


Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

Scanned Record Cover Page

Inventory No:	LOW.97	
Historic Name:	Chalifoux Building - Colonial Building	
Common Name:	Merrimack, The	
Address:	24 Merrimack St	
	28 Central St	
City/Town:	Lowell	
Village/Neighborhood:	Downtown;	
Local No:	190;	
Year Constructed:	1906	
Architectural Style(s):	Classical Revival;	
Architect(s):	Davis, Millard F.; Melay, Frederick F.;	
Use(s):	Abandoned or Vacant; Commercial Block; Department store;	
Significance:	Archaeology, Historic; Architecture; Commerce;	
Area(s):	LOW.B, LOW.BC, LOW.BE	
Designation(s):	Nat'l Register District (06/05/1978); Nat'l Register District (01/16/1979); Local Historic District (12/13/1983);	
Building Materials:	Wall: Brick; Cast Iron; Cast Stone; Copper;	
Demolished	No	

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

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[BE] - 11/16/83 LOWELL CULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY

PI- DOWNTOWN

[BC] - 11/16/83

IDENTIFICATION 24 MERRIMACK STREET AND 28 CENTRAL STREET MAP SHEET # 8

1) CURRENT OWNER Louis Saab OWNER OCCUPIED no

2) HISTORIC NAME Colonial Building/Chalifoux Building

3) CURRENT NAME The Merrimack

4) PROPERTY TYPE commercial 5) ZONING CLASSIFICATION B3

6) TAXES: PAYMENTS current STATUS clear

7) WITHIN BOUNDARIES OF LHPD, Merrimack-Middle Streets HD

HISTORICAL ABSTRACT

1) CONSTRUCTION DATE 1906/addition ca. 1925

SOURCE documented: date on building/circumstantial: 1924 atlas (addition)

2) ARCHITECT OR BUILDER unknown

3) HISTORIC OWNER J. L. Chalifoux (and sons)

4) ORIGINAL USE: GF commercial UF commercial

5) PREVIOUS BLDGS ON PROPERTY yes DATE ca. 1843-1865

SOURCE maps and atlases

DESCRIPTIVE DATA

1) ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

Renaissance Revival

2) PRESENT USE:

GF commercial

UF commercial

3) NO OF STORIES 5

4) PROP SQ FT 5506

5) PLAN polygonal

6) ROOF flat

7) STRUCTURAL SYSTEM

metal frame

8) OUTBUILDINGS

none

9) MATERIALS:

FOUNDATION

not visible

VIEW FROM northwest PHOTO TAKEN June 1979



FACADE all sides: brick in stretcher bond, Central Merrimack: yellow brick other sides: red brick

TRIM cast stone ornamentation, cast iron, copper cornice

10) NOTABLE SURFACE L SCAPE ELEMENTS none

ADDRESS 24 MERRIMACK STREET and 28 CENTRAL STREETVISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 1) CONDITION OF BUILDING FABRIC good
- 2) IF DETERIORATED, CAUSES n/a
- 3) INTEGRITY OF HISTORIC BLDG FABRIC: GF major and irreversible changes
UF intact original fabric
- 4) SURROUNDING LAND USES commercial
- 5) INTEGRITY OF PROP'S HIST SETTING moderately disrupted historic setting
- 6) IMPORTANCE OF PROP TO HIST SETTING focal point in area

ADDITIONAL DESCRIPTION

See Research Report.

ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL INFORMATION

See Research Report.

ARCHEOLOGICAL COMMENT

The Chalifoux Building (and extension) fully occupy the site. Due to size and construction, intact subsurface remains of the Church/Barristers' Hall Building are extremely unlikely.

Research Report

24 Merrimack Street and 28 Central Street
Colonial Building (now The Merrimack)

1906

This commanding five-story corner block, facing both Merrimack and Central Streets, was built as a downtown department store. The architectural style is Renaissance Revival, executed in a wrap-around design which addresses the intersection with a beveled corner. The basic wall surface is yellow brick, lavishly overlaid with cast iron and "cast stone" (ceramic) elements. The Central side has a later, compatibly styled extension, approximately half as long as the original wall.

The original storefront level has been reworked. The original building entrance remains somewhat intact at the east end. It has a rectangular surround of cast stone in imitation of sandstone or travertine. The doors are recessed and remodeled.

