

LOWELL CULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY

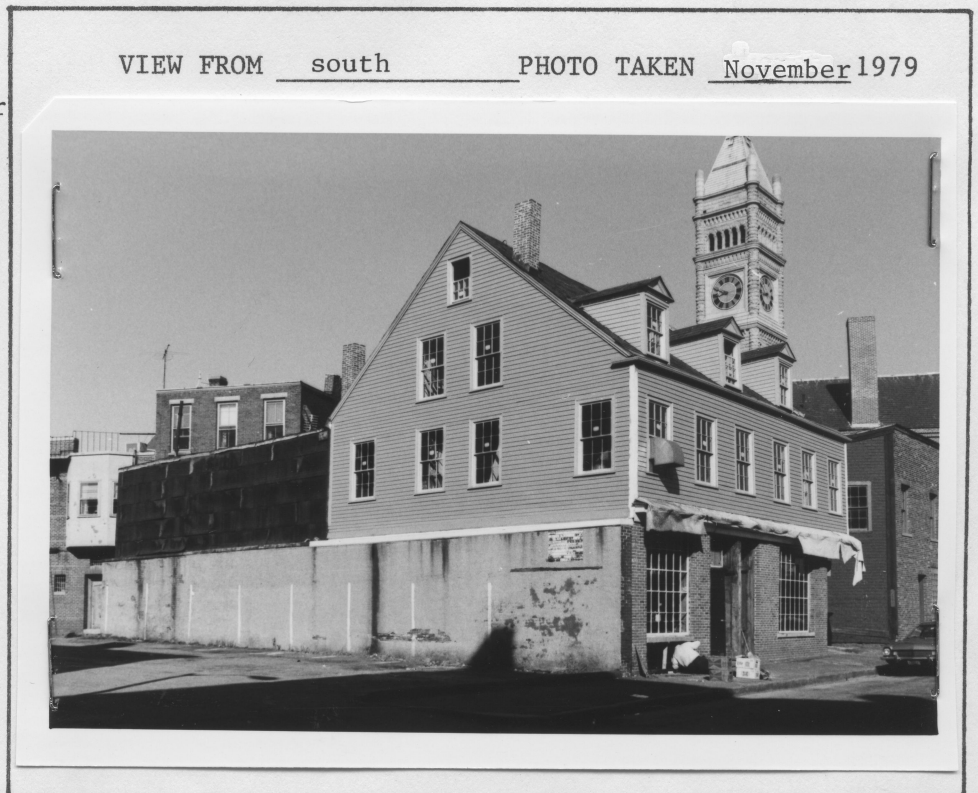
IDENTIFICATION 143 WORTHEN STREET MAP SHEET #7
 1) CURRENT OWNER Old Worthen, Incorporated OWNER OCCUPIED yes
 2) HISTORIC NAME Nichols and Johnson's West India Goods
 3) CURRENT NAME Old Worthen
 4) PROPERTY TYPE commercial 5) ZONING CLASSIFICATION B3
 6) TAXES: PAYMENTS current STATUS clear
 7) WITHIN BOUNDARIES OF LHPD, City Hall HD

HISTORICAL ABSTRACT

1) CONSTRUCTION DATE ca. 1834/ca. 1848
 SOURCE circumstantial: Lowell Business Directories; deeds
 2) ARCHITECT OR BUILDER Hodgkins and Gannett (upper floors)
 3) HISTORIC OWNER Henry C. Johnson and Hiram Nichols (1832)
 4) ORIGINAL USE: GF commercial UF residential
 5) PREVIOUS BLDGS ON PROPERTY no DATE _____
 SOURCE _____

DESCRIPTIVE DATA

1) ARCHITECTURAL STYLE mid-19th c. vernacular
 2) PRESENT USE:
 GF commercial
 UF vacant
 3) NO OF STORIES 2½
 4) PROP SQ FT 1,466
 5) PLAN triangular
 6) ROOF end-wall gable
 7) STRUCTURAL SYSTEM
wood frame
 8) OUTBUILDINGS
none
 9) MATERIALS:
 FOUNDATION
not visible



FACADE all sides: wood clapboard; first floor f:red brick in stretcher bond; s:stucco
 TRIM metal storefront

10) NOTABLE SURFACE & LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS none

ADDRESS 143 WORTHEN 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, industrial, residential, institutional
- 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 brick and frame commercial structure was begun in the 1830s. By 1879 the rear additions were in place, completely filling the lot. If these additions lack cellars, they might protect below-ground remains of the commercial and craft activities carried out in this area as early as the 1820s and 1830s.

