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Worcester Area Poets

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Worcester Area Poets

An Interactive Qualifying Project

submitted to the Faculty

of the

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Science

by

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on

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Professor Kent Ljungquist
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Abstract

This project describes Worcester area poets with the intent to expand upon and publicize the Archives' current holdings of Worcester poets. We delved into the rare book trade and examined the poets' lives by reading primary and secondary works and conducting interviews. We adapted and updated the existing web publication on Worcester Authors to also include the Worcester Poets. We also investigated the holdings of the Gordon Library and made recommendations to the Archives Department on the acquisition of appropriate works to expand the collection.
Acknowledgements

Along the path of this project we were blessed to find many people that went out of their way to help us.

Mary Fell, Fran Quinn, and Bill Tremblay all provided us with information about themselves, including interviews and newspaper articles.

Mott Linn, Head of Archives and Special Collections at Clark University's Goddard Library, was very generous and helpful to us in locating information about Olive Higgins Prouty.

Rodney Obien, Archivist and Special Collections Librarian, and Chris Cox, Reference / Instruction Librarian, both of WPI's Gordon Library, were especially helpful to us and made themselves available to help us whenever they were requested to.

Our Advisor, Professor Kent P. Ljungquist, shared his knowledge of our poets with us, and also shared his prized book collection with us for the purpose of research. His knowledge of key locations in Worcester was invaluable.

Many thanks to all who helped us.
Problem Statement

The collection of books by Worcester Area Poets at Worcester Polytechnic Institute's Gordon Library is undesirably limited. While there is an admirable collection of Elizabeth Bishop, Charles Olson, and Stanley Kunitz, the six other poets we have chosen are noticeably lacking. This creates an enormous problem when students and faculty attempt to obtain information about any Worcester poets, since the availability of these works is also limited at other locations throughout the region.
Goal Statement

The main goal of this project will be to publicize and expand on the current holdings of Worcester poets at the Gordon Library.

We have edited and updated the current Worcester Area Writers web publication. We have also compiled a list of recommended resources for the Gordon Library Archives Department to acquire.
Introduction

The city of Worcester and the surrounding towns have been a hotspot for famous writers throughout the last few centuries. We desired to focus our efforts on nine poets who we feel have made a significant contribution to poetry in the Worcester Area. They are Elizabeth Bishop, Mary Fell, Stanley Kunitz, Olive Higgins Prouty, Frank O’Hara, Charles Olson, Francis Quinn, L. E. Sissman, and Bill Tremblay.

In choosing these authors, three major poets, Elizabeth Bishop, Charles Olson, and Stanley Kunitz, caught our eye as being obviously necessary in a project of this magnitude. Using *Worcester Area Writers 1680-1980* by Michael True, we identified a number of area writers such as Corrine Bostic, Jean Lozoraitis, Louise Monfredo, Frank O’Hara, Olive Higgins Prouty, Francis Quinn, Carleton Ford Shaw, L. E. Sissman, William Tremblay, Mary Fell, Chris Gilbert, and Joseph Langland. Corrine Bostic was eliminated from the pool because of a lack of materials available, as were Jean Lozoraitis, Louise Monfredo, Chris Gilbert and Carleton Ford Shaw. It posed very difficult to find any material on or by Joseph Langland; he was ultimately taken off the list because while he was a major part of the Worcester County Poetry Association, he didn’t have any local or biographical association with the city of Worcester. Frank O’Hara was raised locally in Grafton before he went off to New York City to spend the remainder of his life. Francis Quinn was selected due to the fact that he was one of the co-founders of the
Worcester County Poetry Association. While Olive Higgins Prouty was known mostly for her prose and fiction works, she was chosen because she had a strong connection to WPI as the daughter of Milton Prince Higgins. Her poetry was especially important because it was not published during her lifetime and was mostly unknown. She did have connections to the poetry world during her lifetime, as well, having sponsored Sylvia Plath's education at Smith College. Tremblay was chosen because he grew up in nearby Southbridge and worked with Langland on a study of Charles Olson.

While a few local libraries have dedicated collections on some local authors, none of the libraries in the area have a comprehensive collection of Worcester poet publications. WPI's Gordon Library has an extremely limited of Worcester poets' works in comparison to Clark University's Goddard Library, Assumption College, and Worcester Public Library (Appendix B). Students and faculty have difficulties obtaining detailed information on Worcester authors due to the limited collections at Gordon Library and other area libraries.

The librarians at Gordon Library, Christopher Cox (reference/instruction librarian) and Rodney Obien (Archivist and Special Collections Librarian), were not only instrumental in our research but they also served as our sponsors and in liaison and advisory roles.

The Gordon Library Worcester Archive preserves artifacts, photographs, documents, and publications about WPI's history, from its founding in 1865, in order to make this information available to students,
faculty, administration, alumni and all interested researchers. Gordon Library's Special Collections are housed in the Archives room, and they include early scientific writings, nineteenth-century engineering works, books on Worcester history, and first editions of literary works. The Special Collections also include the Robert D. Fellman Dickens Collection, a large source for Dickens materials in Central Massachusetts.

The goal of this project is to publicize and expand the Archives' current holdings of Worcester poets. We have edited and updated the current Worcester Area Writers web publication, which contains short biographies and information on the material available at the Gordon Library. We have also compiled a list of recommended resources for the Gordon Library Archives Department to acquire.

We anticipate that our results will be used by the Gordon Library to acquire the books that we recommend. As the web publication we create will be unique in showcasing Worcester Area Writers, of both the prose and poetry genres, we believe that it will be an essential resource for anyone trying to study the history of Worcester.

In order to create the web publication, we read biographies on the local poets, read the works of the poets, and conducted interviews with selected poets: Francis Quinn, Bill Tremblay, and Mary Fell. We would have preferred to have made the interviews in person; however since many of these people did not remain in the Worcester area, phone and email interviews were necessary. To make a list of recommendations to Gordon
Library, we accomplished the following tasks: 1) Visited Worcester Public Library, Goddard Library at Clark University, and the Southbridge Public Library and looked at their special collections of the authors. 2) Researched costs of additions to the collection. 3) Researched the rare book trade and examine how the internet has affected the rare book trade.

The results of this project were presented to Rodney Obien, Archivist and Special Collections Librarian, at the end of C term 2003 with a presentation of the website and the list of recommendations. The Archives Department, after considering the recommendations, will be able to thoughtfully choose some books to expand the Worcester authors collection. This will make a larger selection of local writers for students, faculty, administration, alumni and all interested researchers to access. We also expect this project to be used as a basis for future projects, detailing more of the writers, poets, and playwrights of the Worcester Area.
Literature Review

Our topic was one without extensive previous research, thereby making one of our main goals to provide a basis for future research. Worcester Polytechnic Institute has sponsored two other projects to guide us on our way, the 2002 project, “Worcester Area Writers” and an MQP written by Timothy Adams entitled, “A Literary Tour of Worcester.” Two extremely helpful books, Worcester Area Writers 1680-1980, & Worcester Poets, written by Michael True, provide a shallow and far from comprehensive background to start from.

Worcester Polytechnic Institute’s librarians Rodney Obien and Chris Cox served as essential resources for learning how to acquire books through the rare book trade.

We consulted as many biographical works concerning these poets as we could find. Elizabeth Bishop has had at least eight biographies written about her, Olson has had at least five, and Kunitz has had at least three. The other six poets have an average of one biography each, with some having none at all. We anticipated being able to interview those poets that did not have biographies or autobiographies out on the, as they were still alive.

In addition to consulting books about the poets, it is important to read works by the authors as well. Many of the poets wrote poems about their time in Worcester. While not histories, these works give insight into the way the poets felt about Worcester more than anything else.
**Procedure**

As previously stated, not only was the goal of this project to present a report on Worcester area poets, but also to expand WPI’s current holdings and to publicize these holdings and other information on the authors. It was publicized on the Web in a form following a web publication that can easily be added to in future projects on the topic. Also included in our presentation were recommendations to the library on possible additions to the Worcester author holdings that it already possesses, some in the form of new information on the authors, and others in the form of older, rare books written by the authors themselves, i.e., First Editions and chatbooks, preferably signed.

Throughout the duration of the project, we were reading books both by and about our selected authors: Elizabeth Bishop, Mary Fell, Stanley Kunitz, Olive Higgins Prouty, Frank O’Hara, Charles Olson, Francis Quinn, L. E. Sissman, and Bill Tremblay. The works by the poets gave us greater insight into who they were as people and what aspects of the world intrigued them. A close examination of their writing styles should have allowed us to get a sense of their personalities. An intriguing thing to note is that several of these selected poets knew each other, and in many cases were students of each other or good friends.

During B term of 2002 we visited area libraries, including Worcester Public Library, the Goddard Library at Clark University, and the Jacob
Edwards Memorial Library in Southbridge. We expected each of these libraries to have a section on Worcester area writers, with the Worcester Public Library having the most extensive holdings. The special collections that applies the most to us is the Worcester Room at the Worcester Public Library. Sissman has a special collection at Harvard University, Olson’s works are archived at the University of Connecticut, all of Prouty’s manuscripts and correspondence are contained in special collections at Clark University, and there is extensive research done on Bishop at Vassar College.

Upon completion of the research phase of the project at the end of B term, we brought all this information together in a report and web publication. The report provides a brief synopsis of the book trade and how the internet has affected it. The synopsis will focus on the impact the internet has had in terms of increased accessibility of resources involving the book trade. Following the synopsis of the book trade, there is a section on each poet that we studied. Each section contains a brief biography, along with a listing of books written by and about the poet.

Supplementing and extending the report is the web publication. The web publication focuses not just on the poets we have studied, but all Worcester area authors in general. Our poets have their own respective sections, and each includes a short biography, information on books by and about the author, as well as links to other pages of extensive research and other illustrated materials such as photographs, etc. The goal of the publication is to allow it to be expanded upon in the future with other
projects and more authors so that it may become a comprehensive source on Worcester authors. We intend to include a list of poets such as Joseph Langland and Chris Gilbert that we would recommend be pursued in a future project.

The timeline for this project was 14 weeks, encompassing B and C term of 2002/2003. The research aspect was to be completed during B term, with the report and web publication being completed during C term. Teammates include Tara Ellsworth, Kathleen Joyce, and Vickie Wu. Kathleen Joyce was responsible for Stanley Kunitz, L.E. Sissman, and Mary Fell. Vickie Wu was responsible for Elizabeth Bishop, Fran Quinn, and Olive Higgins Prouty. Tara Ellsworth was responsible for Charles Olson, Frank O'Hara and Bill Tremblay. The rest of the work was split evenly.
The Book Trade and the Internet

Though most people think that buying books is as simple as going to any local bookstore and perusing the shelves, it can in reality be much more complicated than that, especially if one is dealing with rare and/or out of print books. People looking for a rare book might find what they are looking for at the first secondhand bookstore they go to, but more than likely they'll end up having to spend large amounts of time immersed in the rare book trade before they find what they're looking for. Despite all this, though, it is not as difficult to find rare books as one might think.

In addition to bookstores that specialize in rare and out of print books, antiquarian and book societies will also often hold trade shows or conventions for collectors to be able to peruse large collections in one central location. The complicated part of the book trade lies in the language they use to determine conditions of books, which determines the pricing. A small, out-of-print book may look inexpensive at first, but it might be signed, and then the value would skyrocket. While conditions such as limited printing, or signed copies may increase a book's value, things as minor as dog-eared pages or a dent in a hard cover can also decrease a book's value. Of course, the buyer and seller of any particular book must agree on what exactly the condition of the book means in terms of the sale, or the terms of the condition are useless anyway. In such cases it is beneficial to have access to publications about the book trade or a glossary
of terms related to the book trade. One such glossary can be found online at http://dogbert.abebooks.com/docs/HelpCentral/Glossary/index.shtml. This glossary in particular is helpful because there are pictures included of many of the conditions it describes.

The expansion of the Internet into the global marketplace has made finding rare books easier for the consumer. Commercial book giants like Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble online have made books widely accessible, yet they have not had a significant impact on sales in physical bookstores. The rare book trade has been impacted, too, by the internet. Online databases of trade shows let collectors know when large events are occurring so they can not only mingle with other collectors but also purchase and sell to larger numbers of people. Also, rare book sites like the Advanced Book Exchange (www.abebooks.com), alibris.com, abaa.org and Bookfinder.com allow collectors to search for books in a much wider area than local shops and conventions. Because collectors using online search engines can even search internationally for books, the Internet has made the rare book trade faster and easier for the collector or consumer. The added ease of searching has also made the trade cheaper, though prices are still dependent on the condition of the product being shipped.

However, despite the added ease and convenience of buying books online, the shops that deal in rare books have not suffered financially. Perhaps this goes to show that there is something to be said about the thrill of the hunt, and being able to see what is purchase before it is paid for and
shipped. Many Internet databases on the book trade, instead of having search engines to purchase books online, have links to small bookshops for consumers to contact directly. So while the Internet has indeed advanced the book trade and brought it to a wider populace, there is as yet little danger of the physical bookstores being put out of business by online shopping.

Web sites related to the book trade:

This is a glossary of terms used in the book trade. It includes terms and shorthand used to describe book conditions, editions, covers, sizes and the like. The glossary might be useful as a novice book collector’s first stop as a knowledge of the terms is necessary in order to know what exactly is being purchased.

http://gateway.library.uiuc.edu/ala/alawess/books.htm
This is primarily a site with links devoted to French studies, but most of the links point to websites devoted to rare books. There are links to rare book sites and booksellers online that deal with rare and out-of-print books.

http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/booktrade.html
This is another link page with links covering all aspects of the book trade.
http://www.thebookseller.com/?pid=2

This is a site about the book trade in general. It doesn’t have as much about rare or out of print volumes but it does give a good crash course on the book trade in broader terms.

http://elj.warwick.ac.uk/jilt/BILETA/1996/3weedon/2.htm

This is a very informative article about the internet and the book trade.
Elizabeth Bishop

When Elizabeth Bishop’s 1956 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, Poems: North and South – A Cold Spring first appeared in August of 1955, reviewer Donald Hall called her “one of the best poets alive.” Later, Questions of Travel would lead Robert Mazzocco to call her “one of the shining, central talents of our day.” Bishop’s work has gained increasing attention in recent years, marking her as one of Worcester’s great poets. Though she only spent a few short years in Worcester, those years had a marked impact on her writing, namely in her prose piece “The Country Mouse” and one of her most well known poems, “In the Waiting Room.”

Born in Worcester, Massachusetts on February 8, 1911, Elizabeth Bishop’s began her life with a series of tragedies: her father William died of Bright’s Disease when she was just eight months old. Baby Elizabeth and her mother Gertrude moved to her grandparents’ house in Nova Scotia, as Gertrude had lost her US citizenship on William’s death. Gertrude Boomer Bishop suffered a series of nervous breakdowns and was committed to the Nova Scotia Hospital in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia in 1916. It was the last time Elizabeth Bishop saw her mother. This ordeal was chronicled in Bishop’s prose piece, “In the Village.” Despite a tragic beginning, Bishop was happy in Nova Scotia; her family there was warm and caring.
At the age of six, Bishop was called to live with her responsible but emotionally aloof paternal grandparents in Worcester. As recounted in her narrative “The Country Mouse,” Bishop resented moving to Worcester and hated living with her grandparents. She was afflicted with many physical and nervous ailments while staying with the Bishops. Bishop, miserable from illness, was very lonely. Though the Bishops had wanted to raise her in Worcester, they had to conclude that their “experiment” had failed – Bishop, never a healthy child, was so weak from illness she could barely walk. Being rescued from her grandparents’ home by Maud Shepherdson, her mother’s sister, was a major turning point in young Bishop’s life.

In 1918, Elizabeth Bishop moved to the South Boston area with Maud and George Shepherdson. She was much happier with her new surroundings, and slowly began to regain her health. She spent summers in Nova Scotia, and attended Camp Chequesset on Cape Cod. Influenced by Maud’s love of literature, Bishop began writing her own poetry. Though her prolonged previous illnesses delayed the start of her formal schooling until she was 14, she enrolled and was an excellent student at the Walnut Hill School for Girls in Natick, Massachusetts, and enrolled in Vassar College in 1930. While she was at Vassar, Bishop and others started Con Spirito, an underground literary magazine that was more socially conscious and avant-garde than the legitimate Vassar Review.
1934 was a significant year for Bishop. She met lifelong friend Marianne Moore that year on the front steps of the Vassar library. It was Moore who influenced Bishop to think about pursuing poetry as a vocation. In Bishop's poem, "Invitation to Marianne Moore," she hints at a "priceless set of vocabularies," indicating an interest in pursuing something of a literary nature. This was not the only major event to happen to Bishop that year, though. In May, Gertrude Boomer Bishop died. In June, Elizabeth Bishop graduated from Vassar and moved to New York City.

After winning the Houghton Mifflin Poetry Prize Fellowship in May of 1945, Bishop's first book, *North & South*, was published in 1946. *North and South* established themes prevalent to Bishop's poetry: the relation between humans and the natural world, and questions of knowledge and perception. There were also a number of poems in that collection that dealt with loneliness and detachment; these were perhaps a reflection upon her years in Worcester with her grandparents. Around the time *North and South* was published, Bishop also met and became friends with Robert Lowell. Like Marianne Moore, Lowell encouraged Bishop to pursue poetry. He also opened many doors for Bishop by showing her grants, fellowships and awards she could get. In 1950, Bishop secured the post of Poetry Consultant for the Library of Congress with Lowell's help.

In fall of 1951, Bishop won the Amy Lowell Travel Fellowship and embarked upon a trip to South America. While she was in Brazil, however,
she had a violent allergic reaction to a cashew fruit she had eaten and was hospitalized, missing the freighter for the Amazon River. During her convalescence, she fell in love with her friend and nurse, Lota de Macedo Soares. After a brief visit to the States to clean up her affairs, she moved to Brazil in June 1952. Bishop’s stay in Brazil with Soares was probably the happiest time in her life. She wrote to Robert Lowell that she was “extremely happy for the first time in [her] life.” In 1955, Bishop published her second book, *A Cold Spring*, in a volume that included works from her first entitled *Poems: North and South – A Cold Spring*. The next three years Bishop spent translating the *Diary of Helena Morely*, a popular Brazilian work.

Bishop’s third book, *Questions of Travel*, was published in 1965 and is divided into two sections: Brazil, and Elsewhere. Again geography and nature themes are extensive, as well as themes of exploration and excitement. Reflective of the intimacy of Bishop’s relationship with Lota de Macedo Soares, the poems in this collection allow more intimacy between the reader and the poet. Even so, poems in her Elsewhere section that reflect on Bishop’s childhood return to the sense of loneliness and detachment that pervaded her earlier works.

The mid-1960s were a difficult time for Bishop and Soares in Brazil. Increasing political turmoil made Bishop feel more and more uncomfortable in her adopted Brazilian home, and Soares’s involvement in the public parks
project was stressful for both women. Both Bishop and Soares suffered from physical and psychological distress and had to be hospitalized. When they recovered, the women left for New York, but Soares committed suicide shortly after her arrival in September 1967. The loss devastated Bishop, but she continued to publish and write, releasing her *Complete Poems* in 1969. The book contained all of her previous works as well as several new pieces.

In 1970 Bishop moved back to the United States to teach at Harvard. Her last collection of poetry, *Geography III*, was published in 1976. The themes of loneliness, pain, and loss are reflected throughout the volume, possibly because Bishop never recovered from the loss of Soares from her life. Two of Bishop's most famous poems of loss, "One Art" and "In the Waiting Room," are from *Geography III*.

While teaching on and off at Harvard until 1977, Bishop met Alice Methfessel, who would be Bishop's closest companion for the rest of her life. When her tenure at Harvard was done, she taught for one year at New York University.

Elizabeth Bishop died in 1979 at Lewis Wharf, Boston, Massachusetts. She was buried at Hope Cemetery in Worcester. Currently her poetry continues to gain recognition and study. Bishop's poetic wit and humor made her poems likeable and accessible to the public. Though balanced by wit and humor, the poems speak eloquently of pain and loss, leaving plenty of room for re-readings to sift through the many layers of her work.
Mary Fell

The city of Worcester has always had its fingers in all areas of the arts and literature. It has been the home and the resting place of many great writers and poets. When most think of the poets in Worcester, names like Kunitz, Bishop, or Olson surface, but what has kept that fire alive has been the less known, less published poets of this generation. Mary Fell was born in and grew up in Worcester, and she is one of these poets.

Fell was born to Elizabeth "Betty" and Paul Fell in Worcester City Hospital on September 22, 1947. Betty had come from Fairhaven, Massachusetts to Worcester during the Great Depression in order to find work. Once there she met and married Paul, an Irish American “Worcester kid.” Paul worked as a custodian in Worcester, was on the city Retirement Board, and had become chairman by the time he passed away.

Fell grew up mostly in Main South Worcester with her older brother Paul. She attended Downing Street School for kindergarten, and then went to St. Peter’s through high school. Though their mother was a Protestant she sent her children to St. Peter’s because at the time children had to come home for lunch at Downing St., but St. Peter’s allowed them to bring their lunch. This was important because her mother needed to work and couldn’t be home for the children at lunchtime.
Fell spent most of her childhood days in Main South at the St. Peter’s School and church and in the local landmarks like the Park Theater, Coes Pond, Beaver Brook, and Crystal Park. Because they never owned a car, any family excursions were taken on the bus. She remembers downtown Worcester being magical with ice skating in Elm Park, and the Charity Circus at the Auditorium.

Though she was born after the war World War II was very present in her life. This interest is portrayed in her poetry. Poems like *American Legion* and *Basic Training* illustrate everything from the effect the war had on veteran soldiers, to war games played by children.

```
We practice jungle belly crawl
through the high grass in Gordon’s yard,
Red Ryder air rifles cradled in our elbows.
For sneaking up on enemies, walk
heel first, then the whole foot, quietly.

Take a bottle cap. Gouge out
the cork heart. Put it inside your shirt
over your own heart, the cap outside.
Push them back together:
a war medal.
- *Basic Training*
```

After high school Fell attended Worcester State College and majored in English. Throughout most of her childhood the children she encountered were just like her “second or third generation Americans who were rarely ethnically diluted by more than half – Irish or Polish or Italian.” It wasn’t until she attended college that she was introduced to many of the other
ethnicities and people of the world. College in the 1960s meant the anti-war movement, free speech, civil rights, and feminism. These were all accepted as part of daily life.

