

6. Function or Use Varnum Building, Lowell, Massachusetts

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/multiple dwelling
Commerce/Trade/department store
/specialty store
/professional

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/multiple dwelling
Commerce/Trade/department store

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Queen Anne

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone
 walls wood: weatherboard
 roof asphalt
 other cast-iron cresting

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Varnum Building, at the corner of Bridge and Third Streets, is an imposing four-story wood-frame commercial structure with two stores on the first floor and twelve apartments above. Although the Varnum Building, built in 1882, is one of the oldest of the commercial buildings in this section of Centralville, the surrounding residential neighborhood of Third Street and other side streets contain a variety of single- and multi-family houses built as early as the 1840s. The Third Street blocks adjacent to the Varnum Building contain a number of modest gable-front houses from the 1840s, though several display later Queen Anne derived modifications. At least three later residential structures on Third Street, Nos. 14, 16-22, and 24-26, were also built by the Varnum brothers and, though altered, still show architectural features identical to those in the Varnum Building.

The Varnum Building is prominently located on the northern approach to the Central Bridge crossing of the Merrimack River. This approach, Bridge Street, curves slightly from the bridge alignment, exposing the corner of the building to view as one travels north across the bridge. This exposure and the building's architectural embellishment at the corner combine to make it the landmark of commercial buildings in Centralville.

Approximately 36 by 93 feet in plan, the Varnum Building is basically rectangular, with the western corner of the building, at Bridge and Third Streets, clipped to allow a full bay to be oriented toward the street intersection and the Central Bridge. This bay, flanked by paneled pilasters which rise the full height of the building, and topped by a square tower with a steep slate pyramidal roof, dominates the streetscape and is the most readily visible feature of the building as one approaches from the river. At the first-floor level the bay provides the entrance to the corner grocery store. Paired windows fill the bay in the three floors above. The second-floor windows are given emphasis with an elaborate window hood, clad in scalloped slates, supported by heavy turned brackets, and topped by intricate iron cresting. These details are repeated elsewhere on the building, and are also featured on the Varnum-built residence on the adjacent Third Street properties.

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The building's principal facade is that facing Bridge Street. The 36-foot long facade is four bays in width and dominated by the storefronts on the first floor. The central entrance leads to a small vestibule and a flight of stairs to the apartments on the upper floors. The store to the north, 405 Bridge Street, for many years was occupied as a real-estate office by the building's owner, Leavitt R.J. Varnum. The storefront consists of a central entrance flanked by large plate-glass windows above a paneled base. The corner store, 401 Bridge Street, takes up the remainder of the facade (as well as the corner bay and a portion of the Third Street elevation). Originally occupied as a grocery store until World War I, it housed the drug store of Raymond Webster until the late 1940s. Today it once again supplies groceries and other items to the neighborhood. A major element of this elevation is the decorative hood extending the full length of the shop fronts facing Bridge and Third streets. Probably originally clad in scalloped slates, it matches in almost all details the slated window hood noted on the second-floor corner bay. Its most distinctive feature is its fully intact length of iron cresting which lines the ridge. The slates have either been covered or replaced by sheet metal. Turned brackets similar to those described above support this hood.

The facade of the upper floors is less embellished. Paneled pilasters mark the vertical edges of the elevation, across the top of which runs a dentil cornice beneath a paneled parapet. Large turned ball finials ornament parapet pedestals at each corner. Four windows with heavy molded lintels pierce the clapboard facade of each of the upper stories.

The long Third Street facade extends six bays between corner pilasters. At the ground floor, two entrances are located at the Varnum Place end of the facade. This was the location of a third storefront, removed about 1960. Both are sheltered beneath slate-roof hoods identical to those noted above, although the iron cresting is missing. The doorways themselves contain modern panel doors. The first bay of the Bridge Street end of the facade continues the storefront design noted on the adjacent elevation. On the upper stories, all but the sixth bay consist of narrow paired windows, with 1/1 double-hung sash beneath a common molded lintel. Fire escapes, probably installed about 1900, now link the central four bays. A rear seventh bay, facing the alley and set back slightly from the line on the adjacent bays, marks the location of rear porches and built-in sheds, lit on the three upper floors by smaller narrow windows. These porches may originally have been open, lined with railings.

continued

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National Park Service**

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Varnum Building
Lowell, Massachusetts

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On the interior, identical floor plans are used for the three upper floors, with four apartments on each floor: two on the north side of the central hall, and two on the south side. Much of the millwork remains intact, including open stairways with their original balustrades. In the hallways, match-board wainscots are employed. Door and window casings in the hallways and principal rooms consist of reeded standing and running trim with raised corner blocks. Casings and newel posts have similar design motifs.

