



Jack Kerouac's Lowell: Where the Road Begins

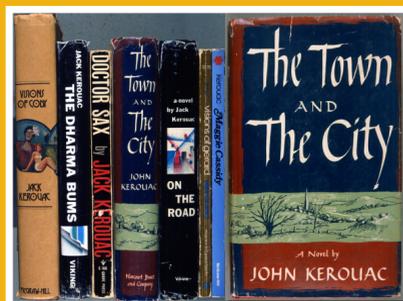


John Sompas
Jack Kerouac, 1951.

Map & Guide
to Jack Kerouac's
hometown, Lowell,
Massachusetts, Fea-
turing sites referenced
in his books from the
multi-volume
Legend of Dulouz.

Lowell Historical Society

Merrimack Street, Lowell, Massachusetts, 1941.

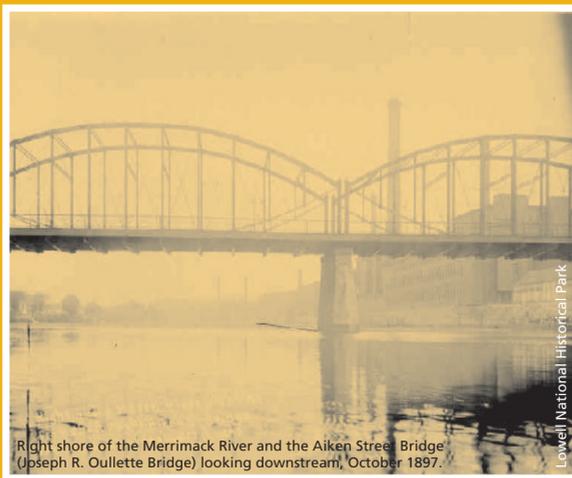


John Sompas
A portion of Kerouac's multi-volume *Legend of Dulouz.*

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Lowell National Historical Park
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Lowell National Historical Park
Right shore of the Merrimack River and the Aiken Street Bridge (Upseph R. Oulette Bridge) looking downstream, October 1897.



John Sompas
Jack Kerouac, November 1938.

American Beat Author Jack Kerouac

(1922–1969) wrote more than 30 books of prose and poetry. Most of his work draws on adventures in Lowell, across America, and beyond. Born in Lowell and raised in the French Canadian community, Kerouac dreamed about telling the stories of his generation—young Americans who had come of age during the Great Depression and World War II. He and many of his contemporaries were restless seekers after the meaning of life. He coined the term “Beat Generation,” which refers to them being world-weary (“I’m beat”) and even beatific in their spiritual questing.

Best known for his classic novel *On the Road* (1957), Kerouac wrote five novels based on his Lowell years: *The Town and the City* (1950), *Visions of Gerard* (1958), *Doctor Sax* (1959), *Maggie Cassidy* (1959), and *Vanity of Dulouz* (1968). Kerouac is buried in Edson Cemetery in Lowell, Mass. His life and work are recognized in the *Jack Kerouac Commemorative*, a sculptural tribute in Kerouac Park on Bridge Street. Many of the places that were important to Kerouac are still present and look much the same as they did in the years he was growing up here in Lowell. With this guide we welcome you to explore the Lowell of Jack Kerouac.

The Legend of Dulouz

While the name “Kerouac” evokes an image of free spirited wanderlust, there was much more complexity to be found in the life the writer whose best known work is *On the Road*. But this was only one of twelve novels Jack Kerouac had published at the time of his death in 1969. The more recent publications of his journals and letters, as well as the vast store of a collection of his material at the New York Public Library demonstrate just what an amazingly prolific writer he really was.

Kerouac's immense literary creativity flowed in part from the tension he experienced between the universal human need for both roots and wings. The title of his first published novel *The Town and the City*, which came out seven years prior to *On the Road*, captures this tension quite well. The book's prose style also clearly reflects the influence of one of Kerouac's earliest literary mentors Thomas Wolfe.

The Town of Galloway, Kerouac's name for Lowell, provided the author his sense of place, of ancestry, of home. The City, in this case New York, represented the call to adventure, to the road, and to all that beckons one away from home in the search for a unique identity. In an entry to his journal in January, 1948, Kerouac said of *The Town and the City*, “It is the sum of myself, as far as the written word can go.”

