

Research Report

The History and Development of the Acre Neighborhood
(especially that area bounded by Fletcher, Cross, &
Suffolk Streets)

(See Survey Files for properties on Adams, Broadway,
Cross, Fletcher [121 to 215], Lagrange, Marion, &
Suffolk [38-252] Streets.)

Introduction

The "Acre" neighborhood traces its name to the initial period in the development of industrial Lowell in the 1820's. The term, according to tradition, derives from the acre of land where the Irish laborers who were engaged in building the canals and mills made their original encampment. By the 1830's the term was in common use, for a school committee report of 1831 refers to the "Irish settlement in the Acre, so called." [1] The name is sometimes now applied to the whole of the residential section bounded by the Pawtucket and Western Canals, Merrimack Street, and the Merrimack River, but more often, the Acre describes the eastern part of that section, composed of the land bounded roughly by Suffolk, Market, Common, Cross, and Fletcher Streets. The heart of the Acre is incorporated in the LHPD, including Adams, Marion, Lagrange, and parts of Fletcher, Suffolk, Broadway, and Cross Streets.

Successive immigrant groups have used the area as their entry neighborhood into Lowell--beginning with the Irish in the 1820's, followed by Greeks around the turn of the twentieth century, and Hispanics in recent years. These groups have played critical roles in the Lowell work force, but the densely settled Acre often served its occupants less well, offering sub-standard housing and crowded, unhealthful conditions.

This report identifies four periods in the history of the Acre, and describes the conditions, the pattern of development, and the building types of each period.

Initial Period of Development:

The "Paddy Camp"

In the summer of 1822 Hugh Cumiskey led a band of thirty fellow Irishmen along the Middlesex Canal from Charlestown to East Chelmsford, to work on the industrial town being built there by the Merrimack Manufacturing Company [2].

Hundreds followed soon after, providing the bulk of the force of day laborers who built the canals and mills. By the early 1830's, the Lowell directories listed the names of approximately 500 Irish heads-of-households [3]. While these laborers physically built Lowell, they were not included among those for whom shelter was planned, and they consequently housed themselves in rude huts in an area which became known as New Dublin or Paddy camp or more simply, the Acre.

Information as to the exact location of this initial settlement is rather ambiguous. O'Dwyer, whose "Irish Catholic Genesis of Lowell" is the most authoritative history of the Irish in Lowell, quotes two sources who state that the first Catholic Mass and baptism were celebrated in the Irish camp pitched at the corner of Merrimack and Tilden Streets [4].

John McEvoy writing reminiscences for the semi-centennial of Lowell in 1876 states that "In 1828, they (the Irish) had mostly concentrated themselves in the part of town lying west of the Suffolk Canal and north of Broadway still known as the 'Acre'" [5].

O'Dwyer himself states that as the settlement grew many "pitched their camps on the Frye land, afterwards known as the 'Paddy Camp lands'" [6]. The Frye land which became portions of Adams Street, Lagrange Street, Broadway, Cross Street and all of Marion Street was the only major in-town parcel of land which the Merrimack Manufacturing Company (subsequently the Proprietors of Locks and Canals) did not acquire in 1821 and 1822.

Whether or not this made the Frye lands a more likely location for the Irish squatters than the surrounding Locks and Canals land is unclear.

Irish settlement within the former Frye land is implied by several sources. Two plans of the former Frye lands were drawn in the 1830's, with the present Marion and Lagrange Streets labeled Cork and Dublin Streets, respectively [7]. The land at that time was the subject of several legal disputes (see Appendix) over ownership.

O'Dwyer quotes (without naming a source) a "traditional account" of the May 18, 1831 Battle of the Stone Bridge which states that the "Irish forces from Cork and Dublin Streets" repulsed an attack on the "Acre" by local malcontents. That bridge still spans the Western Canal at Broadway.

O'Dwyer stretches the initial settlement south of the Frye land into land held by the Locks and Canals Company below Lagrange Street when he states that Hugh Cumiskey died at his home at 8 Adams Street in 1871 "where nearly fifty years before, the first Irish pitched their camp." [8]

The choice in 1830 of Fenwick Street as a site for the first Catholic church implies that this area was central to the Irish encampment as well.

While the exact location of the original settlement remains clouded, it is likely that before long the settlement extended along the west side of the Western Canal from the south end of Adams and Suffolk Streets, north to the Fenwick Street area, and that even in the early days of Lowell a few Irish lived outside this area.

Description of early shelters

An 1831 account of the Irish settlement provides the following description:

In the suburbs of Lowell, within a few rods of the canals, is a settlement, called by some, New Dublin, which occupies rather more than an acre of ground. It contains a population of not far from 500 Irish, who dwell in about 100 cabins, from 7 to 10 feet in height, built of slabs and rough boards; a fire-place made of stone, in one end, topped out with two or three flour barrels or lime casks. In a central situation, is the school house, built in the same style of the dwelling-houses, turfed up to the eaves with a window in one end, and small holes in two sides for the admission of air and light. In this room are collected together perhaps 150 children.

