



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Lawrence History Center ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, September 13, 2025

6 Essex Street, Lawrence

10:00 AM—12:00 PM

“Immigrant City: A Pilgrim’s Journey”

By Ron Suduiko

I grew up in the Stadium Projects. My mother’s parents were mill workers: immigrants from Canada and Ireland. They lived within a few hundred yards of where the Merrimack River collides with the Great Stone Dam: two mighty forces, one of nature, the other of man. The Great Stone Dam, engineered to harness raw, explosive power, a force perhaps unparalleled at the time (1848). Creating a mill city, from the ground, up; mammoth brick factories piercing the sky; employing tens of thousands, overwhelmingly immigrant, many of them children; a center for machine and paper manufacturing; the very best of textiles, for the world.

In reflecting upon the struggles of my family as they worked to build a life in Lawrence in the 1930s I found, through my research at the Lawrence History Center (LHC), that there was much more to Lawrence than one family’s story. I learned that it was just a short leap across time, and the river, to the epochal years of 1912 and 1913: back to the immigrants of Lawrence who, very much like my family, struggled to survive and build a life.

This is the story of my “pilgrimage trek” through the places and people of my hometown, Lawrence, the Immigrant City. My journey began with the “legendary” family story of my grandfather’s swim across the Merrimack in 1933: I was simply curious. Little did I expect that in learning about him, I would walk around a bend in the path of time and history to discover two iconic and tragic incidents in the life of Lawrence and, most importantly and poignantly, its children. The Children’s Exodus, in February 1912, a key component of the victory of the Bread and Roses Strike; and, the Bathhouse Tragedy, a horror happening just over a year later, in June 1913. Upon “discovering” them in the files of the LHC, they were as compelling to me as a Shakespearean drama. They captured my attention, inspired me to keep moving on, as if on a pilgrim’s journey. I needed to learn more about that era of Lawrence and its children.

This has been an amazingly irresistible, challenging and fulfilling journey for me, through my hometown, and the Lawrence History Center.

Questions? Please contact Amita Kiley, 978-686-9230, amita@lawrencehistory.org

Ron grew up in Lawrence in the Stadium Projects, where he resided along with his mother and brother. They lived on Welfare, until his Mom was able to attend a night school program offered by a local social service agency. There she received her nursing degree and went on to a medical service career in Lawrence. Ron attended Central Catholic High School, Phillips Exeter Academy, graduated from Harvard College, and, at Suffolk University, became a lawyer. He returned to Lawrence to practice law, and ran the successful Congressional Campaign of James Shannon, another Lawrence native, becoming his Chief of Staff. Thereafter, Ron pursued a career in education working at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); The UMass Foundation; the University of California, Santa Cruz; and, at Phillips Exeter Academy. In his retirement years, Ron has become a Pilgrim, walking Spain’s 500-mile Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage, and Italy’s 700-mile Via Francigena, a trek from the Alps to Rome. He lives in New Hampshire with his wife, Lois, and has three children and six grandchildren.