



A Place Like No Other



1978 ~ 200

LOWELL

NATIONAL

HISTORICAL

PARK

t is a milestone... thirty years since the establishment of Lowell National Historical Park. It started out as the vision of a few and turned into a force for regenerating a City. Many of those early visionaries were considered crazed optimists. But as we have seen over the years, the power of place matched with the imagination of a BIG idea caught fire and Lowell became a city of proud collaborators. The creation of this national park was an expression of faith in the future. It reinforced the great innovations that occurred in the 19th century and challenged us to be innovators for the 21st century.

The National Park holds some of the most significant restored properties in Lowell that create a platform for telling Lowell's stories. Most impressively, 77% of the 5 million square feet of the historic mills have been rehabilitated. The mills provide the backdrop for the industrial revolution story to be unveiled to nearly 700,000 visitors annually. They are greeted at an engaging visitor center in the Market Mills; they can ride the rails of historic replica trolleys that move people about the City where they can experience the clatter and motion of a working weave room and museum at the Boott Mill; or the restored Boarding House and immigrant exhibit; and connect to the River Transformed Exhibit at the Wannalancit Mill where a 14 foot flywheel is turned by a water powered turbine. The school year brings 60,000 children to the Tsongas Industrial History Center for "hands-on" experiences. The Patrick Mogan Cultural Center is a commitment to Lowell's heritage and ethnic communities – a place that is considered the park's community platform for civic engagement. Over 2,000,000 people have experienced the Lowell Folk Festival, the premier cultural event of the year offering traditional music, crafts and ethnic foods. The canals can be experienced by boat tours and some \$43M has been invested to create the Canalway and Riverwalk system. The park's commitment to the economic vitality of

Lowell is also brought to life during the **Summer Music Series** when Boarding House Park becomes a lively venue entertaining some **30,000+ people** annually with renowned performances.

The park has been shaped and is supported by a long-standing tradition of collaboration... people that have a passion for this special place and this evolving story, along with a commitment to making Lowell a world-class city. During the course of this 30th year, the park has recommitted itself to community engagement and has been in active conversation with diverse members of the community, National Park Service, and others concerned for our nation's heritage. These conversations have challenged the park to look afresh at its role within a dynamic community and in a global context. For the most part, the early vision has been realized and expanded. The question then begs... what's next?

Meshed gears and Park Rangers bring about visitor understanding of Lowell's waterpower story.

Unveiling a National Story

Left: Charter signed by Governor John Hancock in 1792, The Proprietors of Locks and Canals on Merrimack River are still in operation today.

Below: "The Worker" by Ivan and Elliot Schwartz, 1985. f, 30 years ago, you told a visitor to Lowell, Massachusetts, that the city played a significant role in America's rise to a worldwide industrial power, he might have looked around at the deteriorating buildings and silent mills and asked what happened?

But it was here in Lowell in the beginning of the 19th century, that this town 30 miles northwest of Boston became a birthplace for new ideas as part of America's burgeoning industrialization.

It wasn't a natural birth—Lowell was the first planned urban industrial community in the country, conceived by a group of entrepreneurs that included the city's namesake, Francis Cabot Lowell.

Just as the Merrimack River attracted Native-American residents as much as thousands of years ago, the surging waterway—and, in particular, its 32-foot drop at the area's powerful Pawtucket Falls—lured the Boston Associates seeking increased waterpower from their initial manufacturing base in Waltham. The hydropower in Lowell, they figured, would be ideal for operating textile mills like the ones Francis Cabot Lowell had visited in England—and from whom he had "borrowed" the technology of power looms, the workings of

which he memorized while overseas. By creating 5.6 miles of canals to channel the naturally falling water, the investors harnessed a continuous surge of kinetic energy powerful enough to provide, by 1888, enough horsepower to run the machinery in 175 mills producing 4.7 million yards of cloth a week. The first mill had opened in 1823.

Industry explodes in Lowell

If the technology used in Lowell's mills was unprecedented in the U.S.—permitting all the steps used in the production of cloth to be performed under a single roof—so, too, was the plan to create humane working conditions.

