

LOWELL HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

The Commission Bulletin Lowell, Massachusetts Spring, 1979 Vol. I, No. 1

We're the Commission

The Lowell Commission is an independent federal entity, separate from both the National Park Service and State Heritage Park.

The purpose of this initial bulletin is to explain our responsibilities and programs. The 15-member federal-state-local Commission was created by the same legislation that established the Lowell National Historical Park. However, we are separate from, and have different responsibilities than, the National Park Service.

The Commission was created to help the city set standards and help owners make improvements on historic properties in the "preservation district." The preservation district is an area surrounding

the national park. It contains a large number of commercial and residential historic properties. (see map on page 3)

There are also important cultural responsibilities. In addition to sponsoring cultural and educational programs, the Commission must make sure that economic development does not ignore or disrupt the ways of life that give Lowell its special character.

For the national park is not just a story of this mill building and that canal, it is the story of people.



Workers at the Wannalancit Mill in Lowell

photo by Steve Dunwell

Who's Who in the Park

NPS

The National Park Service has primary management responsibilities within a 2-by-5 block historic section of the downtown, as well as the privately owned Lowell canal system. These areas are known as the national park. The downtown area of the park represents a cross-section of 19th century Lowell. Several buildings and streets will be restored to their original appearance and interpretive exhibits and transportation will be provided for visitors.

The National Park Service is now planning summer visitor programs which will include a shuttle bus, downtown walk, tour of the Lowell Museum, and a barge ride. In cooperation with the Lowell Sun, a regular event calendar will be published during summer months. Also underway are an historic and cultural resources survey and initial planning efforts to determine the direction of the park.

The National Park Service was established by Congress in 1916 to maintain and preserve the nation's natural, historic and cultural resources. Early additions to the park system tended to be western scenic areas, revolutionary and civil war sites. The park system now includes historical parks, such as Boston, Philadelphia, Lex-

ington and Concord, and now Lowell. The National Park Service office is located at 171 Merrimack St. and is open to visitors.

City

Before the national park or state park were established, the City of Lowell and City Council adopted the park theme for local development. This has resulted in better coordination of planning activities and substantial funds for downtown and neighborhood improvements that relate to the park.

Specific grant programs have been established to assist owners rehabilitating their properties within the central business district and historic neighborhoods. Other community block grant funds have assisted with park development and promotions. Downtown sidewalks have been re-paved and bricked, street lamps purchased, pocket parks created, and cobblestone streets exposed.

The city commitment has resulted in rehabilitation of 22 downtown facades and a large number of residential properties. Planning officials have encouraged present and potential owners to develop their properties in accordance with future park plans.

Under the park strategy, the city will continue to be responsible for overall plan-

ning and development, a majority of street improvements and maintenance, as well as for enforcing standards for rehabilitation and use of historic and cultural properties.

State

In 1974, the Lowell Heritage State Park was established. The state theme is centered around the waterways of the city and their recreational and interpretive uses. The Department of Environmental Management has spent \$4 million to date in Lowell.

The most prominent state involvement has taken place along Pawtucket Boulevard where a river front park and performing arts pavilion has been built. A downtown visitors center and park is currently under construction between Shattuck and Dutton Streets, the former site of the YMCA building.

The State is now undertaking a canal transportation and recreational study in order to consider operation of a barge transportation system. Several other projects are also being considered to encourage use of canal and river areas.

Lowell's Heritage Park has served as a model for development of similar state parks in Lawrence, Holyoke, Gardner, Lynn, North Adams, and Springfield.



Commission members: (left to right) Brian Delaney (seated), Raymond Lord, Jr., James Linnehan, Robert Crecco, Frank Keefe, Angelike Georgalos, Charles Donahue, Robert Paquin, Armand LeMay, William Whalen, John Duff, George Duncan, Patrick Mogan. Absent: Chris Delaporte, Helen Keyes

Upcoming Events

Commission meetings

The Commission will hold public hearings on Monday, June 4 at 7 p.m. at the City Council chambers of City Hall. A brief report on Commission responsibilities and programs will be followed by public comments on park development. If you or your organization wishes to appear before the Commission, please call 458-7653.