It was in college that Fell began writing poetry. She studied, loved and tried to write it. However, she felt that it wasn’t possible for someone like her to write poetry. It wasn’t until the Women’s Movement in the 1970s that she realized that she could write poetry about the things she wanted to write about: mostly, the life and people she had grown up with. This movement made Worcester a great place for a budding poet in the 70s. The Worcester County Poetry Association brought many of Fell’s heroes to Worcester for readings. Poets like Adrienne Rich, Denise Levertov, Ann Sexton, Muriel Rukeyser, Robert Bly, Michael Harper, Galway Kinnell all came to Worcester during this time.

After graduating from college in 1969, Fell worked as a social worker for the Welfare Department for about five years, and later in a city social service project until 1975 when she met Fran Quinn, another local poet, and they toured local schools reading poetry and teaching workshops on how to teach poetry. She returned to social work until 1977 when she went to the University of Massachusetts in Anherst and received her MFA in 1981. Right after graduate school Fell went to Indiana to fill in for another professor that was on sabbatical and eventually it turned into a permanent position. It
was here that in 2001 she received the Indiana University Award for Distinguished Teaching.

Fell’s first book, *The Persistence of Memory*, was published in 1983 when it was selected for the National Poetry Series. The poetry in the book speaks in a very personal voice about everything she has experienced. The poem *Out of Luck, Massachusetts*, for example, illustrates the unfortunate downfall of the town of Ware, a town outside of Worcester:

```
The town that couldn’t be licked
gives up, sunk
between these hills. The sacred
heart beats fainter, blessing the poor
in spirit. Boarded-up
factories litter the river. It does no good,
town fathers knitting their brows,
there’s not enough shoe leather left
to buy a meal. In company houses
the unemployed wear out
their welcome. Diminished
roads run east, west, anywhere
better than here.
```

*The Persistence of Memory* also includes *The Triangle Fire*; a collection of poems once published as a hand-sewn chapbook. This collection contains several poems about the tragic Triangle Factory fire that took place on March 25, 1911. This fire took the lives of 146 of the 500 employees of this sweatshop because of the poor safety measures taken during the Industrial Age. This fire also caused a reform in fire safety for many businesses and buildings. The poems help to portray the actual events of this horrific fire in a very human way.
Mary Fell is currently living in Indiana where she teaches English at Indiana University, and continues to write.
Stanley Kunitz

Stanley Kunitz was born with poetry flowing through his veins. His love of words, and interest in writing was clear in his youth in Worcester;

I used to sit in that green Morris chair and open the heavy dictionary on my lap, and find a new word every day. It was a big word, a word like "eleemosynary" or "phantasmagoria" -- some word that, on the tongue, sounded great to me, and I would go out into the fields and I would shout those words, because it was so important that they sounded so great to me. And then eventually I began incorporating them into verses, into poems. But certainly my thought in the beginning was that there was so much joy playing with language that I couldn’t consider living without it.

With his first book published before the age of thirty, and more than twenty other books published within the last 75 years, Stanley Kunitz could easily be called one of America’s greatest and most influential poets.

Born on July 29, 1905 in Worcester, Massachusetts Kunitz was no stranger to tragedy. His father’s public suicide just weeks six before his birth overshadowed most of his life. In his poetry it can be seen that he felt a longing for his father. The poem ‘Father and Son’ from Passport to the War illustrates this theme: “At the water’s edge, where the smothering ferns lifted/ Their arms, "Father!" I cried, "Return! You know/ The way. I’ll wipe the mudstains from your clothes;/ No trace, I promise, will remain.” The effect of his father’s death on his mother is seen most directly in ‘The Portrait’.

My mother never forgave my father for killing himself, especially at such an awkward time.
and in a public park,  
that spring  
when I was waiting to be born.  
She locked his name  
in her deepest cabinet  
and would not let him out,

Kunitz attended the Worcester Classical High School, and it was there that he discovered and was influenced by such great poets as Robert Herrick, John Yeats, William Butler, and William Blake. Kunitz then was awarded a scholarship to Harvard University, and graduated summa cum laude in 1926. After graduation he was indirectly told that due to his Jewish background he could not continue working in the English Department. This hurt him, and although he worked at many schools, including Yale, Princeton, Bennington College, and Columbia University, he was never able to settle at any one institution.

For several years after college Kunitz worked for the H. W. Wilson Company in New York as an editor of the Weekly Library Bulletin. During this time he began work on a series of biographical dictionaries of American and English authors with Howard Haycraft. These volumes were published between the years of 1931 and 1952. Also, in 1930, while working as an editor Kunitz's first book of poetry, Intellectual Things, was published. Unfortunately, this book was barely recognized and thus Kunitz did not publish his next book, Passport to the War: A Selection of Poems, until 1944, which again was looked down upon by critics. During this time he did, however, have many of his poems published in several magazines. In 1958
Kunitz’s luck with the literary world would change when he received the Pulitzer Prize for his Selected Poems.

Though Kunitz was a conscientious objector during World War II he did serve in the United States Army for three years as a non-combatant and was discharged in 1945 with the rank of staff sergeant. It wasn’t until after the war that Kunitz finally took a teaching position at Bennington College. However, when offered tenure he turned it down because he preferred to be "a poet who works as a professor rather than a professor who writes poetry."

In 1967 a visit to Russia inspired him to begin translating poems from Russian to English. Some of the poets he translated were Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, and Andrei Voznesensky. His other ventures around the world took him to several countries in Europe and Africa.

Kunitz has been considered a great mentor to young poets. In 1985 he started the Poet’s House in New York City. Poet’s House is a “literary center and poetry archive – a collection and meeting place that invites poets and the public to step into the living tradition of poetry.” It houses a 40,000 volume library of poetry and hosts many public readings and lectures every year. Kunitz was also an editor for the Yale Series of Younger Poets, a group dedicated to publishing the poetry of younger poets. He also founded the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts.
Since the publishing of his first collection in 1930, Kunitz's acclaim as a poet has grown by leaps and bounds. Since being awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1958, Kunitz has been awarded the Bollingen Prize, the National Endowment for the Arts Senior Fellowship, the Harriet Monroe Award, the Ford Foundation Award, the National Medal of the Arts in 1993, an 'In Celebration of Writers' award from Poets & Writers in 1999, a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship, a Harvard's Centennial Medal, the Levinson Prize, the Shelley Memorial Award, and recently in his home town of Worcester he was awarded the Massachusetts Book Medal for Lifetime Achievement by the Massachusetts Center for the Book. Possibly one of the greatest honors Kunitz has received in his life came in 2000 when he was offered the position of United States Poet Laureate.

Stanley Kunitz is now splits his time between his homes in Greenwich Village, New York and Provincetown, Massachusetts with his wife, where he spends many hours a day in his garden. He continues to write poetry even now in his 90's because he simply refuses to grow old.
Frank O’Hara

Of all the poets of Worcester, Frank O’Hara was one of the most displaced. Born and raised in Grafton, he would end up spending the majority of his adult life in New York City. There he was considered to be a “New York Poet”, and sought out a life of popular culture.

It all started in Baltimore, Maryland, where he was born June 27, 1926. His family then moved to Grafton and he grew up in this small suburban town, which even today remains a close-knit community. His family had ties in nearby Worcester, with his father having attended the College of the Holy Cross and O’Hara himself attending St. Paul’s School and St. John’s Preparatory School in Worcester.

Grafton was the setting of the movie “Ah, Wilderness!” which was filmed there when O’Hara was eight. Hollywood had decided that Grafton was the perfect New England town in which to film its movie: with one exception. Grafton would need a bandstand on the town square to suit its needs, and since Grafton didn’t have one, Hollywood built one.

It was the exposure to this movie set which would later pull O’Hara into the world of pop culture. The glamour of the stars seemed all too real to him. O’Hara may have even volunteered to be an extra on the set of the movie.
After Hollywood had come and gone from Grafton, O'Hara concentrated his efforts on his first love: the piano. He had a passion for music of all types, though he loved contemporary best, and he studied piano from the time he was 15 through when he was 18 at the New England Conservatory in Boston.

But O'Hara was loyal to his country, too, and when World War II came, he was willing to serve. He joined the Navy and served as a sonarsman on the “USS Nicholas” in the South Pacific and Japan.

When he got back to the states after the war, he jumped right back into academia and became a student at Harvard University. He majored in music and continued to play the piano, also doing some composing. He dabbled in poetry; he especially appreciated the poets Rimbaud, Mallarme, Pasternak, and Mayakovsky; but the guiding force in his life was music.

All this would change when he met John Ashberry, another poet. Ashberry’s influence would eventually change O'Hara from a music major to an English major, and he began to publish his poetry in the Harvard Advocate. He received his degree in 1950, and sent himself off to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, where he received his MFA one year later.

When he graduated from the University of Michigan in 1951, O'Hara wasted no time and by fall had settled himself into an apartment in New
York City. He found a job working at the front desk of the Museum of Modern Art and began to write seriously. He published one of his first poems, "A City in Winter" in 1952 and started writing art reviews in ArtNews, where he received a reputation for being an excellent critic. Slowly but surely, O'Hara was carving his niche in New York and earning his place in the New York School of Poets, along with Ashberry, James Schuyler, and Kenneth Koch. His qualifications in music and writing from his learnings at Harvard would lead him to become curator at the museum.

“There is fire in O'Hara’s poems, a prophetic and spiritual fire, the very quality the wiseacre, Frank O'Hara, would consciously deny, but that’s the post of Emerson, Duncan, Olson, and the tradition, to trick the brain into writing beyond itself, as what the surrealists started to do back to us as their kind of contribution to ‘the new romanticism,’” says Professor Wayne-Daniel Berard of the Worcester County Poetry Association.

He continued to publish, releasing Meditations in an Emergency in 1956 and Lunch Poems in 1964. Lunch Poems was especially witty. Whereas many poets write about death and other sober things, O'Hara loved to write about the little things in life that amused him, that he wished others would find funny as well. Though it was not widely known, he also dabbled in comics to some degree.
His vibrant life was cut short in 1966, at the age of 40, when he was hit by a jeep on the beach on Fire Island, and tragically died of internal injuries.
Charles Olson

One might look back on Charles Olson and say that he was a "poetic thinker." He once applied this term to a writer he idolized, Herman Melville, and Olson himself was much more than just a poet. Not content to just sit still and write, Olson's purpose was to go out into the world and give something back to it. He scrutinized peoples and cultures, he always wanted to know "why?" Why did people act in the manner that they did? What made a society? Much of his life was spent on this quest, and his response to the question was the writing of his epic work, The Maximus Poems.

He dabbled in politics, appreciated art, and taught for most of his life. Perhaps his most valuable contribution to poets of today was his involvement with the Black Mountain School, a progressive school based on the theory that a liberal arts education must take place both inside and outside the college. Olson devoted the last few years of his life to his Maximus Poems, in which he scrutinizes Gloucester, Massachusetts. It was his magnum opus, and he tragically died before he had fully completed it.

If Olson spent most of his life away from his hometown of Worcester, it was for good reason. After being born there in 1910, he spent his time between the city and the coastal fishing town of Gloucester, to which he grew emotionally attached. His childhood was positive, though he and his
family were very poor. He fondly remembers skating on Elm Pond when he was seven years old in the poem "Ode on Nativitiy:"

All cries rise, & the three of us
observe how fast Orion
marks midnight
at the climax
of the sky
while the boat of the moon settles
as red as the southwest
as the orb of her was, for this boy, once
the first time he saw her whole halloween face northeast
across the skating pond as he came down to the ice, December
his seventh year

Later in life, while reading this poem at a poetry reading, Olson would comment, "I am celebrating the city of my birth... Worcester, Massachusetts... I'm just extrapolating an instance of childhood, when I came with my skates on to the ice of Elm Park one night just at the hour of the coming of the night, and the moon, a hot moon... Gee, I'm moved. Wow, I never wrote about Gloucester like this. Do you think I've been wrong all this time? I belong in- my subject is Worcester!" While Olson's words cannot be taken completely seriously, as he remained in Gloucester and not Worcester following this comment, the possibility exists that as he grew older he may have started to forgive the city of his birth.

Olson's hard feelings against Worcester had started with his father, who worked very hard as a postal worker, and his efforts were not always well rewarded. Because he fought for worker's rights, his superiors made an
example of him. The stress and mental anguish that was his father endured led to a string of bad health and his eventual death, which happened just as Charles had come home to Worcester to teach at Clark University. Charles was twenty-five and already had his Master's Degree in English from Wesleyan University, having written as his thesis "The Growth of Herman Melville, Prose Writer and Poetic Thinker." School had seemed to come easy to Charles; he was an honor student at Classical High School, captain of the debate team and class president. His undergraduate years at Wesleyan proved much the same; he was honored with membership into Phi Beta Kappa, and also was an editorial writer for the school newspaper, goalie on the soccer team, an actor and an orator.

Driven by the death of his father, Olson would eventually write the narrative "The Post Office," which detailed the events leading up to the unfortunate death of his father. Many years later, he would be offered the position of Post Office General, which he turned down; he later wished that he might have accepted it, if only long enough to fire the men responsible for his father's misery.

While the events in his father's life caused him to see Worcester in an unfavorable light, he cherished the memories of his summers in Gloucester. Traditionally his family had occupied the "Oceanwood" cottage, and it was here that after the death of her husband Olson's mother would remain for most of her life. They had begun their vacations north when Charles was
approximately five years old. While throughout his life Olson tended to be extremely nomadic, never content to remain in one place for long, Gloucester was the only place where he really set down strong ties of home, and it was the one place to which he always returned.

After the death of his father, Charles enrolled in Harvard and also started teaching there. His nomadic ways sent him off hitchhiking to San Francisco, but he returned to Harvard for the fall semester. After graduating and completing all of the course work for his Ph.D., he received a Guggenheim Fellowship for his studies in Melville and returned home to Gloucester to see his mother. While there he wrote his first poems and an essay on myth, and took off to live in New York the very next day.

It was in New York that his career in politics began to take shape. He became the publicity director for the American Civil Liberties Union, and then moved into a position as chief of the Foreign Language Information Service in the Common Council for American Unity. This allowed him, in 1942, to become the Associate Chief of the Foreign Language Division in the Office of War Information. He began living with Constance Wilcock in a common-law marriage, and quit his job two years after he started it in protest over an issue of censorship.

He bounced right into a new job as the director of the Foreign Nationalities Division Democratic National Committee, and within a year moved to Key West so that he could focus more on his writing. While there,
he was offered the posts of Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and the Post Office Generalship in Roosevelt's administration, both of which he turned down.

He returned to Gloucester to write again. His book on Melville, *Call Me Ishmael*, was published in 1947, and it was shortly after this that the idea to write the *Maximus Poems* was conceived.

He didn’t act on this idea immediately, however, and instead vented about the troubles of his father in his three stories, "Stocking Cap," "Mr. Meyer," and "The Post Office." He announced his intentions to write a book on the way the Indian, the white settler and the negro affected the American West, which he intended to call, "Red, White, & Black." He received his second Guggenheim Fellowship for this project, though the book never came to pass. He then amused himself by writing a dance-play version of *Moby Dick*, called *The Fiery Hunt*.

In September 1948, Olson was invited to lecture at the Black Mountain College, an event that would forever change the course of his life. A college that boasted the likes of Albert Einstein on its board of directors, Black Mountain was a reaction to the traditional schools of the time. The school was informal and promoted communal living, but sought to provide a strong education focusing on liberal and fine arts.
1949 was an eventful year for Olson in that his first book of poetry "Y&X", while very short, was published.

In 1950 he published his influential essay, "Projective Verse," which promoted the theory that poetry should embody the rhythms of natural breath and thought. Olson claimed "A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. . . . the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge. So: how is the poet to accomplish same energy, how is he, what is the process by which a poet get in, at all points energy at least the equivalent of the energy which propelled him in the first place, yet an energy which is peculiar to verse alone and which will be, obviously, also different from the energy which the reader, because he is a third term, will take away?" A perfect example of projective verse is Olson's poem "The Kingfishers."

At this time Olson became interested in some of the Mayan ruins and letters found in the Yucatan Peninsula, and not content to merely read the news, he spent six months there studying them and writing. After returning from Mexico, he took up more responsibilities at Black Mountain, and eventually was promoted to Rector.

In 1953 he published In Cold Hell, In Thicket and began reading drafts of his Maximus Poems at Black Mountain. His poem "The Twist" showed his close ties to Worcester still remaining. "Trolley-cars are my inland waters,"
he says, comparing the trolley cars of Worcester to the rivers of Worcester that are now covered up.

The next year he also published *Mayan Letters* and married Elizabeth Kaiser, a student at Black Mountain. Within another year, his son was born. It was only one year later when the exodus of students and teachers from Black Mountain to San Francisco or New York forced the school to face the coming times and close its doors.

At this point in Olson's life, he became dedicated to writing his *Maximus Poems* and to reading at poetry festivals, touring through the United States and Canada. He became a visiting professor at the State University of New York, Buffalo, and shortly after that move in 1964 his wife Elizabeth was killed in a car accident. He taught there for one more year and then moved back to Gloucester.

That year he attended a conference in Yugoslavia and enjoyed it so much he returned to Europe for several months the following year. While he was there, he participated in poetry readings and colloquias, and also researched the original settlers of Gloucester.

In 1968 he published *Maximus IV, V, and VI* in London. In October 1969 he accepted the post of Visiting Professor at the University of Connecticut, and by Thanksgiving he was admitted to Manchester Hospital and then
transferred to New York Hospital. He died January 10th of the following year of liver cancer.

Olson’s contributions to the world were not just poetry. He truly believed it was every person’s duty to think and reflect about the actions in the world, and deeply contemplated the problems that the everyday person encountered. He wanted to think of ways that American society could improve as a whole, and he had faith in humanity. Though his *Maximus Poems* were never finished, enough of his work for the next installment was available to be published posthumously. Though he could not finish his dream on his own, it is still amazing to think of the marvelous contribution he was not only to poetry but to the liberal and fine arts community of the world.
Olive Higgins Prouty

Though Olive Higgins Prouty is primarily remembered as a romance novelist, she was also a poet, writing her poetry whenever and wherever she could. Her poems were never published during her lifetime, as they were much more intimate writings than the novels she wrote professionally. Perhaps because she could put more of herself into her poetry than in her novels, Prouty’s poems are powerful and emotional, revealing ideas radical for the time in which they were written. Her children, Richard Prouty and Jane Chapin, published her poems in a very limited release in 1997.

Prouty was born in Worcester in 1882 to Katherine Chapin and Milton Prince Higgins, who would raise one of Worcester’s most prominent, and one of Worcester Polytechnic Institute’s most important, families. The Higgins family residence was at the corner of West Street and Salisbury Street, where WPI’s Goddard Hall now stands. Prouty spent most of her childhood deeply connected to WPI as her father was superintendent of the Washburn shops and supervised its very construction. Milton and Katherine Higgins had four children in total, all of whom would go on to make generous contributions to WPI, including Higgins Laboratories, Higgins House, Sanford Riley Hall, a scholarship, and a library fund. Milton Higgins was not only prominent in the development of WPI, but he was also an entrepreneur, buying the Norton Emery Wheel Co. with George Alden in 1885 and serving as its president until his death in 1912.
Prouty's mother was also an active member of the growing Worcester community. Katherine was the superintendent of the Sunday school at the First Congregational Church and insisted upon Olive joining the church at age thirteen. Katherine was also the founder of the Parent Teachers Association, having spoken in many states for the PTA throughout her lifetime.

Prouty was close to her parents despite their busy professional lives, and speaks of her time in Worcester and at WPI with great fondness. Though she had an early interest in rhyme, Prouty did not have much early success at school, and the anxiety that resulted was a precursor to nervous troubles that would come later in her life.

Nevertheless, Olive Higgins graduated from Smith College in 1904 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Literature and returned to Worcester determined to start a writing career. Prouty feared that her marriage to Lewis Prouty would hinder her attempts to write professionally, but Lewis turned out to be supportive and introduced Olive to the editor who would publish her first stories. The Proutys moved to Brookline, Massachusetts soon after their marriage in June, 1907.

Prouty's first novel *Bobbie, General Manager* was published in 1913. She tried to keep up with her writing, but by 1920 Prouty was feeling more and more torn between her writing and her duties to her family. As the Proutys were quite prosperous, Olive had trouble balancing the social obligations that came with prosperity with her family obligations and still
having time to write. When her third daughter Anne died in 1919, she decided to devote herself to the care of her children.

Prouty's youngest daughter Olivia was very dear to her, possibly more so than her other two surviving children. In both her published and unpublished works, she rarely mentioned Richard or Jane, but she wrote quite a bit about Olivia. Olivia's death in 1923 of encephalitis devastated Prouty, and the nervous breakdown that resulted led her to spend some time at the Riggs Foundation in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Her psychiatrist, Dr. Austen Fox Riggs, encouraged her to treat her writing professionally, and Prouty was immeasurably grateful for the new freedom that afforded her.

*Stella Dallas*, one of Prouty's most famous works, was published around this time. It was eventually made into a play in 1924, then a radio serial, and then its first movie incarnation in 1925. In 1937 it was remade with Barbara Stanwyck, and Bette Midler starred in its most recent version, *Stella*, in 1990. Another of her novels, *Now, Voyager*, would be made into a feature film starring Bette Davis.

Throughout much of the 1930s and 1940s Prouty flourished as a writer, publishing prolifically and enjoying the success of her novels. She also took up philanthropy, donating much of the proceeds from her work as well as her time to charitable causes such as the Children's Hospital in Boston. She also endowed a scholarship at Smith College, becoming friends with its recipient, poet Sylvia Plath. Their friendship was long and complex, and
Prouty also paid the medical expenses for Plath's attempted suicide in 1953. Plath and Prouty corresponded frequently, and Prouty was the basis for one of the characters in Plath's *The Bell Jar*.

Throughout this period Prouty continued writing her poems, but because they were intimate and powerful, involving her personal thoughts about her family and her husband, she never published them. Many of her poems were about loving relationships but hinted at the desire for more freedom. She also wrote much about nature, and her own feelings about her life and her perceptions as she aged and grew. Her poems were short, not relying on flowery descriptions but on statements that left a huge impact on the reader, despite that she probably never intended the poems to actually have an audience.

Lewis Prouty died in November 1951, just after Prouty's last novel, *Fabia*, was published. Though Prouty continued to write poetry, she wrote much less in other areas; her personal correspondence declined drastically after Lewis' death.

Olive Higgins Prouty died in Brookline on March 24, 1974. At her bequest and helped by generous donations from her son Richard, the Olive Higgins Prouty Library Fund supports WPI's collection in the humanities.

Richard and Jane knew of and possibly even shared their mother's love of literature. They released Prouty's poems for publication in 1997, and the Friends of the Goddard Library published her collection, *Between the Barnacles and Bayberries: and Other Poems*, at Clark University.
Though Prouty was never known for her poetry in her lifetime, she nevertheless remains as one of Worcester’s most noted authors, and an important piece of WPI and Worcester history.
Fran Quinn

Though he is now living in Butler, Indiana, Fran Quinn helped to make the Worcester poetry scene into what it is today. Not only did he write and publish, he was also instrumental in the formation of the Worcester County Poetry Association, which continues to further the local poetry scene.