In 1985-86, the Varnum Buildings was rehabilitated to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, and given a new coat of paint in contrasting colors. The building was renamed the "United Building" after the development company, and in the paneled parapet of the corner bay, the developers caused to be inscribed, "United Building, 1882."

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Archaeological Description

While no prehistoric sites are recorded on the property it is possible that sites are present. At least six known sites are reported in close proximity (within one mile) to the property. In general, however, the potential for significant archaeological remains, either prehistoric or historic, seems low, as a result of the small lot size and the fact that the building, which has a full basement, covers nearly the entire lot.

8. Statement of Significance Varnum Building, Lowell, Massachusetts

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance
1882-1923

Significant Dates
1882

Architecture

Commerce

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder
Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Varnum Building in Lowell, a late 19th-century wood-frame commercial building, possesses integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, and association. The building is architecturally significant as an intact and well-detailed late 19th-century commercial structure, unusually rich in architectural detail. Slate tiles, iron cresting, elaborate turned brackets, and a prominent corner tower make the building a visible landmark for this part of the city of Lowell. The building is historically significant for its associations with the economic life of Lowell. Its builders, Daniel and Leavitt Varnum, who operated a real-estate office on the first floor, were extensive real-estate promoters and developers in Centralville. As an intact commercial storefront, it is today probably the oldest such example in this section of Lowell. Its period of significance spans the years from the building's construction in 1882 to 1923, when the building was sold by Leavitt Varnum and the real estate office was closed. The Varnum Building meets Criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places at the local level.

Centralville, originally part of the town of Dracut, became part of Lowell in 1857. It is a largely residential district on the north bank of the Merrimack River, directly opposite the textile mills which were a major source of employment for the inhabitants in Centralville. Bridge Street, which bisects the Centralville area, has been a major thoroughfare to New Hampshire since the 18th century. Today it is part of State Route 28 from Boston to New Hampshire. Where the road crosses the river (now the location of the Central Bridge), a ferry had been established at least as early as 1735. In the 1760s, the area passed into the hands of Amos Bradley, a native of Haverhill, who purchased a large farmstead, extending eastward from Bridge Street to Beacon Street, and from the river to Tenth Street. Bradley also acquired the rights to the ferry, which his family operated until 1828.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References Varnum Building, Lowell, Massachusetts

Chase, Charles C., "Lowell," in Duane Hamilton Hurd, comp., History of Middlesex County, Massachusetts (3 vols., Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co., 1890), vol. 2, pp. 1-238.

Coburn, Silas R., History of Dracut, Massachusetts (Lowell: Press of the Courier-Citizen Co., 1922).

Hengen, Elizabeth Durfee, Architectural Survey, City of Lowell, 1980. Building Inventory Form #545, Area Form C.

Illustrated History of Lowell and Vicinity, Massachusetts (Lowell: Courier-Citizen Company, 1897).

Varnum, John Marshall, The Varnums of Dracut, (Boston: D. Clapp & Son, printers, 1907).

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested HPCA # 10187MA
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Massachusetts Historical Commission

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A

1	9
Zone	

3	1	1	1	5	0
Easting					

4	7	2	4	3	4	0
Northing						

C

B

D

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies the city lot identified on Lowell Assessor's Map #176 as 401 Bridge Street.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire city lot that has historically been associated with the property. North of the Varnum Building is a store (405 Bridge Street) and south of the building is 3rd Street. To the west lies Bridge Street and to the east is another building lot.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Peter H. Stot, consultant, w/Harry L. Gorman and Betsy Friedberg, Nat'l. Reg. Dir.
organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date May 1, 1988
street & number 80 Boylston Street telephone (617) 727-8470
city or town Boston state Massachusetts zip code 02116

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In 1824, two years after the organization of the first of the Lowell cotton mills, Joseph Bradley (son of Amos) and several Dracut residents organized a company to build and operate a toll bridge at the site of the Bradley ferry. The Central Bridge Company opened its new structure in 1828. Bradley sold most of his 57-acre Centralville farm to the Central Bridge Company, and in 1831 the old farm was laid out for houselots, one of the earliest subdivisions in the present-day city of Lowell. Forming a grid pattern, east-west streets were named numerically, and north-south streets after trees. To distinguish it from more outlying sections of Dracut, the area was named Centralville. The proprietors offered to waive the bridge tolls to encourage the purchase of houselots. However, until the tolls were completely eliminated in 1843, development was slow. (Durfee).

