North Street: Heart of the Old North End

North Street has always been the commercial center of Burlington's Old North End neighborhood and has played a critical role in the economy of the city since the 1850's. After the Chambly Canal opened in 1843 (connecting Lake Champlain with the St. Lawrence River in Québec, Canada) and the development of railroads, commerce throughout the region grew. North Street was an ideal place to live and conduct business as it was located between jobs at the mills in nearby Winooski and at Burlington's waterfront. North Street grew quickly after the Civil War becoming the center of immigrant life in Burlington and Vermont.

A Center for Immigrants

North Street plays a crucial role in the City's social development. The people living on or around North Street had French Canadian, Irish, German, Polish, Russian, English and Lithuanian roots. The Irish began arriving in the 1840's taking jobs on the docks and in Winooski's textile mills. The French Canadians came in large numbers beginning in the late 1850's and through the Civil War years of the 1860's. They principally went to work in Winooski's textile mills, as did many of the Eastern Europeans who came in the 1870's through 1910. The Lithuanians, who were mainly Jewish, came initially in the 1870's. They too took jobs in the mills but also set up as shopkeepers. The 1910 U.S. Census listed more than half of Burlington's population as first or second-generation immigrants. These ethnic roots still exist and now also include immigrants from Tibet, Vietnam, Laos, Bosnia, Yugoslavia, Senegal, and Somalia.

Intersection of Elmwood Avenue and North Street, looking west, c. 1930.

Photo by McAllister, courtesy of UVM Special Collections

North Street was Burlington's second "downtown," with dozens of shops and stores lining the street.

Courtesy of UVM Special Collections

Arthur Martelle and Octave Lavallee operated their grocery store from about 1925 to 1941.

Courtesy of Barbara Ryan

The ethnic diversity and working class heritage of its immigrants define this neighborhood and give it its resiliency.

Courtesy of K.M. Shapiro

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