In typical Renaissance Revival fashion the stories are organized into distinct horizontal units with separate facade treatments and strong banding between floors. The second story is enframed in cast iron with large casements and a band of transoms, so that this story is almost all glass. It is topped with a metal frieze. The third and fourth story windows are rectangular triplets, divided by brick piers and cast stone spandrel panels. The date, 1906, appears in one of the spandrels facing Central Street. The division between the middle and topmost sections of the facade is made with a cast stone entablature which also serves as a fourth floor window header. Midway over each set of windows is a boldly molded split-and-broken-scrolled pediment. The fifth floor windows are round-arched, connected with cast stone moldings over the arches, and a springline cast stone molding. There also are metal spandrel panels at the springline. The wall is capped with a dentilated metal frieze and a copper cornice.

The extension along Central Street is much less ornate than the original portion, but is quite compatible. At street level, south of the remodeled storefront band, is a recessed entrance with a round arch and a fanlight over the door. The surround is cast stone with an octagonal light above the arch. The upper story windows are all rectangular. The second floor has three sets of casements and transoms between brick piers.

24 Merrimack St.

-2-

Above that are three stories of Chicago-style windows, with fixed center panes and side casements, three bays across each floor. The frieze and cornice duplicate the metal work of the original, unifying the Central Street facade at the top.

The Colonial Building is the third generation of structures to occupy this site. The first included a corner church, built in 1843 by the Third Universalist Church; the contractor was Jonathan Page [1]. The building was successively occupied by the Second Wesleyan Methodist Church (ca. 1853), and the Central Methodist Episcopal Church (ca. 1855-1861), according to city directories. This building was a simple Greek Revival structure facing Merrimack (Fig. 1); the first floor was occupied by stores. There was another building on the site at this time, located behind the church; its use is unknown.

By 1865, again according to city directories, the church had been converted, elaborated, and expanded into Barristers' Hall, a lawyers' office building (Figs. 2, 3, and 4). This was a four-story wood frame building, Italianate in style. A detailed history of the site development and descriptions of the church and of Barristers' Hall are given in the manuscripts cited above (Footnote 1).

Behind Barristers' Hall on Central was Swan's Block (or Building), constructed ca. 1888 by Daniel A. Swan, who was in the retail shoe trade in Lowell for over fifty years (Fig. 2). Swan's Building was reputed to be Lowell's first six-story business block, constructed in brownstone on the former site of a Dr. Mansfield's office [2]. The architect for Swan's Building was Frederick W. Stickney whose local work included the First National Bank and the High School of 1892 (with W.D. Austin) [3].

By 1896 Barristers' Hall was owned by Joseph L. Chalifoux, and around 1900 he acquired Swan's Building as well. Chalifoux was owner of one of Lowell's largest clothing stores. Born in Quebec Province in 1850, he came to Lowell in 1868 and by 1875 had established his own clothing store on Merrimack Street, near Central. By the 1880s his store was the principal occupant of the Central Block on Central Street at Middle [4].

When Barristers' Hall burned in 1905 [5], Chalifoux had the Colonial Building erected on the site. Due to ill health,

he elected to keep his store in the Central Block, and leased his new building to Nelson's, a five-and-ten-cent retail enterprise [6].

Joseph L. Chalifoux was a director of the Union National Bank, trustee of the Lowell Textile School, trustee of the Central Savings Bank, member and one-time president of the Board of Trade, and a member of the Financial Commission. He also had a very successful store in Birmingham, Alabama. He died in 1911. Chalifoux was survived by his wife Nellie (Gallagher), former principal of the Mann Grammar School, two sons, and three daughters. Both sons, Paul and Harold, were involved in the store before their father's death [7].

In 1912 Paul sold his interest to his younger brother, Harold. In 1914 the Chalifoux department store moved to its Merrimack Street building. In 1920 Harold had already expanded into Swan's Building and had purchased the Phoenix Building on Prescott Street for another annex. The extension along Central Street was built in the 1920's, replacing Swan's Building. The last directory listing for the Chalifoux Company was in 1929. Apparently its recent rapid expansion left it vulnerable to the onset of the Depression. In 1940 the building housed offices, mainly of lawyers. It currently accommodates retail tenants on the street level, and offices above. (In the 1976 directory many of the rooms were vacant.)

The Chalifoux Building is well maintained and it appears to be in good structural condition. It is very important visually for its contributions to both the Merrimack and Central streetscapes. On Merrimack it is the west anchor in a block of three yellow brick buildings between Central and Prescott Streets; the other corner of the trio is the Sun Building high rise. In downtown Lowell, this block face is unique in what is essentially a red brick district (where other yellow brick buildings, like the Bon Marche', have been covered over). The Chalifoux Building is individually a fine example of the Renaissance Revival style, notable for its skillful use of both materials and ornament.

