

The Arts Take Center Stage

Young Entrepreneurs on Being the Boss • Local History Online

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Merrisa Zoppo '06 and Ricardo Valdivia turned in a show-stopping performance in the Visual and Performing Arts Department's spring 2006 production of *Once upon a Mattress*. The production was directed by Patrick Tangredi, Musical Direction by Christie Nigro, scenic and lighting design by John H. Hood, costumes by Susan Johnson Hood, and choreography by WSC student Derek Sylvester. Sylvester won an Irene Ryan award for his choreography.

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DIGITAL WORCESTER makes history accessible

When Assistant Professor of History Tona Hangen joined the WSC faculty in 2008, she didn't know much about the city of Worcester. So, using Omeka software, she created a website based on student research into the history of the city, as well as input from the broader community. The site www.digitalworcester.org—is an expanding, fully searchable database of material related to Worcester, primarily from 1800 to 2000.

"I'm a social and cultural historian," says Hangen. "I developed the project as a way to get to know Worcester and energize my students to do the same. The city's history is so rich, and I thought it would be cool to have old maps and documents and other materials in one place."

So far, research projects have taken students to the Worcester Historical Museum, the Worcester Public Library, Hope Cemetery, and other local well-known locations. In addition, some students have branched out into oral history, recording residents' recollections of significant events or everyday life.

ALUMNI AND MEMBERS OF THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY WHO BOOK VACATION PACKAGES WITH COLLETTE WILL RECEIVE A DISCOUNT, AND COLLETTE WILL DONATE A PERCENTAGE OF THE PRICE TO THE COLLEGE.

"I'm giving students the freedom to research topics that interest them," Hangen explains. "It's an opportunity for experimentation while contributing to the field of historical knowledge. I want students to be creative, to go beyond the text. They can interview their grandmother, for example, or study a photograph or monument. The key is to ask themselves what a particular story or image or document tells us about a time in history, to use the specific to think about the general."

Her students have responded enthusiastically. At the Worcester Historical Museum, they were particularly intrigued by early 20th century documents from the Edward Street Temporary Home and Day Nursery. "The museum has 12 boxes full of records from the shelter," Hangen says. "We have only begun to scan them into our website, but already they have provided a very personal view of social history."

The Edward Street case files present a poignant portrait of families in trouble. The Abbott family file from 1915, for example, reveals a father who was jailed for non-support and a mother who lost custody of her children because she could not support them. The story becomes more than a sad anecdote in history, however, because students are required to analyze their findings and connect them to what they know about social conditions of the time.

Marta Kozlowska, a psychology major who reviewed and scanned the Abbott family files, writes, "Every student had some interesting facts to tell about each family, so maybe individually each family might not be as important, but together when all the facts are put together, they might create an interesting story of many families of this period ... in our class we learned most importantly to see that every piece of information counts, every person counts, no matter who they were or [what they] did, because at the end it all creates history."

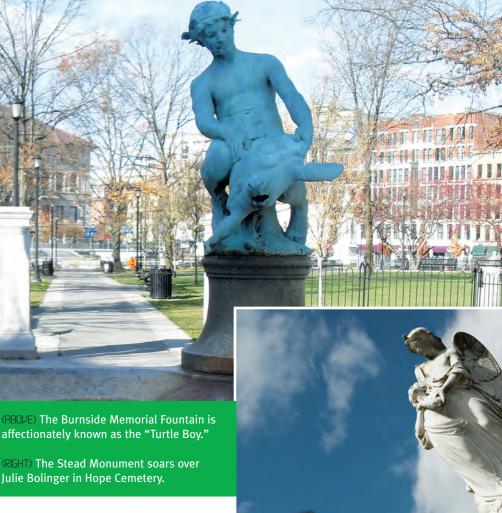
Julie Bolinger, a biology major, decided to photograph stone monuments in Hope Cemetery. She had previously visited the place during an ecology course and welcomed the opportunity to go back and focus on the monuments. "We don't see them anymore," she explains. "It was interesting to see the repeated symbology, the ties to Christianity and resurrection. I didn't know anything about this before going into it." Photo

Her favorite was a sculpture of an angel and child erected by the Stead family. Dating from 1877 to 1945, the monument presides over several members of the family and bears the inscription, "With a Hope of Future Bliss, She Passed From Earth to Heaven."

"We don't usually get to go out and do field work for a history class," Bolinger notes. "When you take the time to focus on everyday people, it makes history come alive."

John Dunn, a business administration major, chose to research the Burnside Memorial Fountain, informally known as the "Turtle Boy." The statue, situated on Worcester Common overlooking Salem Square, depicts a naked boy astride a sea turtle. Dunn says he had passed by the statue many times but never taken the time to learn about its history. "When Professor Hangen assigned us to research some aspect of local history, I immediately thought of the Turtle Boy," he recalls.

He started with the extensive collection of old newspaper clippings held by the



Worcester Public Library and was fascinated by what he found. "Harriet P.F. Burnside was the daughter of a prominent Worcester attorney," he says. "When she died in 1904, she left the city \$5,000 to erect a sculpture and fountain for horses and dogs in memory of her father."

Sculptor Charles Harvey designed the statue, and architect Henry Bacon, who designed the Lincoln Memorial, created the pedestal, complete with four drinking basins for horses and a lower trough for dogs at the rear. But by the time the statue was completed in 1912, the automobile was replacing horses as the major form of transportation.

In time, the sculpture—which has been moved, stolen and returned, and knocked off its pedestal—became something of a city icon. "It has not exactly lived up to Miss Burnside's vision," observes Dunn, "but I believe it has become a landmark in Worcester and also a kind of mascot for the city."

He says that since doing the research, his eyes have been opened to the historical landscape. "I had never done anything like it before, and now I notice so many monuments," he says. "The history in Worcester is very deep."



His reaction to the assignment is exactly what Hangen was hoping for. "The website will grow over the years and become a valuable resource to anyone interested in Worcester's history," says Hangen. "But what's especially exciting to me is seeing students get interested in the history of their immediate surroundings. Bringing students into contact with the raw material of history is exciting to them. It's someone's story."