Quinn was born in Easthampton, Massachusetts on May 5, 1942. He and his family moved to Clinton when he was six and a half years old. He stayed with his family until his junior year at Assumption College, when he moved to Worcester. Until that point Quinn hadn’t been introduced to much poetry other than the classics. That all changed when he met a professor, Michael True. True, one of the founding members of the Worcester County Poetry Association, knew that his student liked poetry and asked him to join a group of people who had the same interest to start a reading series. This group of people would also include Joseph Langland, Robert Bly, Mary Fell, and others. None of the people in the group yet were writing, though, with the exception of Quinn, and he wasn’t showing his writing to anyone. The interest then was more in the reading, and in bringing more famous writers to the area.

At that point in time, Quinn didn’t know poets were accessible people. He was teaching at St. John’s Preparatory School in Shrewsbury when something happened that would change his entire perspective. Michael True had tickets to see Robert Bly give a reading in the area, but
took ill and offered his tickets to Quinn so he could take some students. Bly gave an incredible reading, taking time as well to explain the poems he read. After meeting Quinn and talking to him, Bly offered to visit St. John's Prep the next time he was in the Worcester area. True to his word, Bly visited St. John's Prep and spent an entire afternoon reading poetry and talking to the enraptured crowd. The experience was so fantastic that even though the school day ended at about two-thirty in the afternoon, no one left until about six o'clock that evening. Quinn was fascinated by the response poetry and poets were getting. With that in mind, when Quinn taught briefly at Rivier College in Nashua, New Hampshire, one of the major things he did was institute a poetry program.

During this time, the Worcester County Poetry Association was busily trying to meet as many poets as its members could. It was Michael True who understood where the poets were, but the exciting thing was that Quinn and Company were actually meeting them. They would do reading ahead of time to "not sound like complete idiots" while talking to them. However, though the Association was running all these readings, the organization was entirely volunteer – no one got paid. Quinn, due to a bet made at a Friendly's restaurant, was wrangled into becoming the Association's third president and realized that there was much work to be done. Paying attention to the fact that the name of the group was the Worcester County Poetry Association, Quinn wanted to get poetry and poetry readings out to the rest of the county. He managed to spread readings out all over to place,
as far as Athol and Gardner, but it was a hectic schedule. Between September and June they had 57 readings all over the county. This meant that they were sometimes doing more than one reading a week, and all of it was free.

While Quinn was teaching, he was introduced to the state arts councils of Rhode Island and Massachusetts. His last teaching position during this time period was in Rhode Island, but he was heavily involved with poetry in Massachusetts, and his involvement with both of the state arts councils meant he was crossing state lines with poetry. He was taking work he was doing with the Poetry Association to Rhode Island, and taking materials he used with his classes to the Poetry Association. He was made to stop by both State Arts Councils. After Quinn quit teaching, he was forced to take odd jobs such as a janitor and bookmobile driver to make ends meet.

In 1888 when Butler University offered Quinn to come out for one semester a year to do teaching and run a reading series, he jumped at the chance. It was an area of work he preferred to be in, and there was nothing comparable to it in the Worcester area. It was also a job, offering more money than the odd jobs he was taking. The odd semesters turned into a full time position in 1992, so Quinn moved permanently to Indianapolis.

Because of the poetry association, Mary Fell, David Williams, Chris Gilbert, and Fran Quinn got together and starting writing and trading their own poems. That generation of writers was very influential in the poetry scene. At that point poetry was more of a hidden scene in New England, but
the Vietnam War situation brought out poets in ways that hadn't been previously visible to the budding poetry association.

Quinn cites as his three biggest influences: Joe Langland, Robert Francis, and Robert Bly. Quinn wasn't even aware of what and who poets really were until he was in graduate school because not much poetry was taught in school other than the classics. That Robert Bly was generous enough to stay and continue talking with the children after the conference put Quinn in closer proximity with poets than he'd ever had to that point. Quinn and his friends would ask visiting poets who they thought they should be reading, and would then be introduced to the next literary movement almost as it was happening.

Though Fran Quinn was the first of his group of contemporaries to publicly call himself a poet, he wasn't sure he really believed it himself. He was immersed in the poetry scene but didn't know what exactly a poet did. It took quite a while for him to realize that it was what he really wanted to do.

Fran Quinn has published one volume and one chapbook of his poetry: The Goblet Crying for Wine, edited by Robert Bly and published in 1995, and the chapbook, Milk of the Lioness in 1982. He was also featured with Mary Fell in the Spring/Summer 2001 edition of Diner, a journal of poetry put out by the Worcester County Poetry Association. Quinn's writing style is frank and direct, the simplicity of the words he uses highlighting the complexity of the topics presented both on the surface of his work and
between the lines. Many of his poems, especially in *the Goblet Crying for Wine*, are dedicated to friends, showing that his group of contemporaries from his Worcester poetry days will not be forgotten.

Fran Quinn is still living in Indianapolis, and teaches full time at Butler University.
To an outsider L. E. Sissman may seem an unlikely candidate for an award winning poet. Born Louis Edward Sissman in Detroit on New Year’s Day in 1928, he had an enormous vocabulary and love of facts. His vocabulary led him to victory in the National Spelling Bee in 1941 where he “bested some poor little girl from...Kentucky on an easy word (‘chrysanthemum,’ as I remember).” Two years later at the age of fifteen he became a Quiz Kid on national radio, which he later describes as an exploitation of American children by their teachers and parents.

After that Sissman was accepted to Harvard University. At sixteen years old and a gangly six foot four inches tall, he was the youngest person ever to be accepted Harvard. He, however, wasn’t emotionally ready for college and was kicked out two years later in 1946. Though his first attempt at college life was unsuccessful he realized he had found his home in Boston.

For the next year he worked in the Boston Public Library and spent his free time writing poetry and growing up. In 1947 he was readmitted to Harvard and graduated cum laude in 1949. While there he was awarded the Garrison Prize in poetry and was elected class poet. He was also married for the first time in 1948.
During the 1950s Sissman spent some time in New York, where he unhappily worked at Prentice-Hall as a copywriter and copyeditor. After that he worked at another New York publishing company, and when it went under, he returned to Boston. For the next few years Sissman worked at many odd jobs, such as campaigning for John F. Kennedy, and selling vacuums, until he was hired by an advertising company, and was hooked for life. He also found happiness with his new wife, Anne, and settled in Still River, a small town in Worcester County.

He continued to work in advertising exercising his wit and “verbal dexterity,” along with a knowledge of products and how things worked for the rest of his life. He also began writing poetry again. By 1964 he had compiled a typescript of poetry called *Homage to Cambridge*.

In 1965 Sissman was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease. This news changed his outlook on life and the mood of his poetry, in which he speaks about his family, his home, and many other things including school, and death. He felt that this disease introduced him to a new chapter in his life: death. From this point he wrote poetry “incessantly, as if his life depended on it” according to Edward Hirsch. In his own words, “Instead of a curtain falling, a curtain rose. And stayed up, revealing a stage decked in light.” It was during this time that he published his first book, *Dying: An Introduction* (1968).
He wouldn’t let his illness keep him from living life. He continued to work at the Creative Vice President for Quinn and Johnson Advertising in Boston. He also wrote many book reviews for *The New Yorker* and nearly sixty monthly columns for *The Atlantic Weekly*. Many of these columns, which depicted everything in his life from being a Quiz Kid to selling Deshler vacuums in Northern Vermont, were later published in a collection entitled *Innocent Bystander: The Scene from the ‘70’s*. Poetry continued to flow out of his pen until 1974, when his “Muse left his body.”

For the next two years Sissman battled with Hodgkin’s disease until he passed away at the age of forty-eight. His death, however, did not bring an end to his poetry. His final collection, *Hello Darkness*, was published in 1978.
If there is a poet among the Worcester group who represents the small town, Bill Tremblay is surely that man. His poem, “There is Only One Endless Poem” speaks of this.

My town is called Southbridge
its streets and gutters
run with the rain
of my memory

every space in it definite enough
to be a place
has an episode of the poem
hidden like a demigod in it

I make my Via Delorosa
through the cobbling streets of this town
how it flowed into me
how the outside world like the Quinebaug River
flooded my town of ecstasy
away.

Bill Tremblay was born and raised in Southbridge, and grew to love the town of his birth. “Southbridge is a great place to be from,” he said. “I feel that I owe a great deal to the community for providing such a good place to grow up in. It’s a place where parents cared about their children and people cared about education.” As he grew older, he idolized the local football great Bill Swiacki, and went to Columbia University on a football scholarship. It was there that he was introduced to the works of T.S. Eliot. “I was astounded. I hadn’t realized you could do that in poetry, make it so dramatic, internal, suggest so much about loneliness and alienation. It was a
revelation." Also while he was at Columbia he was introduced to Jack Kerouac, a poet who had also attended Columbia University on a football scholarship, but he had dropped out due to injury. Surprisingly, Tremblay would also follow in the footsteps of his newfound hero, dropping out due to injury. He then transferred to Clark University, in Worcester, Massachusetts.

At Clark he was very successful. He published his work in Helicon and also The Clark Review. By graduation he had received the Hoyt Poetry Prize.

Tremblay was writing his poems in isolation while he was teaching at a number of schools around the region, including Southbridge High School, Cole Trade School, Sutton High School Tantasqua Regional High School, Sturbridge and Leicester Junior College. A friend told him that he should contact fellow poet Robert Bly for suggestions. "He was enormously helpful to me. I took a lot of encouragement from him," said Tremblay. Robert Bly would also later introduce Tremblay to another successful Worcester poet, Fran Quinn.

Bill Tremblay supported the student strike after the Kent State and Jackson State killings, and was asked to leave Leicester Junior College; this prompted him to enroll at University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Though he was studying for his Ph.D. in American Literature and had even completed all of the course work for his degree, he switched to the MFA
when his newest manuscript was accepted for publication “in a gesture of solidarity with my new identity as a ‘published poet.’”

While at the University of Massachusetts, one of his teachers was Joseph Langland: “Over the months I came to admire Joe more and more for his generosity and his commitment to the community of poets, especially in Worcester, where he was a frequent and beloved visitor.”

With Langland he worked on a study of Charles Olson. “Joe was often in disagreement with Olson’s ‘projectivist’ poetics since there was no accounting for music, for the sounds poetic language can make,” said Tremblay.

When Tremblay began teaching again, he drew on what he’d learned from the teaching skills of Langland, whom he admired greatly, trying to model his teaching style on him. “I dare to think that in my better moments I modeled myself on Joe’s example as a poetry teacher. He helped poets become what they wanted to be, rather than stuff them into one preconceived mold.”

At the current date, Bill Tremblay has published 6 full length volumes of poetry and has another on the way. He has been teaching at Colorado State University for thirty years, and his work there has earned him the John F. Stern Distinguished Professor Award for his years of service.
"The Lost Boy," from his last book, Rainstorm Over the Alphabet, has been selected for inclusion in BEST AMERICAN POETRY 2003, which will be published in September, just about the same time as his latest book, Door of Fire, will be published. He also hopes to come back to Worcester to do book signings at that time.

At Colorado State, he has served three times as Director of the MFA Program in Creative Writing at Colorado State University. Outside of the college, for fifteen years, he was Poetry and Managing Editor of Colorado Review.

Though he is far removed from his childhood home, his memories are clearly strong. "I stepped outside to cool off, remembering my own neighborhood when I was a kid & how easy it is to lose the community," he reflects in "The Community" from The Anarchist Heart.

In "The Eightieth Day of July" from The Anarchist Heart Tremblay talks about his experience being jailed for auto-theft in Worcester. It was not being accused of stealing a car that seems to upset him the most, rather he remembers Cynthia waking up and being angry with him, saying, "You're just going away, like you always do."

And yet Tremblay's poems are often tender. "The Third Son" from The Anarchist Heart, is a fitting example of this tender tone. "The struggles have not ended. I have taken the world into me & the armies of darkness &
of light forever march toward each other in my fears & hopes whenever I write a poem. But this morning, the morning you were born, I had this vision I could be a messenger. If you wonder why I look at you & smile, unaccountably, sometimes, it’s because I see that.”
Book Recommendations

Elizabeth Bishop

Because the Gordon Library already has an extensive Elizabeth Bishop collection, there are not many recommendations for acquisitions related to her.

Recommendations:


Mary Fell:

The George C. Gordon Library doesn't have any copies of any of either of Mary Fell's collections. I have located a signed first edition of The Persistence of Memory that I feel should be added to the special collections. There are also many other copies of this book available on abe.com as well as amazon.com. I have been unable to locate a copy of the chapbook The Triangle Fire.

Recommendations:

Stanley Kunitz:

In my opinion the George C. Gordon Library has a very representative collection of the Stanley Kunitz's works. There are many first editions, signed copies and new copies of most of his books available from many of the online bookstore as well as local bookstores. At this time I don't feel that there needs to be any changes made to what is currently there, however, I have found some interesting items that could be added.

Recommendations:

Kunitz, Stanley The Wellfleet Whale NY: Sheep Meadow Press, 1983. Signed by Author. First edition, first prnt. The deluxe hardcover issue. Signed by Kunitz on the title page. With an 8x10 glossy black & white publicity photo of Kunitz. Renate Ponsold's stamp and her holograph notation "Stanley Kunitz 1993" and the number of the negative from which she made this print on reverse. Also signed by Kunitz on the reverse. The print has a few shallow tiny edge creases. The book is an unread copy in Fine condition. ISBN:0935296379 Bookseller Inventory #120227
Price: US$ 175.00 (From abe.com)

Kunitz, Stanley. Selected Poems: 1928-1958 Little, Brown Boston (1958). First edition, fourth printing 8vo, orange cloth spine lightened very slightly, else fine in a lightly dampstained dust jacket, with two small tears. The poet's Pulitzer Prize-winning collection (so stated on the dust jacket). This is copy has been inscribed cryptically by Kunitz on the first leaf to the novelist John Hawkes: "For Jack Hawkes, of the Devil's Party, whom it is a pleasure to join in the Foxfire Festival of the Old Wasatch Chapter. - Stanley Kunitz, Salt Lake City, June 1962.". Bookseller Inventory #200466
Price: US$ 157.50 (From abe.com)

Price: US$ 150.00 (From abe.com)
Price: US$ 115.00 (From abe.com)

Price: US$ 75.00 (From abe.com)

**Frank O'Hara**

The Frank O'Hara collection, as it were, is very good but the library could stand to acquire some first editions, especially if they were signed. I recommend the volumes below.

**Recommendations:**

O'HARA, Frank. **Lunch Poems**. City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1964. First edition. 12mo. Wrappers - there was no hardbound issue. The Pocket Poets Series - Number Nineteen. Thirty-eight poems. 1500 copies were printed. Rear cover faintly soiled. Near fine. Bookseller Inventory #OHARAFRA004246
Price: US$ 120.20 (From abe.com)

[Nakian, Reuben] O'Hara, Frank, Illustrated by about 100 b/w illus
Price: US$ 125.00 (From abe.com)

Price: US$ 75.00 (From abe.com)

Brainard, Joe, ed. Ted Berrigan, Bill Berkson, Frank O'Hara, et al
Price: US$ 75.00 (From abe.com)
**Price:** US$ 65.00 (From abe.com)

Charles Olson

The Charles Olson collection at the Gordon Library is pretty impressive and has a good number of first editions. I don’t feel that it’s necessary to acquire more, but I am recommending a few exceptional items that I saw.

Recommendations:

OLSON (Charles). **Maximus poems IV, V, VI.** Cape Goliard Press, [10a Fairhazel Gardens,] London [N.W.6,] 1968. Demy 4to; 108 leaves, unpagedinated; colophon leaf followed by two blanks at end; textured cream card wrappers, cut flush, printed on front wrapper in moss green and black, lettered black on spine; deep orange end-papers, the outermost not pasted down. Very nice copy. The ordinary issue; there was also an issue limited to 100 copies numbered and signed by the author and case-bound, and an issue limited to 26 copies, lettered A-Z, signed by the author, hand-bound, and boxed. Precedes all other editions. All books first editions except as stated. Bookseller Inventory #LRT515445
**Price:** US$ 154.80 (From abe.com)

**Price:** US$ 85.00 (From abe.com)

Olive Higgins Prouty

One can find most of her novels online at the Advanced Book Exchange. Depending on edition, printing, and condition, they will range from $2 to over $100. Below are some samples:

**Price:** $30.00
The same novel as a first edition from a rare book shop in Gloucestershire, United Kingdom costs $102.79

This novel is recommended because of its fame – it was made into a movie in 1942 starring Bette Davis and Claude Rains. One can also get a VHS copy of the movie from amazon.com for about fifteen dollars.

**Stella Dallas.**
There are many listings for *Stella Dallas* on abebooks.com, as it was Prouty's most famous work, and has been adapted for film three times. Prices for copies of Stella Dallas run the gamut from five dollars to one hundred fifty dollars, for a signed first edition in excellent condition. I recommend the $30 version, still in great condition, which can be bought either from The Book Faire in Placentia, CA or DJ Collins, Bookseller, in Pittsfield, MA. Another option is a volume that includes "illustrations from the photoplay" also being sold at $30 from Joseph F. Scheetz, Antiquarian Books, Boardman, OH.

This is a first edition and a signed presentation copy from Olive Higgins Prouty to her literary agent, Dorothy Olding.
Price: $175.00 from abebooks.com, James Pepper Rare Books, Inc., ABAA, Santa Barbara, CA
Since the library already has a few copies of *Pencil Shavings*, this is not a high priority. However, I do not believe the library has anything signed by Prouty, as all of Prouty's correspondence is held at Clark University. It is very expensive though.

**Between the Barnacles and Bayberries: and Other Poems.** Worcester: Friends of the Goddard Library, 1997
This is a must-have, as it is the only collection of Prouty's poetry ever published.

There are quite a few copies of this book at Clark University's Goddard Library, Archives and Special Collections.
The contact there is Mott Linn.
He can be reached at mlinn@clarku.edu or at (508) 793-7572.
He will sell copies of the book for $15.00.
Fran Quinn

Though the library already has a copy of Milk of the Lioness, I do not believe we have a signed copy.

No place online seem to have any copies, new or used, of The Goblet Crying for Wine, the volume of Quinn's poetry that the library does not own. However, since we do have contact information for the author, it might be possible to contact him and ask for a copy or information on how to get a copy.

Recommendations:


L. E. Sissman:

There are no copies of any of L. E. Sissman's works available in the George C. Gordon Library. Most of his collections are out of print, but can be found on abe.com, however Night Music is available new for about $14.00. I have found several copies of his other works that I feel should be added to the library's collections. Many of my recommendations are merely copies of his books, but I have included a broadside of the poem The Museum of Comparative Zoology.

Recommendations:


Price: US$ 85.00 (From abe.com)

This is a collection of columns Sissman wrote for *The Atlantic Weekly*.  

Sissman, L. E. *Collected Poems* Little. CLOTH Second Edition. Four copies available. All have a visible but light stain on top edge. Otherwise it looks like new. Bookseller Inventory #4517  Price: US$ 16.00 (From abe.com)


Sissman, L.E. *Pursuit of Honor* Little, Brown and Company. 1st ed. Hardback,W/DJ Book and DJ in VG cond. Ex library in protective mylar jacket. This is Sissman's third collection of poetry. The theme is Honor-what does that mean to a nation, a culture, a young man, and old man, a woman, a poet? POETRY.Books shipped immediately upon receipt of payment . 100% satisfaction guaranteed. Bookseller Inventory #30643  Price: US$ 11.21 (From abe.com)

**Bill Tremblay**

Bill Tremblay's work is not very well known around Worcester and it is vital that the WPI library acquire some of his works. He has a new book, *Door of Fire* that will be published in September of 2003 and I strongly recommend that the Gordon Library purchase it. Also, he is planning a trip to Worcester at that time and it would be beneficial to ask him to sign any copies of his books we have acquired by then.

**Recommendations:**

Tremblay, Bill *Crying in the Cheap Seats* University of Massachusetts Press, 1971. First edition Fine and bright in very close to find dustjacket with crisp text throughout. A personal copy of the poet Joseph Langland, signed on the opening flyleaf. Bookseller Inventory #16940  Price: US$ 20.00 (From abe.com)
Tremblay, Bill, *Rainstorm Over the Alphabet*  Trade Paperback  
Publisher: Lynx House Press  
Date Published: 10/2001  
ISBN: 0899241107  
Description: 84 p.  price: $11.34  
(alibris.com)  New Book
Conclusion

This project was broken down into several segments. For the first term, we prepared and selected our poets.

During the second term, we researched our poets, read their works and works about them, and went to area libraries to peruse special collections. The libraries included the Worcester Public Library, the Goddard Library at Clark University, the Jacob Edwards Memorial Library in Southbridge, MA. Specials collections at these libraries were the Olive Higgins Prouty Collection at the Goddard Library, the Bill Tremblay collection at Jacob Edwards, and assorted books in the Worcester Room at the Worcester Public Library.

We conducted one phone interview and two email interviews. All of our interviews were conducted with the actual subject. Our interview with Fran Quinn was over the phone (Appendix B). Our interview with Mary Fell (Appendix C) and Bill Tremblay (Appendix D) were conducted via email as we found it difficult to arrange times when we could speak to one another.

In the final term of our project, we compiled our information together to write this report. We also completed an overhaul on the web publication and updated it with our information, as well as pulling together pictures to use. This web publication should help provide WPI students, faculty and staff with information they may need about Worcester Area
Writers. It is our hope that it will continue to be expanded upon, until one day it may be the comprehensive guide to literature in Worcester.
Future Project Recommendations

The web publication should be an evolving work that continues to be updated and added to in the coming years. We especially hope that in the case of writers who are not yet deceased or still publishing that these profiles will be maintained as the years progress.

It is our hope that new sections be added, such as Worcester Area Playwrights or Worcester Area Songwriters, as well as the addition of other writers to the existing sections.

For prose writers, we recommend the writers Alice Morse Earle, John Dufresne, Jack O'Connell, Don Asher, Isaiah Thomas, George Bancroft, Abigail Kelly Foster, and Stephen Symonds Foster, be considered for further work.

For poets, we recommend the poets Corrine Bostic, Chris Gilbert, Carl Johnson, Joseph Langland, Jean Lozoraitis, Louise Monfredo, and Carleton Ford Shaw, be considered for future additions.
Web Publication Information

There was a web publication built for the *Worcester Authors on the Web* already in existence before we began this project. We chose to take this publication and completely revamp it for our project. We found that the publication had a dated feel to it, which reflected the times of the authors already on the site. We wanted a more modern feel that could encompass the different generations that the web publications would now reflect with the addition of the poets.

