings to the south. The Master Builders' Exchange to the north is somewhat more compatible with the frame house in scale, and behind the house, facing Gorham Street, are three masonry, end-wall gable buildings closely related to the frame house in date, scale, and form.

The present structure first appears as an L-shaped outline on the 1832 Lowell map. By 1841 a T-shaped configuration is shown. Stables to the north and south (unattached) are indicated on the 1831 map. By 1850 this property is labeled Mansur and Reed. Alvah Mansur and Ransom Reed were grocers near this location as early as 1824 (1). Before 1850 they had relocated their West India Goods store nearby, to the north corner of Green and Central Streets. Mansur and Reed owned several properties on the west side of Central Street at mid-century. Whether any was their original store is unclear, as is the original use of the large frame building, no. 321 Central Street.

The 1879 atlas shows a T-shaped structure, with a rectangular frame stable located to the south of the main building. The property is labeled R. Reed. The Reed family lived nearby between Tyler and George Streets from 1832 until the early twentieth century.

By 1896 the property is labeled P. Ryan. Patrick Ryan's Provisions occupied this site from 1894 until 1903. The 1896 atlas shows the T-shaped structure of the earlier atlases and maps now enlarged by a frame addition which appears behind the rear wing. A small frame rectangular stable continues to appear to the south.

In 1906 and 1924 the same 1896 configurations for this property reappears on the atlases.

An F. M. Reed owned the property in 1906. In the twentieth century this structure has housed a variety of commercial enterprises. Furnished rooms have been located on the upper floors from 1912 until 1964, when those floors became vacant.

Tailors have worked in this building since G. K. Topjian opened a shop here in 1915. Topjian is listed as owner of the property on the 1936 atlas. "Peter the Tailor" was located at 321 Central Street in the 1950s and early '60s, and his sign still appears on the side wall of the store addition. Steven Parigian's Barber Shop occupied part of this building in the 1940s and 50s, and the Lowell Pet Shop has utilized this building since 1960. An insurance agency has been located here since 1970.

The survival of a ca. 1830 frame building in a commercial area of Lowell is unique to this building. This makes it all the more frustrating that the original use of the structure is unclear. Probably it was primarily

residential, as it was through most of this century on the upper floors. As the city grew and the key Central-Gorham Street business center expanded, the building attracted the succession of ground-floor commercial occupants such as grocer, tailor, and barber. While the building presently has an impoverished appearance, it can and does make a unique contribution to the Central-Gorham Street area.

Footnote

- 1) A. B. Wright, "Lowell in 1826," in Contributions of Early Residents, v. 3, pp. 419-20.

Other Sources

1832, 1841, 1850 maps.

1879, 1896, 1906, 1924 atlases.

Lowell city directories.