Among the earliest to settle in Centralville was another Essex County native, Moses M. Tuxbury (1792-1858). Born in Amesbury, he probably moved to Centralville in the 1840s, constructing a house on the site of the present Varnum Building. After Tuxbury's death, his widow remained in the house until 1882, when the property was sold at an auction, on May 9th of that year. The purchasers, for \$6,005, were Daniel and Leavitt R.J. Varnum. The Lowell Morning Mail wrote that the bidding for the property was lively and commented that the location was "a good business center and will rapidly increase the value under the enterprising hands of the purchasers" [Morning Mail 11 May 1882, p. 4]. The Morning Mail added that the Varnums were expected to remove the old building and erect a business block on the property. "Somebody says the Varnums are like the farmer who meant sooner and later to have 'all the land which jined [sic] him'" [Lowell Morning Times 10 May 1882, p. 1].

The new building was evidently finished in the fall of 1882. By the third week of September, the Lowell Sun wrote:

The Varnum Block, at the corner of Third and Bridge streets, is assuming attractive proportions. It will be a credit to Centralville and a monument to the enterprise of the projectors, Messrs. L.R.J. & D.H. Varnum" [Lowell Weekly Sun 23 September 1882, p. 5].

Water Department records indicate that the building was connected to city mains during the same month.

The Varnum Building became a landmark of the Centralville business district and helped to define the growing neighborhood. Between 1870 and 1895, Lowell more than doubled in size, growing from 40,928 to 84,367 persons, leading to major expansion in the city's outlying districts. Centralville, on the

continued

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opposite bank of the Merrimack River from the Boott and Massachusetts textile mills, housed a large proportion of mill operatives. From its opening in 1882, the Varnum Building became the center of the Varnum brothers' real estate interests, with the north storefront occupied by their real-estate business. Leavitt R. J. Varnum (1841-1926) and Daniel Hale Varnum (1845-1908) were brothers, both born in Dracut and members of one of the most prominent Dracut families, descendants of Samuel Varnum, who settled in Dracut in 1669. The Varnum name is commonly encountered in both Dracut and Lowell. In 1874, the brothers began a real-estate business in Centralville and began the development of several large Centralville tracts of land. An 1897 history of Lowell credits the growth of Centralville "in great measure ... to the enterprise shown by the members of this firm" [Illustrated History, p. 524].

Illustrative of their role in the development of the region are several residences on Third Street, also built by the firm. These include Nos. 14, 16-22, and 24-26 Third Street, directly behind the Varnum Building. These multi-family dwellings, though now significantly altered, retain some of the same architectural details used on the Varnum Building. Distinctive are the elaborate entrance hoods with heavy, turned brackets. Another prominent commercial/residential structure on Bridge Street built by the Varnum brothers was a building known as the "Varnum Block" (now demolished). Completed in 1892 at the corner of Bridge and Sixth streets, the Varnum Block showed marked similarities to the Varnum Building completed a decade before. The building displayed six stores across the front with a center-hall entrance to apartments above. In elevation, the building was also four stories in height and repeated the corner tower motif, with towers on both Bridge Street corners. In keeping with the prevailing architectural style, the 1892 building exhibited Queen Anne and Classical Revival details, including oriel bays, swags, broken pediments, and urns. Drawings of the plan and elevation (now in the State Archives) suggest that the same architect (unnamed) may also have been responsible for the 1882 Varnum Building.

