

Open the book on Framingham's Bancroft Building

By **Chris Bergeron/DAILY NEWS STAFF**

GHS

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FRAMINGHAM — If the Bancroft Building's walls could talk, they might recall a once-towering factory that turned out shoes, a classy but short-lived car, military caps and now houses a thriving community of artists.

Since those thick cement walls remain mute, photographer Lynne Damianos has told the Bancroft Building's century-long story in a handsome book that chronicles the birth, decline and rebirth of a Framingham landmark and the lives of those who labored in it.

Her book, "The Bancroft Building & Its People: 100 Years of History" combines archival images, nearly 200 of Damianos' photos of current occupants and Roy Perkinson's well-researched account of a factory that wouldn't die.

For Damianos, who runs her commercial photography business out of a tidy fourth floor studio, creating her first book was the culmination of a long-held dream that might have opened new prospects.

"On Jan. 12 (2010) I told a friend 'I'm going to do a book.' Then I thought, 'Now I've said it, I have to do it,'" she said.

With help from her friends, Damianos pulled off the entire project of photos, stories, editing and printing the 164-page book in four months.

"I discovered people love this big building. They love the creaks and squeaks in its floors. They love their neighbors. They even love their neighbors' dogs," said Damianos. "It's not just me. They love the creative community here."

Lisa Breslow Thompson, of Framingham, donated her services to design the 164-page book with 198 color photos. It has been printed by Bridgeport National Bindery of Agawam, and sells for \$55.95.

A painter of luminous landscapes, Perkinson initially researched the building's history for a 2009 Open House event.

His introductory essay, "From Autos -- to Apparel -- to Art: The Secret Life of a Building," brings alive an era when industry drove Framingham's growth from a bustling railroad intersection to the corporate and commercial center it is today.

Mixing history and legend, Damianos' book revives the formidable achievements of Richard H. Long who built the rectangular building on the shoulder of Farm Pond to house his shoe factory which manufactured, among other products, the swanky high-topped Waldorf Shoe."

Long's decision to buy and build on the 4-acre site remains shrouded in local legend.

Some say he glimpsed the site through the window of a moving train on a Sunday afternoon ride. According to one version, he was so intrigued that he got out in Ashland and walked back to check out the site that came to symbolize Framingham's glory days.

Kevin Swope, research historian at the Framingham History Center, said Long's building featured large windows that gave workers more natural light and improved ventilation. He said Long's short-lived 1922 venture building the Bay State Automobile which was advertised as "A New England Product built of the Highest Grade Materials" only lasted a few years.

Portrayed in Damianos' photos, 72 business owners, building staff and artists tell their own stories in vignettes that convey the pride and dreams of a thriving community.

Sharing more than 50 years of memories, maintenance supervisor Enrico "Rico" Tognacci remembers his mother Josephine getting him a job in March 1958 that he still holds today. Starting at the age of 26, he "blocked" military caps, switched to children's snow suits before taking over as manager of the boiler and building.

Cheryl Clinton arrived in 1996 looking for studio space to paint and sparked a still-ongoing exodus of artists who've transformed the 5-story building into a sort of Left Bank on Farm Pond.

Owner Richard Goldman keeps alive a family business reaching back to the 1920s when his grandfather, Hyman Goldman started a Worcester cap company. An immigrant from Russia, he named his company the Bancroft Cap Company "since everything in Worcester seemed to be named Bancroft."

The family business moved to Framingham in the 1950s and eventually into the building at 59 Fountain St. as a tenant.

Goldman said his family bought the building in 1967 and he took sole ownership in 1994.

He said 71 of the building's current 102 tenants are artists who've turned their studios into nests of creativity and often decorate the halls with their art.

A Framingham resident, he said between 300 and 500 people worked in the building making military gear during its boom years.

Surrounded by Boston sports memorabilia, Goldman said his building has its own character which often can not be seen from the outside,

"Think of all the things that have happened here," he said motioning with his hand. "From the outside, it might be an old ugly building. But look how it's come to life. If you work here, you can feel its personality."

The Framingham History Center will hold a reception Sunday, June 4, for Damianos and all the building's occupants at the Edgell Memorial Library.

An award-winning commercial and architectural photographer, Damianos said working on the book forced her to shoot in a looser,

more intimate style, almost always in natural light.

"I never really photographed people before," she said. "I totally feel it freed me up."

For Damianos, working with people helped her understand how a big, drafty building has come to be a home for more than 100 different people.

"At first, a lot of the business owners and artists felt shy about talking about themselves," she said. "A lot of them worked in a kind of isolation. As a result of participating in the making of this book, I think they feel more connected."

To learn about Damianos or order the book, call 508-872-4880 or visit www.Damianosphotography.com.

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