In the years that followed, however, Kerouac's “written word” went far beyond this initial work. In time he would publish four more novels that would focus almost exclusively on his childhood, adolescence, and young adult life in his hometown of Lowell, Massachusetts. The novels are: *Visions of Gerard*, *Doctor Sax*, *Maggie Cassidy*, and *Vanity of Dulouz*.

Each novel captures successive chronological stages in Kerouac's early life. They also comprise a series in a larger literary vision Kerouac had set forth for himself to compose: “The Legend of Dulouz.” This was to be one vast *oeuvre* with the central character being Kerouac's persona, Jack

Dulouz. This Legend would play out against the backdrop of America from the 1920s up to the early 1960s.

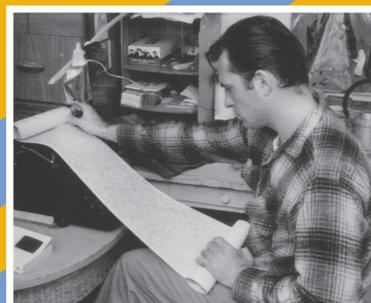
In these opening stages of the Dulouz Legend *Visions of Gerard* very movingly tells the story of four-year-old Jackie Dulouz witnessing the gradual death of his nine-year-old brother, Gerard, due to rheumatic fever. This work also shows Kerouac's strong sense of identity with his French-Canadian ancestry and culture. In the following installment, *Doctor Sax: Faust Part Three*, an early adolescent Jackie communes with the imaginary figure of Doctor Sax who lurks unseen—except in the mind of the Dulouz boy—in and around the environs of Lowell. Then, in *Maggie Cassidy*, high school football star Jack Dulouz experiences his first serious romance with his Irish sweetheart Maggie. And in *Vanity of Dulouz*, young Mr. Dulouz completes his senior year at Lowell High School and moves to New York to attend and play football for Columbia University. From there his life moves beyond his Lowell origins as the Dulouz Legend continues.

Even at the age of 21 Kerouac was able to identify two divergent aspects of himself that play out in much of his writing. In a highly introspective letter written in 1943 to his Lowell friend George Apostolos, he first identifies himself as a “bent and brooding figure... (my) introverted, scholarly side...” Then in the following paragraph he points to his “halfback-whoremaster-alemate-scollion-jitterbug-jazz critic side which recommends a broad rugged America (and) gutsy red-blooded associates.”

On the Road is a clear expression of this latter side of Kerouac. But to truly know the man and his work one has to seek out the ongoing interplay between these two components of his personality. It is this interplay that reveals what a truly remarkable writer, and truly remarkable American, this native son of Lowell, Massachusetts really was.



John Sompas
Jack Kerouac's personal copy of *On the Road*.



Orange County Regional History Center
Jack Kerouac reading the *Dharma Bums* scroll, 1958.

Downtown

1. Visitor Center, Lowell National Historical Park, 246 Market Street

Discover Lowell's many museums, events, tours, and programs. In the Visitor Center Theater, every half hour there is a multimedia presentation *Lowell: The Industrial Revelation*. Each day at 4:00 p.m., there is a showing of the film *Lowell Blues*, exploring the city through Kerouac's words and poetic imagery. Call (978) 970-5000 for programming updates.

2. Lowell High School, Kirk Street

Kerouac began writing seriously while at Lowell High School, influenced by Whitman, Saroyan, Wolfe, and Thoreau. In high school, Kerouac was a football and track star and earned a football scholarship to Columbia University. One of his Lowell novels, *Maggie Cassidy*, is set during his senior year at high school.

3. Boott Cotton Mills Museum Lowell National Historical Park 115 John Street

The Boott Cotton Mills operated from 1835 to 1964. Kerouac wrote about the silent mills on Sundays, foreshadowing their closing as the textile industry slowly left Lowell. Today, the Boott Cotton Mills Museum houses a recreated 1920s weave room, permanent exhibits, multimedia presentation, and temporary exhibit gallery.

“In my opinion -- Lowell, Massachusetts is now the most interesting city in the United States of America . . .”

Jack Kerouac, September, 1962

4. Patrick J. Mogan Cultural Center, Lowell National Historical Park, 40 French Street.

Jack Kerouac's typewriter and backpack are on display in the *Mill Girls & Immigrants Exhibit* located in a restored 1835 Boott Cotton Mills boardinghouse. The exhibit tells the story of the working people of Lowell from Yankee mill girls to immigrant families. The Mogan Cultural Center also houses the University of Massachusetts Lowell Center for Lowell History, and the Angkor Dance Troupe.