The publication now contains six authors and nine poets, of which the poets are discussed in this paper. The publication also now has a layout that readily allows more writers to be added.

Each writer's page consists of an introduction page, a biography page, a page of photographs and a list of the writer's works. If there were no photographs, then this page was omitted. The web publication can be viewed in Appendix F.
Bibliography


Appendix A

Library Book Listings

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Bishop, Elizabeth; *Complete Poems*, 1969.
Bishop, Elizabeth; *Exchanging Hats: Paintings*, 1996.
Bishop, Elizabeth; *Geography III*, 1976.
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Bishop, Elizabeth; *Poems: North & South, A Cold Spring*, 1955.
Kunitz, Stanley; *The collected poems*, 2000.
Kunitz, Stanley; *A kind of order, a kind of folly*, 1975.
Kunitz, Stanley; *Next-to-last things*, 1985.
Kunitz, Stanley; *Passing through*, 1995.
Kunitz, Stanley; *The testing-tree*, 1971.
Kunitz, Stanley; *The Wellfleet whale and companion poems*, 1983.
O'Hara, Frank; *Art Chronicles*, 1975.
O'Hara, Frank; *Early Writing*, 1977.
O'Hara, Frank; *Lunch Poems*, 1964.
O'Hara, Frank; *Nakian*, 1966.
O'Hara, Frank; *New Spanish painting and sculpture*, 1960.
O'Hara, Frank; *Poems retrieved*, 1977.
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Olson, Charles; *Additional prose: A bibliography on America, Proprioception & other notes & essays*, 1974.

Olson, Charles; *Archaeologist of morning*, 1970.

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Olson, Charles; *Company of men*, 1958.

Olson, Charles; *D. H. Lawrence & the high temptation of the mind*, 1980.

Olson, Charles; *Distances: poems*, 1961.

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Olson, Charles; *Fiery Hunt and other plays*, 1977.

Olson, Charles; *For Edward Dahlberg*, 1948.

Olson, Charles; *Horses of the sea*, 1976.

Olson, Charles; *Human Universe*, 1958.

Olson, Charles; *In Cold Hell, in thicket, poems*, 1967.


Olson, Charles; *Maximus Poems*, 1960.

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Olson, Charles; *Selected Writings*, 1967.

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Prouty, Olive Higgins; *Stella Dallas*, 1923.

Prouty, Olive Higgins; *White Fawn*, 1931.

Tremblay, Bill; Crying in the cheap seats, 1971.
Tremblay, Bill; Second sun: new and selected poems, 1985.

Assumption Library
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Kunitz, Stanley; A kind of order, a kind of folly. 1975.
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Quinn, Fran; *Milk of the Lioness*; 1982.
Biographical info:
Born east hampton ma may 5 1942.
Moved clinton when 6 1/2.
Stayed there til junior year in col. assumption. then moved worcester
Moved indiana 1988...did a semester at a time

Question: how did you get involved in worcester poetry scene?
mike true and sam bachrach helped F.Q. involved in poetry scene.
had mike as teacher at assumption. grollier bookshop in cambridge (mike
and sam met). one of only totally poetry stores in US.
run from a dude (gordon?) from w boylston. had gone to harvard, stayed in
harvard area.
everyone dropped in (eliot, auden). became a hangout for poetry.
mike true (gordon was in late 70s-early 80s) would drop in. gordon would
heckle him about doctor.
sam would come in, gordon would heckle about professor.
(finally introduced to each other)
sam wanted to publish delicate little books and broadsides of poems (real
expensive, fine printing)
mike wanted public readings. the two got together and started talking back
and forth.
worc county poet association was born. then.
FQ was a student of Mike, True knew that he liked poetry, asked to join group
knew bly, langland, few others... started reading series, sam underwrote it.
started off interested in poetry, not necessarily writing. FQ might have been
only one writing at time
but wasn't showing to anyone
interested in bringing bigger writers to the area.

back then didn't even know poets existed in the world.
FQ met bly because was teaching at St. John's prep in Shrewsbury.... because Mike had tix but got sick.
Robert bly to give a reading down there, offered for FQ to take some students down.
RB gave incredible reading, explained the poems, then he decided to come to St. John's next time was in area.
did an incredible afternoon reading, last couple hours of school was Robert reading poetry and talking
everyone stayed after school about 3 hours (got out about 2:30, no one left til about 6)...
fq was fascinated with responses was getting

when he taught at college in Nashua, one of things he did was institute poetry.
it was Mike who understood where poets were and stuff, but they were actually meeting them.
would do reading ahead of time to not sound like complete idiots while talking to them.

Question: How did you end up in Indiana?
in early days of worc county poet ass, all volunteer, no one got paid... but ran all these readings
fq was 3rd pres, wrangled into it... bet at friendly's... claimed they would help. but lots of work.
he started paying attention to fact that they were worc county... wanted to get readings out to the county.
spread the thing all over the place... had 57 readings between sep and june. were doing more than one a week.
were all over the place. (athol, gardner, worc)
all of it was free :: fq was teaching for a bit, then stopped. got odd jobs. working poets in schools arts councils in ri and ma at beginning, but then made rule couldn't be in 2 states at same time.
last teaching job was in RI. when introduced to states arts councils. (assigned to RI council)
when started to do same version in worc, went thru mass councils of arts & hu...
than was running across state lines w/ poetry, was made to stop odd jobs: bookmobile driver, janitor, to make ends meet.
when butler asked to come out for semester to do teaching and run reading series, was making more money.
and doing it in area of work he preferred to do it in.... isn't an equivalent job in worc area.

in worc review article dedicated to fq... wanted to thank him for work he'd done.

Question: what were your biggest influences?
growing up, almost none - poetry wasn't really well taught in schools those days.
when went to col, mike basically introduced fq to poetry other than classics.
wasn't a lot of activity until mike started getting them thinking about poetry -- live ones and not just dead ones.
lit history to the city that they were living in. that they didn't realize.
wasn't until grad school that fq got really aware of fact of what/who the poets were.
3 most influential: joe langland (still alive, down in western ma - amherst)
robert francis (died 1987) very reclusive man, sweet guy. lived in cabin (read thoreau in college.) wrote, got published, was total vegetarian, grown most of his food in backyard. other things would shovel walks and give music lessons for. very clear writing
robert bly (giving reading at butler on monday) have been friends since 1968 when met him at conference.
very strong influence. in his concept of what poetry would be.

mary fell, david williams, chris gilbert, mary benina got together b/c of poet ass. and started writing own stuff.
started swapping own poems.
denise levertov important (living in cambridge, friends with mike) died 1997. b. 1923ish.
that generation of writers, very strongly influential.
vietnam war situation -- brought poets out in ways they hadn't been aware of.
poetry scene was pretty much a hidden scene in new england...
first poet fq he saw live was at wpi. senior year in col... archibald mcleash.
(had been friends with eliot, pound, williams)
was grand dean of am poetry at that point. lived in western ma, but was a lawyer by trade, became diplomat in roosevelt admin.
when pound was tried for treason, was mcleash that got judge declare him insane and unable to stand trial.
mcleash was one of big guns of the time... never influenced fq's writing but seeing him and having studied his poetry in school was stunning.
mc was tall imposing handsome man... was in his mid 70s at time and was grand dean of whole generation.
they saw him... wasn't until mike came and started inviting poets on regular basis that they really began to understand that it was a possibility to be able to do.
bly... being so generous to talk with kids at conference, put fq in much more proximity w/ poets than he'd had at the point.
they started reading everyone they could get their hands on... would discuss who they'd want to meet next.. wanted to sit and talk with these guys.
in a sense lucked out b/c they had a living anthology of poetry, had chance to meet guys and talk about stuff, meet in bars and discuss readings.
fer movement at its beginning, women were really pumping women poets they admired.
almost everyone who came in, they asked, who do you think we ought to be reading? would get next movement.
beserky grassroots style ... all of them were serious about own writing and getting it going, were still surprised when they actually produced a poem.
none of thought were ever poets. fq when dropped out of teaching, went back to live in clinton for a couple years, ri council had just hired..
fq went library in clinton (to get a card) filling out form, "occupation" -- took 3 or 4 min to write down.. "poet"... librarian said no money in it, but fq said "yeah, that's what i am"... took 5 or 6 min to convince her it was ok to put poet down.
fq was first one who had guts to call self a poet publicly.
didn't really think of selves as poets, thought of selves as regular human beings who occasionally wrote poems.
took while to realize more and more that it was what they really wanted to do.

mary fell was first one to get real job as poet, now in richmond indy. gotten mfa, gotten job. everyone pleased for her.

even thouth called poet at that poet, not sure he really believed... immersed in stuff, but didn't know what a poet did.
took a while.
Appendix C
Mary Fell Transcript
Email Interview Feb 8 2003

Can I have just a brief biography (including schooling, family, work, etc.)?

I was born in Worcester (City Hospital) on September 22, 1947. My mother was Elizabeth “Betty” (Delong) Fell. She came to Worcester from Fairhaven, Mass, during the Depression to find work. She worked in many jobs, mostly as a secretary when I was growing up. My father was Paul Fell. He was a Worcester kid, Irish American. He worked for the City of Worcester as a custodian and served for many years on the city Retirement Board. He was chairman when he died. I have a brother Paul who is 20 months older than me. He is a cartoonist, and he has lived in Nebraska since he went to college out there. We grew up mostly in Main South. I went to Downing Street School for kindergarten and then to St. Peter’s through high school. Interestingly, my mother, a Protestant, sent us there only because at that time you had to come home for lunch if you went to Downing St., but you could take your lunch to St. Peter’s. She needed to work, and so we went to St. Peter’s. I went to Worcester State and majored in English. Graduated in 1969. Was a social worker for the Welfare Department, working in family and children’s services, for five years, and worked another couple of years in a city social service project until I went to graduate school in 1977. Received my MFA from UMass Amherst in 1981. Have taught here at IU East since then and am now a professor of English. I’m divorced, no kids, although I am a doting “auntie” to several of my friends children and I have two cats, Chucky and Minnie.

What was growing up in Worcester like for you?

Do you have a few years? The Worcester I grew up in was pretty small, or so it seemed to me. My life took place in Main South – St. Peter’s School and church, the Park Theater, Coes Pond, Beaver Brook, Crystal Park - the usual neighborhood landmarks. There were excursions, of course – but they were all on the bus line – my family never owned a car. Downtown seemed magical then. And there was skating at Elm Park and the Charity Circus at the Auditorium, where my father worked. We got to go downstairs and see the elephants and play with the chimpanzees. The Second World War seemed very present in my life although I was born after it – big parades every Memorial or Veterans Day downtown, Audie Murphy and war movies, the granite memorial markers on every street corner, playing soldiers and war. The children I knew and played with were mostly like me – second or
third generation Americans who we rarely ethnically diluted by more than half – Irish or Polish or Italian. I was a rare one, Irish and Yankee, whatever Yankee meant. And of course most of Main South was Irish Catholic. I managed a few Protestant friends, although I lived in terror of discovery by the nuns who taught me. I didn’t know anyone Jewish until I went to college. Or anyone Black. Or Spanish-speaking. Going to college in the 60’s, even in Worcester, was an education in more ways than one – the anti-war movement, free speech, civil rights, feminism – all of those issues were part of our daily lives.

Are there any aspects of it that influenced your writing?

All of it, I’d say. The poems in The Persistence of Memory, many of them, are “about” growing up in Worcester. My identity as being from the working class was a major impetus. I wanted to represent the life and the people I came from in poetry – it wasn’t anything I had encountered in the poetry I studied in college. But the women’s movement in the 70’s helped me see that I could write about the life I knew and about being female—“the personal is political” was the slogan then. So even the poems in that book that aren’t “about” Worcester or my life there are often touch on women’s issues or working class history – like The Triangle Fire, for instance.

When did you become interested in poetry and were there any poets that inspired you?

I started to write poetry in college. I loved poetry and studied it. I tried to write it. But I really didn’t think it was possible then, for someone like me to write poetry. The women’s movement made me think it was possible. And the many poets reading against the war. Worcester was a great place for a budding poet to be in the 70’s. The Worcester County Poetry Association brought scores of poets to the city. I heard all my heroes – Adrienne Rich, Denise Levertov, Ann Sexton, Muriel Rukeyser, Robert Bly, Michael Harper, Galway Kinnell -- you name it, they came to Worcester.

Have you won any awards?

My book, the Persistence of Memory, was a selection of the National Poetry Series in 1983. That’s how it was published. I’ve received many small awards, residences, and so forth. One of the awards I’m most proud of is an Indiana University Award for Distinguished Teaching that I received in 2001.
How many published works do you have?

I have the one book and a chapbook, The Triangle Fire. My other publications since then are all poem in journals.

What inspired you to write about the Triangle Factory fire?

As I said above, I wrote some poems based on or inspired by history. That was one of them. I wrote it while I was in Amherst. A friend and I were talking one day about the Triangle Fire. I went to the library and on a whim looked it up. I found there was a small book by Leon Stein, a non-fiction recreation of the events of the fire. The poem grew directly from that book.

When did you begin teaching?

I actually started teaching in 1975. I took a year off from work and went all over Worcester County at the side of Fran Quinn, one of the founders of the WCPA and my first formal teacher of writing poetry. I had signed up for a fifteen dollar class in poetry writing through the public schools' Night Life program, and there was Fran! Anyway, he took me into all these schools around the county as part of the Poets in the Schools Program. We gave poetry readings and workshops on how to teach poetry – or how not to teach it. Then, in graduate school, I got a teaching assistantship to pay my way through school.

When and why did you head to Indiana?

I came here in 1981, right out of graduate school. It was a one-year job replacing someone on sabbatical. Eventually it became permanent.

Do you miss Worcester?

Sure – I lived there until I was thirty and I came home often after that – it is my hometown. I still have many good friends their – some of my best friends. I come back at least once a year, sometimes more.
Appendix D

Bill Tremblay Transcript

Email Correspondence December 10 2002

Tara Ellsworth:

I'm excited about the possibility of this "Worcester Area Writers" website, and I'd like to know more about the project. I am from Southbridge, Massachusetts, and graduated with a B.A. in English from Clark University in 1962, then took an M.A. in American Literature from Clark [1969].

I was connected to Worcester in the 1960s, and I knew something of the literary heritage--that "canonical" poets [featured in the NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN POETRY] like Charles Olson, Elizabeth Bishop, and Stanley Kunitz were either born there or lived there or had some connection.

I will be in Alabama from January 17th to the 21st. Other than that, you can reach me at watremblay@aol.com, at 970-226-0311 most evenings, or at my mailing address--3412 Lancaster Drive, Ft. Collins, CO 80525-2817. You may also consult WHO'S WHO IN AMERICA and the reference book entitled CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS to get the bare bones of the biography.

Last fall, there was a biographical article/interview about me published in the WORCESTER TELEGRAM, written by John Dignam [my spelling could be off] to announce a series of readings in Massachusetts--at
Salem State College, the Jacob Edwards Memorial Library in Southbridge, and Worcester State College. If you contact Margaret Morrissey or Dick Whitney at the Jacob Edwards Memorial Library in Southbridge I think they can put you onto some website material about me they posted. There was a video of my reading there that's been played on public-access TV in Southbridge which you might upload a portion of onto your website. I don't know how "intense" the planned website is, how technical, &c.

At any rate, you can reach me here as well. I'm not teaching right now because I'm on "transitional retirement." I will start teaching again January 21, 2003.

Sincerely,
Bill Tremblay

BILL TREMBLAY: BRIEF BIO
(enclosed in email)

poems, Door of Fire, is forthcoming from Eastern Washington University Press [2003].


Mr. Tremblay has recently been the recipient of the John F. Stern Distinguished Professor Award for his nearly thirty years service at Colorado State University, during which time he three times served as Director of the MFA Program in Creative Writing at Colorado State University as well as the AWP Program Directors' Council. For fifteen years, he was Poetry and Managing Editor of Colorado Review.

He has been a member of the University of Massachusetts Press literary board, a reader for the annual AWP Poetry Series contest, a juror for the
Wyoming Arts Council's Writing Fellowships, a literary board member of the Colorado Council on the Arts, a member of the Board of Puerto Del Sol, and is currently a Master Poet in "Literacy Through Poetry," a poets-in-the-schools project funded by the Wytter Bynner Foundation. His former students have garnered the Pulitzer Prize, the American Book Award, many National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, Fulbrights, Busch awards, publications through poetry contests, and hold many college and university teaching and editing positions.

He has taught American Literature at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa [Portugal] on a Fulbright-Hays Lectureship, has studied poetics with M.L. Rosenthal at New York University under a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, and has written poetry with support from a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship as well as grants from the Corporation at Yaddo. Forty of his reviews of contemporary American poetry have appeared in Western American Literature, Minnesota Review, Colorado Review, Bloomsbury Review, The AWP Chronicle, and American Book Review. He has read his work at scores of colleges and universities as well as public libraries throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Portugal, including literary festivals at Southern Methodist University, Old Dominion University, Bisbee, Arizona, Portland, OR, and Spokane, WA.

His historical novel, The June Rise [Utah St University Press] has recently been re-issued in a cloth-bound edition from Fulcrum Publishing [Golden, CO] has been widely and favorably reviewed in the press, and he has been featured
on the cover and in an interview in The Bloomsbury Review and on NPR’s “All Things Considered,” by Alan Cheuse.

Email Correspondence December 10 2002

Dear Tara Ellsworth:

How is the plan to expand the Worcester Authors website to include poets going?

If the site is still being built, I'd like to add a detail to my brief bio: my poem, "The Lost Boy," from my last book, RAINSTORM OVER THE ALPHABET [2001], has been selected for inclusion in BEST AMERICAN POETRY 2003, which will be out--incidentally--in September, just about the same time as my next book, DOOR OF FIRE, will be published by Eastern Washington University Press.

My hope is that I can get a reading and/or a bookstore booksigning appearance in Worcester or the area to help promote sales of the new book. I am on transitional retirement and not teaching next fall. I would ask the Worcester County Poetry Society for help, except I don’t know how to contact them. Do they have an email address? a contact person?

Thank you in advance for any information you could give me.

Yours,

Bill Tremblay
Appendix E

Poets Works Listings

Elizabeth Bishop

North & South, 1946

Poems: North & South – A Cold Spring, 1955

The Diary of Helena Morley, 1977

An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry, 1972

The Ballad of the Burglar of Babylon, 1968

Brazil, 1967

The Collected Prose, 1984

The Complete Poems, 1969

Geography III, 1976

One Art : Letters, 1994

Questions of Travel, 1965

Exchanging Hats : Paintings, 1996

Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell, 1991

Mary Fell

The Persistence of Memory, 1983

Triangle Fire, 1983

Stanley Kunitz

Intellectual Things. 1930

Authors Today and Yesterday; A Companion to "Living Authors", 1934

British Authors of the Nineteenth Century, 1936

Passport to War, 1944

"The Waltzer in the House" in New Yorker, January 6, 1951

Authors Today and Yesterday, 1955
Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature, 1955
Selected Poems 1928-1958, 1959
Kunitz, Stanley J. and Howard Haycraft The Junior Book of Authors, 1959
British Authors Before 1800, 1965
The Testing Tree, 1971
The Terrible Threshold: Poems, 1974
The Coat Without Seams, 1930-1972, 1974
A Kind of Order, A Kind of Folly: Essays and Conversations, 1975
The Lincoln Relics, 1978
The Poems of Stanley Kunitz 1928-1978, 1979
Antaeus. #37 1980
The Wellfleet Whale. 1983
Next-To-Last Things New Poems and Essays, 1985
Interviews and Encounters with Stanley Kunitz, 1993
Passing Through: The Later Poems New and Selected, 1995
Poems of Akhmatova, 1997
Collected Poems, 2000
Touch Me, 2002

Frank O'Hara
A City Winter and Other Poems, 1951
Oranges: 12 pastorals, 1953
Meditations in an Emergency, 1957
Second Avenue, 1960
Odes, 1960
Lunch Poems, 1964
Love Poems, 1965
In Memory of My Feelings, 1967
The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara, 1971
The Selected Poems of Frank O'Hara, 1974
Standing Still and Walking in New York, 1975
Early Writing, 1977
Poems Retrieved, 1977
Selected Plays, 1978
Amoros Nightmares of Delay: Selected Plays, 1997

Charles Olson
Call Me Ishmael, 1947
Y & X, 1950
Projective Verse, 1950
The Mayan Letters, 1953
In Cold Hell, in Thicket, 1953
The Distances, 1960
The Maximus Poems, 1960
A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn, 1964
Human Universe and Other Essays, 1965
Selected Writings, 1966
The Maximus Poems, IV, V, VI, 1968
Casual Mythology, 1969
The Special View of History, 1970
Additional Prose, 1974
The Post Office: A Memoir of His Father, 1974
The Maximus Poems, Volume Three, 1975
The Maximus Poems, 1983
The Collected Poems of Charles Olson, 1987

Olive Higgins Prouty
Bobbie: General Manager, 1913
Conflict, 1927
Fabia, 1951
Ellsworth, Joyce & Wu

Home Port, 1947
Lisa Vale, 1938
Now, Voyager, 1941
Pencil Shavings: Memoirs. 1961
The Star in the Window, 1918
Stella Dallas, 1923
White Fawn, 1931
Between the Barnacles and Bayberries: and other poems, 1995

Fran Quinn
The Goblet Crying for Wine, 1995
At the End of the Worlds, 1994
Milk of the Lioness, 1982

L. E. Sissman
Typescript Homage to Cambridge 1964
Dying: An Introduction, 1968
Innocent Bystander: The Scene from the '70's, 1975
Scattered Returns, 1969
Pursuit of Honor, 1971
Hello Darkness, 1978

Bill Tremblay
Crying in the Cheap Seats, 1971
The Anarchist Heart, 1977
Home Front, 1978
Sacred Sun: New and Selected Poems, 1985
Duhamel: Ideas of Order in Little Canada, 1986
Rainstorm Over the Alphabet, 2001
Door of Fire, 2003
Worchester has an exciting literary history that many people are unaware of. This website was designed to aid students, faculty, and other scholars in finding information on Worchester area authors and their works. Look for this website to be expanded to include more authors in the future.
Psychoanalysis makes quite simple people feel they're complex.

-S. N. Behrman

The ability to laugh at its own pretensions and shortcomings is a true mark of the civilized nation, as it is of the civilized human.

- S. N. Behrman

Shaarai Torah Synagogue
Robert Benchley

Biography

Works

Photos


Autobiography, by Robert Benchley
I never felt the need to go elsewhere for material... I love the feeling of going down-town and meeting someone I was in first-grade with...