As opposed to the slum-like mill towns in England—which had prompted Americans to view industry as degrading, cruel and squalid—the Lowell mills promised comfortable and clean working and living spaces, ample green space and good monthly cash wages.

Seeking a large workforce, mill owners recruited (in addition to the Irish laborers who built the canals, mills and boardinghouses) young Yankee women and men from all over New England's rural areas. Eventually, the mills also attracted more residents—namely scores of immigrants seeking work—as well as many large manufacturers.

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On March 1, 1826, Lowell was incorporated as a town with a population of 2,500—by almost exactly 10 years later, the population had grown to 17,633 and Lowell became a city. By 1850, that number had almost doubled, and Lowell was the second largest city in Massachusetts and the country's largest industrial center.

The profitable mills, which were producing 50,000 miles of cloth annually, employed more than 10,000 workers and served as a training ground for skilled laborers who spread throughout the country and were instrumental in the development of new technologies.

The city, meanwhile, continued to spawn technological advances itself. In 1830, Patrick Tracy Jackson commissioned work on the Boston and Lowell Railroad, the first passenger railroad in Massachusetts; around 1880, Lowell became the first city in America to have telephone numbers.

Visitors like Charles Dickens and President Andrew Jackson marveled at the modern achievements of the city. As one traveler from Scotland enthused at the time:

"Niagara and Lowell are the two objects I will longest remember in my

American journey: the one the glory of American scenery, the other of American industry."

Lowell: from shining example to struggling city

"It would not be an exaggeration to state that Lowell was the premier industrial city in the United States during the first half of the 19th century," wrote Douglas Griffin, chief of the federal government's Historic American Engineering Record, in the 1970's.

The second half of the century, however, was a different story.

Irish had flocked to the promise of jobs—followed by French Canadians, Greeks, the Polish, the Portuguese, Swedes, Armenians, Germans, and Jews. (By 1910, almost three quarters of Lowell's residents were foreign born.) By 1850, the cheap labor provided by immigrants increased competition in Lowell and drove some manufacturers elsewhere; meanwhile, the conditions and treatment of workers declined as market pressures grew.

External factors—like the transition from water to steam power and the shift of textile operations to the South, which boasted cheaper labor, electricity,



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Lowell's National Prominence

Created as a planned textile mill city in the early 19th century, Lowell has ever since been a poster child for American innovation and industriousness—changing and reinventing itself throughout the decades. Once known as the premier industrial city in the United States, Lowell's technological innovations and development of an urban working class served as models to the entire country. Falling into desperate hard times with the decline of its manufacturing in the 20th century, the city has rebounded in recent decades. With its former mill district along the river greatly restored and part of the Lowell National Historical Park, Lowell has once again become a model—this time of how to rise triumphantly from the ashes of deindustrialization.

and transportation costs—prompted the decline to continue. Internal factors—like worker strikes and poor management—didn't help.

By 1930, the city's population was declining rapidly; whereas the textile industry there employed 25,000 in 1920, the number dropped to 8,000 in 1940. By the start of World War II, 40 percent of Lowell's residents were on relief.

The last of the large mills closed in 1958 and over the next decade, the city's abandoned infrastructure and buildings deteriorated swiftly, in many cases "helped" by the demolition spurred by desperate urban renewal efforts.

As historic structures were bulldozed to make way for new uses, city leaders discussed filling in the landmark canals to free up even more real estate. Lowell was regularly compared to the scene in a war-torn European town after World War II.

Foreclosures and crime rates skyrocketed, and Lowell's reputation suffered enormously. By 1976, unemployment was at 13 percent—the highest rate of any Massachusetts city and among the 10 highest in the country.

The chief economist of the Bank of Boston said around that time, "Lowell

has no future. Government officials ought to stop wasting their time trying to save the city—it has no hope." Many residents agreed, joking with each other that the city limits should feature a billboard reading "Will the last one to leave please turn out the lights?" But some more prophetic members of the community took exception; they banded together to fight urban decay and the destruction of the structures that had once made Lowell such a pulsating, celebrated city.

A community bands together

Even considering Lowell's downtown deterioration, a remarkable number of high-quality early structures survived, serving as unparalleled historic models.

A local educator, Patrick J. Mogan, campaigned for the creation of an urban cultural park in the city; focusing on Lowell's cultural diversity and ethnic heritage would be the only way to revitalize it, he argued.