Public Workshops

A workshop for downtown business owners will be held on Wednesday, June 6 at 4:00 p.m. at the Athenian Corner Restaurant, Market and Shat-

tuck Sts. in Lowell. Information will be available on preservation grants, loans, architectural assistance, and tax incentives, as well as future directions for park development. The workshop will be cosponsored by the Commission, Northern Middlesex Chamber of Commerce, and National Park Service.

Evening meetings to encourage public participation in Park Service planning activities will be held during the weeks of June 11 and June 18. Concepts and alternatives will be discussed with National Park Service planners.

Who's Eligible

To qualify for a Commission grant for exterior renovations, your property must be within the national park or preservation district. Your property should generally have been built prior to 1910 and be distinguished by its architecture or its historical or cultural associations. Neighborhoods or commercial districts containing a high concentration of early buildings may qualify. Residences and businesses are both eligible.

The Commission is currently providing grants for buildings in serious need of repair.

However, one year from now, grants, loans, technical assistance will be available for additional eligible buildings.



What Do I Have To Do?

If your property meets the above standards and you are interested in rehabilitating, these are the steps to take:

1. Check the grant formulas on this page. Commission funds will not pay the entire cost. Is this project affordable?
2. Try to determine what type of work needs to be done and the approximate cost, if possible. Remember that the intent is to preserve the original building materials whenever possible, not to recreate what early Lowell might have been like.
3. Contact the Commission to be sure that your property qualifies and that funds are available.

If you qualify, here's what happens next:

4. A Commission staffer and an architect will review your plans and arrive at an approved cost. The grant will be figured on the basis of this cost. Specifications for the work will be prepared.
5. The Commission will have to vote to approve your grant at its

regular monthly meeting. Owners do not have to attend such meetings.

6. You must get three written estimates for the work, with the lowest qualified bid being selected.
7. A contract between the Commission and owner is signed. The contract specifies the work to be done and protects against major exterior alterations without Commission approval. A grant payment schedule is agreed to.
8. A building permit must be obtained from the City.
9. Work begins. Commission staff inspects work and billing records in order to make scheduled payments.
10. Work is completed satisfactorily. Final payment is made.

Owners are strongly encouraged to use contractors paying prevailing wages and who have demonstrated a commitment to equal opportunity laws.

Exterior Grant Formula

Commercial Within Preservation District

Approved Cost	City Share	Comm. Share	Total
\$ 1,000-\$16,000	25%	25%	50%
\$16,001-\$50,000	\$4,000	50%-4,000	50%
\$ 1,000-\$50,000 *	0	33%	33%

Commercial Within National Park

\$ 1,000-\$16,000	25%	35%	60%
\$16,001-\$50,000	\$4,000	60%-4,000	60%
\$ 1,000-\$50,000 *	0	50%	50%

Residential Within Preservation District and National Park

Approved Cost	Max. City Share	Comm. Share
\$1,000-up	\$1,000 to \$3,500 depending on area and household income	25% (max. \$2,000)
(*If property is ineligible for a city grant.)		

Other Funds and Assistance

There are a number of other sources of assistance if you are trying to renovate your home or business according to the national park theme.

City

The City of Lowell has a community block grant program for both residential and business properties.

Homeowners within a designated area qualify for between \$1000 and \$3500 depending upon income and area. A city program also provides materials and labor for painting and certain maintenance activities.

Business properties (generally in the central business district) can qualify for grants totalling 25% of approved exterior renovation costs, up to a maximum grant of \$4000. Technical assistance is also available to assist in drawing up architectural plans. For information call the

Division of Planning and Development at 459-6138.