Later accounts provide further description of early conditions. When Benjamin Walker wrote in the 1880's of the Irish in the early days of Lowell, he referred to "Their colonization of the 'Acre', their turf huts and primitive methods of living". [10] In a similar vein, Coburn in 1920 recalls that "some of the early [Irish] settlers, according to Cowley [a mid-19th century Lowell historian], had pigs in their shanties, but the more progressive soon placed their pigsties to the rear. Dennis Crowley is said to have been the first settler to apply whitewash to his shanty and Nicholas Fitzpatric, the second." [11]

From the above accounts a picture emerges of the Acre in the early 1830's as a densely populated area containing, for the most part, crude dwellings.

There are indications that what began as illegal squatting by the Irish in the Acre evolved shortly into a system where- by the Irish rented the land occupied by their shanties. Rev. Eliphalet Case, editor of the "Mercury" and writing in May 1831 decrying the recent attack upon the Paddy Camps during the Battle of the Stone Bridge, states of the Irish, "They hire the ground on which they live, and their camps or huts are as dear to them and as sacred in the eyes of the law, as are the most costly houses of our citizens to those who occupy them." [12]

In addition, O'Dwyer mentions the leasing of land by Irish pioneers.

In April, 1832, John Sullivan leased "a lot of land on Fenwick street for a term of two years for \$30 a year, from T. W. Churchill. Land for the same terms and the same period was leased by Mr. Churchill to Michael McCarthy, David Whelton, James Campbell and Michael Doyle on Fenwick Street. In July, 1831, Denis Kelly leased "land on the east side of Fenwick Street;" so did James Marren. [13]

Second phase of Acre Development: 1830-1860

The 1831 description of "New Dublin" mentions 100 huts and 500 settlers. The 1832 map of Lowell, however, indicates very few buildings in the area west of the Western Canal, with the only concentration being eleven buildings on Fenwick Street, just north of St. Patrick's Church. Apparently the shanties were too ephemeral, or their inhabitants too poor, for inclusion on the map. The Fenwick Street buildings were probably more substantial, and suggest the beginning of a second phase in the growth of the area, a gradual change over from crude shanties to more permanent housing.

Whether Fenwick Street was previously the area of the Acre with the greatest concentration of Irish settlers or not is unclear. Evidence indicates, however, that after 1831 it became the central focus of the Irish population. First, of the 500 names of Irish pioneers compiled by O'Dwyer from the 1833 to 1835 Directories, 150 are listed as living on Fenwick Street.

(Interestingly, Hugh Cumiskey was the only Irishman deemed worthy of listing in the 1832 Directory.) None are listed as living on Adams Street, Dublin (Lagrange) Street, Cork (Marion) Street or Cross Street. This seems contradictory to previously mentioned references to encampments on these streets. Perhaps this part of the Acre was still a "no man's land" which compilers of the Directories did not choose to enter, or perhaps Fenwick Street was used in a general way as an address for shanties in its broad vicinity. Second, beginning in 1831 the Locks and Canals Company began to sell house lots on Fenwick and Suffolk Streets. Few of these lots were sold to O'Dwyer's listed "Irish Pioneers", but the number of transferrals suggests rapid development of the area. It would be expected that the Irish could afford to rent more substantial housing in the Fenwick Street area before they were able to purchase it. In fact, deeds exist for the rental of property on Fenwick Street to Irishmen at this time.

Third, the school committee of Lowell arranged and supported an Irish primary school in the basement of St. Patrick's Church. Surely this school would have been placed in a location convenient to the greatest number of Irish children.

Finally, by 1841 the lands at the Northern end of Adams Street and Suffolk Street, and all of Fenwick Street were fully built up. As yet there were no buildings in the southern part of the Acre substantial enough to be indicated on the map.

No houses on Fenwick Street from the 1830-1840 period survive, due to the construction of the North Common Housing project in 1939. Photographs taken incident to the appraisal of properties there in 1938 show a few Greek Revival cottages similar to houses standing today in the southern area (at 77 Adams Street and 1 Marion Street, for example).

In the southern part of the Acre, the lands along Adams Street and those roughly bounded by Cross Street, Suffolk Street and Lagrange Street (the former Frye land) were the subject of lengthy ownership disputes which were not settled until 1840. At that time, most of the land was sold at auction. (For a full account of the legal proceedings involving these lands, and their interpretation by previous historians, see Appendix.)

The lots were purchased by people with Irish surnames who held such occupations as laborer, box maker, and grocer. For more detailed history of some of these lots see survey forms: 51 Marion Street, 163 and 167 Adams Street, and 1 Marion Street.

The lands bounded by Suffolk Street, Lagrange Street and Fletcher Street were held by the Locks and Canals Company until 1845. At that time the company auctioned these and most other undeveloped properties in order to raise capital. It is likely that the above mentioned lands were used by squatters or renters before they came on the market in the 1840's. If there were crude dwellings here, the same sort of transformation occurred as had occurred in the Fenwick Street area in the 1830's. By 1850 the triangle enclosed by Adams, Lagrange and Suffolk Street was fully built up with small single or double cottages, with even smaller ells to the rear. John F. Munahan, a carpenter, purchased six lots on Adams Street at the Locks and Canals Company's land auction. Houses in that triangle had Franklin Square addresses at that time, which perhaps refers to the triangle of open land in the center, part of which is still known as Franklin Court.