Research Report
143 Worthen St.
Nichols' and Johnson's West India Goods Store (now the
Old Worthen Tavern)
ca. 1834/ca. 1848

The Old Worthen Tavern at 143 Worthen Street is comprised of a main rectangular block with a triangular rear addition. The main block is two-and-a-half stories high, with a gable roof. The ground floor is brick on the facade and right (north) side, and rubble "canal stone" on the left (south side). The upper floors are frame. 143 Worthen Street is a structure firmly rooted in the vernacular building tradition of the 1830s and 1840s and reflects the work of masons and carpenters.

The brick ground-floor facade features a central entrance bay flanked by large multi-panel psuedo-colonial windows. Above the ground floor on the Worthen Street facade are six windows, simply enframed by thin boards. There are two offcenter chimneys in the front slope of the roof, and one in the rear. Three gabled dormers appear on the front slope of the roof.

The southern wall of this building (next to a parking lot) is faced with various materials. The entire length of the wall on the ground floor is hidden by a stuccoed brick wall, apparently a fragment of the stable which stood on the parking lot site. This brick wall stands a few inches in front of the tavern's wall, which appears to be randomly laid "canal stone" rubble. The second floor of the rear addition is covered in metal shingles, while the upper portion of the main block's south wall is faced with dilapidated wood clapboards. The northern wall, along a narrow passageways is built of brick on the first-floor level, and frame above, sheathed with wood clapboards. The fenestration of the side walls is irregular. Notable features include the first floor windows on the north brick wall, which have no visible lintels, except for a soldier course of brick. There are windows in the frame portion not only on the second and attic levels, but also in the very peak of the gable. Almost all of the upper floor windows are boarded over.

The interior retains on the first floor a decorated, pressed tin ceiling, a late nineteenth century bar, and a system of belt-linked ceiling fans. The upper floors are

vacant. The Old Worthen is currently undergoing extensive exterior repair (Summer 1979).

The tavern building is flanked by vacant lots to the south and the west. A frame stable (faced with brick) once abutted 143 Worthen Street's southern wall (1). The large, brick Associates Hall and smaller brick and frame buildings used as a stable once stood across Worthen Street from the tavern. The Old Worthen Tavern and the adjacent Bank Block (1826) to the north are a pair of quite dissimilar survivors from the initial phase of Lowell's development in the 1820s and 1830s.

The tavern's site was purchased in 1832 by Henry C. Johnson and Hiram Nichols from the Locks and Canal Company for \$992.00 (2). A clause in the deed stipulated that "this conveyance is made subject to the condition...that no building shall ever be erected on said premises of more than twelve feet in height of any other material than brick or stone with roof covered with slate or some other "incumbustable (sic) material." Initially that restriction was doubly respected, for the first stage of building produced a structure of brick and rubble stone a single story high (3). The 1834 directory lists Johnson's and Nichols' "West India Goods Store" on Worthen St., and an 1834-35 map shows the characteristic trapezoidal outline of the front portion of the current building (4). In 1833, the West India Goods Store had been recorded at "Fitt's building on Lowell St.," and the year before that on Merrimack St.

Thomas Dodge bought Johnson's share of the property in 1835. Dodge, a housewright who lived on Lowell St., apparently was not involved with running the store. Instead, Nichols took a new partner in 1836, when the directory listed the firm as Nichols and Plympton.

In 1847 a pair of carpenters bought the property. Stephen Hodgkins of Southborough bought Hiram Nichols's share (5), and Edward Gannett bought Thomas Dodge's share of the property (6). Despite the 1847 deeds' repetition of the 1832 deed's prohibitions against a building over twelve feet tall of materials other than "incombustibles," the carpenters Hodgkins and Gannett apparently added the frame upper floors soon after their purchase of the property.

They maintained work rooms on the ground floor and resided in the building, probably on the upper floors (7). Hodgkins moved out of the building by 1853, when the directory listed him as a "Sawfiler and Carpenter at 10 Lowell place".

