

LOWELL DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

In 1995, Lowell's downtown was designated a Downtown Historic District and registered on the National Register of Historic Places. The district is a collection of buildings that reflects our rich history.

In the beginning, the Grand and Flat Rivers attracted Native Americans to the area. It was chosen for its easy access to rivers, productive farm land and good hunting grounds. Joseph LaFramboise established the first trading post near the Odawa village here, and his wife continued trading after his death in 1806 until 1821. Daniel Marsac built the first permanent trading post at the mouth of the Flat River in 1831, making Lowell the third oldest settlement in Kent County.

Settlers began pouring into the area in 1836. Cyprian Hooker constructed a grist mill in 1848. The township was also organized in 1848 and named Lowell. The first railroad reached the south side of the Grand River by 1858. This caused the population to jump to more than 3,000 by 1880 and it has remained nearly the same ever since. The lumber industry (1870-1892) dominated the town with a sawmill on the Flat River. Diverse businesses emerged, including a cutter factory, woolen mill, button factory and the state's oldest family-run flour mill.

During the depression, the businessmen of Lowell joined together to build a showboat to help draw visitors to town. The Showboat is still one of the most recognizable features in Lowell. Today it is used as a backdrop for Sizzlin' Summer Concerts providing free community concerts on Thursday evenings during the summer. The Showboat also showcases a Museum pictorial exhibit from the Showboat heyday (1932-1997).

The Lowell Area Historical Museum is proud to present this walking tour. Please enjoy your stroll through Lowell's Downtown Historic District.



LOWELL DOWNTOWN HISTORIC WALKING TOUR

*Presented by
Lowell Area Historical Museum*



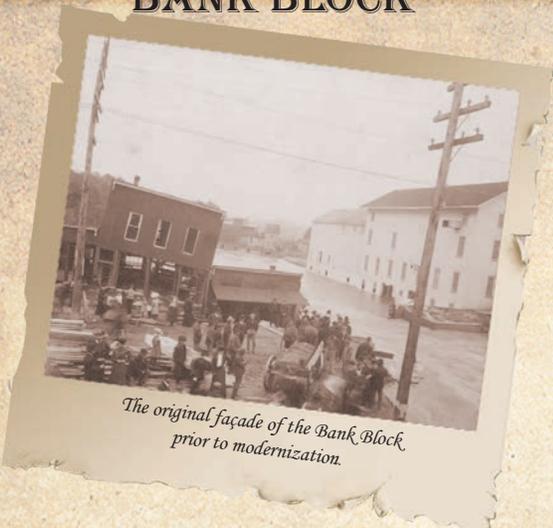
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BANK BLOCK



The original façade of the Bank Block, prior to modernization.

19 218 East Main - *Hearthstone Design Studio LLC*

One of the oldest buildings in Lowell, the Lowell National Bank constructed this building in 1868. Purchased by the Lowell State Bank in 1891, it continued as their place of business for 77 years until they moved to 414 East Main. Notice the two distinct architectural styles. As a result of a fire in 1927, the top floor is the original Romanesque style while the first floor was rebuilt in the Art Deco style popular in the 1920's.

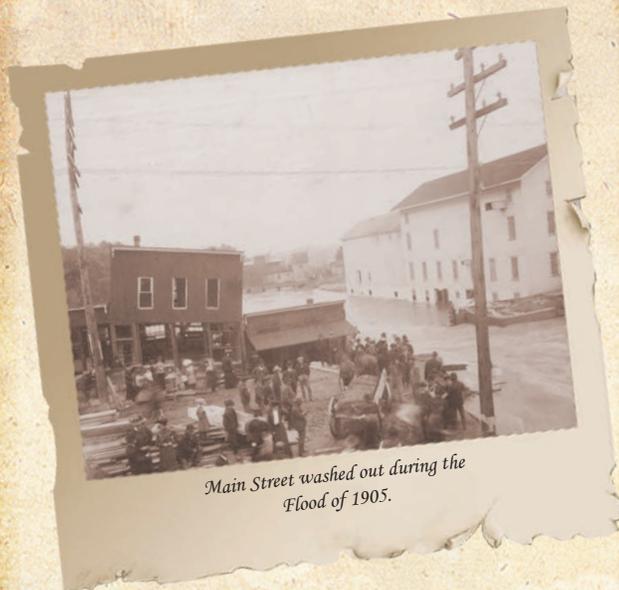
20 216 to 206 East Main - *MOOSE Lodge, Chimera Design, Salon 206*