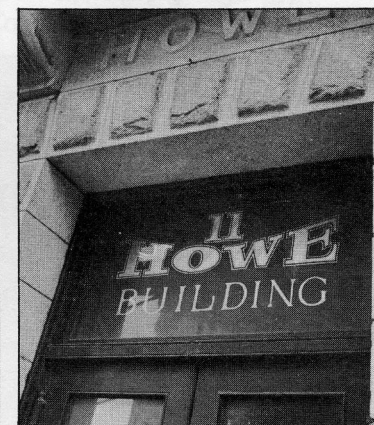
LDLC

The Lowell Development and Financial Corporation provides low-interest loans (4%) of up to \$33,000 for exterior and interior renovations conforming with the park theme. The Corporation's Board of Directors must approve all loans based on financial capability to repay and design acceptance. For information call the Commission at 458-7653 or George Duncan at 256-2565.

Massachusetts Historical Commission

A limited number of grants are available for national register properties from the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The Commission provides national historic preservation funds to Massachusetts. Grants in Lowell have ranged from a few thou-

sand dollars to over a hundred thousand dollars. However, the competition is difficult. For initial information about eligibility, call the Planning Department at 459-6138. The Massachusetts Historical Commission can be reached at 727-8470.



The Howe Building will be renovated by the non-profit group ACT of Massachusetts with state, federal, city, and Commission grants, as well as an LDLC loan.

Tax Incentives

The Tax Reform Act allows an owner of a National Register property or certified historic structure to amortize the costs of a certified rehabilitation over a five year period, even if the expected life of the improvement exceeds five years.

There are two National Register Districts in Lowell and additional individual structures which may be qualified for Register Status.

If a property qualifies as a substantially rehabilitated historic property, the owner instead may take accelerated depreciation by depreciating the adjusted basis of the entire rehabilitated structure at a faster rate than he otherwise would be allowed to use. A substantially rehabilitated historic property is any certified historic structure for which the cost of certified rehabilitation (during a 24-month period ending on the last day of any taxable year, less any amounts allowed as depreciation or amortization during this period) exceeds either \$5,000 or the adjusted basis of the property, whichever is greater. The adjusted basis is generally the owner's initial cost of the property plus the cost of prior improvements less amounts previously allowed to the owner as depreciation. The accelerated depreciation provision of the act applies to expenses incurred after June 30, 1976, and before July 1, 1981.

Properties to be Preserved

The Commission has identified a number of historic and cultural properties which qualify for preservation funds during 1979 and 1980. These properties have been determined to be either key to development or require immediate improvements. They include:

- *Boott Mill/Capehart Lowell Manufacturing
- *Fairburn Building Strand Theatre
- *Derby Electric
- *Gas Light Bldg.
- Boott Mill/Remainder Residential Reserve Fund
- Whipple/Sterling Mills
- Appleton St. Boarding Houses
- Old Market Building
- Howe Building
- Early Residence
- Welles Block
- Weiners Bldg.
- Yorick Club
- Mass. Mills Boilerworks
- Jackson Mills
- Library Murals



photo courtesy ULowell Archives
The Strand Theatre, pictured here in better days, is on the list of buildings to be preserved.

Final approval of qualifying projects is up to the Department of Interior.

Additional properties may qualify for immediate assistance on the basis of special needs. A majority of projects will wait until after completion of the Commission's preservation plan next June.

**The Commission has voted to authorize grants for these properties*

Cultural Programs

Ethnic festivals, performing arts, cultural programs, and park-related scholarships all may be funded by the Commission beginning in the fall of 1980.

Prior to establishing or encouraging these activities, a plan to preserve Lowell's cultural heritage must be submitted for federal approval. Until then only minor contri-

butions can be made to these activities.

The Commission needs the assistance of neighborhood groups, ethnic organizations, cultural organizations, educational institutions and individuals to help plan these programs. Please call the Commission office if you or your group would like to participate.

Why a Commission?

The Lowell Historic Preservation Commission is unique. So are the resources of Lowell.