Among the owners of houses in this triangle in 1850 were, Otis H. Morrill, teacher, on site of current 97 Adams Street, William C. Gregory, engraver, at 77 Adams Street, Francis Carll, carpenter and James F. Springer, teamster, on site of current 63 Adams Street, Walter Pettingill, a carpenter, at 76 Suffolk Street, Elihu Gates, machinist, at 84 Suffolk Street, Ephraim Andrews, contractor--Lowell Machine Shop, at 120 Suffolk Street, and Horace Sanborn, bobbin maker, at 30 Lagrange Street. On the west side of Adams Street at the current 102 Adams Street, W. Fisk, a lumber dealer and box maker, had a house.

Description of buildings of the Acre's Second Period

The houses built in the Acre between 1840 and 1860 were simple wood frame dwellings with a few Greek Revival decorative features. These features included simple door surrounds with a suggestion of pilasters and an entablature, attempting to emulate in a less costly way the full-blown frontispieces popular at the time. In addition, these buildings often had paneled pilasters at the corners and a broad frieze board at the eaves. The buildings themselves were either small facade gable one and a half story cottages, like 77 Adams Street or 22 Lagrange Street, or larger

buildings with two or more side by side dwelling units like 51 Marion Street, 1 Lagrange Street or 153 Adams Street.

The houses had small yards, and restrictions in the deeds provided ample space for sidewalks. Those buildings which survive suggest an attempt on the part of their builders' to create modest, but gracious surroundings for themselves. This image contrasts sharply with contemporary accounts of living conditions in the Acre.

Descriptions of living conditions in the Second Period.

A letter from Rev. Mr. H. Wood, "minister at large" in Lowell, to Dr. Josiah Curtis who was studying health conditions in the city in 1848 contains the following comments.

There is one infraction of the laws of life and health among the poor, which, I think, should be brought more prominently before the public. This is in connection with their habitations. Their rooms are generally not ventilated at all. From six to ten persons frequently sleep in a single room, and sometimes in one bed. This is particularly the case among our foreign population. The air is stagnant, soon becomes poisonous, and exceedingly offensive. Often every room in the house has from four to twelve inmates, in a narrow lane, perhaps, crowded close with tenements; the little uncovered ground the receptacle of dirty water, rubbish, and corrupt vegetable matter; and numerous outhouses of necessity near to the windows, sometimes filling every room, and the whole neighborhood with noxious exhalations. Cellars are occupied in very damp locations, where water frequently stands in drops on the walls, and in wet times can be wrung from the sheets of the bed. Two-thirds of the inhabitants of the city, probably, would not deposit their vegetables where not a few families reside, and pay from \$1.50 to \$2 per month for rent. There are many cellars under ground, with only one or two half windows, and a few panes of glass, where the poor are urged to locate themselves, at a cheaper rate--urged to gratify avarice, though they take to themselves fevers, rheumatisms, and consumption. I know of one case, where in two connected rooms in a cellar--and lighted by only three small panes of green glass covered with cobwebs, and where, on entering, I stumbled over

the beds, because I could not see them--four families, amounting to twenty-two souls, were living! [14]

The above quotes from the Rev. Wood's letter by Dr. Curtis of Lowell in his report on the Hygiene of Massachusetts given to the American Medical Association in 1849. Dr. Curtis then goes on to say

The above conveys a general idea of some of the worst places in the city which demand attention. We cannot leave this matter, however, without an allusion to another, and, probably, the worst district, known as "The Acre." It is inhabited, I believe, exclusively by foreigners, and contains two Roman Catholic churches, but in other particulars, it beggars all description! [15]

Dr. Curtis explains that water in Lowell is taken from wells and that

Sewerage and drainage are in a very imperfect condition in many parts of the city, and many lanes and alleys are without either; the house-slops and other refuse remaining on the surface, especially in wet weather. Filth accumulates in various places, and tells the hygienist where zymotic diseases prevail. Typhus and dysentery especially, which we have seen to be so fatal of late, spring up around these fomites. [16]

In this regard it is interesting to observe that the land referred to in the deed conveying the current 173 Adams Street from Thomas H. Elliot to Edward Costello in 1874 is "subject to any and all rights of drainage if any through the premises." [17]

While it is impossible to pinpoint specific locations, it seems likely that some areas of the Acre in the mid-nineteenth century improved upon the 1831 conditions, especially in that housing was becoming more substantial.

Other parts of the Acre, according to Dr. Curtis, must have been declining as overcrowding became worse and health conditions deteriorated.

Third Phase of Acre Development: 1860-1890

Broadway was extended through the Acre between 1861 and 1864. The two wood frame blocks at 235-237 and 175-185 Broadway Street, with gable roofs parallel to the street and simple Greek Revival trim, must have been built soon after the street was extended. A group of large multi-family dwellings in the Second Empire style was built on or near that major through-street in the 1870's. A few Second Empire buildings, such as 92 Suffolk Street, were built elsewhere in the Acre. These buildings have mansard roofs, some of which retain their original slates, and typical Second Empire decorative features. These include corner paneled pilasters or occasionally groins, frieze boards at the eaves embellished with brackets, bracketed door hoods and projecting window heads.

These buildings were erected to house a number of families and must relate to an attempt to accommodate an ever-growing population in the Acre. The owners, nevertheless, intended their buildings to be stylish and went to the trouble and expense of applying a number of decorative features.

Fourth period of housing in the Acre: 1890-1920

Beginning in the 1890's and reaching a peak of activity around 1910 there was a redevelopment of many of the lots in the Acre. Large, three-story multiple-family dwellings were put up to replace buildings dating from the 1840's and 1850's. The building of these tenements surely represents an attempt to house yet larger numbers of tenants on the small lots.