The south, or corner, storefront was for many years a grocery store, occupied by a succession of grocers. The earliest appears to have been the McMonagle brothers, George, Stephen, and David. All three were less than thirty years old, when they died ("of consumption") within 2-3 years of opening the shop. In 1890, Frank H. Cram advertised "choice groceries, flour, fine teas, coffee, pure spices, etc." Cram was succeeded in the grocery trade by Clarence Stevens, by 1910, James B. Arthur, and later George N. Stewart. In 1918 Ray F. Webster opened a drugstore in the corner shop. Evidently Webster was more successful than the sequence of grocers, and in 1923 Webster purchased the building from Leavitt Varnum [Deed Book 693, p. 101]. Webster continued to

continued

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operate a drug store here, but for much of the period, the north office was vacant. By 1930, eight of the nineteen apartments were also vacant, probably a reflection of the declining economy. In 1941, another real-estate firm, F&M Real Estate, acquired the building [Reg. Deed Book 32, p. 61]. Plunkett's Drug Store occupied the corner shop for most of the two decades following World War II.

Today the building is part of a general revitalization of Lowell that has accompanied the establishment of the Lowell National Historical Park on the opposite side of the river in 1978. The United Development Company purchased the Varnum Building in 1985 and during the course of the succeeding two years rehabilitated the structure to the Standards of the Secretary of the Interior.

The Varnum Building is significant both under Criterion A, for its association with major real estate development in Centralville, and under Criterion C, as a well-preserved example of a Queen Anne commercial building with tenements above. Much of the original interior and exterior finish materials remain intact, with the exception of shop interiors and the east shopfront.

**PLOT PLAN
401-405 BRIDGE STREET
LOWELL, MASS.**

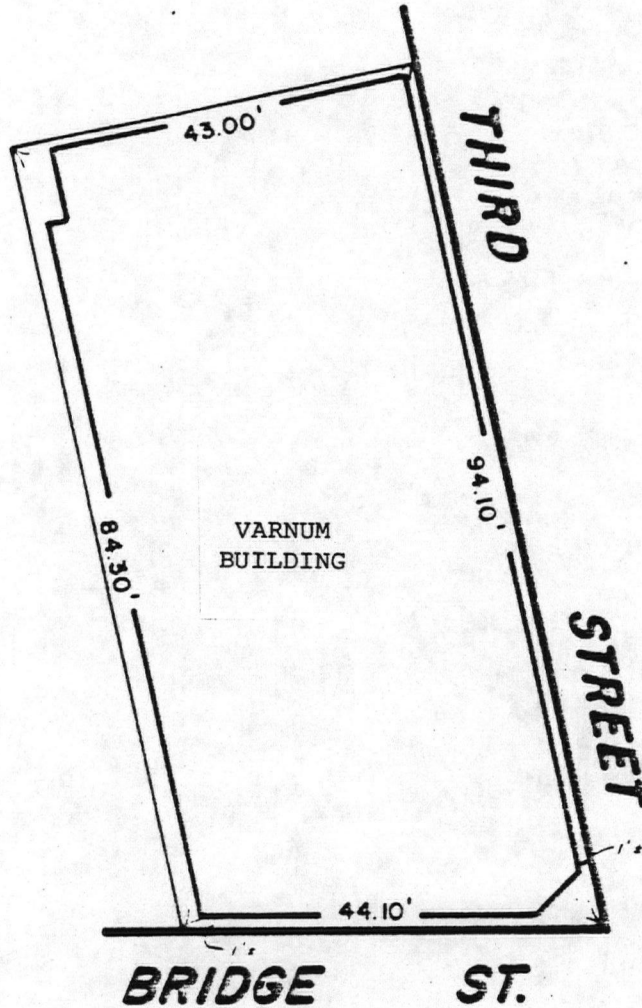
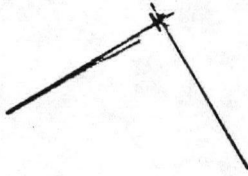
SCALE: 1" = 20'

JUNE, 1985

WILLIAM G. TROY

REGISTERED LAND SURVEYOR

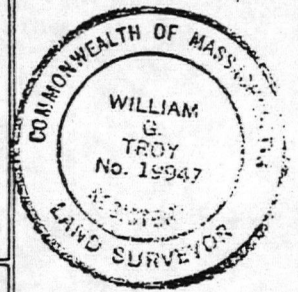
12 EUCLID ROAD - TEWKSBURY, MASS.