Two years ago, a congressionally established Commission produced a report recommending that a national park be established in Lowell. That report won several national awards. It was also the basis of legislation which was eventually passed by Congress establishing the Lowell Park.

The success of the initial local-state-federal Commission led to recommendations that a similar panel be part of the management and development strategy in Lowell.

Congress last June created a national park and adjoining preservation district. The National Park Service and new Commission were given joint responsibility for preserving Lowell's resources.

The Commission can draw from the diverse talents and experiences of its members. Unlike the often tedious decision making procedures of the federal bureaucracy, the Commission can make quick on-the-scene decisions. Private citizens and the three different levels of government on the Commission encourage coordination, imaginative ideas, and a sensitivity to local needs.

Our Job

The Commission was created to make preservation of buildings profitable. Grants, loans and technical assistance are means of preserving properties through private ownership.

The Commission has \$20 million over a ten-year period to accomplish these purposes. There are additional mechanisms to accomplish preservation. In the next year, construction and alteration standards will be devised. They will apply to both park and preservation district properties.

Before implementation of the Commission's full scale preservation plan and expending major funds the city will have to turn these standards into local zoning ordinances and regulations. New construction or alterations will then be required to conform with the national park theme. This strategy will encourage private preservation efforts while protecting the

federal investment in Lowell.

Our job is also to preserve Lowell's culture and traditions. This means making sure there is adequate opportunity for cultural expression. This means finding ways to integrate the cultural into the physical.

No matter how impressed visitors to Lowell are by natural wonders like the Pawtucket Falls or man-made wonders like the mile of mills, people always leave Lowell talking about people. About the museum guide who showed them the mill he spent 50 years in. About the store owner who took an hour out to talk about business and life in the Acre. And about being able to buy feta cheese on one side of the street and kielbasa on the other. This is what makes Lowell special. The Commission's job is to consider these stories and find ways to preserve these experiences and ways of life.

The Way of Life

Lowell is a park in the sense that Vienna and certain other cities of the world are a park, specifically, in their portrayal of a way-of-life.

History books generally emphasized the economic exploitation and poor living conditions in this textile-city. Hardly ever was told the remarkable story of how the various ethnic groups coped within this process of industrialism. Therein lies the untold human story associated with the 5.6 miles of canals, the two rivers, the massive mill buildings, the ethnic neighborhoods, and the customs, traditions, and cultural expressions of approximately 44 different cultural groups. The physical artifacts are the 'props' around which this dream of America was realized. This is an important part of the national park story.

As part of this rebirth and reassociation, the life styles of the various culture groups (the religious festivals, the use of the water for recreational activities, and the customs and traditions) must be interwoven with the physical artifacts to portray the



Ceremonial dress at Greek Independence Day celebration.

complete story of the process and the consequences of industrialization.

Lowell slowly evolved from ethnic enclaves to an intercultural community. Organized labor and the women's movement had their roots here. The ways of life associated with all these aspects of Lowell must be nurtured to reproduce the flavor once associated with the industrial era. And the national park should help reassociate local groups and visitors with a positive sense of their cultural identities. It will be at this point that we can pronounce it a success.