Footnotes

- 1) "Barristers' Hall," unpublished manuscript in U. of Lowell Library, Special Collections, vertical file. Apparently written by Alfred P. Sawyer, attorney, and edited by Milford F. Davis, architect (ca. 1920).

24 Merrimack St.

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- 2) "Daniel A. Swan," unsigned historical note in U. of Lowell Library, Special Collections, photo file.
- 3) See survey form on 30 Kirk Street for additional information on Stickney.
- 4) Frederick Coburn, History of Lowell, v.III (1920), pp. 301-304.
- 5) Lowell Sun, Oct. 9, 1905, p.1.
- 6) Coburn, op.cit.
- 7) Ibid.

Other Sources

Lowell maps and atlases.

Lowell city directories.

City of Lowell, Its Commercial and Financial Resources: A Souvenir. The Lowell Morning Mail, 1890, p.71.



Figure 1

1855 Lowell City Directory, pp. 238-9.

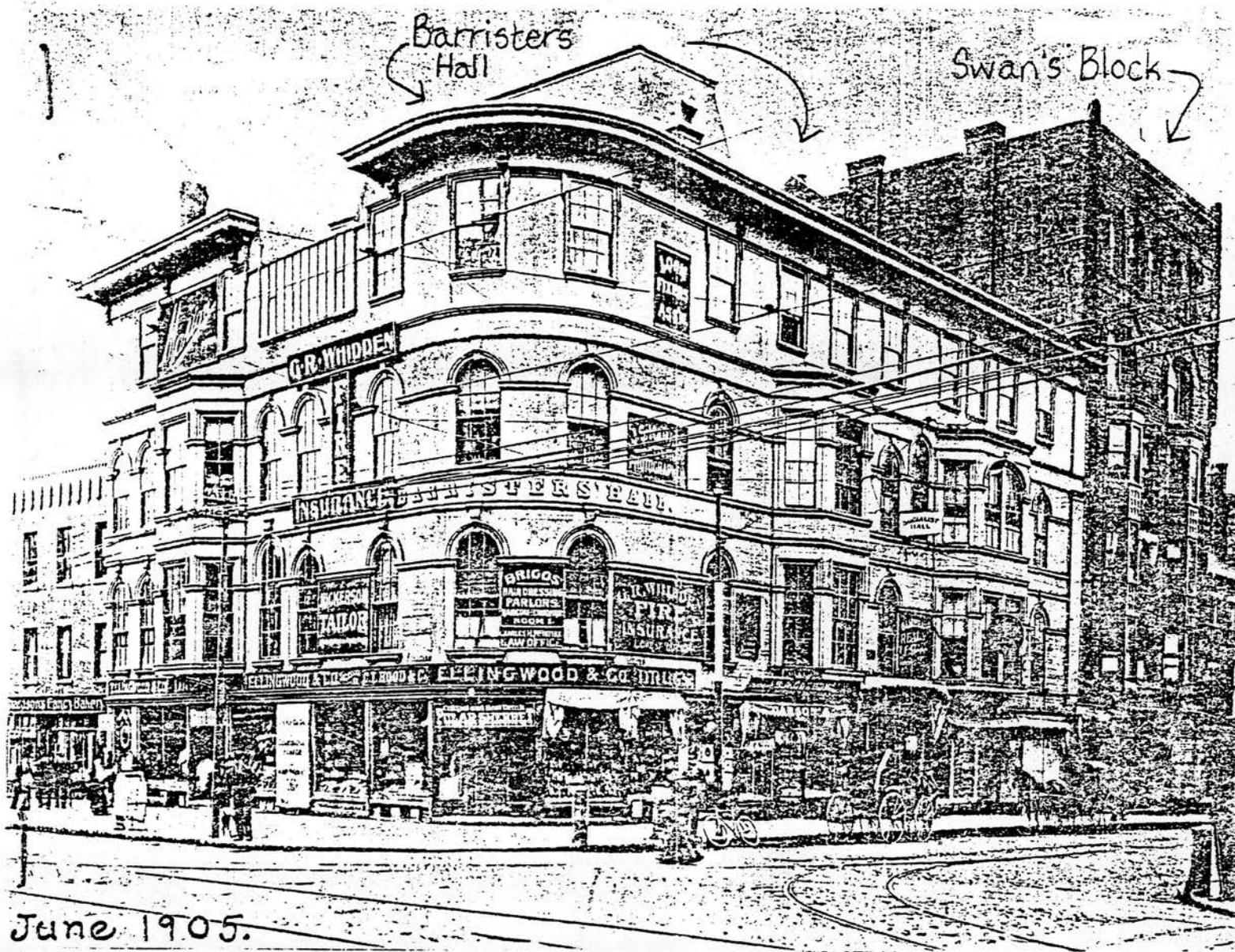


Figure 2

University of Lowell Photo File.