-Robert Cormier, in an interview, July 2000
...books are only the shadow and life the real thing. I believe this as strongly as any belief I hold. I also believe that writing becomes worthwhile and vitalized only through a full and exciting life.

- Esther Forbes, in a letter to Katharine Harrington, May 28, 1916

(Source: Mirror for Witches, Woodcutting by Robert Gibbings)
Thomas Wentworth Higginson

Biography

"Worcester was so important to me as a means of development; my connection with the Worcester of fifty years ago was so active and varied; and I was concerned in so many of its early enterprises, that it has always remained near my heart."

-Thomas Wentworth Higginson, in a letter to Alfred S. Poe
Worcester Area Writers

Mark Twain on Writing

Milton Meltzer

Biography

Works

"Meltzer's contribution to American literature for children spans five decades and continues to be a model for informational writing today."

-Pat Scales, chair of 2001 Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal

(Mark Twain Himself)
Plaque placed at the Birthplace of Elizabeth Bishop
(Source: Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

If Anne Sexton is the Siren of the dark psyche, Adrienne Rich the Pilot of political vitality, Jorie Graham the Valkyrie of philosophical investigation, Bishop is surely the elder Sybil of everyday human life, wandering the waste lands, as it were, and revealing her wise art only to those who actively seek it out. For those who continue to seek her art and lifework, these recordings are nothing less than essential.
—Ernest Hilbert
Worcester Area Writers

Charles Olson

Biography

Works

Photos

"a poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it . . . by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader . . ."
-Charles Olson

Charles Olson

WPI Library

The Pear Tree in Kunitz's backyard
(Source: Tara Ellsworth, 2003)
"We were not, either by temperament or experience, meant to live in paradise."
-L. E. Sissman

"One learns from Sissman's example that the whole of poetry is available to us for our own use, our own enchantment."
-Edward Hirsch
The struggles have not ended. I have taken the world into me & the armies of darkness & of light forever march toward each other in my fears & hopes whenever I write a poem. But this morning, the morning you were born, I had this vision I could be a messenger. If you wonder why I look at you & smile, unaccountably, sometimes, it’s because I see that.

-Bill Tremblay

Third Son from “The Anarchist Heart”
Mary Fell

If people experience what it is like to write poetry, then that experience will inspire them - Mary Fell
PROSE WRITERS
S.N. Behrman
Robert Benchley
Robert Cormier
Esther Forbes
Thomas Wentworth Higginson
Milton Meltzer

POETS
Elizabeth Bishop
Charles Olson
Stanley Kunitz
L. E. Sissman
Bill Tremblay
Mary Fell
Fran Quinn
Frank O'Hara
Olive Higgins Prouty

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Worcester Area Writers

Fran Quinn

Biography

Works

Photos

"I was good in math, so I majored in English; if you're going to pay money to learn something, learn something you don't already know."
-Fran Quinn

"I was attracted to poetry because I didn't understand it, and hearing it dropped me back into my psyche. It took me years to realize that it was taking me back to my childhood when my mother used to read to us daily."
-Fran Quinn

"If you were climbing up a cliff, I would be the one tapping you on the shoulder saying 'turn around and look at the view'
-Fran Quinn

[Source: Laura Partridge Butler Collegian]
Worcester Area Writers

Frank O'Hara

Biography

“O'Hara was a poet of lightness, who generally eschewed the political role, even of his acquaintances, the Beats, and sought to apply music theory, surrealist models, and the techniques of Abstract Expressionist painters in his work.”
-Professor Trevor Code, WPI English Department

Works

“Reading O’Hara for the first time is like discovering for the first time that corn pops.”
-Professor Wayne-Daniel Berard of the Worcester County Poetry Association.

Photos

Frank at the Museum of Modern Art

WPI Library
Most of her novels were written in an upstairs library at her home in Brookline, Massachusetts, at a drop-leaf table equipped with 8-by-10-inch manila copybooks and a mug of soft pencils. Her poetry, however, was written at different places - on fishing trips and when she was traveling alone or with Fater -- at odd moments and on various pieces of paper. My mother loved nature and people. Wherever she went she brought the tools of her trade and would find a place to sit and write.”

-Richard Prouty from the foreword of Between the

Olive Higgins Prouty

Biography

Works

Photos

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-Richard Prouty from the foreword of

Between the
Barnacles and Bayberries
Most of the writers discussed in this report lived in Worcester between 1850 and 1970. Some essential history of Worcester before this time period will be discussed.

In 1668, a tract of land called Worcester was proposed as a plantation. New settlers began arriving in 1674. (Erskine, 14) The Nipmuck Indian tribe decided to reclaim their land and drive out the settlers. Sometime during 1675, all of the settlers left Worcester. Only a few people dared to settle in Worcester; anyone who did was driven out by the Indians. (Erskine, 15)

The first permanent settlers, the families of Gershom Rice, Nathaniel Moore, and Jonas Rice, arrived in 1715. By 1718 there were about 600 people living in Worcester. (Erskine, 20)

Worcester grew and became a town on September 7, 1722. (Erskine, 23) The Indians were still kidnapping and murdering people, which frightened many people away from settling in Worcester. Residents of Worcester kept to their houses and only worked in fields or attended church in large groups with guns at their side.

On April 2, 1731, Worcester was chosen by the General Court to become the new county seat. Worcester County was made up of five towns taken from Suffolk County and seven towns from Middlesex County. (Erskine, 25) While Worcester lacked waterpower and good transportation over the hills, it now held the county seat; Worcester would prosper for the next hundred years.

Worcester could not join in the Industrial Revolution without power or good transportation. In 1822, the construction of a canal was discussed. The canal would run from Worcester to Providence, Rhode Island, following the Blackstone River. (Erskine, 52) Construction began in 1826, bringing a population of Irish workmen to Worcester. The canal was completed in 1828. (Erskine, 53) The canal proved to be an unreliable source for transportation and waterpower. It froze in the winter and eroded the banks in the spring. When there was drought, the canal would dry up.

Worcester could not support any large textile mills because of the lack of reliable waterpower. Instead, smaller mills in Worcester made the tools and machines needed by others. There was a great demand for highly skilled and sober workers, which led to the initiation of a temperance movement.
In 1829, the legislature proposed a railroad from Boston to Worcester and continuing on to Springfield. The first locomotive arrived in Worcester on July 4, 1835. People were sure that the railroad would solve Worcester’s problems. A third railroad, to Providence, was added in 1847, which made Worcester the center of a network of railroads. The canal closed the same year. (Erskine, 58)

Worcester became a city in 1848, with a population of about 17,000. (Southwick, 3) The first mayor elected was Levi Lincoln, a distant relative of Abraham Lincoln. (Erskine, 66) Mechanical industry prevailed in Worcester with Ichabod Washburn’s wire factory and different factories renting space and power in William Merrifield’s buildings, which were powered by a steam engine.

Not only was Worcester becoming an industrial city, it was also becoming a well known abolitionist city. In 1854, three fugitive slaves had been arrested in Boston, despite the statute forbidding the arrest of fugitive slaves by police in Massachusetts. Nine-hundred people from the Worcester area protested in Boston, including Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Later that year, Asa Butman, the same man who arrested the fugitive slaves in Boston, traveled to Worcester looking for another runaway slave. (Erskine, 74) A mob nearly lynched Butman, but George Hoar, Stephen Foster, Martin Stowell, and Higginson, all staunch abolitionists, protected him from the crowd. Higginson accompanied Butman back to Boston by carriage. (Erskine, 75)

A meeting place was needed to hold industrial conventions for the industry oriented city. Mechanics Hall was built in 1857, but the poor economy that year overshadowed its brilliance. There was still no uniform currency for the United States. Worcester shipped many of its products west by railroad and received Western currency that had no value in the East. Manufacturers were forced to barter their goods, and paid their employees with goods instead of cash wages. It was one of the worst economies Worcester had faced. (Erskine, 78)

The Civil War coincided with the collapse of Worcester’s economy. Three-thousand nine-hundred and seventy-two men from Worcester fought in the Civil War. (Erskine, 79) Meanwhile, in 1862, the city hired men to build a causeway over Lake Quinsigamond. The project was finished the next year. Material needed by the army, such as cloth, guns, wire, and leather goods, were manufactured in Worcester and, in turn, this helped the economy.

Worcester’s economy remained stable because of the diversity of industries in Worcester. With a growing population, triple-decker housing became more popular. Each floor was a separate apartment identical to the other two floors, and received fresh air and sunshine. Triple-deckers proved to be healthier housing than tenements in other cities. (Erskine, 90)

With the stable economy, a new city hall was opened in 1898 and the old city hall was torn down a few months later. The new city hall represented Worcester’s hopes and dreams for the future of the city. (Southwick, 49)

Between 1870 and 1920 many Europeans settled in Worcester. In 1895, almost 32,000 residents, a third of the population, were immigrants. (Southwick, 38) Immigrants came to Worcester to work for the many
industrial wire and steel companies such as Washburn and Moen, Morgan Construction Company, Wyman-Gordon Company, Leland Gifford, and over 1,000 other companies. Shrewsbury Street was mostly Irish. Quinsigamond Village, Belmont Hill, and the Greendale area were occupied by Swedes. The French lived in the Wall Street-Hamilton Street area. Water Street and Providence Street were heavily Jewish. (Southwick, 42)

The center of the city was crowded: almost half of the population lived within walking distance of city hall. (Erskine, 115) It was estimated that the population would grow to 300,000 by 1970. (Erskine, 113) In 1910, the city began to have problems with traffic congestion and sewage. Cars lined the narrow streets and trolley cars blocked intersections. There was no waterway to carry off the sewage, so people used the canal to carry off their waste. Eventually sewer lines were added and a sewage-disposal plant was created. (Erskine, 118)

When the stock market collapsed in October, 1929, Worcester was hit hard. The population stopped growing, banks were no longer trusted, and unemployment was high. By 1932, about one-quarter of the population was unemployed and those who were employed were working at greatly reduced wages. Building the New Auditorium provided some people with employment; it was finished in September, 1932. (Erskine, 124)

World War II brought with it a revived economy. Worcester factories filled orders for the war, creating jobs and decreasing unemployment. Young men registered for the draft starting in October, 1940, and began to leave for the service. There were plenty of jobs now; the problem now was finding skilled workers to fill them. (Erskine, 127)

When the war ended, the economy was still thriving but now Worcester needed to face the fact that it was a 19th century city living in the 20th century. The three main problems of the city were the inadequate water resources, the old schools, and the poor streets. Streets, highways, and railroads were relocated in order to improve the traffic problems. Today the city is still struggling to improve itself and bring more business to Worcester.
Though most people think that buying books is as simple as going to any local bookstore and perusing the shelves, it can in reality be much more complicated than that, especially if one is dealing with rare and/or out of print books. People looking for a rare book might find what they are looking for at the first secondhand bookstore they go to, but more than likely they'll end up having to spend large amounts of time immersed in the rare book trade before they find what they're looking for. Despite all this, though, it is not as difficult to find rare books as one might think.

In addition to bookstores that specialize in rare and out of print books, antiquarian and book societies will also often hold trade shows or conventions for collectors to be able to peruse large collections in one central location. The complicated part of the book trade lies in the language they use to determine conditions of books, which determines the pricing. A small, out-of-print book may look inexpensive at first, but it might be signed, and then the value would skyrocket. While conditions such as limited printing, or signed copies may increase a book's value, things as minor as dog-eared pages or a dent in a hard cover can also decrease a book's value. Of course, the buyer and seller of any particular book must agree on what exactly the condition of the book means in terms of the sale, or the terms of the condition are useless anyway. In such cases it is beneficial to have access to publications about the book trade or a glossary of terms related to the book trade. One such glossary can be found online at


This glossary in particular is helpful because there are pictures included of many of the conditions it describes.

The expansion of the Internet into the global marketplace has made finding rare books easier for the consumer. Commercial book giants like Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble online have made books widely accessible, yet they have not had a significant impact on sales in physical bookstores. The rare book trade has been impacted, too, by the internet. Online databases of trade shows let collectors know when large events are occurring so they can not only mingle with other collectors but also purchase and sell to larger numbers of people. Also, rare book sites like the Advanced Book Exchange, abibris.com, abaa.org and Bookfinder.com allow collectors to search for books in a much wider area than local shops and conventions. Because collectors using online search engines can even search internationally for books, the Internet has made the rare book trade faster and easier for the collector or consumer. The added ease of searching has also made the trade cheaper, though prices are still dependent on the condition of the product being shipped.
However, despite the added ease and convenience of buying books online, the shops that deal in rare books have not suffered financially. Perhaps this goes to show that there is something to be said about the thrill of the hunt, and being able to see what is purchase before it is paid for and shipped. Many Internet databases on the book trade, instead of having search engines to purchase books online, have links to small bookshops for consumers to contact directly. So while the Internet has indeed advanced the book trade and brought it to a wider populace, there is as yet little danger of the physical bookstores being put out of business by online shopping.

**Web sites related to the book trade:**

This is a glossary of terms used in the book trade. It includes terms and shorthand used to describe book conditions, editions, covers, sizes and the like. The glossary might be useful as a novice book collector's first stop as a knowledge of the terms is necessary in order to know what exactly is being purchased.

http://gateway.library.uiuc.edu/ala/alawess/books.htm
This is primarily a site with links devoted to French studies, but most of the links point to websites devoted to rare books. There are links to rare book sites and booksellers online that deal with rare and out-of-print books.

http://internet.ggu.edu/university_library/booktrade.html
This is another link page with links covering all aspects of the book trade.

http://www.thebookseller.com/?pid=2
This is a site about the book trade in general. It doesn’t have as much about rare or out of print volumes but it does give a good crash course on the book trade in broader terms.

http://elj.warwick.ac.uk/jilt/BILETA/1996/3weedon/2.htm
This is a very informative article about the internet and the book trade.
Worcester Area Writers

Other Resources

American Antiquarian Society  
Highlight: Esther Forbes Material

Assumption's Emmanuel d'Alzon Library  
Highlight: General Collections

Boston University's Mugar Memorial Library  
Highlight: Robert Benchley Material

Clark University's Robert H Goddard Library  
Highlight: S. N. Behrman, Olive Higgins Prouty and Esther Forbes Material

University of Connecticut, Storrs  
Highlight: Charles Olson's & Frank O'Hara's Papers

Fitchburg State College Library  
Highlight: Robert Cormier Material

Harvard University's Houghton Library  
Highlight: L.E. Sissman Papers

Holy Cross Libraries  
Highlight: General Worcester Collection

The Jacob Edwards Memorial Library, Southbridge, MA  
Highlight: Bill Tremblay Special Collection

Vassar College's Special Collections  
Highlight: Elizabeth Bishop's Papers

Worcester Public Library  
Highlight: The Worcester Room

WPI's Gordon Library  
Highlight: Archives and Special Collections and Esther Forbes
About this Website

This website was originally designed and implemented by Michael LeBarron and Andrea Hubbard in 2002 and was redesigned and reimplemented by Tara Ellsworth, Kathleen Joyce, and Vickie Wu in 2003.

The material located here on Behrman, Benchley, Cormier, Forbes, Higginson, and Meltzer, as well as the research on Worcester History, is the work of Michael LeBarron and Andrea Hubbard.

The material located here on Bishop, Olson, Kunitz, Sissman, Tremblay, Fell, Quinn, O'Hara, and Prouty, is the work of Tara Ellsworth, Kathleen Joyce, and Vickie Wu.

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PROSE WRITERS
S.N. Behrman
Robert Benchley
Robert Cormier
Esther Forbes
Thomas Wentworth Higginson
Milton Meltzer

POETS
Elizabeth Bishop
Charles Olson
Stanley Kunitz
L. E. Sissman
Bill Tremblay
Mary Fell
Fran Quinn
Frank O'Hara
Olive Higgins Prouty

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City Hall - Old and New

The Merrifield Building Burning

Sketch of Worcester Academy

Mechanics Hall Interior - Current
(Taken By: Andrea Hubbard)

Mechanics Hall Interior
(Early Photo)

Mechanics Hall Exterior
(Early Photo)

Washburn & Moen Manufacturing Co.
(Current Photo)

South Baptist Church
(Source: Worcester Historical Museum)

Elm Park
(Source: Worcester Historical Museum)
Though Olive Higgins Prouty is primarily remembered as a romance novelist, she was also a poet, writing her poetry whenever and wherever she could. Her poems were never published during her lifetime, as they were much more intimate writings than the novels she wrote professionally. Perhaps because she could put more of herself into her poetry than in her novels, Prouty's poems are powerful and emotional, revealing ideas radical for the time in which they were written. Her children, Richard Prouty and Jane Chapin, published her poems in a very limited release in 1997.

Prouty was born in Worcester in 1882 to Katherine Chapin and Milton Prince Higgins, who would raise one of Worcester’s most prominent, and one of Worcester Polytechnic Institute’s most important, families. The Higgins family residence was at the corner of West Street and Salisbury Street, where WPI’s Goddard Hall now stands. Prouty spent most of her childhood deeply connected to WPI as her father was superintendent of the Washburn shops and supervised its very construction. Milton and Katherine Higgins had four children in total, all of whom would go on to make generous contributions to WPI, including Higgins Laboratories, Higgins House, Sanford Riley Hall, a scholarship, and a library fund. Milton Higgins was not only prominent in the development of WPI, but he was also an entrepreneur, buying the Norton Emery Wheel Co. with George Alden in 1885 and serving as its president until his death in 1912.

Prouty’s mother was also an active member of the growing Worcester community. Katherine was the superintendent of the Sunday school at the First Congregational Church and insisted upon Olive joining the church at age thirteen. Katherine was also the founder of the Parent Teachers Association, having spoken in many states for the PTA throughout her lifetime.

Prouty was close to her parents despite their busy professional lives, and speaks of her time in Worcester and at WPI with great fondness. Though she had an early interest in rhyme, Prouty did not have much early success at school, and the anxiety that resulted was a precursor to
nervous troubles that would come later in her life.

Nevertheless, Olive Higgins graduated from Smith College in 1904 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Literature and returned to Worcester determined to start a writing career. Prouty feared that her marriage to Lewis Prouty would hinder her attempts to write professionally, but Lewis turned out to be supportive and introduced Olive to the editor who would publish her first stories. The Proutys moved to Brookline, Massachusetts soon after their marriage in June, 1907.

Prouty's first novel Bobbie, General Manager was published in 1913. She tried to keep up with her writing, but by 1920 Prouty was feeling more and more torn between her writing and her duties to her family. As the Proutys were quite prosperous, Olive had trouble balancing the social obligations that came with prosperity with her family obligations and still having time to write. When her third daughter Anne died in 1919, she decided to devote herself to the care of her children.

Prouty's youngest daughter Olivia was very dear to her, possibly more so than her other two surviving children. In both her published and unpublished works, she rarely mentioned Richard or Jane, but she wrote quite a bit about Olivia. Olivia's death in 1923 of encephalitis devastated Prouty, and the nervous breakdown that resulted led her to spend some time at the Riggs Foundation in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Her psychiatrist, Dr. Austen Fox Riggs, encouraged her to treat her writing professionally, and Prouty was immeasurably grateful for the new freedom that afforded her.

Stella Dallas, one of Prouty's most famous works, was published around this time. It was eventually made into a play in 1924, then a radio serial, and then its first movie incarnation in 1925. In 1937 it was remade with Barbara Stanwyck, and Bette Midler starred in its most recent version, Stella, in 1990. Another of her novels, Now, Voyager, would be made into a feature film starring Bette Davis.

Throughout much of the 1930s and 1940s Prouty flourished as a writer, publishing prolifically and enjoying the success of her novels. She also took up philanthropy, donating much of the proceeds from her work as well as her time to charitable causes such as the Children's Hospital in Boston. She also endowed a scholarship at Smith College, becoming friends with its recipient, poet Sylvia Plath. Their friendship was long and complex, and Prouty also paid the medical expenses for Plath's attempted suicide in 1953. Plath and Prouty corresponded frequently, and Prouty was the basis for one of the characters in Plath's The Bell Jar.

Throughout this period Prouty continued writing her poems, but because they were intimate and powerful, involving her personal thoughts about her family and her husband, she never published them. Many of her poems were about loving relationships but hinted at the desire for more freedom. She also wrote much about nature, and her own feelings about her life and her perceptions as she aged and grew. Her poems were short, not relying on flowery descriptions but on statements that left a huge impact on the reader, despite that she probably never intended the poems to actually have an audience.

Lewis Prouty died in November 1951, just after Prouty's last novel, Fabia, was published. Though Prouty continued to write poetry, she wrote much
less in other areas; her personal correspondence declined drastically after Lewis' death.

Olive Higgins Prouty died in Brookline on March 24, 1974. At her bequest and helped by generous donations from her son Richard, the Olive Higgins Prouty Library Fund supports WPI's collection in the humanities.

Richard and Jane knew of and possibly even shared their mother's love of literature. They released Prouty's poems for publication in 1997, and the Friends of the Goddard Library published her collection, Between the Barnacles and Bayberries: and Other Poems, at Clark University.

Though Prouty was never known for her poetry in her lifetime, she nevertheless remains as one of Worcester's most noted authors, and an important piece of WPI and Worcester history.
PROSE WRITERS
S.N. Behrman
Robert Benchley
Robert Cormier
Esther Forbes
Thomas Wentworth Higginson
Milton Meltzer

POETS
Elizabeth Bishop
Charles Olson
Stanley Kunitz
L. E. Sissman
Bill Tremblay
Mary Fell
Fran Quinn
Frank O'Hara
Olive Higgins Prouty

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Bobbie: General Manager, 1913
Conflict, 1927
Fabia, 1951
Home Port, 1947
Lisa Vale, 1938
Now, Voyager, 1941
Pencil Shavings: Memoirs, 1961
The Star in the Window, 1918
Stella Dallas, 1923
White Fawn, 1931
Between the Barnacles and Bayberries: and other poems, 1995
PROSE WRITERS
S.N. Behrman
Robert Benchley
Robert Cormier
Esther Forbes
Thomas Wentworth Higginson
Milton Meltzer

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Worcester Area Writers
Olive Higgins Prouty
Photos

“The Pampered Child”
(Source: Pencil Shavings)

“The Buffeted Log”
(Source: Pencil Shavings)

Olive in her teens
(Source: Pencil Shavings)

“The College Graduate”
(Source: Pencil Shavings)
Aerial photo 90 years later, house is indicated by arrow. (Source: Pencil Shavings)

Her husband, Lewis Prouty (Source: Pencil Shavings)

WPI in the early days. Arrow indicates location of her house. (Source: Pencil Shavings)

Olive with her dog Taupe (Source: Pencil Shavings)

Olive’s favorite picture of Lewis (Source: Pencil Shavings)

Lewis Isaac Prouty (Source: Pencil Shavings)

Her house, 228 West (Source: Pencil Shavings)

Renovations on 228 West. (Source: Pencil Shavings)
Manuscript of "Stars and Crickets"
(Source: Clark University Archives)

Manuscript of "The Violin"
(Source: Clark University Archives)

Olive's Poetry book
(Source: Clark University Archives)

Manuscript of "The Other Room"
(Source: Clark University Archives)

Cover of "Bobbie General Manager"
(Source: Clark University Archives)

Manuscript of "Bobbie General Manager"
(Source: Clark University Archives)

Title Page of "Between the Barnacles and the Bayberries"
(Source: Clark University Archives)

Manuscript of "Between the Barnacles and the Bayberries"
(Source: Clark University Archives)
Pencil Shavings
(Source: Clark University Archives)

Manuscript of "My Flower"
(Source: Clark University Archives)

Manuscript of "Olivia"
(Source: Clark University Archives)

Olive handrew this image from the cover of Pencil Shavings
(Source: Clark University Archives)
Of all the poets of Worcester, Frank O'Hara was one of the most displaced. Born and raised in Grafton, he would end up spending the majority of his adult life in New York City. There he was considered to be a "New York Poet", and sought out a life of popular culture.