These buildings, constructed in 1873, are Italianate Style featuring recessed entries and single-pane glass storefront windows. 214, 208 & 206 still showcase their original construction. 216, 212 and 210 have been refaced. 212 was once the retail outlet for John Kopf's Furniture, which included caned bottom chairs and bedsteads, that were manufactured in his Lowell factory south of the Grand River (1873-1895). The Lowell Ledger printing office was located on the 1st floor of 210 from the 1890's to the 1950's. The MOOSE Lodge used the 2nd and 3rd floors since purchasing the building in 1916. Presently, they use both 210 & 212.



A stack of Lowell Ledgers towers above Founder Frank M. Johnson and employees in the printing office in 1919.

ON THE BRIDGE - SOUTHSIDE



Main Street washed out during the Flood of 1905.

21 106 West Main - *Rookies*

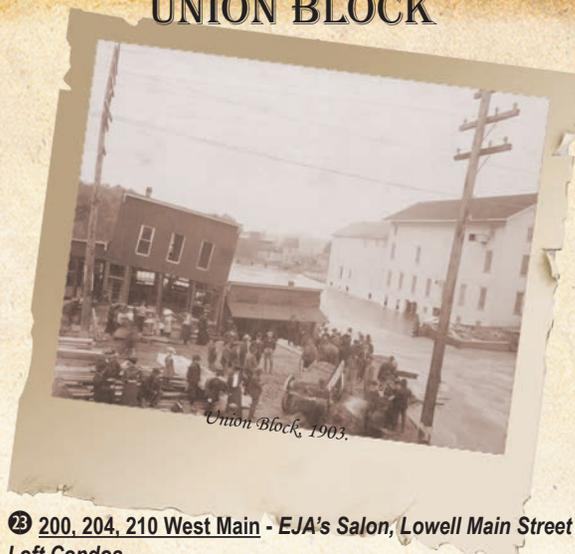
Like the other buildings on this block, this building is supported by piers set in the small land mass below. Mrs. Carr's building which contained the millinery business of Mrs. White was destroyed by the Flood of 1905. The building fell so that the roof was at street level. It was rebuilt.

22 120 West Main - *King Milling Company*

When the lumber era ended, Mr. King and several others bought the flour mill and moved King's sawmill office here (the small building). This has been the King Milling Company since 1890. It is one of the oldest continuously operating flour mills in Michigan. The structure behind the office burned in 1943 and was rebuilt in a continuous cement pour operation. The facility was expanded and updated in 2004 and now produces over 1 million pounds of flour per day.



UNION BLOCK



Union Block, 1903.

23 200, 204, 210 West Main - *EJA's Salon, Lowell Main Street Loft Condos*

Built in 1866, Train's Opera House had three storefronts on the 1st floor, hotel rooms on the 2nd and a ballroom on the 3rd. The Star Theatre, Lowell's first theatre, occupied 200, the easternmost storefront. The word "Chapel" in the glass refers to the undertaking businesses that were also once here. The Lowell Journal was published from an office on the 2nd floor (1865-1936). Flat River Antique Mall used the entire building plus 216 (1986-2006).

24 216-218 West Main - *Modern Photographics, Collector's Korner*

This two story center section of the block was built about 1867, as a single building with five separate owners each with a storefront. Hill's Shoe Store occupied 218 from 1917 to 2002. The original pulley driven awning, wooden floors, tin ceiling and shelves remain from Hill's. See the oil lamps and cash register at the Museum.