The pressure to raise the occupancy rate probably corresponds to the influx of Greek immigrants to Lowell. Greek immigration began in the 1890's and reached its peak in the second decade of the 1900's. Although greater concentrations of Greek immigrants settled in the northern Acre and the area around Market Street, many resided in the southern Acre as well.

The 1890 period buildings are among the most utilitarian in the Acre. 70 and 84 Adams Street are examples. They have practically no decoration. However, virtually all of the tenements built ca. 1910 show certain amenities and decorative embellishments which demonstrate an attempt on the part of the builders to be more than strictly utilitarian. They are so similar in plan and detail that they might be termed the Lowell Triple Decker.

The buildings which derive their features from the Queen Anne style typically have symmetrical bay windows or oriels on the facade and recessed porches between. Often the bays are decorated with paneling or shingle skirts and porches with turned posts, brackets and cut-out balusters. The design is topped invariably by a broad cornice which juts out over and defines the various elements on the facade. Frequently the square corners of the cornice over the angle of the bay are finished with right angle brackets and drops. This feature is so prevalent that it is virtually the signature of this building type. Some have brackets or moldings at the cornice and there is always a flat or very low pitch roof.

Living Conditions, ca. 1900-1910

In spite of the obvious attempt to decorate these buildings and by extension to provide a pleasing streetscape some areas of the Acre were apparently deteriorating in the early 1900s and causing concern. Kenngott, writing in 1912, describes tenements in the Greek district, as follows:

In the old wooden buildings they are crowded in close and narrow quarters, with three or more in a room, little or no ventilation, rooms often dark without windows, no facilities for bathing, no opportunity for drying clothes except in the crowded kitchen and with toilet facilities which are extremely bad.... Worse conditions can hardly be imagined than in certain old wooden tenement houses in the Greek district. "Bathtubs and bathrooms are unknown to the Greeks, in this section." [18]

Kenngott further states that:

Tuberculosis is largely a matter of housing and the Acre has always been a pest-house of disease, no matter who occupied it because air and sunshine rarely find their way into its crowded tenements.... In 1906 [T.B.] became so prevalent that the Board of Health caused a notice to be printed and circulated especially in the Greek Section of the city stating the causes of Tuberculosis and the means of its prevention. Certain regulations in regard to the ventilation of bedrooms and the number of beds in each and the provision and use of spittons, were prescribed and it was stated that any violations of them would be prosecuted. But no prosecutions occurred and little else was done about the matter. [19]

Apparently the Acre was still a mixture of decent housing and slum conditions. By the end of this period, Greeks began to purchase property in the Acre following the pattern of rental and then purchase established earlier by the Irish. Before that buildings had been owned almost exclusively by people with Irish or English surnames.

Description of living conditions in the Acre: 1920 to present

There has been little building activity in the Acre since 1920 with one notable exception, the North Common housing project.

In 1939 the city of Lowell in conjunction with the United States Housing Authority razed the area bounded by Hancock Avenue and Market, Dummer, Cross, Fletcher and Clark Streets which included the northern Acre in order to build a housing project. The project, one of the earliest in Massachusetts is generally deemed to be a success, but in the process of building it the heart of the Greek district was destroyed and the Greek population suffered considerable hardship and dislocation. For some reason Greeks never moved into the project once it was completed.

An excellent account of the development of the project has been written by Marion McCartin [20]. In addition, 200 government appraisers who came to assess fair market value for the buildings to be torn down took photos and surveyed each property. These valuable documents are now at the Lowell museum.

Description of the Acre today.

Today the LHPD portion of the original Acre retains a totally nineteenth and early twentieth century streetscape. Earlier houses and later tenements are interspersed seemingly at random. Further features reminiscent of earlier times are the paving stones of Adams Street and the paving blocks in the yard of 1 Marion Street. The blocks survive from the time when Donohue's, later Bennett's, Court cut through here from Marion to Suffolk Streets.

Another element which has contributed significantly to the character of the Acre is the setback restriction which accompanied virtually every deed in the nineteenth century. The setbacks vary from street to street (Adams Street: first block 14' open, 7' for sidewalk, second block: 7' for sidewalk; Marion Street: 8'; Lagrange St: 5').

These restrictions, for instance, gave Marion Street a more intimate character which survives to this day. Marion Street's narrowness may also be the reason that it was the only street in the Acre that remained unpaved until the 1940's.

The Acre is now owned almost entirely by people with Greek surnames. It is still the residence or the place of business of a number of Greek-Americans. There has recently been an influx of Hispanics particularly into the large tenements along Adams and Lagrange Streets.

Today there are a number of vacant buildings in the Acre. These buildings are problems to the residents in that they are often vile smelling and are particularly vulnerable to fires. A current solution has been to tear down buildings which have remained vacant for as little as a year. Ten buildings have been torn down in the recent past in the Acre.

While the residents of the Acre have legitimate concerns about the vacant buildings, these buildings have potential utility, historic relevance, and even beauty. If enough assistance could be provided, these structures might be stabilized and rehabilitated. Perhaps current residents of the Acre should be given priority for ownership or occupancy of the rehabilitated buildings. In this way overcrowding of other buildings in the Acre might be lessened, continuity of residency and neighborhood preservation might be achieved and perhaps finally living conditions might be improved for all the occupants of the Acre.