It all started in Baltimore, Maryland, where he was born June 27, 1926. His family then moved to Grafton and he grew up in this small suburban town, which even today remains a close-knit community. His family had ties in nearby Worcester, with his father having attended the College of the Holy Cross and O'Hara himself attending St. Paul's School and St. John's Preparatory School in Worcester.

Grafton was the setting of the movie "Ah, Wilderness!" which was filmed there when O'Hara was eight. Hollywood had decided that Grafton was the perfect New England town in which to film its movie: with one exception. Grafton would need a bandstand on the town square to suit its needs, and since Grafton didn't have one, Hollywood built one.

It was the exposure to this movie set which would later pull O'Hara into the world of pop culture. The glamour of the stars seemed all too real to him. O'Hara may have even volunteered to be an extra on the set of the movie.

After Hollywood had come and gone from Grafton, O'Hara concentrated his efforts on his first love: the piano. He had a passion for music of all types, though he loved contemporary best, and he studied piano from the time he was 15 through when he was 18 at the New England Conservatory in Boston.

But O'Hara was loyal to his country, too, and when World War II came, he was willing to serve. He joined the Navy and served as a sonarsman on the "USS Nicholas" in the South Pacific and Japan.
When he got back to the states after the war, he jumped right back into academia and became a student at Harvard University. He majored in music and continued to play the piano, also doing some composing. He dabbled in poetry; he especially appreciated the poets Rimbaud, Mallarme, Pasternak, and Mayakovsky; but the guiding force in his life was music.

All this would change when he met John Ashberry, another poet. Ashberry’s influence would eventually change O’Hara from a music major to an English major, and he began to publish his poetry in the Harvard Advocate. He received his degree in 1950, and sent himself off to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, where he received his MFA one year later.

When he graduated from the University of Michigan in 1951, O’Hara wasted no time and by fall had settled himself into an apartment in New York City. He found a job working at the front desk of the Museum of Modern Art and began to write seriously. He published one of his first poems, “A City in Winter” in 1952 and started writing art reviews in ArtNews, where he received a reputation for being an excellent critic. Slowly but surely, O’Hara was carving his niche in New York and earning his place in the New York School of Poets, along with Ashberry, James Schuyler, and Kenneth Koch. His qualifications in music and writing from his lemmings at Harvard would lead him to become curator at the museum.

“There is fire in O’Hara’s poems, a prophetic and spiritual fire, the very quality the wiseacre, Frank O’Hara, would consciously deny, but that’s the post of Emerson, Duncan, Olson, and the tradition, to trick the brain into writing beyond itself, as what the surrealists started to do back to us as their kind of contribution to ‘the new romanticism,’” says Professor Wayne-Daniel Berard of the Worcester County Poetry Association.

He continued to publish, releasing Meditations in an Emergency in 1956 and Lunch Poems in 1964. Lunch Poems was especially witty. Whereas many poets write about death and other sober things, O’Hara loved to write about the little things in life that amused him, that he wished others would find funny as well. Though it was not widely known, he also dabbled in comics to some degree.

His vibrant life was cut short in 1966, at the age of 40, when he was hit by a jeep on the beach on Fire Island, and tragically died of internal injuries.
Worcester Area Writers

Frank O'Hara

Works

A City Winter and Other Poems, 1951
Oranges: 12 pastorals, 1953
Meditations in an Emergency, 1957
Second Avenue, 1960
Odes, 1960
Lunch Poems, 1964
Love Poems, 1965
In Memory of My Feelings, 1967
The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara, 1971
The Selected Poems of Frank O'Hara, 1974
Standing Still and Walking in New York, 1975
Early Writing, 1977
Poems Retrieved, 1977
Selected Plays, 1978
Amorous Nightmares of Delay: Selected Plays, 1997
Worcester Area Writers

Frank O'Hara

Photos

O'Hara as a boy in 1931
(Source: Courtesy of Philip O'Hara)

Frank with his mother outside 16 North Street, Grafton
(Source: Courtesy of Philip O'Hara)

Frank and his dad
(Source: Courtesy of Philip O'Hara)

Frank home in Grafton on leave from the Navy with his parents and brother Philip and sister Maureen.
(Source: Courtesy of Maureen O'Hara Granville-Smith)
Wearing his trademark corduroy jacket at Harvard
(Source: Courtesy of George Montgomery)

Ah, Wilderness Article
(Source: Courtesy of Blackstone Valley Tribune)

Ah, Wilderness
(Source: Courtesy of Amazon.com)

The Gazebo built in the Grafton Center by "Ah, Wilderness"
(Source: Courtesy of Robert Gallagher)

O'Hara with John Ashbery at a taping for Daisy Aldan's poetry magazine.
(Source: Courtesy of Joe LeSueur)

Mike Goldberg at work his studio- the inspiration for the O'Hara poem "Why I Am Not a Painter"

Sardines, the Goldberg painting specifically mentioned.
O'Hara in the kitchen at 791 Broadway, 1963
(Source: Courtesy of Joe LeSueur)

The Collected Poems' Controversial cover
(Source: Kent Lundquist, photo by Tara Ellsworth)

Red Ryder, #1

Red Ryder, #2

Poem (in graphic form)

Gravestone, covered with seashells

WPI Library
Though he is now living in Butler, Indiana, Fran Quinn helped to make the Worcester poetry scene into what it is today. Not only did he write and publish, he was also instrumental in the formation of the Worcester County Poetry Association, which continues to further the local poetry scene.

Quinn was born in Easthampton, Massachusetts on May 5, 1942. He and his family moved to Clinton when he was six and a half years old. He stayed with his family until his junior year at Assumption College, when he moved to Worcester. Until that point Quinn hadn't been introduced to much poetry other than the classics. That all changed when he met a professor, Michael True. True, one of the founding members of the Worcester County Poetry Association, knew that his student liked poetry and asked him to join a group of people who had the same interest to start a reading series. This group of people would also include Joseph Langland, Robert Bly, Mary Fell, and others. None of the people in the group yet were writing, though, with the exception of Quinn, and he wasn't showing his writing to anyone. The interest then was more in the reading, and in bringing more famous writers to the area.

At that point in time, Quinn didn't know poets were accessible people. He was teaching at St. John's Preparatory School in Shrewsbury when something happened that would change his entire perspective. Michael True had tickets to see Robert Bly give a reading in the area, but took ill and offered his tickets to Quinn so he could take some students. Bly gave an incredible reading, taking time as well to explain the poems he read. After meeting Quinn and talking to him, Bly offered to visit St. John's Prep the next time he was in the Worcester area. True to his word, Bly visited St. John's Prep and spent an entire afternoon reading poetry and talking to the enraptured crowd. The experience was so fantastic that even though the school day ended at about two-thirty in the afternoon, no one left until about six o'clock that evening. Quinn was fascinated by the response poetry and poets were getting. With that in mind, when Quinn taught briefly at Rivier College in Nashua, New Hampshire, one of
the major things he did was institute a poetry program.

During this time, the Worcester County Poetry Association was busily trying to meet as many poets as its members could. It was Michael True who understood where the poets were, but the exciting thing was that Quinn and Company were actually meeting them. They would do reading ahead of time to “not sound like complete idiots” while talking to them. However, though the Association was running all these readings, the organization was entirely volunteer – no one got paid. Quinn, due to a bet made at a Friendly’s restaurant, was wrangled into becoming the Association’s third president and realized that there was much work to be done. Paying attention to the fact that the name of the group was the Worcester County Poetry Association, Quinn wanted to get poetry and poetry readings out to the rest of the county. He managed to spread readings out all over to place, as far as Athol and Gardner, but it was a hectic schedule. Between September and June they had 57 readings all over the county. This meant that they were sometimes doing more than one reading a week, and all of it was free.

While Quinn was teaching, he was introduced to the state arts councils of Rhode Island and Massachusetts. His last teaching position during this time period was in Rhode Island, but he was heavily involved with poetry in Massachusetts, and his involvement with both of the state arts councils meant he was crossing state lines with poetry. He was taking work he was doing with the Poetry Association to Rhode Island, and taking materials he used with his classes to the Poetry Association. He was made to stop by both State Arts Councils. After Quinn quit teaching, he was forced to take odd jobs such as a janitor and bookmobile driver to make ends meet.

In 1988 when Butler University offered Quinn to come out for one semester a year to do teaching and run a reading series, he jumped at the chance. It was an area of work he preferred to be in, and there was nothing comparable to it in the Worcester area. It was also a job, offering more money than the odd jobs he was taking. The odd semesters turned into a full time position in 1992, so Quinn moved permanently to Indianapolis.

Because of the poetry association, Mary Fell, David Williams, Chris Gilbert, and Fran Quinn got together and starting writing and trading their own poems. That generation of writers was very influential in the poetry scene. At that point poetry was more of a hidden scene in New England, but the Vietnam War situation brought out poets in ways that hadn’t been previously visible to the budding poetry association.

Quinn cites as his three biggest influences: Joe Langland, Robert Francis, and Robert Bly. Quinn wasn’t even aware of what and who poets really were until he was in graduate school because not much poetry was taught in school other than the classics. That Robert Bly was generous enough to stay and continue talking with the children after the conference put Quinn in closer proximity with poets than he’d ever had to that point. Quinn and his friends would ask visiting poets who they thought they should be reading, and would then be introduced to the next literary movement almost as it was happening.

Though Fran Quinn was the first of his group of contemporaries to publicly call himself a poet, he wasn’t sure he really believed it himself. He was immersed in the poetry scene but didn’t know what exactly a
poet did. It took quite a while for him to realize that it was what he really wanted to do.

Fran Quinn has published one volume and one chapbook of his poetry: The Goblet Crying for Wine, edited by Robert Bly and published in 1995, and the chapbook, Milk of the Lioness in 1982. He was also featured with Mary Fell in the Spring/Summer 2001 edition of Diner, a journal of poetry put out by the Worcester County Poetry Association. Quinn's writing style is frank and direct, the simplicity of the words he uses highlighting the complexity of the topics presented both on the surface of his work and between the lines. Many of his poems, especially in the Goblet Crying for Wine, are dedicated to friends, showing that his group of contemporaries from his Worcester poetry days will not be forgotten.

Fran Quinn is still living in Indianapolis, and teaches full time at Butler University.
**Worcester Area Writers**

**Fran Quinn**

**Works**

The Goblet Crying for Wine, 1995  
At the End of the Worlds, 1994  
Milk of the Lioness, 1982
Worcester Area Writers

Fran Quinn

Photos

Kent Ljundquist, friend of Quinn
(Source: Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Ljundquist, professor at WPI
(Source: Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Ljundquist
(Source: Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

"To Kent, the real source of my inspiration. Love Fran"
(Source: Kent Ljundquist, Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Milk of the Lioness
(Source: Kent Ljundquist, photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Artist Rendering of Fran Quinn
(Source: The Worcester Review, Volume XXIII, Number 1, 2002)

PROSE WRITERS
S.N. Behrman
Robert Benchley
Robert Cormier
Esther Forbes
Thomas Wentworth Higginson
Milton Meltzer

POETS
Elizabeth Bishop
Charles Olson
Stanley Kunitz
L. E. Sissman
Bill Tremblay
Mary Fell
Fran Quinn
Frank O'Hara
Olive Higgins Prouty

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Fran Quinn
(Source: The Worcester Review; Volume XXIII, Number 1., 2002)

Quinn at 44 West St, 1979
(Source: The Worcester Review; Volume XXIII, Number 1., 2002)

Fran Quinn
(Source: The Worcester Review; Volume XVIII Number 1., 2002)

Fran Quinn with Li-Young Lee
(Source: The Worcester Review; Volume XXIII, Number 1., 2002)

Fran Quinn
(Source: The Worcester Review; Volume XXIII, Number 1., 2002)

Fran Quinn with Seamus Heaney and Jim Watt
(Source: The Worcester Review; Volume XXIII, Number 1., 2002)

Fran outside of his place with friends 1988
(Source: The Worcester Review; Volume XXIII, Number 1., 2002)

Fran with Susan Haviland and Emma Claire Haviland-Blunk, 1986
(Source: The Worcester Review; Volume XXIII, Number 1., 2002)
The city of Worcester has always had its fingers in all areas of the arts and literature. It has been the home and the resting place of many great writers and poets. When most think of the poets in Worcester, names like Kunitz, Bishop, or Olson surface, but what has kept that fire alive has been the less known, less published poets of this generation. Mary Fell was born in and grew up in Worcester, and she is one of these poets.

Fell was born to Elizabeth “Betty” and Paul Fell in Worcester City Hospital on September 22, 1947. Betty had come from Fairhaven, Massachusetts to Worcester during the Great Depression in order to find work. Once there she met and married Paul, an Irish American “Worcester kid.” Paul worked as a custodian in Worcester, was on the city Retirement Board, and had become chairman by the time he passed away.

Fell grew up mostly in Main South Worcester with her older brother Paul. She attended Downing Street School for kindergarten, and then went to St. Peter’s through high school. Though their mother was a Protestant she sent her children to St. Peter’s because at the time children had to come home for lunch at Downing St., but St. Peter’s allowed them to bring their lunch. This was important because her mother needed to work and couldn’t be home for the children at lunchtime.

Fell spent most of her childhood days in Main South at the St. Peter’s School and church and in the local landmarks like the Park Theater, Coes Pond, Beaver Brook, and Crystal Park. Because they never owned a car, any family excursions were taken on the bus. She remembers downtown Worcester being magical with ice skating in Elm Park, and the Charity Circus at the Auditorium.

Though she was born after the war World War II was very present in her life. This interest is portrayed in her poetry. Poems like American Legion and Basic Training illustrate everything from the effect the war had on
veteran soldiers, to war games played by children.

We practice jungle belly crawl
through the high grass in Gordon’s yard.
Red Ryder air rifles cradled in our elbows.
For sneaking up on enemies, walk
heel first, then the whole foot, quietly.

Take a bottle cap. Gouge out
the cork heart. Put it inside your shirt
over your own heart, the cap outside.
Push them back together:
a war medal.
-Basic Training

After high school Fell attended Worcester State College and majored in English. Throughout most of her childhood the children she encountered were just like her “second or third generation Americans who were rarely ethnically diluted by more than half – Irish or Polish or Italian.” It wasn’t until she attended college that she was introduced to many of the other ethnicities and people of the world. College in the 1960s meant the anti-war movement, free speech, civil rights, and feminism. These were all accepted as part of daily life.

It was in college that Fell began writing poetry. She studied, loved and tried to write it. However, she felt that it wasn’t possible for someone like her to write poetry. It wasn’t until the Women’s Movement in the 1970s that she realized that she could write poetry about the things she wanted to write about: mostly, the life and people she had grown up with. This movement made Worcester a great place for a budding poet in the 70s. The Worcester County Poetry Association brought many of Fell’s heroes to Worcester for readings. Poets like Adrienne Rich, Denise Levertov, Ann Sexton, Muriel Rukeyser, Robert Bly, Michael Harper, Galway Kinnell all came to Worcester during this time.

After graduating from college in 1969, Fell worked as a social worker for the Welfare Department for about five years, and later in a city social service project until 1975 when she met Fran Quinn, another local poet, and they toured local schools reading poetry and teaching workshops on how to teach poetry. She returned to social work until 1977 when she went to the University of Massachusetts in Anherst and received her MFA in 1981. Right after graduate school Fell went to Indiana to fill in for another professor that was on sabbatical and eventually it turned into a permanent position. It was here that in 2001 she received the Indiana University Award for Distinguished Teaching.

Fell’s first book, The Persistence of Memory, was published in 1983 when it was selected for the National Poetry Series. The poetry in the book speaks in a very personal voice about everything she has experienced. The poem Out of Luck, Massachusetts, for example, illustrates the unfortunate downfall of the town of Ware, a town outside of Worcester:

The town that couldn’t be licked
gives up, sunk
between these hills. The sacred
heart beats fainter, blessing the poor
in spirit. Boarded-up
factories litter the river. It does no good,
town fathers knitting their brows,
there's not enough shoe leather left
to buy a meal. In company houses
the unemployed wear out
their welcome. Diminished
roads run east, west, anywhere
better than here.

The Persistence of Memory also includes The Triangle Fire; a collection of poems once published as a hand-sewn chapbook. This collection contains several poems about the tragic Triangle Factory fire that took place on March 25, 1911. This fire took the lives of 146 of the 500 employees of this sweatshop because of the poor safety measures taken during the Industrial Age. This fire also caused a reform in fire safety for many businesses and buildings. The poems help to portray the actual events of this horrific fire in a very human way.

Mary Fell is currently living in Indiana where she teaches English at Indiana University, and continues to write.
Worcester Area Writers

Mary Fell

Works

The Persistence of Memory, 1983
Triangle Fire, 1983
Worcester Area Writers

Mary Fell

Photos

Signed cover page of *The Persistence of Memory*  
(Source: Kent Ljunquist, photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Cover of *The Persistence of Memory*  
(Source: Kent Ljunquist, photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)
If there is a poet among the Worcester group who represents the small town, Bill Tremblay is surely that man. His poem, “There is Only One Endless Poem” speaks of this.

My town is called Southbridge
its streets and gutters
run with the rain
of my memory

every space in it definite enough
to be a place
has an episode of the poem
hidden like a demigod in it

I make my Via Delorosa
through the cobbling streets of this town
how it flowed into me
how the outside world like the Quinebaug River
flooded my town of ecstasy
away.

Bill Tremblay was born and raised in Southbridge, and grew to love the town of his birth. “Southbridge is a great place to be from,” he said. “I feel that I owe a great deal to the community for providing such a good place to grow up in. It’s a place where parents cared about their children and people cared about education.” As he grew older, he idolized the local football great Bill Swiacki, and went to Columbia University on a football scholarship. It was there that he was introduced to the works of T.S. Eliot. “I was astounded. I hadn’t realized you could do that in poetry, make it so dramatic, internal, suggest so much about loneliness and alienation. It was a revelation.” Also while he was at Columbia he was introduced to Jack Kerouac, a poet who had also attended Columbia University on a football scholarship, but he had dropped out due to injury. Surprisingly, Tremblay would also follow in the footsteps of his
newfound hero, dropping out due to injury. He then transferred to Clark University, in Worcester, Massachusetts.

At Clark he was very successful. He published his work in Helicon and also The Clark Review. By graduation he had received the Hoyt Poetry Prize.

Tremblay was writing his poems in isolation while he was teaching at a number of schools around the region, including Southbridge High School, Cole Trade School, Sutton High School Tantasqua Regional High School, Sturbridge and Leicester Junior College. A friend told him that he should contact fellow poet Robert Bly for suggestions. “He was enormously helpful to me. I took a lot of encouragement from him,” said Tremblay. Robert Bly would also later introduce Tremblay to another successful Worcester poet, Fran Quinn.

Bill Tremblay supported the student strike after the Kent State and Jackson State killings, and was asked to leave Leicester Junior College; this prompted him to enroll at University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Though he was studying for his Ph.D. in American Literature and had even completed all of the course work for his degree, he switched to the MFA when his newest manuscript was accepted for publication “in a gesture of solidarity with my new identity as a ‘published poet.’”

While at the University of Massachusetts, one of his teachers was Joseph Langland: “Over the months I came to admire Joe more and more for his generosity and his commitment to the community of poets, especially in Worcester, where he was a frequent and beloved visitor.”

With Langland he worked on a study of Charles Olson. “Joe was often in disagreement with Olson’s ‘projectivist’ poetics since there was no accounting for music, for the sounds poetic language can make,” said Tremblay.

When Tremblay began teaching again, he drew on what he’d learned from the teaching skills of Langland, whom he admired greatly, trying to model his teaching style on him. “I dare to think that in my better moments I modeled myself on Joe’s example as a poetry teacher. He helped poets become what they wanted to be, rather than stuff them into one preconceived mold.”

At the current date, Bill Tremblay has published 6 full length volumes of poetry and has another on the way. He has been teaching at Colorado State University for thirty years, and his work there has earned him the John F. Stern Distinguished Professor Award for his years of service.

"The Lost Boy," from his last book, Rainstorm Over the Alphabet, has been selected for inclusion in BEST AMERICAN POETRY 2003, which will be published in September, just about the same time as his latest book, Door of Fire, will be published. He also hopes to come back to Worcester to do book signings at that time.

At Colorado State, he has served three times as Director of the MFA Program in Creative Writing at Colorado State University. Outside of the college, for fifteen years, he was Poetry and Managing Editor of Colorado Review.
Though he is far removed from his childhood home, his memories are clearly strong. "I stepped outside to cool off, remembering my own neighborhood when I was a kid & how easy it is to lose the community," he reflects in "The Community" from The Anarchist Heart.

In "The Eightieth Day of July" from The Anarchist Heart Tremblay talks about his experience being jailed for auto-theft in Worcester. It was not being accused of stealing a car that seems to upset him the most, rather he remembers Cynthia waking up and being angry with him, saying, "You’re just going away, like you always do."