Building on Mogan's ideas, a group of community organizations—including the Human Services
Corporation, the Lowell Plan and the Lowell Development and Financial
Corporation—cooperated to create a plan to renovate the historic center of the city, at the heart of which would be the nation's first urban national park.

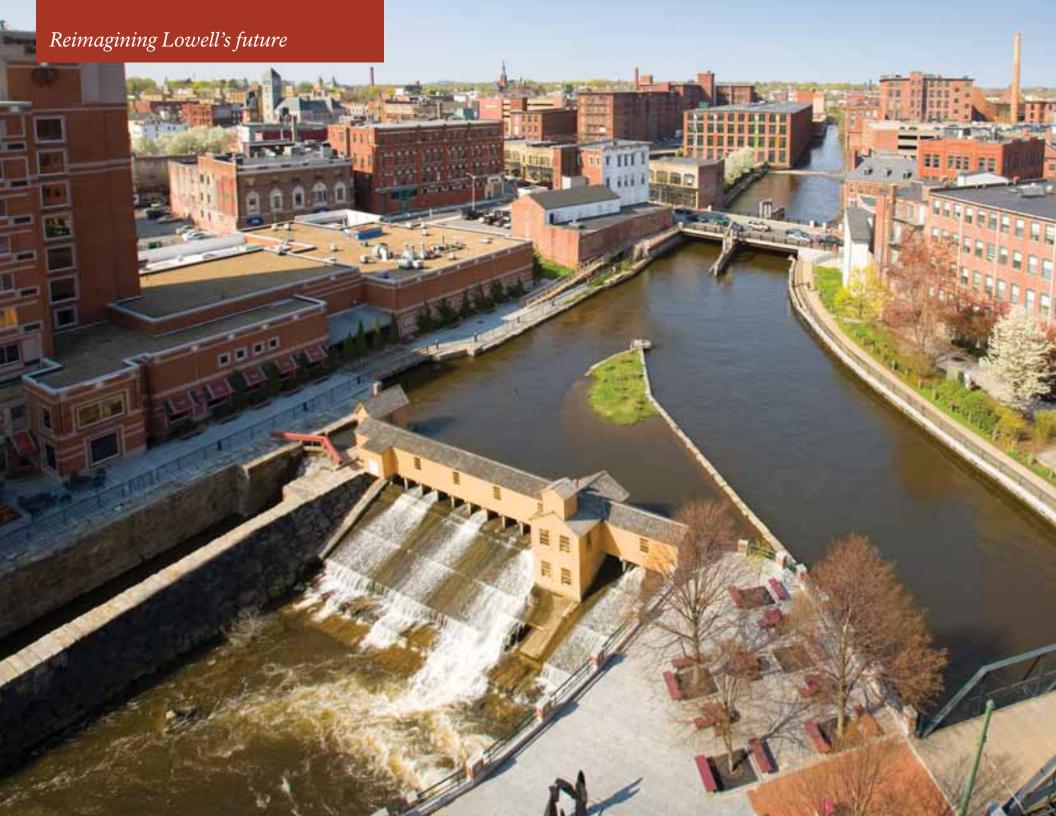
If Mogan was the father of the park, Congressmen Brad Morse and Paul Cronin were its mentors (molding Mogan's ideas). Congressmen Paul Cronin paved the way, with legislation providing for a feasibility study to create the Park concept and Congressman Paul Tsongas, a Lowell-native, was its character reference (pushing the enabling legislation through).

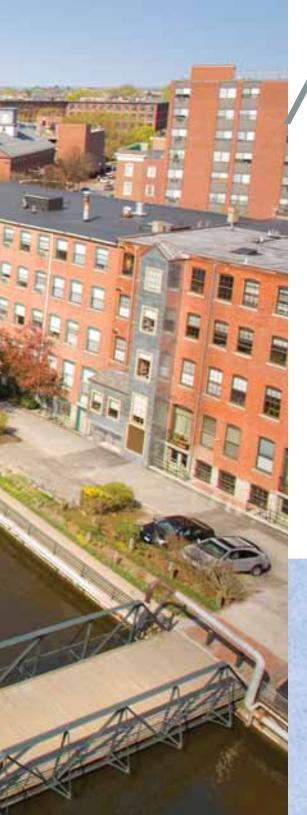
On June 5, 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed legislation dedicating \$40 million to the creation of Lowell National Historical Park. It was a move that saved the city's historic downtown.