APPENDIX:

Legal Disputes involving the Land in the Acre.

At the time of Lowell's semi-centennial in 1876, John McEvoy wrote,

"The title to some of this land (in the Acre) was afterwards called in question and it was eventually decided by the United States Supreme Court in Washington under the name of the "Paddy Camp Lands" and the case is known in the books to this day by that title." [21]

Coburn in 1920 wrote that,

"On June 13, 1823, Samuel Frye executed to Luther Richardson a deed of the Paddy Camp lands which, so it was alleged, was intended to defraud his own minor children. Out of this circumstance arose the litigation which lasted sixteen years. Three bills in equity were brought; one in the Supreme Judicial Court and two in the Circuit Court at Boston. Charles Sumner sat as master in one of the cases; George S. Hilliard in the others. In legal history, therefore, the Paddy Camp lands became nationally celebrated." [22]

O'Dwyer in the Irish Catholic Genesis in Lowell states:

"Among the natives in the town, the district was known as the Paddy Camp Lands since 1830 and, between 1833 and 1840, was the subject of much litigation. The lands were finally the subject of a case brought before the U.S. Supreme Court in Boston at which the tangle of proprietors and litigants was ironed out.

The lands were owned at the beginning of the nineteenth century, by Samuel and Polly Frye of Danville, Vermont. On the 10th of June, 1823, the property was sold at public auction to Luther Richardson of Waltham, trader, for \$594.05. He was the highest bidder. The lands changed hands often after Richardson got hold of the property and, finally in October, 1833, one Henry Flagg who had some equity, sued Samuel Mann et al. and the case was brought to the United States Supreme Court, for decision.

In a deposition made by Francis Hilliard, Esq., in 1831, regarding the occupants of the "Paddy Camp Lands," so-called, he cited affidavits made by some of the Irish pioneers, who originally settled on the lands. Among them were: Morris Fielding, Timothy Crowley, Dennis Crowley, George E. Cooley, Denis Leary, Michael Lee, Timothy Connelly, James O'Brien, Patrick Barney, James Carney, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Henry Farrell, Thomas Driscoll, Solomon Trainer, Michael Murray, John Sullivan, John Sullivan 2d, David Whelton. [23]

Examination of deeds, depositions and summaries of court cases at the North Middlesex Registry of Deeds indicates that only portions of the above accounts are accurate. The following discussion is a further attempt to clarify the history of legal disputes over land in the Acre in the 1830's and 1840's.

First of all, no case in the Supreme Court of the United States or the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court is listed under the popular name of the Paddy Camp Lands case. Three separate cases, each tried a number of times, dealing with land in the Acre have been identified. None of these involves the deposition of Francis Hilliard described by O'Dwyer. Therefore, it is possible that there is a fourth series of cases which could not be located through names of known potential litigants, but which more clearly fits the descriptions by O'Dwyer and Coburn.

The land which comprises the Acre belonged in 1821 to Frye, Melvin, Fletcher and Widow Willie or Thirds [24]. By 1825 the Merrimack Manufacturing Company, the parent organization of the Locks and Canals Company had purchased all of the land which was to become central Lowell with the exception of the Frye and Thirds lands.

In March of 1823 Samuel Frye, yeoman, of Danville, Vermont was empowered to sell at public venue the real estate of the minor children of Porter A. Frye and Polly Frye who had died early in 1823. The land was sold to Luther Richardson, trader, of Waltham (later of Lowell) for \$594.05. [25]

Other transactions involving the Frye land are: Luther Richardson to Prentiss Richardson May 16, 1825 [26] and Prentiss Richardson to Henry Flagg and Samuel H. Mann [27] May 13, 1831.

A legal dispute arose between Flagg and Mann over whether a certain contract constituted a mortgage on the land or an outright sale with an option to repurchase within a specified time. The case (Henry Flagg vs. Samuel H. Mann) was eventually decided by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts in October of 1833 [28].

Between 1833 and 1837 another case involving Josiah Wood Jr. plaintiff in equity and Samuel H. Mann, John R. Adams and Elisha Fuller and others, again concerning disputed ownership of the former Frye land was tried four times in the federal court system [29].

Prefatory to this case John R. Adams got quit claim deeds from all the Frye children on August 8, 1831. This suggests that the Frye children were not defrauded by Samuel Frye. It is unlikely that they would all quit claim to the land had there been any fraud [30].

For this case two maps of the former Frye and Thirds lands, by then referred to as the "Paddy Camp Lands" with streets and house lots shown were drawn up. One was drawn up on May 18, 1832 by S. P. Fuller, Surveyor. The second was surveyed and drawn by John Bennett for Henry Flagg on September 18, 1838. [31]

In the settlement of the case George S. Hilliard, one of the Masters in Chancery of the Circuit Court of the United States for the First Circuit and District of Massachusetts, decreed that some of the land should be sold at auction [32]. The land to be sold included all or part of the lots on the west side of Adams Street which were part of the parcel conveyed on July 25, 1831 to John R. Adams by Josiah Wood Jr.