The last listing for Edward Gannett on Worthen Street is 1861. His family continued to own the building through the 1880s. Under their ownership the building acquired the rear additions, which followed the lines of the constricted lot, completing the building's triangular outline. The 1879 atlas clearly shows this triangularity. In 1889 the widow of Edward Gannett, Prudence Gannett Briggs, sold the property to John O'Donnell.

O'Donnell, a liquor dealer, is credited with remodeling the building in 1898, opening the "Worthen House, a hotel and Tavern" (8). Much of the present interior, most notably the pressed tin ceiling and the bar, appears to date from that remodeling. The impact of Prohibition is reflected in the uses for this building between 1924 and 1933. During these years the city directories list as occupants "Mathew J. Stowell Beverages", "Arthur J. Sency soft drinks", "John D. Shines restaurant" and "Arthur J. Turcotte Real Estate". Perhaps one or more of these occupants surreptitiously maintained the tavern's traditional use.

From 1933 until 1941 this building housed Adelard N. Gerard's Restaurant. In 1942 the "Old Worthen" name was applied to the restaurant. Notable patrons of the Old Worthen are said to have included Jack Kerouac, Alan Ginsberg, and Jimmy Breslin (9).

Architecturally this building is a brick and frame vernacular survivor from the initial phases of Worthen Street's and Lowell's development in the 1830s and 1840s. The brick ground floor is linked with an early Lowell store-- "Nichols and Johnson West India Goods". The upper floors reflect the work of the carpenters Edward Gannett and Stephen Hodgkins. Since the late nineteenth century this structure (with the official exception of the Prohibition years) has served as a tavern.

Footnotes

- 1) See survey form on 169 Worthen St., John Hadley's Stables.
- 2) North Middlesex Registry 16:531.
- 3) Walking Tours of Lowell--Downtown, n.d.
- 4) Boyden - P. Anderson "Plan of Lowell Village," 1834-35, Boston Atheneum.
- 5) North Middlesex Registry 59:245.
- 6) Ibid., 59:249.
- 7) Walking Tours, op. cit.; and city directories.
- 8) Ibid.
- 9) Ibid.

Other Sources

1841 and 1850 Lowell maps; 1879, 1896, 1906, 1924 Lowell atlases.

Lowell Business Directories.

LEGENDARY PUB

Old Worthen bar restored to Prohibition-era luster

By PATRICK COOK
 Sun Staff

LOWELL — When he was 11, Camille Eno would leave his job as a bobbin boy at the Suffolk Mills and go to the Old Worthen bar to fetch his older brothers, who usually were inside quaffing beers brewed in Lowell's own Harvard brewery.

Eno is now 72 and retired, and Tuesday night he was back rubbing elbows at the Worthen. He says the bar looks the same now as it did 61 years ago.

And that's just what new owner Manny Silva wants to hear.

Silva purchased the historical bar at 147 Worthen St. in February and closed it to undertake an

ambitious renovation project that restored the bar's Prohibition-era atmosphere.

On Tuesday night, decked out in a white tux and red bow tie, Silva was host of an invitation-only party for about 100 people to show off his new bar, now known as the Worthen House.

Proudly wearing his white baseball cap with an "I worked in the Lowell mills" pin attached to it, Eno mingled with City Manager James Campbell and other city dignitaries.

He chuckled when Silva popped open a fake wall behind the bar to reveal a hidden compartment littered with antique bottles and cans.

The wall was used during the
 Please see **WORTHEN/5**

SUN/DAVID BROW



Worthen House owner Manny Silva holds an old bottle found during renovations

Prohibition-era luster is back at Old Worthen

WORTHEN/From Page 1

Prohibition era, when the bar was a speak-easy and keeping liquor on the premises was forbidden.

It's only a showpiece now, but Eno remembers the time when it was used for real.

The phony wall was just one piece of the bar's facelift that made Eno nostalgic.

"It brings me back," he said. "I thought places like this were gone for good."

The Worthen, perhaps the city's best-known pub, has been a liquor establishment since 1898.

It was a favorite watering hole for native Lowell writer Jack Kerouac, and also was frequented by his friend, beat poet Alan Ginsberg, and by columnist Jimmy Breslin. Customers from that era used to carve

graffiti into the old wooden booths that formerly graced the establishment.

Silva doesn't know yet if he'll tackle the upper two floors of the building, which was built in 1834 to serve as a boarding house and includes 14 rooms.