25 222 West Main - *King Milling Co.*

The McQueen building was owned by the McQueen family for 103 years (1893-1996). Dr. E. D. McQueen was a veterinarian. He boarded horses and transported passengers by horse drawn taxi to the Grand Trunk depot across the Grand River. In the 1920's, he sold cars from the front and ran his livery from the rear of the building. His son Bruce McQueen and Bruce's son-in-law, Marcel Kropf, continued to sell cars from here until 1966.



MUSEUM BLOCK

1 325 West Main - Lowell Area Historical Museum

Robert Graham built this duplex residence in 1873 for his family and in-laws. His son, Ernest Graham, became a world famous architect in Chicago. The west side of the Graham residence later became the Lowell Library (1922-1996) and the east side the YMCA (1960-2004). Now both sides are the *Lowell Area Historical Museum*. Step inside and visit "the Best Small Town Museum in America."



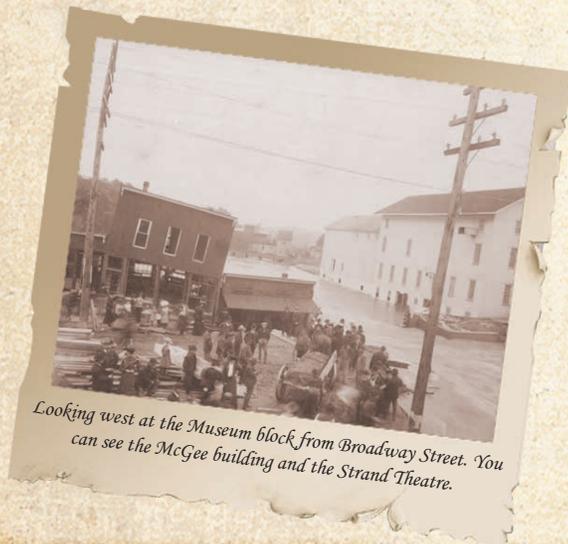
2 315 West Main - Larkin's "The Other Place"

The *Strand Theatre* was built in 1928, when the first talking pictures were being filmed. Comedians Laurel and Hardy performed on the stage as did other vaudeville acts. It operated as a movie theatre until 1985. It is now a banquet hall.



3 301 West Main - Larkin's Restaurant

The McGee building was built in 1878 as McGee Saloon. It became Bergin's, Alexander's, and Houseman's Grocery, and then Richmond's Café and Lowell Café before becoming *Larkin's Saloon* exactly 100 years later in 1978.



Looking west at the Museum block from Broadway Street. You can see the McGee building and the Strand Theatre.

LYON BLOCK

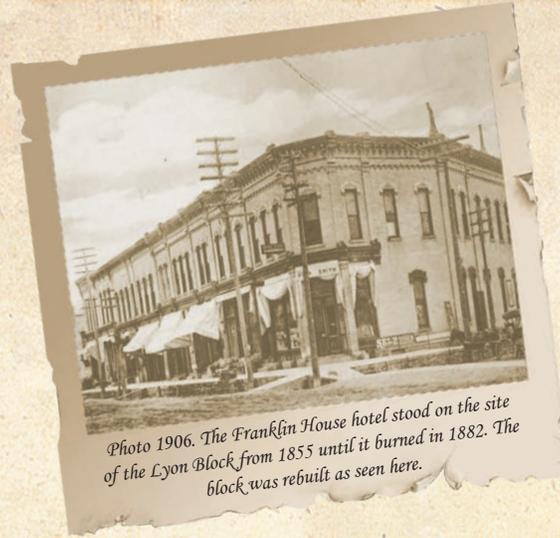
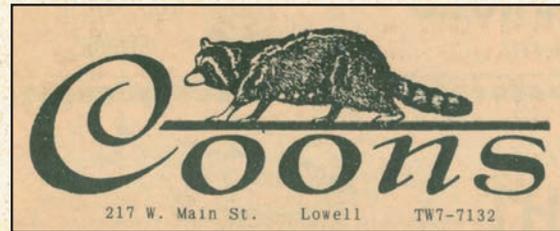


Photo 1906. The Franklin House hotel stood on the site of the Lyon Block from 1855 until it burned in 1882. The block was rebuilt as seen here.