And for the next 30 years, the park—with the help of many partners in the community—would serve as guardian of the city's rehabilitation, protector of its historic legacy and curator of a living museum.

Senators Ted Kennedy and Paul Tsongas with President Jimmy Carter signing the Park legislation in 1978.







any of this country's early national parks were built around, well, "parks." They protect, preserve and share natural wonders like the Grand Canyon, Yosemite and Yellowstone.

When Lowell National Historical Park was established in 1978 there was none other quite like it. It would be within an urban landscape whereby the phrase, "The Park is the City and the City is the Park." The Lowell model set in motion some real challenges for the Service and the community. Not only was it to preserve the physical elements representing Lowell's role in the industrial revolution of the 19th century—and interpret that history into exhibits for visitor education—it would also serve as a catalyst in revitalizing the city's physical, economic and cultural environments.

As Patrick Mogan, the park's first champion and the then Lowell

Superintendent of Schools, said at the time, the park would help "... Lowell to be a good address."

It was no small task: the park's stewardship included millions of square feet of abandoned mills and hundreds of dilapidated historic buildings. Few foresaw the colossal impact the park would have on the city's rebirth. Without it, Lowell's canal system, many mills and some commercial structures downtown would have met certain destruction. Instead, about 77 percent of existing mill space in Lowell has been rehabilitated; that number is expected to climb to 84 percent over the next few years with several mills projects in development.

The park, which now spans 141 acres spread throughout Lowell's downtown, greeted 7,000 visitors in its first tourist season; last year, that number was 700,000+.

However, the park could never have achieved its successes working alone.

A joint venture

Lowell National Historical Park was unique beyond its scope and activities—it also spurred the first real preservation partnership between local, state and federal governments and the private sector.

When Lowell National Historical Park was founded, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts had already expressed interest in Lowell by establishing a State Heritage Park there a few years earlier—and it was a clear first partner.

But since the park was planning many activities beyond its usual reach,

Left: Lower Locks looking up the Pawtucket Canal. Below: Market Mills Courtyard, before and after.





Congress also established the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission to provide technical and financial assistance; the federal legislation additionally recommended that the existing Lowell Development and Financial Corporation administer a preservation loan program.

However, Congress leveled a significant caveat: Federal funds could be withheld should the City of Lowell fail to demonstrate its ability to be a responsible steward of its historic environment. The Lowell Historic Board was created to ensure the city's compliance and thus protect the federal resources.

For the next several years, these organizations worked together to plan and execute the city's revitalization. They were aided by the support of many private citizens and other local organizations. Among those were the

University of Lowell (now the University of Massachusetts Lowell)— whose mission included support for regional economic development—and Wang Laboratories, which by establishing its headquarters in Lowell, brought to the city an industry that many hoped would lead to another bright technological future.

Challenges continue

The 1980's were years of prosperity in Massachusetts; in Lowell, employment rose as business expanded and nearly 200 old buildings were rehabilitated and put to new uses. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, many Southeast Asians moved into the city. With the help of other immigrant groups like Puerto Ricans, these newcomers brought the city's population back up to six figures.

The late 1980's and 1990's brought new challenges to Lowell, as much of

Massachusetts was uneasily balancing changing economic markets and demographics. As competition drove down profits of many in the high tech industry, forcing several companies to disband or relocate, the region's economy cooled. Wang, once one of the area's largest employers, cut most of its workforce. At the same time, the legislated sunset of the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission challenged the Park and partners to redefine roles and carry-on the successes borne by the Commission.

Lowell becomes a "good address" again

In the late 1990's, things began to pick up again in Lowell. The city became home to both the Tsongas Arena and LeLacheur Park in 1998. The addition of the minor league hockey team the Lowell Devils and Red Sox baseball farm team the Lowell Spinners brought notability and visitors to the

city. Both the Tsongas Arena and the long-existing Lowell Memorial Auditorium lure many national acts.