The third series of cases, Melvin vs. the Locks and Canals Company was described by John P. Robinson who served as attorney for the Locks and Canals Company. Robinson wrote "In 1832, when land speculation was at its height some profound lawyer found that the company had no title whatever to two pieces of land (originally belonging to Fletcher) which had already become valuable." [33] Benjamin Melvin brought suit for a fourteenth part of the lots employing as a lawyer, Samuel H. Mann who had been a litigant in the other Acre cases. The case was tried a total of fifteen times after 1833. In the end a verdict was made in favor of the Locks and Canals Company in the United States Supreme Court in 1849. [34] (See Pickering, Vol. 16, pp. 137, 161, Vol. 17, p. 246, 255.) There are 150 pages of depositions regarding this case at the North Middlesex Registry of Deeds [35].

One of the parcels may include what is now the beginning of Adams and Suffolk Streets. It is described as being on Dutton Street and extending over and including about 40 rods of the Western Canal.

Footnotes

- 1) George O'Dwyer, The Irish Catholic Genesis in Lowell, p. 29.
- 2) Ibid., p.7.
- 3) Ibid., pp. 61-76.
- 4) Ibid., p.9.
- 5) John McEvoy, "Letter to Charles Cowley," in Lowell Semi-Centennial 1876, p. 132.
- 6) O'Dwyer, op.cit. p.7.
- 7) North Middlesex Registry, Plan book 2, pp. 13,15.
- 8) O'Dwyer, op.cit., p. 55.
- 9) Ibid., quoted from Niles Register of Baltimore, Aug. 27, 1831, said to have been reprinted from the Portsmouth, New Hampshire Journal.
- 10) Benjamin Walker, "Early Recollections of Lowell," in Contributions to the Old Residents' Historical Association, v. 4, pp. 244-257.
- 11) Frederick Coburn, History of Lowell, v. I, p. 171.
- 12) O'Dwyer, op.cit., p.17.
- 13) Ibid., p.51.
- 14) Josiah Curtis, Brief Remarks on the Hygiene of Massachusetts, p.38.
- 15) Ibid., p.40.
- 16) Ibid., p.35.
- 17) North Middlesex Registry 101:426 (May 7, 1874).
- 18) George Kenngott, Portrait of a City, p.136.
- 19) Ibid., pp. 125 and 145.
- 20) Marion McCartin, The Development of the North Canal Housing Project in Lowell, 1937-1941, Mss., Fall, 1975, U. of Lowell. In U. of Lowell Library, Special Collections.

Appendix Footnotes

- 21) McEvoy, op.cit., p.132.
- 22) Colburn, op.cit., v. I, p.171.
- 23) O'Dwyer, op.cit., p.50.
- 24) 1821 Hale map of "Pawtucket in East Chelmsford."
- 25) North Middlesex Registry 5:364.
- 26) Ibid., 5:492.
- 27) Ibid., 12:534.

- 28) Octavius Pickering, Reports of Cases...in the Supreme Judicial Court of Mass., v. 13, pp. 467-483.
- 29) Federal Cases, Circuit & District Courts, 1789-1880, v. 30, cases # 17,951-17,954.
- 30) See also North Middlesex Registry 9:361, 364;44:60,61.
- 31) North Middlesex Registry, Plan book 2, pp. 13,15.
- 32) Ibid., 30:321.
- 33) John P. Robinson, "The Melvin Suits," in Contributions to Early Residents'...., v. II, pp. 201-205.
- 34) Pickering, op.cit., v. 16, pp. 137, 161; v. 17, pp. 246, 255.
- 35) North Middlesex Registry 30:406-553.

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Martha Mayo of the Special Collections Library of the
University of Lowell, Edward Harley of the Lowell Memorial
Library and Lewis Karabatsos of the Lowell Museum gave
valuable assistance in finding these sources.

Plans & Maps Containing Information on the Acre.

North Middlesex Registry of Deeds:

Plan Book 1, Locks & Canals Co. Plan of 113 lots
of land to be sold at Auction on April 15,
1845.

Plan No. 2, Sect. 29. Land on Suffolk and
Adams Sts.

Plan No. 2, Section 30. Lagrange Street

Plan No. 5, Section 73,82.

Plan Book 2, page 13. A plan of land in Lowell being part of the Paddy Camp Land so called. Surveyed & drawn for Henry Flagg by John Bennett, Sept. 18, 1838. Page 15. Plan of Adams St., Cork St., and Dublin St. by S. P. Fuller, surveyor, Boston, Lowell, May 18, 1832.

"A Plan of Sundry Pieces of Land Belonging to the Merrimack Manufacturing Co., Chelmsford, MA., March, 1825, by George R. Baldwin."

1821, 1832, 1841, 1845, 1850, Lowell maps.

1876 Bird's Eye View

1879, 1896, 1906, 1924, 1936 atlases.