4 219 and 217 West Main - Fire and Water Art Gallery & Giggles and Gumdrops

The Freeman Jones building has two storefronts. J. L. Hudson, founder of the famous department store of that name, had a clothing store in both storefronts, (1888-1890). 219 was Weekes' and Cary's dry goods stores (1890 to 1974). Coons' Men's Wear occupied 217 for three generations (1892-1974).



"Raccoons" were part of Coons' signage.

5 215 to 207 West Main - Glass House Designs, Dovetail Antiques, Journeys Time, Dr. James Reagan, DDS

Morgan Lyon, a local farmer, purchased land in the name of California Edmonds, his live-in housekeeper, and built this building with four storefronts. Chas. J. Church & Son Bank occupied 207 from 1888 to 1905. Mr. Church later shot himself because his bank had failed and he could not repay his depositors. In 1917, when City State Bank moved in, Lowell's first public restroom was installed in the basement and a public drinking fountain was put outside adjacent to the stairs. Since 1932, it has housed dentists and doctors.

ON THE BRIDGE - NORTH SIDE



This 1930's photo shows the Central Hotel and the stores that were rebuilt as the Main Street Inn on the far right.

6 123 West Main - Springrove Variety

Originally, a two story wooden building known as the Central or Farmer's Hotel was here. It offered inexpensive rooms and meals to farmers staying in town while their wheat was ground into flour. It was torn down in 1939 and Frank's 5¢ to \$1 store was built. It has been a "dime store" ever since.

7 117 West Main - Main Street Inn

In 2010, Greg and Deb Canfield purchased three condemned buildings at this location. New foundations were poured during the construction of the Main Street Bridges. The new Inn was built after viewing historic photos and keeping within the Historic District guidelines.

8 101 East Main - Lowell Serenity Club

This building was built as the US Post Office in 1884, after a fire burned the original wooden one on this site. It marks the center of town; buildings are numbered east and west from this location. The post office moved into its new building at 120 N. Broadway Street in 1940.

Lowell Post Office, 1884-1939, with rural mail carriers in front.



NEGONCE BLOCK



Fire destroyed the west half of this block in 1905; it was rebuilt and became the Negonce Block.

9 201 East Main - Flat River Grill

Mr. Bergin, the Village President, bought this lot after the fire and rebuilt the building to help his town. See "Bergin" near the top of the storefront. It housed hardware stores before Borgerson's and A & P Groceries. Gregory Gilmore opened the *Flat River Grill* in 2002.

NEGONCE

10 203-209 East Main - Century Post Pub, Gary's Country Meats, Pep Talk, Lowell Family Hair Salon

John Hooker "christened" this new four-storefront building "Negonce" in honor of the Indian girl who was born on this site and remained in Lowell after Indian removal. She worked for Mr. Hooker doing quillwork and decorating hides.

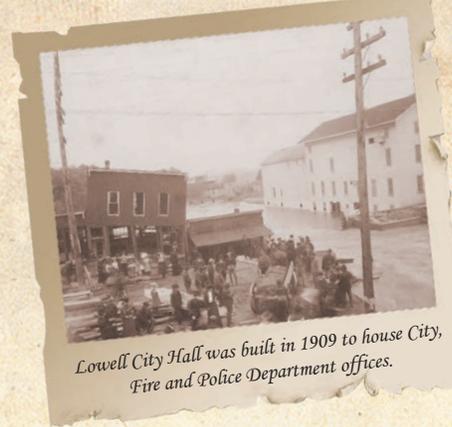
11 211 East Main - Sneaker's Bar and Grill

After the 1905 fire, the Grand Rapids Brewing Co. rebuilt what had been the *Silver Foam Saloon*. Spirits have always been sold from this site except during the 1920's Prohibition when *Pete's Place* sold 'near beer.'