Lowell has experienced a condo and apartment boom over the past decade that has brought many residents and artists into the city's historic mills, resulting in a more vibrant downtown with galleries and restaurants.

Lowell has also continued to attract new groups of immigrants, including Brazilians and Africans—nourishing the city's longstanding role as a melting pot.

The University of Massachusetts
Lowell hopes that it will help bring
more companies into the city as well;
the institution's biotechnology and
nanotechnology programs are increasingly lauded worldwide, recognition it
hopes will eventually bring higherskilled jobs into the city.





Boott Mill tower, before and after.





The National Park, meanwhile, was assigned several of the Preservation Commission's primary functions including Canalway development, preservation advocacy and continued park development. A recent preservation success was the transfer of the preserved B & M Railroad Depot, also known as the Rialto, to Middlesex Community College for future education purposes. The college has been a visionary institution in promoting quality education and service learning.

Ready for the next 30 years

The plan set forth for Lowell National Historical Park in 1978 has been almost completely realized and expanded—thanks in large part to many public-private partnerships.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of visitors see the working components of this early manufacturing center—the nearly six miles of canals that





Transformation of a former boarding house from H & H Paper Company into the Patrick J. Mogan Cultural Center.

harnessed the energy of the Merrimack River; the mills where the cloth was produced; a boardinghouse representing the dozens of similar buildings that housed the workers; the churches where they practiced their faiths and the ethnic neighborhoods.

Once a model for the Industrial Revolution, Lowell is now a different kind of example—one of historic preservation, urban revival and cultural vitality.

As the initial plan for the park's management read: "If 19th-century Lowell represented a laboratory of industrialism, then Lowell of today plays a similar role in the revitalization of America's decayed industrial cities through a unique partnership of federal, state and local agencies and the private sector. Lowell will once again be a pioneer and symbol of a new revolution in America."







Boarding House Park, before and after.

Defining our Future



uring this 30th Anniversary year, the park sponsored a series of listening sessions and workshops with National Park Service staff, community leaders from throughout the region and others who care about Lowell's future. Two white papers were commissioned by the park intended to provoke deeper conversation on the park and its future. The paper, Assessment of Preservation and Development in Lowell National Historical Park was authored by Jonathan Lane and Dennis Frenchman, and the paper The Presentation of Lowell's Stories was authored by Peter O'Connell and Gray Fitzsimons. These papers were invaluable in capturing the spirit and evolutionary process of the park and in offering inspiration on the park's future. They can be read in full by accessing www.nps.gov/LOWE.

It is clear that there remains strong support for the ideals of the national park in Lowell. There were also several recurring themes that came out of the conversations that should be acknowledged as key ingredients for past and future progress. These included: 1) collaboration is critical to getting things done, 2) the National Park Service has had high standards in both the quality of its programs and

facilities as well as its staff, and that as we move forward these should be recognized and supported, 3) the national park and its partner institutions have a critical leadership role to play in advancing plans to make Lowell a "world-class city," 4) the park needs to be more "visible" and people have a desire to see the rangers more throughout the City, 5) new programs that connect people to the broader Lowell story in compelling ways should be expanded and include other partner organizations, and 6) major development projects should be completed including: the Riverwalk and Canalway, restoration and expanded use of the canals, improved signage and gateway identity. Future projects that should be pursued include: expanded opportunities to promote Lowell as "A City of World Culture"; restoration of the Smith Baker Center as a performing arts venue; the development of a new collaborative visitor center and place for cultural expressions; the establishment of a Merrimack River Science and Exploration Center; an expanded Paul Tsongas Center; a permanent program and potential facility to honor Jack Kerouac's legacy; and connections with the Hamilton Canal District development including the expansion of the trolley system.

Themes

The following "major themes" have emerged from the 30th Anniversary process and will be further explored by National Park Service as it develops plans for future management



Charette participants considered Lowell's cultural connections and other future visions.