5. Kerouac Commemorative, Jack Kerouac Park, Bridge Street corner French Street

The Lowell Historic Preservation Commission selected artist Ben Woitena to create the *Jack Kerouac Commemorative*, dedicated in 1988. Five of Kerouac's books are drawn from his early years living in Lowell's working-class, French Canadian neighborhoods. Excerpts are inscribed on eight polished granite columns. The arrangement of the columns and benches in a cross and series of circles alludes to Kerouac's Roman Catholic and Buddhist beliefs.

6. Downtown, Merrimack Street

Jack Kerouac worked for a time as a sports reporter for the *Lowell Sun*. In his Lowell novels, he wrote about the vibrant downtown – busy with stores, restaurants, and movie theaters. Both the Lowell Sun building and the Page's Clock on Merrimack Street were important landmarks for him and are mentioned in many of his novels about Lowell.

7. Pollard Memorial Library 401 Merrimack Street

Built in 1893, Lowell's Public Library with its Memorial Hall was recently restored. Jack Kerouac was determined to read every book the library held. Here he read the works of great authors he wished to emulate rather than follow the high school curriculum. The Lowell library has an extensive collection of books written by and about Kerouac.

Into the Neighborhoods

8. St. Jean Baptiste Church 725-741 Merrimack Street

This gray stone cathedral was built in 1888 to serve the French Canadians who lived in the nearby neighborhood called “Little Canada.” Kerouac described this church as “the ponderous chartreuse cathedral of the slums.” Father Armand Morrisette conducted Kerouac's funeral mass on October 24, 1969. Recently, the church was closed and is now under private development.

9. Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, Franco-American School, 357 Pawtucket Street

There is perhaps no other place in Lowell that evokes Kerouac's deep Roman Catholic faith more than the Grotto with its Stations of the Cross. Built in 1911, the Grotto is fashioned after Lourdes where a vision of the Virgin Mary appeared to a French peasant girl. The young Jack Kerouac and his mother would often stop here on walks from their home in Pawtucketville.

10. Merrimack River and Pawtucket Falls

Jack Kerouac loved this river. The Merrimack River is one of the central images in his Lowell novels. He described it in the opening of *The Town and the City*, telling of its origins in the White Mountains of New Hampshire and its course to the Atlantic Ocean. In *Doctor Sax*, he wrote about the Flood of 1936, the year a rapid spring thaw followed a winter of heavy snow and the Merrimack River surged with biblical ferocity.



John Sompas
Left to right: Armand Gauthier, Caroline, Leo, Jack, and Gabrielle Kerouac, ca 1931.

11. Birthplace: Centralville Neighborhood 9 Lupine Road

Born in Quebec, Canada, Kerouac's parents met and married in Nashua, New Hampshire, and later moved to Lowell. They had three children: Gerard, Jack, and Caroline. Jack, or Jean Louis Lebris de Kerouac, was born at home on March 12, 1922, “at five o'clock in the afternoon of a red-all-over suppertime, as drowsily beers were tapped in Moody and Lakeview saloons and the river rushed with her cargoes of ice over reddened slick rocks, and on the shore the reeds swayed among mattresses and cast off boots of Time.”

12. Nicky's Liquors/Old Sixty Six Cafe 110 Gorham Street

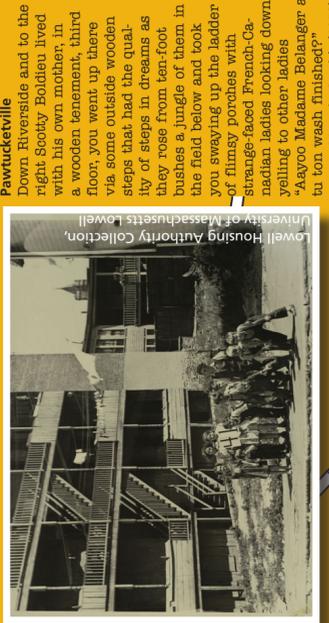
In the 1960s, Jack and Stella Kerouac briefly lived in Lowell, and Kerouac's favorite hang out was Nicky's, owned by one of Stella's brothers. Now Ricardo's Trattoria, the original bar survives along with many stories of Jack “holding court” there. This section of Gorham Street is still architecturally intact, making it easy to imagine Kerouac traveling the sidewalks as he wove his way to Nicky's on one of his many prowls.