And yet Tremblay’s poems are often tender. "The Third Son" from The Anarchist Heart, is a fitting example of this tender tone. "The struggles have not ended. I have taken the world into me & the armies of darkness & of light forever march toward each other in my fears & hopes whenever I write a poem. But this morning, the morning you were born, I had this vision I could be a messenger. If you wonder why I look at you & smile, unaccountably, sometimes, it’s because I see that."
Worcester Area Writers

Bill Tremblay

Works

Crying in the Cheap Seats, 1971
The Anarchist Heart, 1977
Home Front, 1978
Sacred Sun: New and Selected Poems, 1985
Duhamel: Ideas of Order in Little Canada, 1986
Rainstorm Over the Alphabet, 2001
Door of Fire, 2003
Worcester Area Writers

Bill Tremblay

Photos

Bill at the window in the Jacob Edwards Memorial Library.
(Source: Jacob Edwards Memorial Library)

Bill with Margaret Morrissey, Adult Services Librarian at Jacob Edwards Memorial Library in Southbridge
(Source: Jacob Edwards Memorial Library)
Joseph Langland was Tremblay's teacher and mentor.
To an outsider L. E. Sissman may seem an unlikely candidate for an award winning poet. Born Louis Edward Sissman in Detroit on New Year's Day in 1928, he had an enormous vocabulary and love of facts. His vocabulary led him to victory in the National Spelling Bee in 1941 where he “bested some poor little girl from...Kentucky on an easy word (‘chrysanthemum,’ as I remember).” Two years later at the age of fifteen he became a Quiz Kid on national radio, which he later describes as an exploitation of American children by their teachers and parents.

After that Sissman was accepted to Harvard University. At sixteen years old and a gangly six foot four inches tall, he was the youngest person ever to be accepted Harvard. He, however, wasn't emotionally ready for college and was kicked out two years later in 1946. Though his first attempt at college life was unsuccessful he realized he had found his home in Boston.

For the next year he worked in the Boston Public Library and spent his free time writing poetry and growing up. In 1947 he was readmitted to Harvard and graduated cum laude in 1949. While there he was awarded the Garrison Prize in poetry and was elected class poet. He was also married for the first time in 1948.

During the 1950s Sissman spent some time in New York, where he unhappily worked at Prentice-Hall as a copywriter and copyeditor. After that he worked at another New York publishing company, and when it went under, he returned to Boston. For the next few years Sissman worked at many odd jobs, such as campaigning for John F. Kennedy, and selling vacuums, until he was hired by an advertising company, and was hooked for life. He also found happiness with his new wife, Anne, and settled in Still River, a small town in Worcester County.

He continued to work in advertising exercising his wit and “verbal dexterity,” along with a knowledge of products and how things worked for the rest of his life. He also began writing poetry again. By 1964 he had compiled a typescript of poetry called Homage to Cambridge.
In 1965 Sissman was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s disease. This news changed his outlook on life and the mood of his poetry, in which he speaks about his family, his home, and many other things including school, and death. He felt that this disease introduced him to a new chapter in his life: death. From this point he wrote poetry “incessantly, as if his life depended on it” according to Edward Hirsch. In his own words, “Instead of a curtain falling, a curtain rose. And stayed up, revealing a stage decked in light.” It was during this time that he published his first book, Dying: An Introduction (1968).

He wouldn’t let his illness keep him from living life. He continued to work as the Creative Vice President for Quinn and Johnson Advertising in Boston. He also wrote many book reviews for The New Yorker and nearly sixty monthly columns for The Atlantic Weekly. Many of these columns, which depicted everything in his life from being a Quiz Kid to selling Deshler vacuums in Northern Vermont, were later published in a collection entitled Innocent Bystander: The Scene from the ’70’s. Poetry continued to flow out of his pen until 1974, when his “Muse left his body.”

For the next two years Sissman battled with Hodgkin’s disease until he passed away at the age of forty-eight. His death, however, did not bring an end to his poetry. His final collection, Hello Darkness, was published in 1978.
Worcester Area Writers

L. E. Sissman
Works

Typescript Homage to Cambridge 1964
Dying: An Introduction, 1968
Innocent Bystander: The Scene from the '70s, 1975
Scattered Returns, 1969
Pursuit of Honor, 1971
Hello Darkness, 1978
Worcester Area Writers

L. E. Sissman
Photos

L. E. Sissman's signature
(Source: Kent Ljungquist, photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

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Stanley Kunitz was born with poetry flowing through his veins. His love of words, and interest in writing was clear in his youth in Worcester;

I used to sit in that green Morris chair and open the heavy dictionary on my lap, and find a new word every day. It was a big word, a word like "eleemosynary" or "phantasmagoria" -- some word that, on the tongue, sounded great to me, and I would go out into the fields and I would shout those words, because it was so important that they sounded so great to me. And then eventually I began incorporating them into verses, into poems. But certainly my thought in the... in the beginning was that there was so much joy playing with language that I couldn't consider living without it.

With his first book published before the age of thirty, and more than twenty other books published within the last 75 years, Stanley Kunitz could easily be called one of America's greatest and most influential poets.

Born on July 29, 1905 in Worcester, Massachusetts Kunitz was no stranger to tragedy. His father's public suicide just weeks before his birth overshadowed most of his life. In his poetry it can be seen that he felt a longing for his father. The poem 'Father and Son' from Passport to the War illustrates this theme: "At the water's edge, where the smothering ferns lifted/ Their arms, "Father!" I cried, "Return! You know/ The way. I'll wipe the mudstains from your clothes;/ No trace, I promise, will remain." The effect of his father's death on his mother is seen most directly in 'The Portrait'.

My mother never forgave my father for killing himself;
especially at such an awkward time
and in a public park,
that spring
when I was waiting to be born.
She locked his name
in her deepest cabinet
and would not let him out.

Kunitz attended the Worcester Classical High School, and it was there that he discovered and was influenced by such great poets as Robert Herrick, John Yeats, William Butler, and William Blake. Kunitz then was awarded a scholarship to Harvard University, and graduated summa cum laude in 1926. After graduation he was indirectly told that due to his Jewish background he could not continue working in the English Department. This hurt him, and although he worked at many schools, including Yale, Princeton, Bennington College, and Columbia University, he was never able to settle at any one institution.

For several years after college Kunitz worked for the H. W. Wilson Company in New York as an editor of the Weekly Library Bulletin. During this time he began work on a series of biographical dictionaries of American and English authors with Howard Haycraft. These volumes where published between the years of 1931 and 1952. Also, in 1930, while working as an editor Kunitz's first book of poetry, Intellectual Things, was published. Unfortunately, this book was barely recognized and thus Kunitz did not publish his next book, Passport to the War: A Selection of Poems, until 1944, which again was looked down upon by critics. During this time he did, however, have many of his poems published in several magazines. In 1958 Kunitz’s luck with the literary world would change when he received the Pulitzer Prize for his Selected Poems.

Though Kunitz was a conscientious objector during World War II he did serve in the United States Army for three years as a non-combatant and was discharged in 1945 with the rank of staff sergeant. It wasn’t until after the war that Kunitz finally took a teaching position at Bennington College. However, when offered tenure he turned it down because he preferred to be "a poet who works as a professor rather than a professor who writes poetry."

In 1967 a visit to Russia inspired him to begin translating poems from Russian to English. Some of the poets he translated were Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, and Andrei Voznesensky. His other ventures around the world took him to several countries in Europe and Africa.

Kunitz has been considered a great mentor to young poets. In 1985 he started the Poet’s House in New York City. Poet’s House is a “literary center and poetry archive – a collection and meeting place that invites poets and the public to step into the living tradition of poetry.” It houses a 40,000 volume library of poetry and hosts many public readings and lectures every year. Kunitz was also an editor for the Yale Series of Younger Poets, a group dedicated to publishing the poetry of younger poets. He also founded the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

Since the publishing of his first collection in 1930 Kunitz’s acclaim as a poet has grown by leaps and bounds. Since being awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1958, Kunitz has been awarded the Bollingen Prize, the National Endowment for the Arts Senior Fellowship, the Harriet Monroe Award, the Ford Foundation Award, the National Medal of the Arts in 1993, an ‘In Celebration of Writers’ award from Poets & Writers in 1999, a
Guggenheim Foundation fellowship, a Harvard’s Centennial Medal, the Levinson Prize, the Shelley Memorial Award, and recently in his home town of Worcester he was awarded the Massachusetts Book Medal for Lifetime Achievement by the Massachusetts Center for the Book. Possibly one of the greatest honors Kunitz has received in his life came in 2000 when he was offered the position of United States Poet Laureate.

Stanley Kunitz is now splits his time between his homes in Greenwich Village, New York and Provincetown, Massachusetts with his wife, where he spends many hours a day in his garden. He continues to write poetry even now in his 90’s because he simply refuses to grow old.
Worcester Area Writers

Stanley Kunitz
Photos

The plaque on Kunitz's Worcester house
(Source: Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Kunitz's Worcester House
(Source: Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

the Pear Tree in Kunitz's back tree from his Poem "The Pear Tree"
(Source: Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Shaaria Torah Synagogue
(Source: Images of America: Worcester Vol II)

Kunitz Signature
(Source: Kent Ljundquist, Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

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Worcester Area Writers - Stanley Kunitz - Photos
Robert Lowell: Poet of Terribilita, and The Lincoln Relics
(Source: Kent Ljundquist, Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Antaeus
(Source: Kent Ljundquist, Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Letter to Kent Ljundquist
(Source: Kent Ljundquist, Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Signed copy of the Long Boat
(Source: Kent Ljundquist, Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Akhmatova
(Source: Kent Ljundquist, Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)
One might look back on Charles Olson and say that he was a “poetic thinker.” He once applied this term to a writer he idolized, Herman Melville, and Olson himself was much more than just a poet. Not content to just sit still and write, Olson’s purpose was to go out into the world and give something back to it. He scrutinized peoples and cultures, he always wanted to know “why?” Why did people act in the manner that they did? What made a society? Much of his life was spent on this quest, and his response to the question was the writing of his epic work, The Maximus Poems.

He dabbled in politics, appreciated art, and taught for most of his life. Perhaps his most valuable contribution to poets of today was his involvement with the Black Mountain School, a progressive school based on the theory that a liberal arts education must take place both inside and outside the college. Olson devoted the last few years of his life to his Maximus Poems, in which he scrutinizes Gloucester, Massachusetts. It was his magnum opus, and he tragically died before he had fully completed it.

If Olson spent most of his life away from his hometown of Worcester, it was for good reason. After being born there in 1910, he spent his time between the city and the coastal fishing town of Gloucester, to which he grew emotionally attached. His childhood was positive, though he and his family were very poor. He fondly remembers skating on Elm Pond when he was seven years old in the poem “Ode on Nativity:”

\[
\text{All cries rise, & the three of us}
\text{observe how fast Orion}
\text{marks midnight}
\text{at the climax}
\text{of the sky}
\text{while the boat of the moon settles}
\]
Later in life, while reading this poem at a poetry reading, Olson would comment, "I am celebrating the city of my birth... Worcester, Massachusetts... I'm just extrapolating an instance of childhood, when I came with my skates on to the ice of Elm Park one night just at the hour of the coming of the night, and the moon, a hot moon... Gee, I'm moved. Wow, I never wrote about Gloucester like this. Do you think I've been wrong all this time? I belong in- my subject is Worcester!" While Olson's words cannot be taken completely seriously, as he remained in Gloucester and not Worcester following this comment, the possibility exists that as he grew older he may have started to forgive the city of his birth.

Olson's hard feelings against Worcester had started with his father, who worked very hard as a postal worker, and his efforts were not always well rewarded. Because he fought for worker's rights, his superiors made an example of him. The stress and mental anguish that was his father endured led to a string of bad health and his eventual death, which happened just as Charles had come home to Worcester to teach at Clark University. Charles was twenty-five and already had his Master's Degree in English from Wesleyan University, having written as his thesis "The Growth of Herman Melville, Prose Writer and Poetic Thinker." School had seemed to come easy to Charles; he was an honor student at Classical High School, captain of the debate team and class president. His undergraduate years at Wesleyan proved much the same; he was honored with membership into Phi Beta Kappa, and also was an editorial writer for the school newspaper, goalie on the soccer team, an actor and an orator.

Driven by the death of his father, Olson would eventually write the narrative "The Post Office," which detailed the events leading up to the unfortunate death of his father. Many years later, he would be offered the position of Post Office General, which he turned down; he later wished that he might have accepted it, if only long enough to fire the men responsible for his father's misery.

While the events in his father's life caused him to see Worcester in an unfavorable light, he cherished the memories of his summers in Gloucester. Traditionally his family had occupied the "Oceanwood" cottage, and it was here that after the death of her husband Olson's mother would remain for most of her life. They had begun their vacations north when Charles was approximately five years old. While throughout his life Olson tended to be extremely nomadic, never content to remain in one place for long, Gloucester was the only place where he really set down strong ties of home, and it was the one place to which he always returned.

After the death of his father, Charles enrolled in Harvard and also started teaching there. His nomadic ways sent him off hitchhiking to San Francisco, but he returned to Harvard for the fall semester. After graduating and completing all of the course work for his Ph.D., he received a Guggenheim Fellowship for his studies in Melville and returned home to Gloucester to see his mother. While there he wrote his
first poems and an essay on myth, and took off to live in New York the very next day.

It was in New York that his career in politics began to take shape. He became the publicity director for the American Civil Liberties Union, and then moved into a position as chief of the Foreign Language Information Service in the Common Council for American Unity. This allowed him, in 1942, to become the Associate Chief of the Foreign Language Division in the Office of War Information. He began living with Constance Wilcock in a common-law marriage, and quit his job two years after he started it in protest over an issue of censorship.

He bounced right into a new job as the director of the Foreign Nationalities Division Democratic National Committee, and within a year moved to Key West so that he could focus more on his writing. While there, he was offered the posts of Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and the Post Office Generalship in Roosevelt's administration, both of which he turned down.

He returned to Gloucester to write again. His book on Melville, Call Me Ishmael, was published in 1947, and it was shortly after this that the idea to write the Maximus Poems was conceived.

He didn't act on this idea immediately, however, and instead vented about the troubles of his father in his three stories, "Stocking Cap," "Mr. Meyer," and "The Post Office." He announced his intentions to write a book on the way the Indian, the white settler and the negro affected the American West, which he intended to call, "Red, White, & Black." He received his second Guggenheim Fellowship for this project, though the book never came to pass. He then amused himself by writing a dance-play version of Moby Dick, called The Fiery Hunt.

In September 1948, Olson was invited to lecture at the Black Mountain College, an event that would forever change the course of his life. A college that boasted the likes of Albert Einstein on its board of directors, Black Mountain was a reaction to the traditional schools of the time. The school was informal and promoted communal living, but sought to provide a strong education focusing on liberal and fine arts.

1949 was an eventful year for Olson in that his first book of poetry "Y&X", while very short, was published.

In 1950 he published his influential essay, "Projective Verse," which promoted the theory that poetry should embody the rhythms of natural breath and thought. Olson claimed "A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. . . . the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge. So: how is the poet to accomplish same energy, how is he, what is the process by which a poet get in, at all points energy at least the equivalent of the energy which propelled him in the first place, yet an energy which is peculiar to verse alone and which will be, obviously, also different from the energy which the reader, because he is a third term, will take away?" A perfect example of projective verse is Olson's poem "The Kingfishers."

At this time Olson became interested in some of the Mayan ruins and letters found in the Yucatan Peninsula, and not content to merely read
the news, he spent six months there studying them and writing. After returning from Mexico, he took up more responsibilities at Black Mountain, and eventually was promoted to Rector.

In 1953 he published In Cold Hell, In Thicket and began reading drafts of his Maximus Poems at Black Mountain. His poem “The Twist” showed his close ties to Worcester still remaining. “Trolley-cars are my inland waters,” he says, comparing the trolley cars of Worcester to the rivers of Worcester that are now covered up.

The next year he also published Mayan Letters and married Elizabeth Kaiser, a student at Black Mountain. Within another year, his son was born. It was only one year later when the exodus of students and teachers from Black Mountain to San Francisco or New York forced the school to face the coming times and close its doors.

At this point in Olson’s life, he became dedicated to writing his Maximus Poems and to reading at poetry festivals, touring through the United States and Canada. He became a visiting professor at the State University of New York, Buffalo, and shortly after that move in 1964 his wife Elizabeth was killed in a car accident. He taught there for one more year and then moved back to Gloucester.

That year he attended a conference in Yugoslavia and enjoyed it so much he returned to Europe for several months the following year. While he was there, he participated in poetry readings and colloquias, and also researched the original settlers of Gloucester.

In 1968 he published Maximus IV, V, and VI in London. In October 1969 he accepted the post of Visiting Professor at the University of Connecticut, and by Thanksgiving he was admitted to Manchester Hospital and then transferred to New York Hospital. He died January 10th of the following year of liver cancer.

Olson’s contributions to the world were not just poetry. He truly believed it was every person’s duty to think and reflect about the actions in the world, and deeply contemplated the problems that the everyday person encountered. He wanted to think of ways that American society could improve as a whole, and he had faith in humanity. Though his Maximus Poems were never finished, enough of his work for the next installment was available to be published posthumously. Though he could not finish his dream on his own, it is still amazing to think of the marvelous contribution he was not only to poetry but to the liberal and fine arts community of the world.
Worcester Area Writers

Charles Olson

Works

Call Me Ishmael, 1947
Y & X, 1950
Projective Verse, 1950
The Mayan Letters, 1953
In Cold Hell, in Thicket, 1953
The Distances, 1960
The Maximus Poems, 1960
A Bibliography on America for Ed Dorn, 1964
Human Universe and Other Essays, 1965
Selected Writings, 1966
The Maximus Poems, IV, V, VI, 1968
Casual Mythology, 1969
The Special View of History, 1970
Additional Prose, 1974
The Post Office: A Memoir of His Father, 1974
The Maximus Poems, Volume Three, 1975
The Maximus Poems, 1983
The Collected Poems of Charles Olson, 1987
Charles Olson

Plaque Placed on his Norman Ave house
(Source: Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Blessed Sacrament Church, which his mother attended
(Source: Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Title page of Mayan Letters, signed by Bob Creeley
(Source: Kent Ljungquist, Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Abbott Street Grammar School, attended 1917-1924
(Source: Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

His Triple Decker on Norman Avenue
(Source: Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Charles Olson

Worcester Area Writers

Charles Olson

Photos
Black Mountain associate Denise Levertov's associate 1st edition of Anecdotes on the Late War
(Source: Kent Ljungquist, Photo by Tara Ellisworth, 2003)
When Elizabeth Bishop's 1956 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, Poems: North and South – A Cold Spring first appeared in August of 1955, reviewer Donald Hall called her "one of the best poets alive." Later, Questions of Travel would lead Robert Mazzocco to call her "one of the shining, central talents of our day." Bishop's work has gained increasing attention in recent years, marking her as one of Worcester's great poets. Though she only spent a few short years in Worcester, those years had a marked impact on her writing, namely in her prose piece "The Country Mouse" and one of her most well known poems, "In the Waiting Room."

Born in Worcester, Massachusetts on February 8, 1911, Elizabeth Bishop's began her life with a series of tragedies: her father William died of Bright's Disease when she was just eight months old. Baby Elizabeth and her mother Gertrude moved to her grandparents' house in Nova Scotia, as Gertrude had lost her US citizenship on William's death. Gertrude Boomer Bishop suffered a series of nervous breakdowns and was committed to the Nova Scotia Hospital in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia in 1916. It was the last time Elizabeth Bishop saw her mother. This ordeal was chronicled in Bishop's prose piece, "In the Village." Despite a tragic beginning, Bishop was happy in Nova Scotia; her family there was warm and caring.

At the age of six, Bishop was called to live with her responsible but emotionally aloof paternal grandparents in Worcester. As recounted in her narrative "The Country Mouse," Bishop resented moving to Worcester and hated living with her grandparents. She was afflicted with many physical and nervous ailments while staying with the Bishops. Bishop, miserable from illness, was very lonely. Though the Bishops had wanted to raise her in Worcester, they had to conclude that their "experiment" had failed – Bishop, never a healthy child, was so weak from illness she could barely walk. Being rescued from her grandparents’ home by Maud Shepherdson, her mother's sister, was a major turning point in young Bishop's life.
In 1918, Elizabeth Bishop moved to the South Boston area with Maud and George Shepherdson. She was much happier with her new surroundings, and slowly began to regain her health. She spent summers in Nova Scotia, and attended Camp Chequesset on Cape Cod. Influenced by Maud’s love of literature, Bishop began writing her own poetry. Though her prolonged previous illnesses delayed the start of her formal schooling until she was 14, she enrolled and was an excellent student at the Walnut Hill School for Girls in Natick, Massachusetts, and enrolled in Vassar College in 1930. While she was at Vassar, Bishop and others started Con Spirito, an underground literary magazine that was more socially conscious and avant-garde than the legitimate Vassar Review.

1934 was a significant year for Bishop. She met lifelong friend Marianne Moore that year on the front steps of the Vassar library. It was Moore who influenced Bishop to think about pursuing poetry as a vocation. In Bishop’s poem, “Invitation to Marianne Moore,” she hints at a “priceless set of vocabularies,” indicating an interest in pursuing something of a literary nature. This was not the only major event to happen to Bishop that year, though. In May, Gertrude Boomer Bishop died. In June, Elizabeth Bishop graduated from Vassar and moved to New York City.

After winning the Houghton Mifflin Poetry Prize Fellowship in May of 1945, Bishop's first book, North & South, was published in 1946. North and South established themes prevalent to Bishop’s poetry: the relation between humans and the natural world, and questions of knowledge and perception. There were also a number of poems in that collection that dealt with loneliness and detachment; these were perhaps a reflection upon her years in Worcester with her grandparents. Around the time North and South was published, Bishop also met and became friends with Robert Lowell. Like Marianne Moore, Lowell encouraged Bishop to pursue poetry. He also opened many doors for Bishop by showing her grants, fellowships and awards she could get. In 1950, Bishop secured the post of Poetry Consultant for the Library of Congress with Lowell’s help.

In fall of 1951, Bishop won the Amy Lowell Travel Fellowship and embarked upon a trip to South America. While she was in Brazil, however, she had a violent allergic reaction to a cashew fruit she had eaten and was hospitalized, missing the freighter for the Amazon River. During her convalescence, she fell in love with her friend and nurse, Lota de Macedo Soares. After a brief visit to the States to clean up her affairs, she moved to Brazil in June 1952. Bishop’s stay in Brazil with Soares was probably the happiest time in her life. She wrote to Robert Lowell that she was "extremely happy for the first time in [her] life." In 1955, Bishop published her second book, A Cold Spring, in a volume that included works from her first entitled Poems: North and South - A Cold Spring. The next three years Bishop spent translating the Diary of Helena Morely, a popular Brazilian work.

