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Main Street Maine 1979 Spring Conference: Madeleine Giguère Remarks

Madeleine Giguère

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Remarks of Madeleine GIGUERE
Chairperson of the Lewiston Historical Commission
1979 Spring Conference
Maine Citizens for Historic Preservation
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Bates College

From their earliest days cities have been places of exchange: of exchange of agricultural goods for protection, for relations with the gods, for manufactured or hand-crafted goods.. A place where you could buy a cooking pot, a piece of jewelry or have a letter written or a will drawn. But the market place was something more, it was a place of entertainment, of information, of gossip, of fun. Eventually many of the market places moved into places sheltered from the elements. The 12th century enclosed market, one of the coolest places I was in in Bukhara in Central Asia was a twelfth century version of the inside market. The American small-town version up through the middle of this century is our Main Streets.

Lewiston's Main Street is mostly Lisbon Street and only partly Main Street -- this is our "down street" or simply "the Street" to those who work on it. In my youth, our downstreet had all the earmarks of the traditional market. You could get a variety of goods including groceries and a shoe shine. You could get a variety of information there, professional, academic, (there were a couple of schools there) and some not so professional but interesting information. In my High School days, going downstreet on Saturday night was the thing to do and it was exciting -- looking at clothes in the company of your peers, sometimes buying but at least pinpointing what we would campaign for at home, listening to records and almost always spending fifty cents for one. In the process of this shopping we were seeing friends, exchanging information and gossip, taking in the displays in the store windows and deciding what we would do after the stores closed and our friends got out of work at nine. Often the choice was to go and have a rich velvet and French fries at a downstreet restaurant. It was exciting and satisfying place to be -- a place of hustle and bustle, the place where the action was.

Many of us in Lewiston think that it should be that way today. We know from example of some of your cities that this can happen. We are working to make it happen in Lewiston.