J. L. CHALIFOUX, the largest Clothing, Hat, and Boot and Shoe House in New England.

27 TO 35 CENTRAL STREET, LOWELL, MASS.

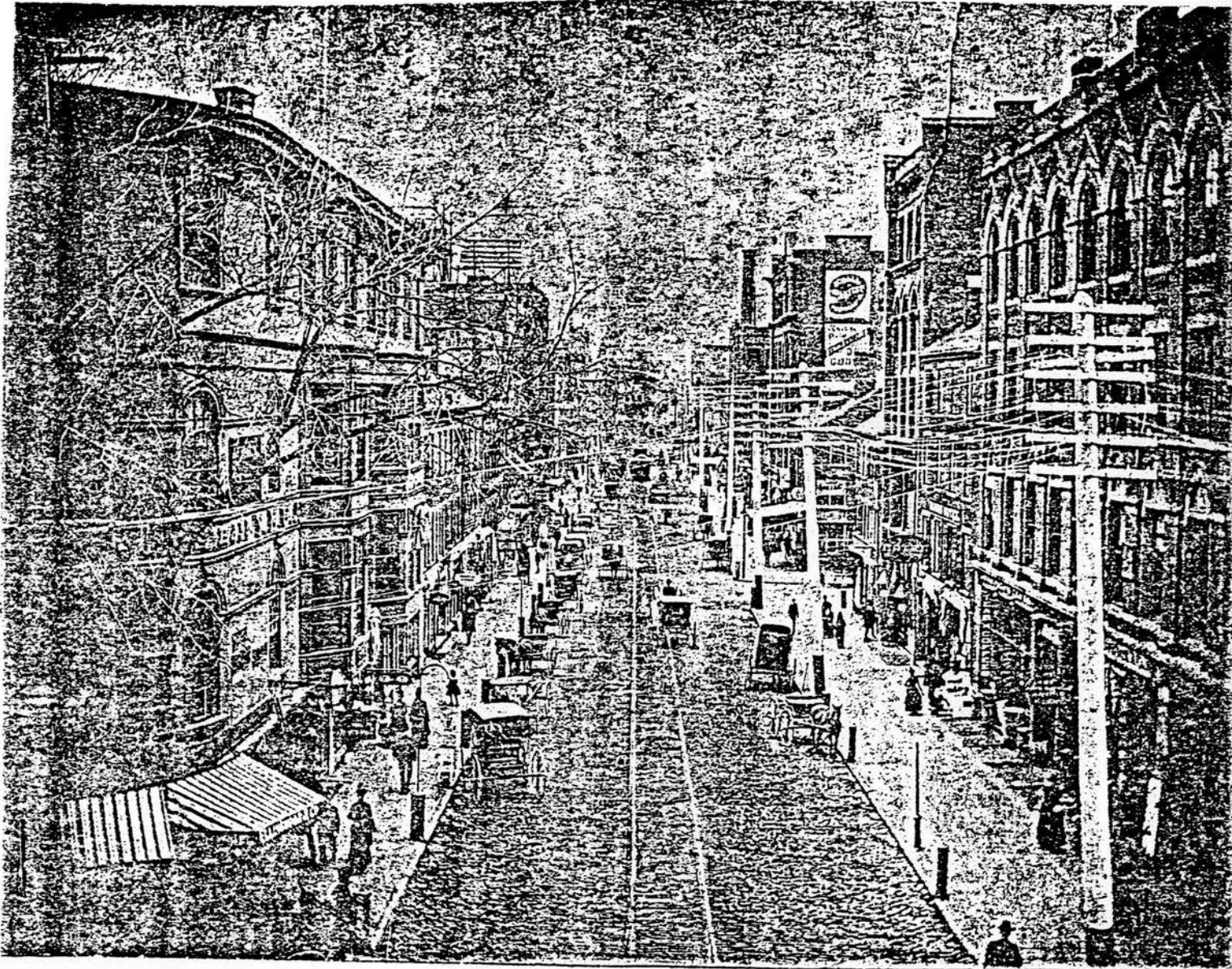


Figure 4

University of Lowell photo file.