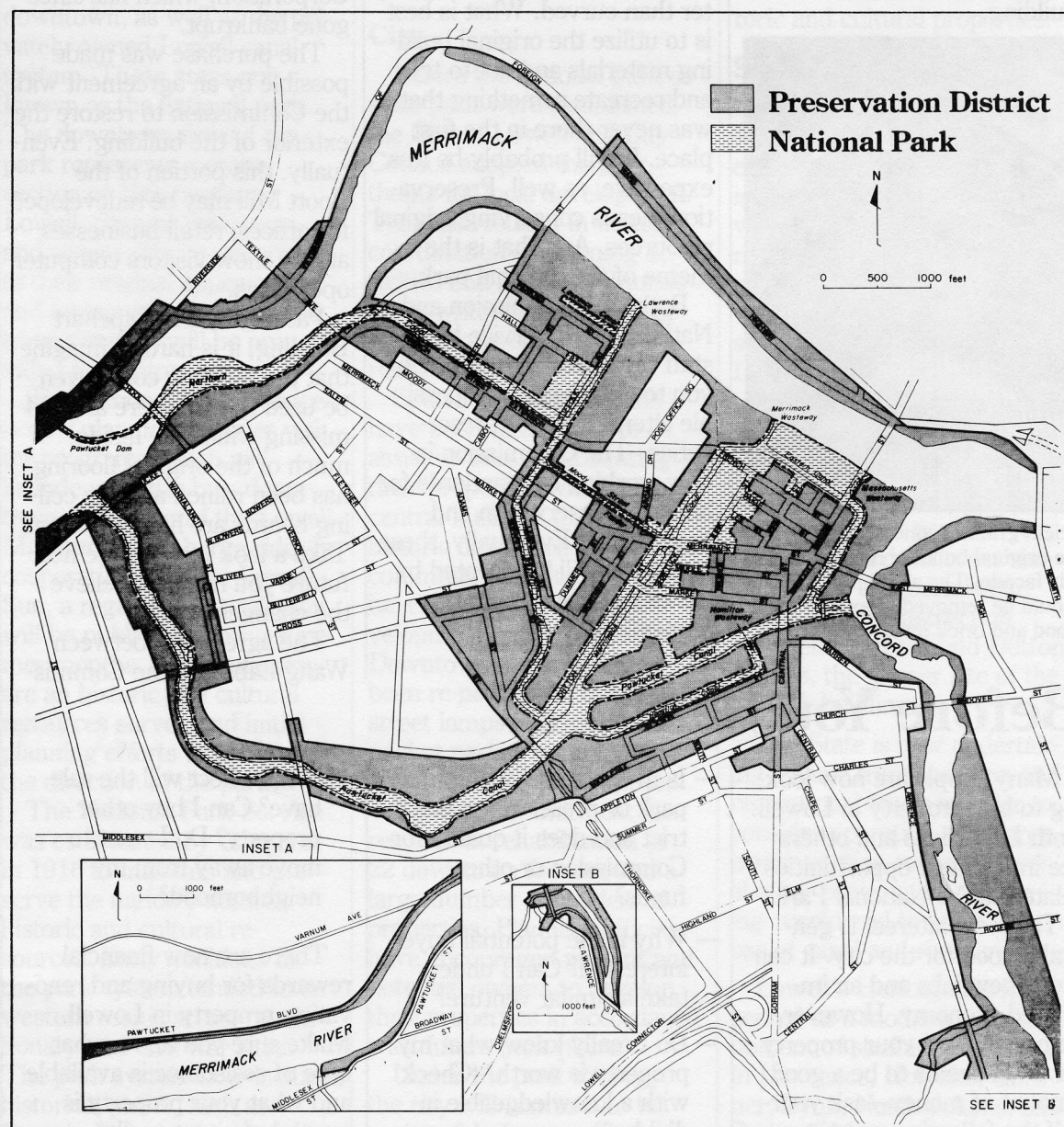
To be complete, the national park must integrate the human factor with the physical. It must explain how an

industrial city was born, flourished, declined, lost its sense of the past and positive identity. It must explain that the reason the national park itself is here in Lowell is because its residents rediscovered their past. This rediscovery came with the conclusion that a community that does not have a respectable past does not have a future. Upon this realization, the remnants of that once great industrial community became the stepping stones for the cultural, social, educational, and economic rebirth of the city.

Lowell is the people's story of adaptive reuse—a story of how seemingly negative factors were made positive. By taking into consideration the tremendous possibilities and concentrating on the uniqueness of Lowell, a directionless community is being changed into a dynamic and interesting place to live, work, and learn.

This article was written by Dr. Patrick J. Mogan, Superintendent of the Lowell School Department and Chairman of the Commission's Cultural and Educational Development Committee. Dr. Mogan initiated the Lowell Park Concept.