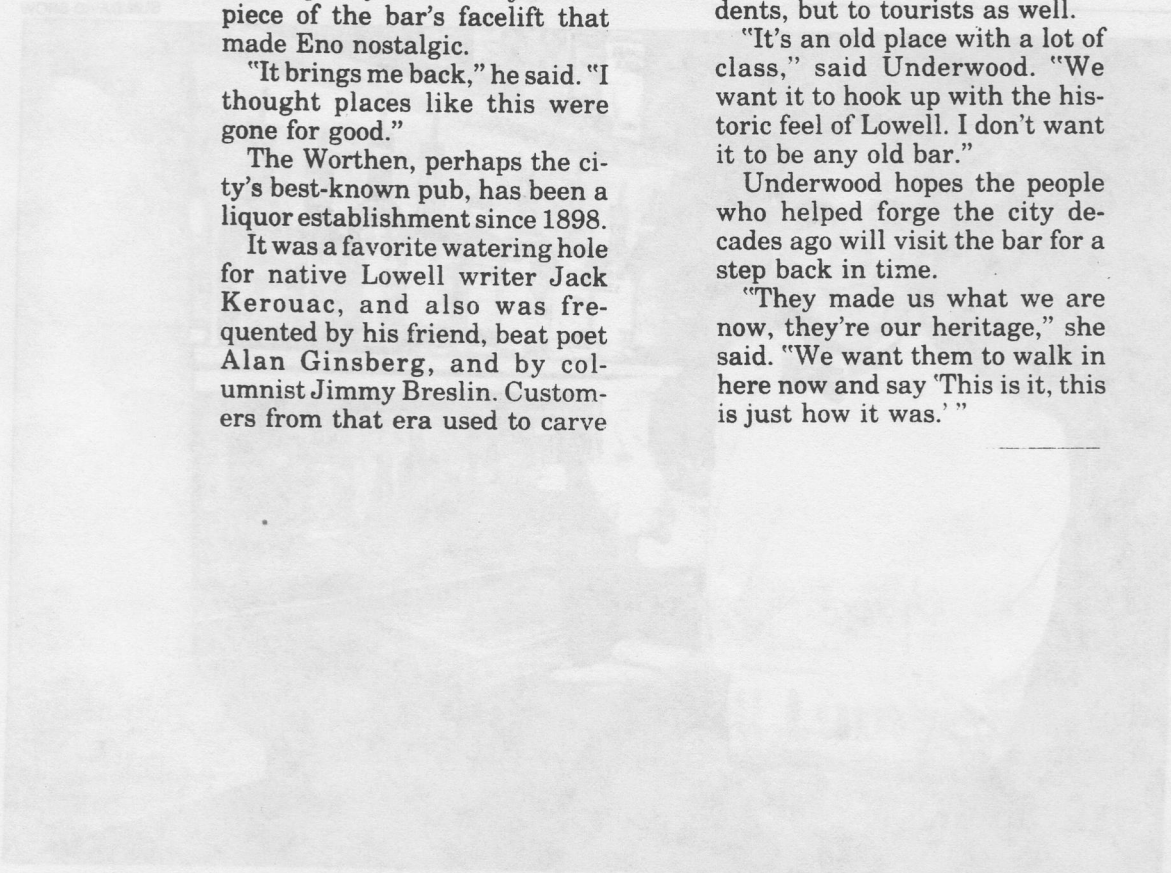
His pride and joy is the set of 1835 belt-linked ceiling fans along the pressed tin ceiling. The fan system is one of only four of its kind left in the country, Silva said.

Silva and his business partner and girlfriend, Mary Beth Underwood, hope the bar's flavor appeals not only to city residents, but to tourists as well.

"It's an old place with a lot of class," said Underwood. "We want it to hook up with the historic feel of Lowell. I don't want it to be any old bar."

Underwood hopes the people who helped forge the city decades ago will visit the bar for a step back in time.

"They made us what we are now, they're our heritage," she said. "We want them to walk in here now and say 'This is it, this is just how it was.'"



Worthen House owner Menny Silva holds an old bottle found during renovations



Figure 1

View of Old Worthen from the south, May 1979. Photo by SBRA.



Figure 2

View of Old Worthen from the south, August 1979, showing upper floor undergoing rehabilitation. Photo by SBRA.



Figure 3

Views of Old Worthen from the south (top) and the east (bottom), November 1979, showing exterior rehabilitation nearly completed. Photos by SBRA.