

Jack Kerouac

Lowell National Historical Park
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



“...I was going home in October.
Everybody goes home in October.”

On the Road



Jack Kerouac, The Writer

Jack Kerouac is a writer who wrote his ‘songs’ in spoken language to be read and sung sometimes aloud. He wrote about his childhood, his adolescence and his friends of Lowell; he also wrote about his many other friends from around the country and the world. He loved religion which was a high note in most of his writings. Most of all he wrote about the wretchedness of the human condition which, according to him, should find solace in brotherhood, kindness and heaven.

Jack Kerouac, His Life

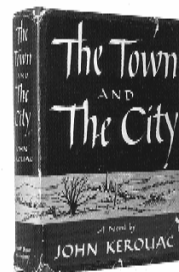
He was born in Lowell, Massachusetts on March 12, 1922 “at five o’clock in the afternoon of a red–all–over supper time” (Dr. Sax) and died in St. Petersburg, Florida on October 21, 1969 at the beginning of a Tuesday morning, at the age of 47. The first seventeen years were those of a normal Franco–American youth living in Lowell; the next thirty years were those of a travelling Ulysses living with everyone everywhere.

Roger Brunelle, Centralville-Lowell, Massachusetts

French-Canadian Roots

Jack’s parents were both born in Quebec. They met and were married in Nashua, New Hampshire, and later moved to Lowell. Jack had one brother, Gerard, who died when Jack was four years old, and one sister, Caroline (Nin). In Kerouac’s adolescent years his family lived in eight different homes before he left in 1939. Lowell in the 1920s and 1930s was a city of 120,000 people, including 30,000 French–Canadians. Most of these French speaking immigrants and their families settled in the Centralville, Little Canada, and Pawtucketville sections of the city. As a teenager, Jack had a room of his own in the family apartment at 118 University Avenue on the fourth floor above Astro’s Sub and Pizza.

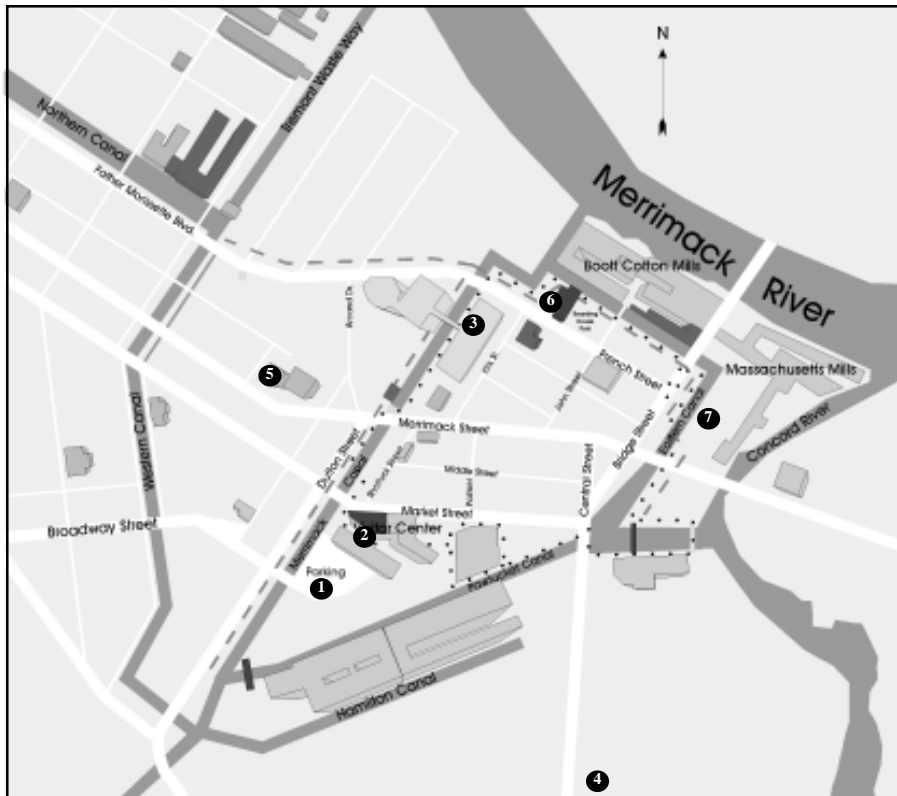
The Pawtucketville Social Club, 123 University Avenue, was founded in 1897 to teach English to the city’s newest French–Canadian immigrants. It continued to serve the neighborhood by providing a recreation center that helped preserve the traditions and customs of the French–Canadians. During the depression, Kerouac’s father managed this club, where Jack and his friends use to shoot pool.