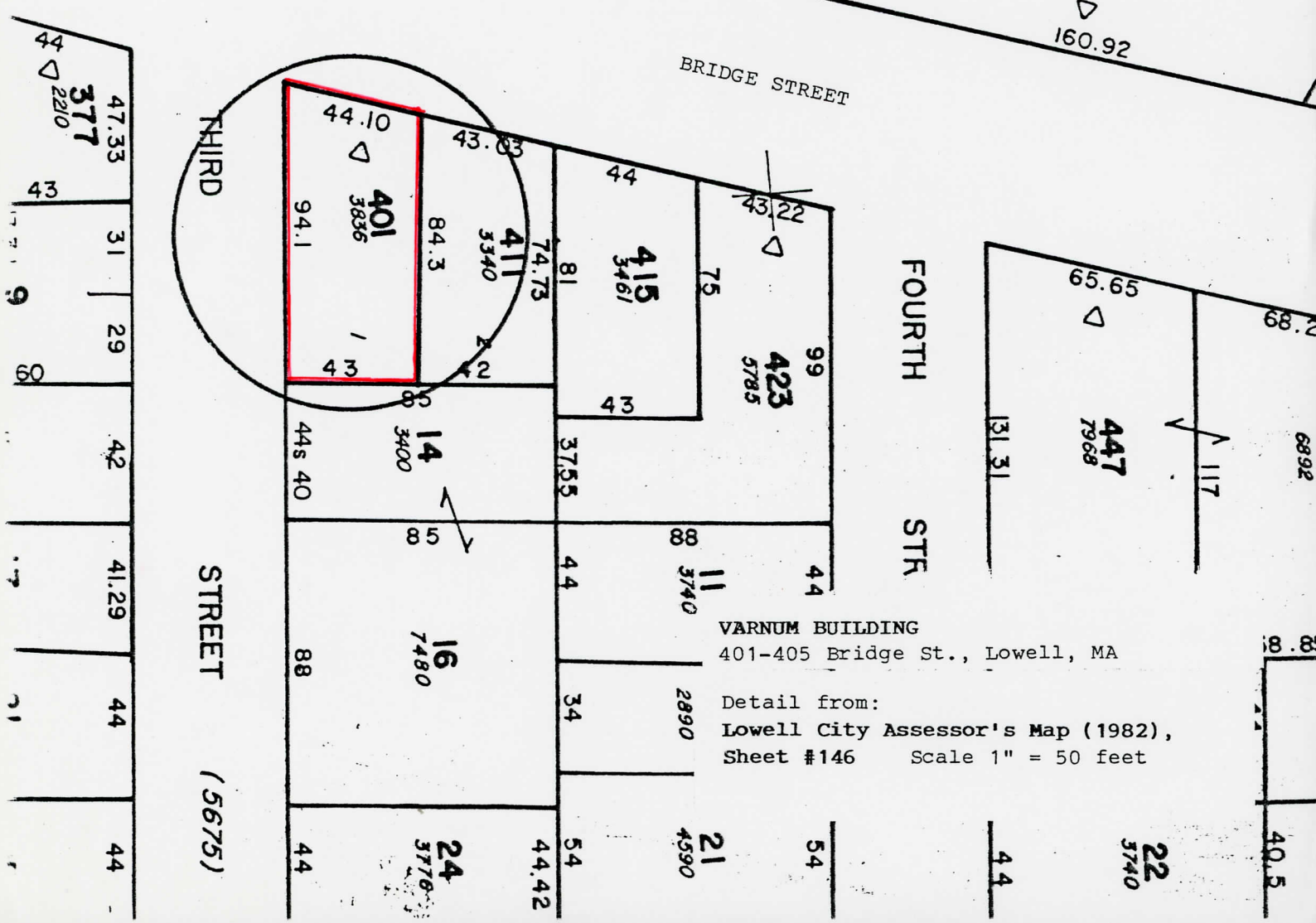
I HEREBY CERTIFY TO THE TITLE INSUROR AND TO THE BANK THAT THE DWELLING IS LOCATED ON THE LOT AS SHOWN AND THAT IT DOES CONFORM WITH THE CITY OF LOWELL ZONING REGULATIONS REGARDING SETBACKS FROM STREETS AND LOT LINES.

I FURTHER CERTIFY THAT THIS DWELLING IS NOT LOCATED IN THE FEDERAL FLOOD HAZARD AREA AS SHOWN ON MAP DATED APRIL 16, 1979.