The Acre

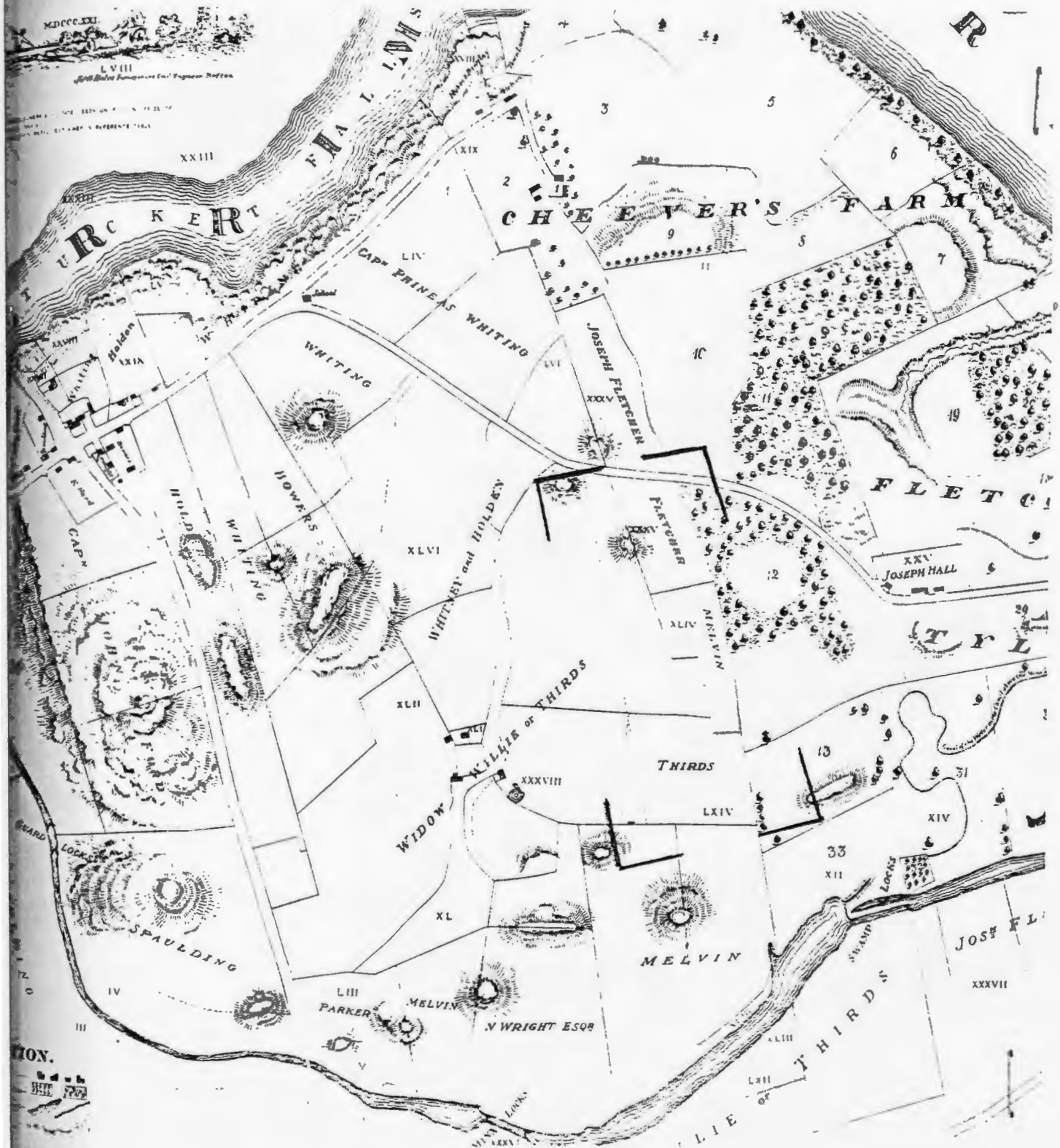


Figure One
Detail of 1821 "Plan of Patucket" by John E. Hale, showing Acre area.