The Park's Footprint Evolves

Since the 1980 park plans were developed, the City of Lowell, and the park within, have changed significantly. A question worth examining is whether the physical framework of the park, as envisioned in the 1976 "Brown Book" Plan, matches the reality of Lowell thirty years later. Opportunities exist to "fine tune" the park's layout and facilities to reflect the current situation, to align with current needs, and to offer better visitor service. Program Goals:

- Take advantage of the *Hamilton Canal District* project this area will create some dramatic opportunities for the park. The park will study these opportunities at a serious feasibility level in tandem with the City and private development proposals.
- Complete the remaining sections of the *Canalway and Riverwalk*, developing these resources to their fullest potential.
- Complete the feasibility study for the *expansion of the trolley system* to connect to the University and Lelacheur Park, through the Hamilton Canal District and to the Gallagher Terminal.
- Conceptualize a new park visitor center as Lowell's *cultural tourism gateway* with a distinct and highly visual architectural identity an icon that creates a sense of arrival.
- Collaborate with the City on a *branding program* that would *enhance signage and way-finding* resources throughout the Park.

Preserving the Spirit of Place

Lowell has worked tirelessly at preserving the irreplaceable. It has learned to appreciate that preserving community character is the cornerstone to Lowell's renaissance and a place that will attract new residents and businesses. Program goals:

■ After three decades, those that were involved with the establishment of the park are thinning and many new residents have limited perspective on the groundbreaking nature of the park or the process by which it helped to the transform the city. The *Lowell Heritage Partnership*, a collaboration of community organizations concerned with preservation, the environment and culture has agreed to help the Park facilitate and advance the concepts of the 30th anniversary report.

- Explore reauthorization of the Preservation Loan Fund administered by the *Lowell Development and Financial Corporation*, slated for termination in 2018.
- The park identified 404 "A" rated nationally significant historic resources in the Lowell National Historical Park & Preservation District, to date approximately 178 have been rehabilitated. Of those 158 remaining properties, the park will work diligently with the Historic Board to complete its rehabilitation goal by the year 2020, and ensure the continued maintenance and preservation of buildings already completed.
- Develop *a connected transportation system* where visitors travel by boat from the Concord River through 7 locks and past 3 gatehouses to the Merrimack River with a river landing at the Pawtucket Gatehouse, connected with the Spaulding House. Travel would continue via the Northern Canal to the Wannalancit Mill and trolleys would link to other locations.

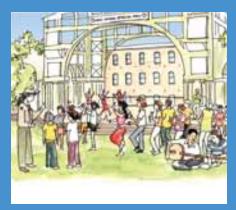
The (Next) "Greatest Generation"

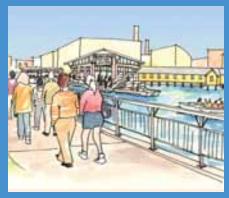
With the world changing at a pace like never before, the youth of today are critical to becoming the Lowell's or Edison's of the 21st century that will define the future American landscape. They will be responsible for reinventing whole communities, redesigning new transportation systems, and rewiring the world with new technologies. The Tsongas Industrial History Center will work with partners to set the standard for designing experiences that will stimulate future innovators and community stewards. Program goals:

- The "2nd Revolution" program would further engage students of all ages to become scholarly detectives, analyzing historic buildings and waterways, neighborhoods, and primary sources related to immigration, environmental history, and globalization.
- 1. Expand Center programs that would be inspired by the engineers and artisans of 19th century Lowell school and college students will be challenged to better understand an increasingly globalized world in which science and technology plays a vital role. Students will be engaged in skills that demand problem solving, teamwork and leadership.
- **2.** The Center will create "wired" learning environments able to reach global audiences through long-distance learning.









Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come.

-VICTOR HUGO



3. Establish a *Merrimack River Science and Exploration Center* to engage youth and adults in citizen science research on historical and present day water quality, work with city planners on sustainable practices, and create programs uniting river education and recreation. The project goal is to foster environmental scientific/technological literacy and stewardship in diverse audiences.