Lowell National Historical Park



The Preservation Plan

In order to have a development and management strategy for the future, the Commission is preparing a "preservation plan." It will be completed in June of 1980.

This plan will contain standards for park and preservation district rehabilitation construction, an index of historic and cultural properties qualifying for assistance, formulas for grant, loan, and easement programs, educational and cultural grant

programs, architectural designs for specific buildings in the park, and major commercial development packages—aimed at preserving the city's mills and other properties.

The plan is to be prepared by consultants and the Commission staff. A series of public workshops will be held to enable those interested to participate in preparing this plan.

The Park Theme

Is red brick or yellow brick proper? Should the doors be glass or wooden? Should signs be gold lettered or illuminated?

There are a number of different opinions as to exactly what the national park theme

If it is not possible to retain the early building materials and detail, modern additions should complement the original building. Compatible new construction is more desirable than bad copies of 19th century Lowell.

The rule of thumb is simple. The theme of the park is to preserve buildings by using their original features and materials.

is and how best to conform to that theme.

Actually, the rule of thumb is simple. The theme of the national park is to preserve buildings by using their original features and materials.

Many of the 1950 and 1960 additions of plastic and aluminum covered original materials. Brick, granite, and cast iron are frequently found beneath the surface. These original materials were often used for structural purposes and could not be removed. They should be restored when possible. They are unique, attractive, and can increase the value of the building.



Brick, granite, concrete and iron are original building materials on this facade. The aluminum sheeting should be removed to expose the wood and brick under the surface.

19th Century architecture in Lowell was centered around the styles of earlier periods. Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, Victorian, French Second Empire, English Tudor, and many other styles can be seen throughout the city. Sometimes, styles were mixed on a building. In many cases, stories and additions were added. There is no "proper" style to be recreated in Lowell today. Every building must be considered for its original design, changes made, and its present condition. Red brick is not better than yellow. Square windows are not better than curved. What is best is to utilize the original building materials and not to try and recreate something that was never there in the first place. It will probably be less expensive, as well. Preservation means conserving original resources. And that is the theme of the national park.

Both the Commission and National Park Service have staff members who can help you to devise the best possible alternatives for preservation. The Commission is now working on standards for building preservation and renovations. Eventually, these standards will be adopted by the city to insure uniform renovations.

Message from the Chairman

We do not often get the opportunity to be part of a venture that can determine national policy. The Commission and National Park Service experience in Lowell are being watched carefully by Congress and the Administration. Successes and failures here may determine future urban policy approaches.

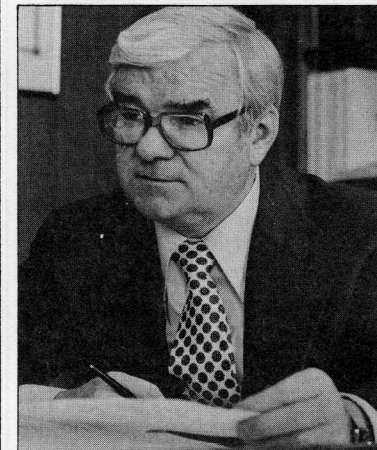
The Lowell Commission was established by Congress to explore new ways of preserving nationally important resources in an urban area. Traditionally, the National Park Service has had property designated as a national park, acquired that property and managed it. Such an approach would be neither possible nor desirable in Lowell. Furthermore, the story of Lowell continues to be told and reflected in human terms. Part of the challenge in Lowell is to preserve the resources without changing the ways of life.

Cooperation from the Lowell community remains an essential ingredient in the mix of the park. The city has adopted the park theme for downtown development. Lowell is the home of the first State Heritage Park. The Lowell Finance and Development Corporation has sparked considerable private investment. A variety of organizations have played a key role in the revitalization of the city.

