

SOURCES FOR THE INVENTORY

Lowell is a richly documented city. The inventory project drew upon historic data in over a dozen collections, but by no means exhausted the available sources. Much more can and should be learned about Lowell's built environment, and hopefully the inventory will provide a reliable foundation for that work. The following list of sources is arranged in the approximate order of the frequency with which they were used in preparing the inventory.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, ALUMNI-LYDON LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF LOWELL

Special Collections is the broadest-based repository of information on the history of Lowell. The comprehensive collection of maps and atlases, city directories, illustrated handbooks and guides, and other published materials gathered there was the most important source of historic information in carrying out the inventory. The maps and atlases provided the basic historic information on every property, and the directories were almost as frequently consulted.

Of similar importance is Special Collection's picture file of prints, photographs and other graphic materials related to Lowell, including many images on deposit from the Lowell Historical Society and the Lowell Museum. Filed separately are approximately four-thousand photographic negatives (and prints) exposed for the Proprietors of Locks and Canals, primarily showing canal and industrial features in the first half of the twentieth century. Together with the well-illustrated histories, guidebooks, yearbooks, and the like published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a remarkably complete composite picture of Lowell's historic appearance, particularly in the late nineteenth century, can be formed.

Other Special Collections resources valuable to the inventory were the document file on Lowell people, places, corporations, and buildings; architectural and engineering drawings and millyard insurance surveys, mostly deposited by Locks and Canals; and

the collection of manuscripts, dissertations, and other research works on Lowell topics. The cooperation and active assistance of the Special Collections staff made these extensive holdings all the more useful.

PROPRIETORS OF LOCKS AND CANALS ARCHIVE,
BOOTT MILLS, LOWELL

The Proprietors of Locks and Canals private archive at the Boott Mills is the best source of historic plans and drawings related to Lowell's power canal system and to the major industrial enterprises that used it. The archive also contains some Locks and Canals Directors' records and other invaluable documents. Lowell was initially a city built for industry, and this industrial archive contains unique sources related to the development of the town and city as a whole, particularly manuscript maps.

The broad scope of the inventory prevented an in-depth analysis of most of the very specific information available in the Proprietors of Locks and Canals archive. That repository should be an important point for further research on the canals and the major industrial sites.

Boott Mills is an active business, yet its staff was consistently generous in assisting the inventory team.

Memorial Library, City of Lowell

The city library's reference collection of Lowell histories, directories, maps, and atlases is very extensive, and includes a copy of the 1936 atlas of the city not found at Special Collections. A unique strength of this library is its exhaustive microfilm collection of Lowell newspapers, accompanied by a WPA-prepared index. The Memorial Library staff frequently advised the inventory team on specific research questions.

Registry of Deeds for the Northern District of
Middlesex County

Lowell researchers are fortunate to have county registry of deeds records available locally.

The breadth and time frame of the inventory effort prohibited investigation of the title history of most properties, but the registry was consulted on many key parcels. Of particular interest were several detailed building contracts discovered in the course of title research, dating from the 1830s through the 1850s. A focused search for and analysis of such documents would tell much about early building practices in Lowell.

City of Lowell, Various Departments

The records of at least four city departments were consulted in the preparation of the inventory. The City Engineer's plates were used to determine current ownership of property. Other records and plans related to public works were not utilized, and represent a source for further research.

The Buildings Office has an index of permit applications dating from 1906 to the present, and the documents themselves are available from 1924 to the present. These records can be very informative as to date, cost, materials, and other particulars on new construction, alterations, and demolition projects. The index is arranged by street name and date of application, but not by numerical address. Locating a permit of unknown date for a property on a long and active street (e.g., Merrimack Street) can be quite time consuming, and could only be done for a few particularly important buildings which raised questions that could not be answered from other sources.

The Assessor's Office assisted in determining the tax status of various properties. Other resources, such as annual property valuation books arranged by owner and address, were not used on the inventory, but could be useful in tracing alterations to specific properties.

The files of Division of Planning and Development's Neighborhood Analysis Project provided photographs of several properties demolished recently, particularly in the Acre neighborhood. Another resource is the Division's collection of photographs of areas affected by urban renewal projects.

Other Sources

The inventory team's less extensive use of other repositories of historic Lowell information more accurately reflects the constraints of the project than the potential usefulness of those sources. The Manuscript Collection at Baker Library of the Harvard Business School has an extremely extensive collection of business records from many of the major Lowell corporations. A brief examination of the material on a single company confirmed that detailed information on the construction and operation of the mills can be uncovered in these records. Like the Proprietors of Locks and Canals' archive, the Baker Library represents a major source for further research on industrial Lowell.

The Merrimack Valley Textile Museum in North Andover includes considerable Lowell material in its library. This is a particularly useful source on the many industrial enterprises in Lowell other than the major corporations, such as the mills on the Concord River. The inventory team was able to devote few hours to the Museum's library, but the very helpful staff there made it time very well spent.

The Lowell Museum's files were consulted on several subjects, particularly concerning immigrant groups. In the course of the inventory, the Museum deposited its photographic file with Special Collections at Alumni-Lydon Library, and several images in that file contained information important to the project.

The Boston Athenaeum's collections include several architectural drawings for Lowell buildings, and an exquisitely detailed manuscript map of Lowell dated 1835. Both the drawings and the map warrant further examination.

The library of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities has the largest and broadest collection anywhere of historic photographs related to New England architecture. The material in the collection on Lowell is extensive. Particularly useful to the inventory were the many stereographs of nineteenth century Lowell scenes.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission's records of archeological sites was consulted for the inventory

and this report. The Commission also provided the National Register of Historic Places nomination forms prepared for the Middle-Merrimack Streets, the Locks and Canals, and the City Hall Historic Districts. The Massachusetts State Archives provided some maps consulted in the course of the project. The State Department of Corporations and Taxation has a useful index to the charters and charter changes of all Massachusetts corporations.

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