William G. Troy
REGISTERED LAND SURVEYOR



THIS PLAN FOR MORTGAGE PURPOSES - NOT FOR BOUNDARY DETERMINATION.
BOUNDARY INFORMATION TAKEN FROM: LAND COURT PLAN 9946A.



BRIDGE STREET

FOURTH STR

THIRD STREET (5675)

VARNUM BUILDING
401-405 Bridge St., Lowell, MA

Detail from:
Lowell City Assessor's Map (1982),
Sheet #146 Scale 1" = 50 feet

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Varnum Building

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: MASSACHUSETTS, Middlesex

DATE RECEIVED: 11/04/88 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 11/15/88
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 12/01/88 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 12/19/88
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 88002752

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: Y PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 12/19/88 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Architecturally and historically important late 19th-century commercial building.

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept A+C
REVIEWER Savage
DISCIPLINE Architectural History
DATE 12/19/88

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

CLASSIFICATION

count resource type

STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

FUNCTION

historic current

DESCRIPTION

architectural classification
 materials
 descriptive text

SIGNIFICANCE

Period Areas of Significance--Check and justify below

Specific dates Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

summary paragraph
 completeness
 clarity
 applicable criteria
 justification of areas checked
 relating significance to the resource
 context
 relationship of integrity to significance
 justification of exception
 other

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

acreage verbal boundary description
 UTMs boundary justification

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTATION/PRESENTATION

sketch maps USGS maps photographs presentation

OTHER COMMENTS

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to

_____ Phone _____

Signed _____ Date _____



FRANK GORMAN FRANK TROUVILLE
UNITED DEVELOPMENT CO. 458-8710
 HARRY GORMAN TONY FAMA

MILL CITY APPLIANCE
 RECONDITIONED MAJOR APPLIANCES
 SALES SERVICE

CARNIVAL
 & COWBELL
 OCT. 2 - 5
 BILLY BILLY
 FUN ORAMA
 GIANT HENRY
 P.T.A. FUND II

CARNIVAL
 & COWBELL
 OCT. 2 - 5
 BILLY BILLY
 FUN ORAMA
 GIANT HENRY
 P.T.A. FUND II



UNITED DEVELOPMENT CO. 458-8710

United Building (Varnum Building)
401-405 Bridge Street, Lowell, MA

Kevin Harkins, Photographer, June 14, 1982
219 Appleton Street, Lowell, MA

Photo number 1 of 3 - West Side
See elevations description G.

UNITED BUILDING (VARNUM BUILDING)

401-405 BRIDGE STREET, LOWELL, MA

KEVIN HARKINS, PHOTOGRAPHER, JUNE 14, 1982

219 APPLETON STREET, LOWELL, MA

PHOTO NUMBER 1 OF 3 - WEST SIDE

SEE ELEVATIONS DESCRIPTION G.



412

OSCAR

SACM

United Building (Varnum Building)
401-405 Bridge Street, Lowell, MA

Kevin Harkins, Photographer, June 14, 1985
219 Appleton Street, Lowell, MA 01852

Photo number 2 of 3 - South Side
See elevations description G.

UNITED BUILDING (VARNUM BUILDING)
401-405 BRIDGE STREET, LOWELL, MA

KEVIN HARKINS, PHOTOGRAPHER, JUNE 14, 1985
219 APPLETON STREET, LOWELL, MA 01852

PHOTO NUMBER 2 OF 3 - SOUTH SIDE
SEE ELEVATIONS DESCRIPTION G.



THAN EDWIN THAN TREVILLE
UNITED DEVELOPMENT
CO. 698-810
170-1700

SPAGHETTI
PEPPER STEAK

MILL CITY
APPLIANCE
RECONDITIONED MAJOR APPLIANCES
SALES SERVICE

Whitcomb

United Building (Varnum Building)
401-405 Bridge Street, Lowell, MA

Kevin Harkins, Photographer, June 14, 1985
219 Appleton Street, Lowell, MA 01852

Photo number 3 of 3 - South West
See elevations description G.

UNITED BUILDING (VARNUM BUILDING)
401-405 BRIDGE STREET, LOWELL, MA

KEVIN HARKINS, PHOTOGRAPHER, JUNE 14, 1985
219 APPLETON STREET, LOWELL, MA 01852

PHOTO NUMBER 3 OF 3 - SOUTH WEST
SEE ELEVATIONS DESCRIPTION G.



