

Address: 716 Middlesex Street	Ethnicities: French-Canadian Armenian* Southeast Asian
Neighborhood: Lower Highlands	

The early history of 716 Middlesex Street, like many buildings that are situated in neighborhoods where a lot of changes have taken place throughout years, is difficult to determine with great certainty. The date of the original construction is not known, while Lowell on-line GIS indicates that the current structure was constructed in 1989. The ownership of the building in its early years is also hard to determine – the City Atlas of Lowell in 1896, 1906 and 1924 present no ownership while only the one in 1936 indicates that the property belonged to Roman Catholic Archbishop of Boston. From other accessible public documents, however, it can be inferred that the building itself went through transformations from residence to businesses and reflects the historical changes that took place in the lower Highlands neighborhood.



The early history of the building is closely associated with the French-Canadian immigrant group in Lowell, especially Notre Dame de Lourdes Church, a French-Canadian Roman Catholic Church which was founded in 1908 to serve the religious needs of the Franco-American Catholic who had settled in the lower Highlands. In 1909 and 1910, in the building lived the church's first pastor, Rev. Michel Dubreuil and his assistant Rev. Victor Viaud. Viaud came from France in 1903 and Dubreuil was likely from French Canada. In the 1910 Census, Dubreuil had already moved on (to Green Bay, Wisconsin) and his successor was 66-year-old Rev. Leon Lamothe, who was born in French Canada and immigrated to the United States in 1892. Also living there was Viaud and Rev. Joseph Magnan, a French-Canadian who immigrated in 1908 and who was moving that year from St. Jean Baptiste parish to "Our Lady of Lourdes" (as it was called in the City Directory for the first three years). Rounding out the household was Joseph Goyette, the Sexton, Anastasia Richard, the cook, and Anna St. Croix the housekeeper, all three entering the country from French Canada in 1910. The parish staff was imported wholesale from French Canada for the local French-Canadians. The priests in the early days were "OMI", Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a missionary order. The U.S. was still a mission country in those days for Roman Catholics.

During his tenure as pastor, Rev. Lamothe witnessed the founding and growth of the parish school, which started with about 200 students. Other associates in the first few years were Rev. Lucien Faganière and Rev. Jean B. A. Barrette who came from Canada in 1908. Another associate Rev. Joseph F. Denis, also a French-Canadian, came to the United States in 1913, started his service as assistant pastor at Notre Dame De Lourdes in 1917, and later was chosen as the pastor in 1924. All spoke both French and English.²

An examination of Lowell City Directories in 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950 and 1960 reveals that 716 Middlesex St was the home for the clergymen of the French-Canadian church in all these specific years. And this is constant with the statement from the history of the church that "the decision was made and finally approved by Cardinal O'Connell to purchase and unite two small adjoining houses located beside the church in order to provide a suitable home for the

¹ Photographed by Craig Thomas and Yingchan Zhang.

² Lowell City Directory 1909 – 1917 & 1920, 1924; 1910 and 1920 United States Federal Census.

priests”³. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that 716 Middlesex was one of the two houses bought for the purpose and had been the constant home for the priests for over forty years.⁴

A brief look at the settings nearby also helps to present a larger picture of the French-Canadian community in the neighborhood during that period of time. Take 1920 for example. At 730 situated the Notre Dame de Lourdes Church. Although the church was a small inner city parish, the parish community continued to grow in population and thus the church brought several other sites for parish halls in the following decades. At 720 Middlesex was the parish school which was begun during the first years of the foundation of the church. As it kept expanding, its new construction on Smith Street was uncompleted due to the parish’s financial crisis and therefore it was sold to the City in 1936. In exchange, the school used the Franklin School on Branch Street until its closure in 1975. (See the story for 21 Branch Street.) Across the street at 717 Middlesex lived the Savard family: Jean B. Savard, a second-generation French-Canadian machinist whose father immigrated to the United States in 1868, and his wife, Georgianna Savard, a dressmaker who came to the United States in 1890. At 706 lived Sisters of Grey Nuns who staffed the parish school with some other lay teachers. To trace their history, they are an order of Roman Catholic nuns founded at 1738 in Montreal and first called to the United States in 1855 who provide accommodations to old people of both-sex incurables, orphans, and abandoned children or foundlings.⁵

Since the 1960s, the site provided good evidence for the major neighborhood transition and larger demographic changes in Lowell. It went through a series of title changes and like many other buildings in that neighborhood, was converted into businesses to satisfy the growing need of the community. In March 19, 1963, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Boston sold the property to SIBACO Corporation, a Delaware corporation with its principal office in New York City, New York. According to the City Directory, the building was vacant in that year though. In the following year, Quadro Station Inc., another Delaware corporation, became the owner and Krikorian Atlantic Service, a gas station run by William Krikorian, occupied the building. Several other auto businesses were operated there in the following few years – Palmer’s Atlantic Service from 1965 to 1972, Fox Auto Service from 1973 to 1974, and Schaefer’s Auto Service in 1975. In Dec 1979, Atlantic Richfield Co., a Pennsylvania enterprise took over the property and then sold it to Silva Bros Investment Inc. in 1980.⁶

William F. McCarty and John E Spinney bought the property from Silva Bros Investments later in 1980 and sold it in 1984 to Doris T Finnegan. She sold the land in 1989 to Stephen Fitzgibbon, Charles H. Bryce Jr., and Bunrith Lach, as trustees of the 716 Middlesex St. Realty Trust. In the same year, the current construction was designed as a shop center for retail to serve the fast-expanding Southeast Asian immigrants within the area, who first came to Lowell in 1979 as refugees but didn’t settle in large number until after the 1985 due to second migration. Now they consist of about twenty percent of the total population of the city. Back to 1992, the 716 Middlesex St. Realty Partnership lost the property by mortgage foreclosure to Newark Investment Inc. and, a month later, Pailin Plaza, Inc. became the owner and has remained so ever since. Small-scale businesses mostly owned by Southeastern Asian families thrive there and satisfy the various aspects of the burgeoning community’s local life. In 2000, for example, seven businesses were registered in there: BAYON FASHION, a men and boys’ clothing store; PAILIN JEWELRY STORE, a jewelry store owned by Moryea Thay, who presumably has a Southeast Asian descent; RED ROSE RESTAURANT, an eating place; 5 SAM’S VIDEO, a video tape rental store; 6 PAILIN DENTAL CENTER; 10 K K INSURANCE, an insurance agency; and 10 K K TRAVELS, a travel agency.⁷

³ A brief History of Notre Dame de Lourdes Parish, Lowell, Massachusetts (1908-1983), <http://ecomunity.uml.edu/francolowellma/churches/NotreDame.htm>. The information is taken from the Souvenir Program published for the 75th anniversary of Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Parish in 1983.

⁴ City Directory 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960

⁵ Lowell City Directory 1920; 1920 United States Federal Census; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grey_Nuns, visited at 6/2/2008; <http://www.grey-nuns.org/chronologicalhistory.aspx>;

⁶ Middlesex North Registry of Deeds, Book 1594, Page 221; Book 1658, Page 28; Book 2398, Page 501; Book 2409, Page 697. City Directory 1963 – 1975.

⁷ Middlesex North Registry of Deeds, Book 2447 Page 222; Book 4923, Page 34; Book 5925, Page 252; Book 5988, Page 182. Lowell City Directory 2000.