13. Grave Site: Edson Cemetery 1375 Gorham Street

Followers of Kerouac have visited his grave in increasing numbers since October, 1969. They bring small offerings: flowers, incense, bottle of beer, jug of wine, handwritten poem, letter to Jack, lucky stone, or a silent prayer. When Bob Dylan came to Lowell in 1975, he and Allen Ginsberg sang at the grave on Lincoln Avenue between Seventh and Eighth Streets. Marked with a small, flat stone engraved, “Ti Jean” John L. Kerouac, Mar. 12, 1922 – Oct. 21, 1969. He Honored Life.



John Sompas
Jack Kerouac and his wife Stella, ca 1966.



Lowell Housing Authority Collection, University of Massachusetts Lowell



Birthplace
It was in Centralville I was born . . . Across the wide basin to the hill - on Lupine Road, March 1922, at five o'clock in the afternoon of a red-all-over supper-time, as drowsily beers were tapped in Moody and Lakeview saloons and the river rushed with her gangue of ice over reddened sliok rocks . . .
Dr. Sax (1959)



Boot Cotton Mills (1835)
O tall red chimneys of the Cotton Mills of Lowell, tall redbrick goot of Boott, swaying in the terminus clouds of the wild boombah day and dreambell afternoon . . . The usually blue windows of the Boott Mills in the night are piercing, heart-breaking with a blue that's never been seen before - - terrible how that blue shines like a lost star in the blue city lights of Lowell . . .
Doctor Sax (1959)

PAWTUCKETVILLE

Merrimack River
The Merrimack River, broad and placid, flows down to it from the New Hampshire hills, broken at the falls to make frothy havoc on the rocks, foaming on over ancient stone towards a place where the river suddenly swings about in a wide and peaceful basin, moving on now around the flank of the town, on to places known as Lawrence and Haverhill, through a wooded valley, and on to the sea at Plum Island, where the river enters an infinity of waters and is gone.
The town and the City (1950)



Lowell National Historical Park

CENTRALVILLE

Visitor Center
The Visitor Center is a modern building with a large glass facade, located near the Merrimack River. It serves as a hub for visitors to the Lowell National Historical Park.

THE ACRIE
The Acrie is a neighborhood in Lowell, Massachusetts, known for its historic architecture and proximity to the Merrimack River.

LITTLE CANADA
Little Canada is a neighborhood in Lowell, Massachusetts, characterized by its diverse population and vibrant community.

THE MERRIMACK RIVER
The Merrimack River is a major waterway in Lowell, Massachusetts, flowing through the city and providing a scenic view.



Franco-American School, Lowell

The Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes (1911)
We made the stations to the ultimate foot of the Cross, where my mother kneeled, prayed, and worked a step up the cross-mount, to show me how some people did it all the way up - to the foot of the cross itself, tremendous ascents to blasphemous heights in the river breeze and views of long land vistas . . . I always liked to get out of there.
Dr. Sax (1959)

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- 1 Lowell NHP Visitor Center
- 2 Lowell High School
- 3 Mill Girls & Immigrants Exhibit
Jack Kerouac's backpack and typewriter
- 4 Boott Cotton Mills Museum
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Kearney Square
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- 9 The Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes/Stations of the Cross
- 10 Pawtucket Falls/Merrimack River
- 11 Birthplace, 9 Lupine Road
- 12 Nicky's Bar (Now Ricardo's)
- 13 Edson Cemetery/Grave Site



Lowell National Historical Park



James Higgins

Jack Kerouac Commemorative (1988)
The commemorative was dedicated in 1988. Passages from the five Lowell novels as well as excerpts from *On the Road*, *Lonesome Traveler*, *Book of Dreams*, *Scripture of the Golden Eternity*, and *Mexico City Blues* are inscribed on eight triangular granite pillars.

Edson Cemetery
Well, it's all in the way the rain barrel rolls over. I guess, they'll spill em out one by one to the hole in the ground out by Edson Cemetery, and we'll take no more trips to Boston that way . . .
Maggie Cassidy (1959)



Lowell National Historical Park