The Lowell National Historical Park will bring many benefits to the city. But the park carries with it obligations. The Commission intends to maintain a standard of excellence and to set an example that can be used as a national model. Too often resources have been lost by neglect. An easy or inexpensive solution often has been substituted for a more proper one. Because of the national park... the Commission, the

city, and its people have an unprecedented opportunity to turn Lowell around economically and culturally. This opportunity must not be lost.

As Chairman of the Lowell National Historical Park, I pledge to do my utmost to meet the mandates of the Congress and the people.



On January 12, 1979, the Commission elected as its chairman Dr. John B. Duff, President of the University of Lowell.

Wang to Buy Portion of Boott Mills

In March, Wang Laboratories signed a purchase and sale agreement to buy a portion of the historic Boott Mills. The building was formerly owned by the Capehart Corporation, which has since gone bankrupt.

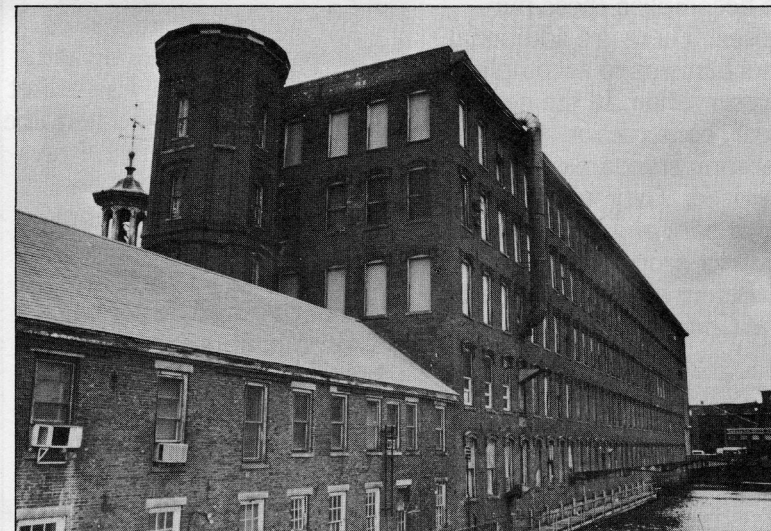
The purchase was made possible by an agreement with the Commission to restore the exterior of the building. Eventually, this portion of the Boott Mill may be redeveloped for offices, retail businesses and to show visitors computer operations.

Passing by the Capehart Building, it is hard to imagine that the building could even be used again. There are 454 missing windows. Inside, much of the original flooring has been ruined and the ceiling boards are hanging down. Take a look now. In the near future you may not believe the changes.

The agreement between Wang Labs and the Commis-

sion may foretell a new chapter in the story of Lowell's mills. With Commission preservation and marketing

assistance it may again be possible to use a number of the city's mills in new and exciting ways.



The Capehart Building, part of the Boott Mill complex.

Downtown Office Planned



In the near future the Commission plans to move into offices at 204 Middle St. on the corner of Shattuck and Middle Streets.

The second floor office in the old Gas Light Building will house the Commission staff and be opened between 9 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. week-

days. Interior renovations are underway and exterior renovations are planned.

The Commission will be announcing a date for an open house later this month. The public will be invited. A temporary office is presently located at the 2 Middle St.

Mailing List

If you wish to be on the Commission or National Park Service mailing list for park information and activities, please send your name and address to: LHPC, P.O. Box 738, Lowell, MA 01853

Before You Sell . . .

Many people are now looking to buy property in Lowell. Both Lowellians and others see investment opportunities related to the National Park.

This new interest is generally good for the city. It can mean new jobs and an improved economy. However, before you sell your property for what seems to be a good amount of money—ask yourself the following questions:

- Is my property within the park or preservation district and does it qualify for Commission or other funds?
- Why is the potential buyer interested? Can I undertake a similar venture?
- Do I really know what my property is worth? (Check with a knowledgeable individual).

- What effect will the sale have? Can I buy other property? Do I want to move away from my neighborhood?

There are now financial rewards for buying and renovating property in Lowell. Make sure you know what type of assistance is available and what your property is worth before you sell.