Jack Kerouac first gained literary notice with the 1950 publication of his autobiographical novel, The Town and the City. In a style that echoed Walt Whitman and Thomas Wolfe, he told the story of his coming of age in Lowell.

Education

Being first generation Franco–American. Jack spoke French exclusively until he was seven years old. He attended St. Louis Parochial School on 79 Boisvert Street through fourth grade where he was taught courses both in French and English. In fifth grade, Jack attended the Oblate School on Merrimack Street in the heart of Little Canada. Jack skipped sixth grade and went into Bartlett Junior High, a public school at 79 Wannalancit Street. The school, located along the Pawtucket Canal, was closed during the great flood of 1936. Fourteen- year-old Jack was impressed by the power of the flood waters and wrote in detail



Downtown Walking Tour of Kerouac's Lowell

1. Parking
2. Lowell National Historical Park Visitor Center
3. Lowell High School
4. Nicky's Bar
5. Pollard Memorial Library
6. Working People Exhibit
7. Kerouac Commemorative



Lowell National Historical Park
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978-970-5000; TDD 970-5002
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about it in *Dr. Sax*. Jack then attended Lowell High School (3) located on Kirk Street. *Maggie Cassidy* takes place during Jack's senior year at Lowell High. Jack earned a football scholarship to Columbia, but dropped out in his sophomore year. After serving in the Merchant Marines during World War II, Jack moved to New York to join his family who had moved from Lowell.

Kerouac's Haunts

The city of Lowell served as a backdrop for many of Kerouac's books where he described various businesses, churches, haunts, and residences of Lowell.

Some of these still exist. They include: St. Jean Baptiste Church, called by Kerouac "The ponderous chartreuse cathedral of the slums," where Jack's funeral was held (now Nuestra Senora del Carmen); the Bienvenue Social Club; and "Funeral Row," a series of funeral homes, one of which, Amedee Archambault & Sons, the site of Kerouac's wake.

At the corner of Pawtucket and School Street is an elegant old house built in 1875 for the industrialist Frederic A. Ayer. In 1908, the building became the Franco-American Orphanage. The Oblate Fathers, a Canadian religious order, built a replica of the Grotto at Lourdes behind the house in 1911. This Grotto haunted Kerouac and he refers to it in *Dr. Sax*.

"Everything there was to remind of Death, and nothing in praise of life."

In 1967, Jack returned home to Lowell. His mother was ill from a stroke, and his only sister had died suddenly. These were considered Kerouac's lonely years and he tended to isolate himself from his friends. He hung out at 112 Gorham Street, which was Nicky's Bar (4), now a restaurant, and spent many hours at Pollard Memorial Library (5) where he used to go with Nin. Jack expressed thanks in *Dr. Sax* for the books that were always available at the library.

Final Resting Place

Jack Kerouac's grave is in the Sampas family plot at Edson Cemetery which is located on Gorham Street, two miles south of the Lowell Connector. You will find the small flush stone at Lincoln Avenue between Seventh and Eighth Streets. The stone is marked "Ti Jean, John L. Kerouac, Mar 12, 1922 - 1969, - He Honored Life-".

Artifacts

The Working People Exhibit (6), a part of Lowell National Historical Park, located at the Mogan Cultural Center, 40 French Street, has a display of artifacts that belonged to Kerouac.

For exhibit hours call Lowell National Historical Park at (978)970-5000, or stop at the Visitor Center at 246 Market Street.

Memorial

The Jack Kerouac Commemorative is located in Kerouac Park (7) on Bridge Street. The commemorative was dedicated in 1988 and contains excerpts from Kerouac's writings. The pavement path, with its cross and series of circles, refers to Kerouac's Roman Catholic and Buddhist beliefs, and evokes his lifelong spiritual quest.



Events

Every fall, the "Lowell Celebrates Kerouac!" Committee holds a three day event in his honor. For more information, write: Lowell Celebrates Kerouac, P.O. Box 1111, Lowell, MA 01853.