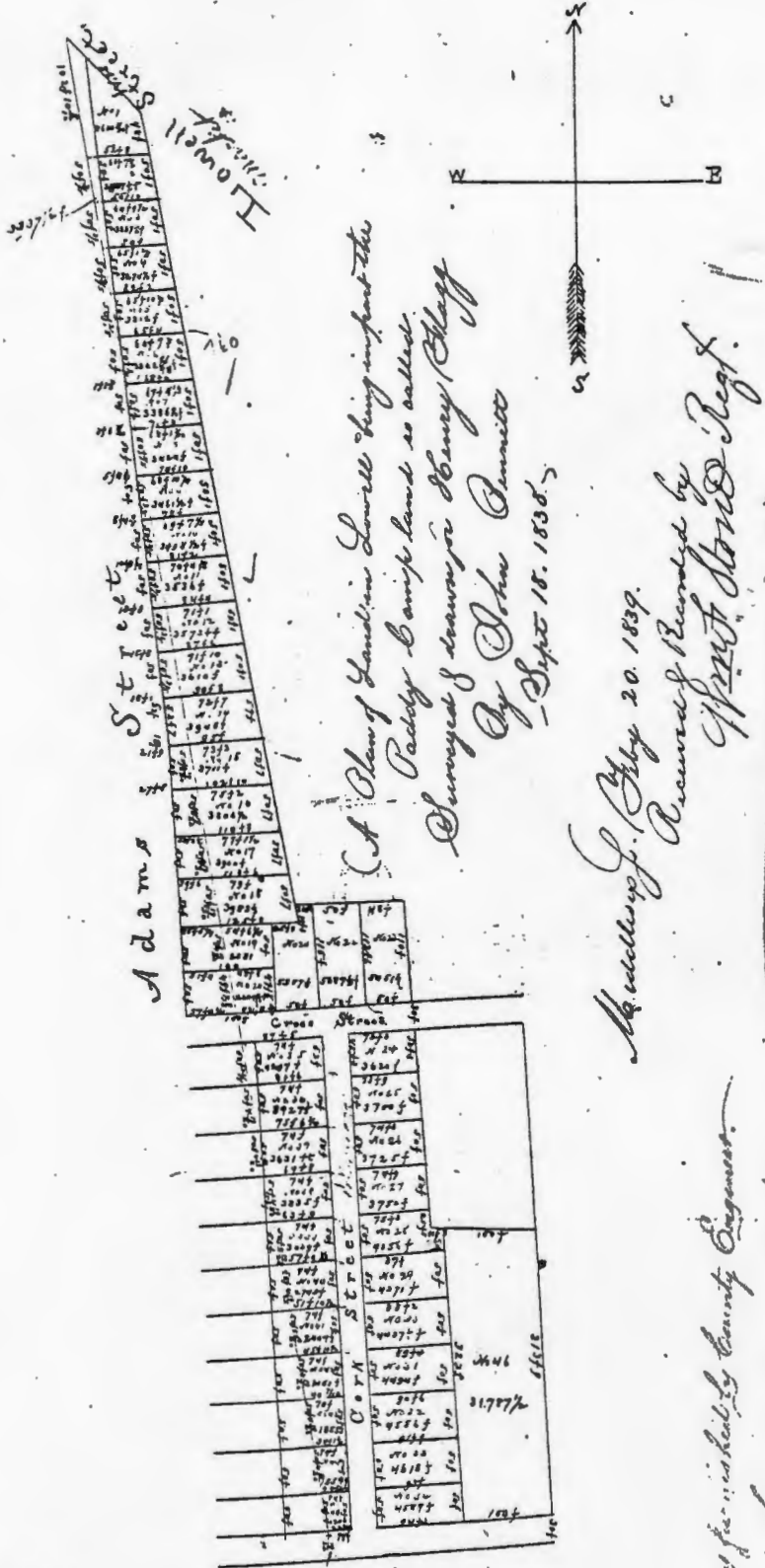
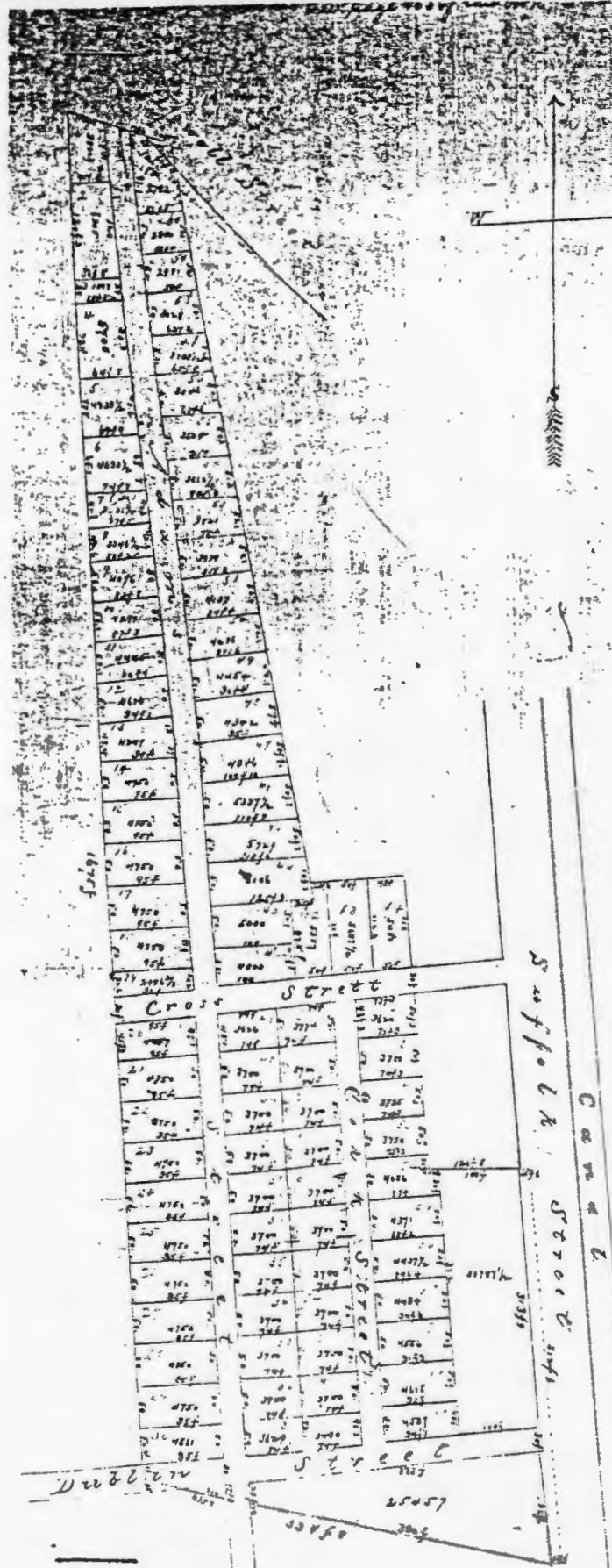


Figure Two
North Middlesex Registry, Plan Book 2, p. 13

The Acre



S. P. Fuller, Surveyor.
 Dated
 Lowell, May 15, 1832.

Copy certified by County Engineer
 Compared and corrected
 Attest: O. P. Thompson,
 Commissioner.

Witnessed for July 13, 1838.
 Read & Recorded by

Figure Three
 North Middlesex Registry, Plan Book 2, p. 15



Figure Four
Detail of 1876 "Bird's-Eye-View of Lowell"