12 219 and 229 East Main - AIC Insurance & North Country Trail Association

Robert Graham, a local mason, erected this 3-story building in 1869 before building his residence, now the Museum. The 3rd floor was removed in 1910. 219 Stockings' *Lowell Music Store*, sold pianos, violins, sewing machines, bicycles and even Black Crow automobiles (1893-1918). Today 229 is the headquarters for the *North Country Trail Association*. Lowell marks the halfway point of the 4,600 mile footpath operated by the National Park Service. The trail extends from New York to North Dakota.

CITY HALL BLOCK



Lowell City Hall was built in 1909 to house City, Fire and Police Department offices.

13 301 East Main - Lowell City Hall

The second floor had an auditorium with a stage that served as the social center of town; it was used as the library, for club meetings, plays, community events and as a shooting gallery for the police. In the renovation of 2003, the bell and fire hose drying tower reemerged as a clock tower and striped awnings were put back over the doors.

14 305 & 307 East Main - Myers' Law Office, Ella's Coffee and Cuisine

Daniel Marsac built a log Inn on this site, to use as a stagecoach stop for early settlers. Later, he sold the Inn to Mr. White. In 1848, the township's first meeting was held here in White's Tavern. Mrs. White proposed the name "Lowell" after prosperous Lowell, Massachusetts. In 1864, the building burned and smoldered for days because of the thick logs inside the walls. This, Lowell's first brick building was begun in 1865. It was used by the VFW for many years.

15 317 & 319 East Main - Flat River Cottage, All Weather Seal

Dr. Draper erected the 2-story building in 1910 as a veterinary hospital in connection with his livery and blacksmith business. Five years later, he erected the adjoining building at 319 to sell automobiles. It was his way of keeping up with the times. Dr. Draper died in 1932 at age 67, after he accidentally took animal nerve medicine containing strychnine for a headache.



Frank Gould bought the Draper garage in 1925, later operating both buildings as Gould's Garage.

DAVIS HOUSE

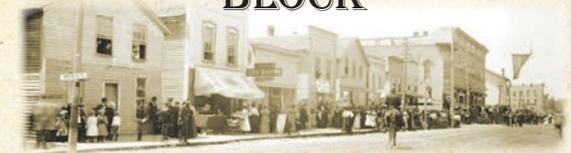
16 411 East Main - Canfield's Plumbing and Heating

This building was built as a 3-story hotel. In 1883, east side residents paid to renovate it. They hired Loren Davis as manager and it became known as the Davis House. The popularity of the hotel declined after 1900 when the Pere Marquette Railroad depot was moved from S. Washington Street to the west side of town.



William Christiansen purchased the hotel building in 1936 and removed the 3rd story. He used it for "an ice cream and paddlepop manufactory" as well as frozen food lockers which customers could rent.

OLD WOODEN ROW / SUPERIOR FURNITURE BLOCK



The Old Wooden Row contained 12 buildings built in the 1850's and 1860's. Some businesses were: Lowell Laundry, City Bakery, Hilers' Studio and Millinery, Dr. Purple's Bazaar, and The Checkered Front.

17 316 East Main - Superior Building

In 1907, five of the buildings in the Old Wooden Row burned. The owners of *Lowell Cutter Company* then bought the lots and built the *Lowell Auto Body Factory* in an attempt to switch production from sleighs to automobiles. However, metal soon replaced wood and their factory was obsolete. Before beginning his assembly line, Henry Ford had come to Lowell and tried to purchase the Cutter Co. The owners however, feeling they had a good business for themselves and their descendents, refused to sell "to any fly-by-night" horseless carriage maker. *Superior Furniture Co.* moved here in 1925 but went bankrupt in 1936. After that, a second *Superior Furniture Co.* formed (1936-2009). Both were known for manufacturing quality furniture.

18 306 East Main - Lowell Granite Co.

The *Lowell Granite Company* dates back to 1873 and has occupied this site since 1940. Harold Englehardt owned the Granite Company from 1931-1960. He willed 12 million dollars to Lowell which is now distributed by the Lowell Community Fund.