Exporting the Lowell Experience

Lowell has had an important national impact on Park Service management approaches both toward nationally significant historic resources in urban and regional settings, as well as upon cities and regions seeking to preserve community character and to use them as a basis for enhancing local identity and economic development. Along the way, the park has encouraged a vast array of other heritage initiatives across the US and abroad. The lessons of this experience are valuable and represent one potential new mission for the park and for its community. Program goals:

- Form the *Paul Tsongas Center for Experiential Education, Public Policy, and Civic Engagement.* Engaged partners will be Lowell National Historical Park, The Lowell Plan, Inc., Middlesex Community College, UMass Lowell, and the City of Lowell. Program development will include:
- 1. Establish a *Center of Excellence for Regeneration of (mid-size) Historic Cities*, such as the National Main Street Center or other national centers that promulgate methods, knowledge, and produce research in other subspecialties. The Center will sponsor a biennial international conference on urban revitalization with Lowell showcased as a premier model.
- 2. Establish a *Paul Tsongas Fellowship* program that will promote research related to the Tsongas papers now archived at UMASS. The first fellows might be the contributing writers and program coordinators of the international urban revitalization conference. Meanwhile, an endowment would be sought to develop a more ambitious, long-term annual fellows program drawing on lessons from the Loeb Fellowship at Harvard, the Howard Baker Center at the University of Tennessee, etc.

- **3.** Create an *integrated research program*, strengthened by the consolidation of and digitization of Lowell's unique historical collections, the Fifth Congressional District Archives, and the City of Lowell Archives, made accessible to students, citizens, and Park visitors through digital portals, including a portal at the Center for Lowell History.
- 4. Establish an R&D component for the Tsongas Industrial History Center whereby the Center could provide both technical assistance and opportunities to franchise experiential education centers to other national parks, heritage areas, universities, and museums.
- **5.** Extend the successful work of the *Civic Collaborative* project between Middlesex Community College and the Park with other related community/ park programs.

Pathways to Learning

The preservation of place with the presentation of history within multi-ethnic forms of cultural expression is what makes Lowell a meaningful experience. Program goals:

- *Embrace the immigration story* as it continues to evolve in the City by fully engaging the ethnic communities in the planning and presentation of interpretation, educational programs, events, cultural funding, and perhaps even use of and design of space.
- Develop a *local/global network*, both in the U.S. and abroad with places that share similar historic and cultural connections. Linking and expanding visitation among international sites with Britain, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Cambodia, Scandinavia, and China, among other countries that could assist in thematically uniting these sites and increase tourism.
- Patrick Mogan Center to develop the "*Heartfelt Learning*" *program* exploration of cultures through oral histories, foodway programs, language, traditional music and crafts, and poetry.
- *Update park exhibitry at primary visitor* sites to be family-friendly, hands-on, discovery, and performance-based.
- Provide visitors the opportunity to experience *interactive wireless tours and programs through the use of handheld technology.*

Thoughtful Giving and Stewardship

People were believers in the Big Idea and over the years have given greatly. Partners have shared resources, volunteers have contributed invaluable time, and businesses and foundations have given generously. However, as Federal resources tightened, the park will need to strengthen these enduring local connections and expand its reach nationally. Additionally, building the next generations of stewards is critical. Program goals:

- Develop a year-round "Spindle City Corps" program that that unites young people between the ages of 15 and 21 years for a demanding schedule of community service and leadership development. It will prepare, and challenge young people to address environmental and social issues in their community, while introducing them to a variety of possible conservation-related career fields.
- Create a *National Park Community Development Academy*, a six month program aimed at inspiring emerging civic leaders to better understand park values and provide community stewardship for the future.
- Develop a high level of partner collaboration toward targeted and sustained funding strategies that would raise private funds and create innovative partnerships.

Far Left (p. 12): Envisioning the future of Lowell National Historical Park and the City of Lowell Left (p. 12): Marcus Santos of BatukAxé performs at the Lowell Folk Festival Below: Exploring traditions at the annual African Festival

CREDITS

All Images: James Higgins, except as noted Page 2: Proprietors of Locks and Canal on Merrimack River

Page 3: National Park Service Page 5: Courtesy of Niki Tsongas

Page 10: National Park Service (right)

Page 12: Renderings, Kendra Halliwell



In the end, there must be purpose to our journey.

Human endeavor cannot consist simply of random acts and happenstance. There needs to be meaning beyond self that gives our limited days definition and direction.

And only within that meaning can the judgment rendered upon our lives have worth.

FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO JOURNEY OF PURPOSE

BY PAUL TSONGAS



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