J. Le Chalifoux

Figure 5

From Coburn, History of Lowell, v. I (1920), opp. 302.

NR 1-16-79

LOW. 97

FORM B - BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, State House, Boston

In Area no. <u>B</u>	Form no. <u>190 97</u>
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1. Town Lowell (Merrimack Street District)Address 24 Merrimack StreetName Chalifoux Building, ("The Merrimack")Present use Store, officesPresent owner Louis M. SaabDescription: 5 1/2 story brick commercial/
office building.
1906Source inscription

Early 20th century commercial with

Colonial Rev.

Architect _____

Exterior wall fabric tan brick, cast stone, metal

Outbuildings (describe) _____

Other features metal cornice, frieze windows,continuous arcade surround at 5th floorwindows, shallow pilasters define bays at
3rd and 4th floors, metal front at second.Altered ground floor Date _____Moved no Date _____

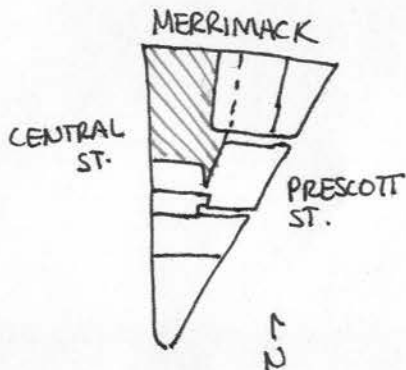
5. Lot size:

One acre or less x Over one acre _____Approximate frontage 6.60 x 80

Approximate distance of building from street

at sidewalk6. Recorded by EFR

Organization _____

Date 2/13/78

(over)

7. Original owner (if known) J. L. Chalifoux

Original use department store

Subsequent uses (if any) and dates _____

8. Themes (check as many as applicable)

Aboriginal	_____	Conservation	_____	Recreation	_____
Agricultural	_____	Education	_____	Religion	_____
Architectural	<u>x</u>	Exploration/ settlement	_____	Science/ invention	_____
The Arts	_____	Industry	_____	Social/ humanitarian	_____
Commerce	<u>✓</u>	Military	_____	Transportation	_____
Communication	_____	Political	_____		
Community development	_____				

9. Historical significance (include explanation of themes checked above)

An interesting illustration of the late Victorian tendency toward eclectic stylistic trim combined with a building form quite up-to-date in 1906, the Chalifoux Building is rich in visual content.

It is a metal-framed structure, its construction is unabashed at the lower levels yet ignored as it reaches the cornice. The building rises in three almost unrelated "layers" -- the two lower stories maximize window breadth and height with the narrowest of pilasters and the third and fourth floors rise in broad bays separated by pilasters and crowned by lintels sporting broken-scroll pediments in the Georgian Revival manner; while the fifth floor is Romanesque Revival in its continuous arcade of round-arched windows.

10. Bibliography and/or references (such as local histories, deeds, assessor's records, early maps, etc.)

Walking tours of Lowell: downtown.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
 MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
 220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
 BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Town

Property Address

Lowell 24 Merrimack St

Area(s)

Form No.

LOW 97

BUILDING INSPECTION DEPARTMENT—DISTRICT POLICE

PLAN RECORD

CASE A RACK 2 APART. 17 NO. 6675 ✓

BUILDING Colonial Building

CITY OR TOWN Lowell

TO BE USED FOR Stores-storage

OWNER J. L. Chalifoux

ARCHITECT M. F. Davis

STREET Merrimack-Central CLASS Part Indus Brick

CERTIFICATE APPROVAL—SPECIFICATION REQUIREMENTS—REFERRED

DATE July 12, 1906

INSPECTOR Bardwell

FORM 41. 10,000. 2-2-18.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Town

Property Address

Lowell 24 Merrimack St

Area(s)

Form No.

Low 97

BUILDING INSPECTION DEPARTMENT-DISTRICT POLICE

B *2* PLAN RECORD *52*

CASE *B* RACE *2* APART *52* NO. 14495 *✓*

BUILDING Chalifoux Dept. Store STORIES 1

CITY OR TOWN Lowell STREET Central-Merrimack

TO BE USED FOR Department Store CLASS Indus Brick

OWNER J. L. Chalifoux Co.

ARCHITECT Frederick F. Melay

CERTIFICATE APPROVAL—SPECIFICATION REQUIREMENTS—REFERRED

DATE Jan. 24, 1918

INSPECTOR McDonald

FORM 41. 1,000. 8-3-18.