VARNUM BUILDING
401-405 BRIDGE ST.
LOWELL, MASS.

PHOTOGRAPHER: PETER STOTT
P.O. Box 356, NEWTON HIGHLANDS, MA 02161
DATE: MARCH 10, 1988
NEGATIVE: PHS-1988-3/7

INTERSECTION OF BRIDGE & THIRD STREETS
VIEW LOOKING NORTHEAST.



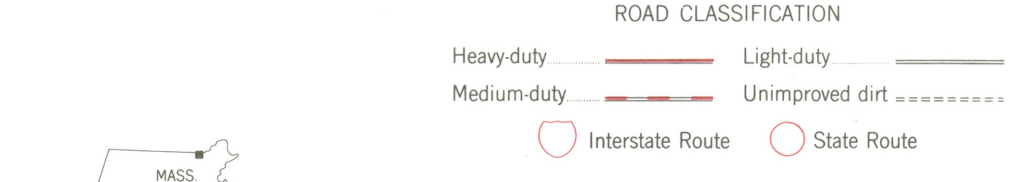
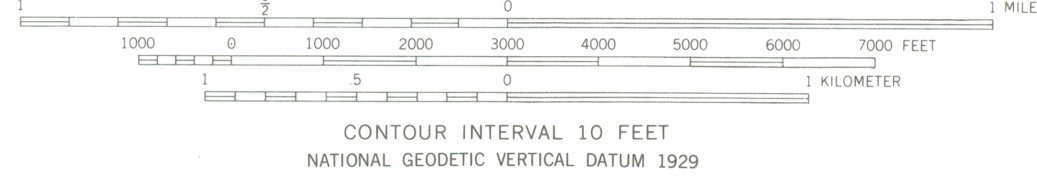
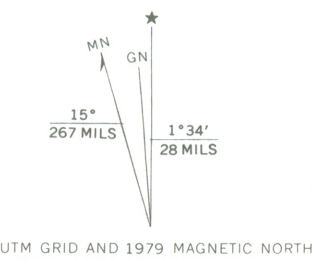
Feet	Meters
1	3048
2	6096
3	9144
4	12192
5	15240
6	18288
7	21336
8	24384
9	27432
10	30480

To convert feet to meters multiply by 3.048
To convert meters to feet multiply by 3.2808

VARNUM BUILDING
401-405 Bridge St., Lowell, MA
LOWELL, MA Quadrangle
UTM: 19/311150/4724340

Varnum Building
Middlesex County, MA
19/311150/4724340

Maped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, USC&GS, and Massachusetts Geodetic Survey
Topography by planetair surveys 1939 and 1944. Revised 1966
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grids based on Massachusetts coordinate system,
mainland zone, and New Hampshire coordinate system
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid
zone 19
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of
the National or State reservations shown on this map
Revisions shown in purple compiled in cooperation with State of
Massachusetts agencies from aerial photographs taken 1977 and other
source data. This information not field checked. Map edited 1979



LOWELL, MASS. - N. H.
N4237.5 - W7115.7.5
1966
PHOTOREVISED 1979
AMS 6769 III NE - SERIES V814

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



October 21, 1988

Carol Shull
National Register of Historic Places
Department of the Interior
National Park Service
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

RECEIVED
NOV 4 1988
NATIONAL
REGISTER

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed you will find the nomination forms for the following properties:

Lowell, Varnum Building; 401-405 Bridge Street (HPCA # 10187MA)

Boston (Roxbury), Mount Pleasant Historic District

Northbridge, Linwood Mill Historic District; Linwood Avenue, Maple Court, Pine Court
(HPCA # 11131MA)

They have been voted eligible by the State Review Board and have been signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer. Owners were notified of pending State Review Board consideration 30-75 days before the meeting and were afforded the opportunity to comment. No comments have been received to date.

Sincerely,

Betsy Friedberg

Betsy Friedberg
National Register Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission

BF/bq

Enclosure

Massachusetts Historical Commission, Valerie A. Talmage, *Executive Director, State Historic Preservation Officer*
80 Boylston Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02116 (617) 727-8470

Office of the Secretary of State, Michael J. Connolly, *Secretary*