Bishop’s third book, Questions of Travel, was published in 1965 and is divided into two sections: Brazil, and Elsewhere. Again geography and nature themes are extensive, as well as themes of exploration and excitement. Reflective of the intimacy of Bishop’s relationship with Lota de Macedo Soares, the poems in this collection allow more intimacy between the reader and the poet. Even so, poems in her Elsewhere section that reflect on Bishop’s childhood return to the sense of loneliness and detachment that pervaded her earlier works.
The mid-1960s were a difficult time for Bishop and Soares in Brazil. Increasing political turmoil made Bishop feel more and more uncomfortable in her adopted Brazilian home, and Soares's involvement in the public parks project was stressful for both women. Both Bishop and Soares suffered from physical and psychological distress and had to be hospitalized. When they recovered, the women left for New York, but Soares committed suicide shortly after her arrival in September 1967. The loss devastated Bishop, but she continued to publish and write, releasing her Complete Poems in 1969. The book contained all of her previous works as well as several new pieces.

In 1970 Bishop moved back to the United States to teach at Harvard. Her last collection of poetry, Geography III, was published in 1976. The themes of loneliness, pain, and loss are reflected throughout the volume, possibly because Bishop never recovered from the loss of Soares from her life. Two of Bishop's most famous poems of loss, "One Art" and "In the Waiting Room," are from Geography III.

While teaching on and off at Harvard until 1977, Bishop met Alice Methfessel, who would be Bishop's closest companion for the rest of her life. When her tenure at Harvard was done, she taught for one year at New York University.

Elizabeth Bishop died in 1979 at Lewis Wharf, Boston, Massachusetts. She was buried at Hope Cemetery in Worcester. Currently her poetry continues to gain recognition and study. Bishop's poetic wit and humor made her poems likeable and accessible to the public. Though balanced by wit and humor, the poems speak eloquently of pain and loss, leaving plenty of room for re-readings to sift through the many layers of her work.
Worcester Area Writers

Elizabeth Bishop

Works

North & South, 1946
Poems: North & South – A Cold Spring, 1955
The Diary of Helena Morley, 1977
An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry, 1972
The Ballad of the Burglar of Babylon, 1968
Brazil, 1967
The Collected Prose, 1984
The Complete Poems, 1969
Geography III, 1976
One Art : Letters, 1994
Questions of Travel, 1965
Exchanging Hats : Paintings, 1996
Becoming a Poet : Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell, 1991
Worcester Area Writers

Elizabeth Bishop

Photos

Casa Mariana, where Bishop lived in Brazil
(Source: Huck Gutman, Professor of English, University of Vermont)

Casa Mariana from the side
(Source: Huck Gutman, Professor of English, University of Vermont)

The view from Casa Mariana
(Source: Huck Gutman, Professor of English, University of Vermont)

Our Lady of the Angels, which stands at the site of Bishop's grandparents' house.
(Source: Photo by Vickie Wu, 2003)

Plaque at the site of Bishop's grandparents' house.
(Source: Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)

Autographed copy of North & South
(Source: Kent Ljungquist, Photo by Tara Ellsworth, 2003)
Milton Meltzer was born on May 8, 1915, to Benjamen and Mary Meltzer of Worcester, Massachusetts. His parents were immigrants from Austria, having moved to America in 1904 and 1900 respectively. They met in New York City, fell in love, got married, and had three sons. His father became a citizen a few months before Milton was born. He lived in Worcester, working as a window washer. Meltzer mentions looking back on his years in Worcester in his book *Starting From Home*:

> ... I realize that all our neighbors had recently arrived from Ireland or Poland or Russia or Italy or Armenia or Greece or Sweden.... And today, is it any different? ... it is the most conspicuous advantage of being an American. You can turn your back on race and caste and class and all that had cramped and crippled your ancestors, and make a new start in this new world.

*(Starting From Home, p. 6)*

Even as he says this, Meltzer recalls how "stupid" and "self-centered" he was when he was young, being uninterested in the heritage of his parents and their life in the old country. He envies those who can talk about their ancestral line for generations back. On his mother’s side he knows her parents, and on his father’s, just the year his grandfather was killed giving him “not a family tree, but only some twigs” *(Starting From Home, p 7)*.

When he was three, his family moved from Chapin Street to 52 Vale Street, in one of the many three-deckers in Worcester. At the time, Worcester was home to so many of these homes that it was sometimes known as “the City of Three-Deckers”. Meltzer’s family had the top floor, with a porch, for a monthly rent of $15.

At the age of five Meltzer attended the Union Hill School. He was escorted to school by his nine year old brother Allen, who would, of course, consider bringing his little brother to school a nuisance. Milton recalls howling and crying until the teacher told Allen to leave the room after he had dropped Milton off. Once Allen left, Milton quickly subsided and took
to school as though he was "born to learn."

Meltzer recalls loving everything about the school, learning to read, write, add and subtract. His specialty was spelling, which seemed to come naturally to him, he mentions winning the school prize many times, and even the citywide competition once. He was, however, never sent to the national bees to test his skill at the highest level.

Meltzer does not recall when he fell in love with the printed word. He does not recall how or when he learned to read. His early readings included books given to him by various teachers, such as The Arabian Nights and Gulliver's Travels. With these books under his belt, his thirst for more led him to the Worcester Public Library, for his school had little or no money for books. Shortly afterwards he started to build his own library, mostly consisting of cheap paperbacks with Horatio Alger among his favorite authors. After Alger he moved to Edward Stratemeyer, whose syndicate specialized in children's books, such as Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys.

At age 12, he entered Grafton Street Junior High, a much larger school than Union Hill, and much more intimidating. At this age he started to lose his shyness, his A's and B's making him feel better about himself and giving him confidence. Then he received what he felt was quite a blow; he was told he had to wear glasses, not just to read, but all the time. The glasses did not affect his social life, as he had feared. In fact, he found it easy to fall in love with almost any girl.

It was not until Meltzer was in junior high that he started to work. He was expected to pitch in and help the family, so that is what he did. He started out delivering the afternoon Post, then advanced to moving around packaged and canned goods at a loading dock. The following summer he got a job for 15 cents an hour delivering milk to the people of the neighborhood, a job he loved, despite having to get up at 2 a.m. to deliver the milk.

Meltzer entered Classical High at the start of the 1930s, the school at that time already nearly 100 years old. Somehow at this time he decided that he would go to college, even though there was no money in the family for it; he knew he would be the first of his family to go. He did not know what he wanted to do, but he knew that he thirsted for knowledge, the more he gained, the more he wanted. He recalls few teachers being interested in ideas, they simply wanted the students to remember facts, dates, and names. One exception to the rule was Anna Shaughnessy, who first introduced Meltzer to Henry David Thoreau.

It was in 1930 when Meltzer came across his first mentioning of the words Nazi and Hitler in the newspaper. He remembers clearly seeing the headline of a European newspaper reading (translated) "Germany awake! Jews perish!" It was also around this time when he began to read about the slavery that had taken place earlier in American history.

That winter of 1931 was his last in Worcester. For the past few years he had been saved some money in the hopes that he could go to college. Miss Shaughnessy informed him of an experiment that was being done at Columbia University. It was an experiment in progressive education, and full scholarships would be awarded to those in need. He won the scholarship and headed off to New York City in the fall. The year was 1932 and he was seventeen.
After leaving Columbia University, Meltzer went to work at the Works Projects Administration as a Staff Writer for the Federal Theater Project. He was there from 1936 until 1939. For the next 30 years he held various jobs, including writer for CBS-Radio and assistant director of public relations at Pfizer Inc. He only held one of his jobs for more than five years, when he worked for Science and Medicine Publishing Co. Inc. in New York City as a full-time writer, historian, and biographer. He published a few of his own books while working at the Science and Medicine Publishing Company. In 1968, he became an independent full-time writer, a job that he continues to do today. He has done some other work since becoming a full-time writer, including lecturing, and serving as an adjunct professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst from 1977-1980.

The majority of Milton Meltzer’s publications are nonfiction books for younger readers, many of them biographies of various prominent people such as Mark Twain. A large majority of his subject matter concerns injustices common to America, such as poverty, discrimination, and slavery. Melzter is known for the approach he takes to such issues, being able to talk about them, but never “talking down” to the reader.

Two of his most well known books include Mark Twain Himself, and Starting From Home. These books each cater to different audiences, adult and young readers, respectively. Mark Twain Himself is a biography of Mark Twain, and Starting From Home is Meltzer’s account of his childhood in Worcester, MA. Many of his childhood experiences have a strong influence on his later writings, something that is more obvious after reading Starting From Home. It is important to note that he has also done work on various documentary films such as History of the American Negro and Five.

Meltzer lives in New York City, and is still publishing books. He has published a total of nearly 100 books throughout his career, many of them award winners of such awards as the John Newbery Medal, and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award. It’s hard to judge the impact he has had on the literary world compared with other authors. The impact Worcester has had on him is quite obvious, however, showing up in many of his works, whether it be directly or simply how he was influenced by growing up the “the City of Triple-Deckers.”
Worcester Area Writers

Milton Meltzer Works

The Bill Of Rights : How We Got It And What It Means. 1990.
Bread--And Roses; The Struggle Of American Labor, 1865-1915. 1967.
Columbus And The World Around Him. 1990.
Crime In America. 1990.
Dorothea Lange : A Photographer's Life. 1978.
Driven From The Land : The Story Of The Dust Bowl. 2000.
Food. 1998.
Frederick Douglass, In His Own Words. 1995.
Gold : The True Story Of Why People Search For It, Mine It, Trade It, Steal It, Mint It, Hoard It. 1993.
The Hispanic Americans. 1982.
Hold Your Horses : A Feedbag Full Of Fact And Fable. 1995.
In Their Own Words; A History Of The American Negro. 1964.
The Landscape Of Memory. 1987.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Langston Hughes; A Biography</td>
<td>1968</td>
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<td>Light in the Dark; The Life of Samuel Gridley Howe.</td>
<td>1964</td>
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<td>Lincoln, In His Own Words.</td>
<td>1993</td>
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<td>Lydia Maria Child, Selected Letters, 1817-1880.</td>
<td>1982</td>
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<td>Margaret Sanger; Pioneer Of Birth Control.</td>
<td>1969</td>
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<td>Mark Twain : A Writer's Life.</td>
<td>1985</td>
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<td>Mark Twain Himself.</td>
<td>1993</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mark Twain Himself; A Pictorial Biography.</td>
<td>1960</td>
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<td>Mary McLeod Bethune : Voice Of Black Hope.</td>
<td>1988</td>
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<td>Never To Forget : The Jews Of The Holocaust.</td>
<td>1976</td>
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<td>Nonfiction for the Classroom: Milton Meltzer on Writing, History, and Social Responsibility</td>
<td>1994</td>
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<td>A Pictorial History Of The Negro In America.</td>
<td>1956</td>
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<td>Poverty In America.</td>
<td>1986</td>
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<td>Remember The Days; A Short History Of The Jewish American.</td>
<td>1974</td>
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<td>Rescue : The Story Of How Gentiles Saved Jews In The Holocaust.</td>
<td>1988</td>
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<td>The Right To Remain Silent.</td>
<td>1972</td>
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<td>Slavery : A World History.</td>
<td>1993</td>
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<td>Starting From Home : A Writer's Beginnings.</td>
<td>1988</td>
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<td>Taking Root : Jewish Immigrants In America.</td>
<td>1976</td>
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<td>Ten Queens : Portraits Of Women Of Power.</td>
<td>1998</td>
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<td>Thaddeus Stevens And The Fight For Negro Rights.</td>
<td>1967</td>
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<td>Theodore Roosevelt And His America.</td>
<td>1994</td>
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<td>There Comes A Time : The Struggle For Civil Rights.</td>
<td>2001</td>
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<td>They Came In Chains : The Story Of The Slave Ships.</td>
<td>2000</td>
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<td>Thomas Jefferson, The Revolutionary Aristocrat.</td>
<td>1991</td>
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<td>Thoreau: People, Principles, And Politics.</td>
<td>1963</td>
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<td>A Thoreau Profile.</td>
<td>1962</td>
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<td>Time Of Trial, Time Of Hope; The Negro In America, 1919-1941.</td>
<td>1966</td>
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<td>Tongue Of Flame; The Life Of Lydia Maria Child.</td>
<td>1965</td>
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<td>The Truth About The Ku Klux Klan.</td>
<td>1982</td>
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<td>Underground Man.</td>
<td>1990</td>
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<td>Violins &amp; Shovels : The WPA Arts Projects.</td>
<td>1976</td>
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<td>Voices From The Civil War : A Documentary History Of The Great American Conflict</td>
<td>1989</td>
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<td>Weapons &amp; Warfare : From The Stone Age To The Space Age.</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<td>Winnie Mandela : The Soul Of South Africa.</td>
<td>1986</td>
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<td>Witches And Witch Hunts.</td>
<td>1999</td>
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<td>World Of Our Fathers; The Jews Of Eastern Europe.</td>
<td>1974</td>
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Thomas Wentworth Higginson was born in Cambridge, MA, on December 23, 1823. He was the youngest child in the family, Louisa Storrow's tenth child and Stephen Higginson's fifteenth. Louisa was Stephen's second wife, but she lived in the Higginson household during the lifetime of his first wife. She took care of the children because Stephen's first wife was a semi-invalid.

Stephen served as the bursar of Harvard College and director of Harvard Divinity School. Thomas did not have much of a memory of his father because he passed away when Thomas was only ten. Thomas attended William Wells school. Higginson then went on to attend Harvard at the age of thirteen in 1837. He graduated second in his class in 1841.

He became interested in Transcendentalism and reform movements, especially abolitionism, that were prominent in New England in the 1830s. Higginson thought that he would like to be a minister in order to address people about reform. In 1843, he started taking graduate courses at Harvard Divinity and finished in 1847.

Higginson married Mary Channing in 1847. The same year he moved to Newburyport, MA and served as a nondenominational minister for the Unitarian First Religious Society. Higginson felt that he was intellectually superior to the seafaring townspeople, and Mary thought she was socially superior. Despite their snobbery, they adjusted to their new home. He was forced to resign his position in 1849, because some members of the congregation found his abolitionist views unacceptable.

He spent three years lecturing in different cities. In 1852, he became pastor of the Free Church in Worcester. He was reluctant to take another pastorate position because of his experience in Newburyport. However, the congregation in Worcester strongly favored abolitionism. Higginson felt very comfortable in Worcester. He became friends with Abby and Stephen Foster, whose farm was a stop of the Underground Railroad, and Lucy Stone, a women's rights activist. Higginson was a founder of
the city's Natural History Society and the Worcester Public Library.

Higginson began his literary career in Worcester, and he considered his time in Worcester (1852-1863) crucial to his development as a writer. He edited Thalatta, an anthology of poetry, and an essay entitled "Saints and Their Bodies," which discussed the importance of exercise in order to stay healthy. The essay appeared in the Atlantic Monthly; he published many more articles in the magazine.

In 1853, Mary had a crippling attack of rheumatism. Barbara Channing, a nurse, stayed with Mary while Higginson escorted Stone and Abby Foster to the World's Temperance Convention in New York. When Higginson nominated Susan B. Anthony and then Stone to serve on the committee on credentials, a debate erupted: some of the men present did not feel that women should serve on the committee. Higginson said that if women were barred from participating in the World's Temperance Convention, then it would only be a Half World's Convention. He left and invited people to attend a Whole World's Convention he would hold at the same time. He quickly built himself a national reputation.

On May 26, 1854, Higginson participated in an attack on the Boston Courthouse in order to free a slave, Anthony Burns. A police officer was killed in the attack and Burns was returned to slavery. Higginson was indicted, with many other people, for being involved in the riot. The charges against Higginson were later dropped. He continued abolitionist activities, including participation in assisting Free Soil settlers in Kansas, and supporting John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry. In 1862, he was chosen to lead the First South Carolina Colored Volunteers, the first regiment of former slaves organized by the Union Army in the Civil War. He served two years before being wounded and discharged in 1864.

Mary had moved to Newport, RI, where her family lived, while her husband was away. After the war, Higginson settled in Newport with his wife, who had started a boardinghouse there. He did not care for Newport or the boardinghouse, but he never thought of going anywhere else.

He continued his writing in Newport. Emily Dickinson sent four poems to Higginson after reading an essay he wrote, "A Letter to a Young Contributor," in the Atlantic Monthly, which was meant to encourage aspiring writers. Higginson and Dickinson corresponded until her death in 1886. In 1890, the Dickinson family asked Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd to edit Dickinson's poems. They agreed and added titles to her poems and corrected her grammar, punctuation, and capitalization. Higginson was criticized by some for making those changes, but other nineteenth-century editors probably would have made similar changes.

Army Life in a Black Regiment, which combines military history and personal experience, was published in 1870. Higginson hoped to correct what he viewed as Northern misconceptions about freed slaves by sharing his stories of their performance as soldiers.

When his wife died in 1877, he returned to Cambridge and remarried. He married Mary Thacher of Newton, MA in 1879. Their daughter, Margaret, was born in 1880. During the 1880s Higginson served in the state legislature. He fought for civil service reform and encouraged religious and cultural pluralism and tolerance.
Higginson continued to write essays, biographies and historical works. His nature essays presented scientific facts in a fashionable literary style. The biographical sketches of New England reformers he knew gave unique perspectives on their subjects. His biographical writing was best when he knew the person or had experienced the event. Margaret Fuller Ossoli, published in 1884, is considered his best biography, because of his personal acquaintance with her and the use of unpublished manuscript sources.

Despite his old age, Higginson and his family traveled through Europe in 1901. Upon his return he had lost weight and was in poor health. Higginson and Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) met in 1905 through the Dublin society and became good friends. He continued to write until his death on May 9, 1911. Decades after his death he was known mainly for editing Emily Dickinson's poems. In the 1960s, when reform movements attracted more attention in that turbulent decade again, his works were given more serious study.
Worcester Area Writers

Thomas Wentworth Higginson
Works

The Afternoon Landscape. 1889.
The Alliance Between Pilgrim and Puritan in Massachusetts: An Address Delivered Before the Old Plan. 1900.
Atlantic Essays. 1871.
Carlyle's Laugh, and Other Surprises. 1909.
Cheerful Yesterdays. 1898.
Common Sense About Women. 1881.
Concerning All of Us. 1892.
Contemporaries. 1899.
Descendants of the Reverend Francis Higginson, First "Teacher" in Massachusetts Bay Colony. 1910.
Enchiridion. 1955.
Harvard Memorial Biographies. 1866.
Helen Jackson. 1998.
John Greenleaf Whittier. 1902.
Letters and Journals of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 1846-1906. 1921.
Life of Francis Higginson, First Minister in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and Author of "New England". 1891.
Life and Times of Stephen Higginson, Member of the Continental Congress and author of the "Laco" Letters, Relating to John Hancock. 1907.
Malbone an Oldport Romance. 1997.
Margaret Fuller Ossoli. 1884.
Margaret Fuller Ossoli. 1981.
Massachusetts in Mourning. A Sermon, Preached in Worcester, on Sunday, June 4, 1854. 1854.
Massachusetts in the Army and Navy During the War of 1861-65. 1896.
The Monarch of Dreams. 1887.
The New World and the New Book, an Address, Delivered Before the Nineteenth Century Club of New York City, Jan. 15, 1891. 1892.
The Nonsense of It: Short Answers to Common Objections Against Women Suffrage. 189-.
Old Cambridge. 1899.
Oldport Days. 1873.
Out-door Papers. 1863.
Poems by Emily Dickinson. 1890.
Studies in Romance. 1900.
The Sympathy of Religions. 1876.
Tales of the Enchanted Islands of the Atlantic. 1983.
Things New and Old: An Installation Sermon. 1852.
Travellers and Outlaws; Episodes in American History. 1889.
Woman and Her Wishes; An Essay: Inscribed to the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention. 1853.
Women and the Alphabet; A Series of Essays. 1972.
Young Folks' History of the United States. 1875.
Esther Forbes was born in Westboro, MA, on June 28, 1891. She was the fifth of six children born of William Trowbridge Forbes and Harriette Merrifield. Her father graduated from Amherst College and taught mathematics at Robert College in Constantinople for a short time before moving to Westboro and opening a law office there. Her mother graduated from Oread Academy, in Worcester, and traveled the United States until she married Forbes in 1884, when she was twenty-eight. She was an historian and a writer.

When Esther's grandfather Merrifield died, he left a huge tract of land in Worcester to Harriette. They built a house on the property and moved to Worcester in 1898. The sons went to Worcester public schools, and the girls were among the first women to attend the Bancroft School. All the children did well in school except Esther. Esther was extremely nearsighted and dyslexic, problems which impeded her schoolwork. The Bancroft School had a strict curriculum to follow, but one of Esther's teachers had assigned the class to write about anything they wanted. Esther was very imaginative and told stories to her sisters all the time, so she was excited at the chance to write about anything. Esther turned in her creative story. After reading Esther's story, the teacher accused Esther of plagiarism in front of the class. Esther decided to never show her stories to teachers after the incident.

Esther went to Bradford Junior Academy for two years and graduated in 1912. When Esther had ideas that she wanted to write about, she would skip her classes and write, which was not appreciated by her teachers. She then went to live in Wisconsin with her sister Cornelia who was teaching at the University of Wisconsin. She took a few courses there and found a teacher with whom she could share her work. She wrote a short story entitled "Breakneck Hill", which she submitted to a magazine, with her teacher's encouragement. The story was published in the Grinnell Review. It won the O.Henry Prize for short stories for 1915.

She moved back to Massachusetts in 1918 and worked for Houghton
Mifflin publishing company as a typist. Because she could not spell, the firm changed her job to reading unsolicited manuscripts. She married Albert Hoskins, a lawyer, at about the same time her first novel was published in 1926. O Genteel Lady! was the second selection of the Book of the Month Club, which guaranteed thirteen-thousand-five-hundred copies of the book sold. The April 21, 1926 Boston Transcript review stated, "A distinguished first novel, written with ease and a mastery of technique unusual in a young writer."

She traveled through Europe with Albert for about a year, and then moved to New York. They soon moved to Weston, because Albert took a job in Boston working for the probation department. The couple was unhappy and divorced in 1933.

Esther moved back to Worcester 1933 and lived with her mother, sisters and brother Alan. Esther’s mother would read through handwritten letters and documents for Esther’s research, since Esther had poor eyesight. Esther and her mother did much of their research at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester.

She wrote Mirror for Witches, a book about a witch’s experiences, in 1928. The book was narrated from the point of view of a Puritan defending the actions against the witch. *The New York Herald Tribune* review stated, "This is a terrific novel, a marvelous novel, a page of history torn open ruthlessly and thrust before our eyes." *(Book Review Digest 1928, 258)* Mirror for Witches was made into a ballet, a movie, and it has never been out of print since its initial publication.

*Miss Marvel*, published in 1935, is story about a strange Worcester family. Esther liked this book the least out of the books she had written. *Paradise*, a book about the early settlements in New England, was published in 1937, and was translated into many different languages. She published two pictoral essay books, *The Boston Book*, in 1947, and *America’s Paul Revere*, in 1948. *Rainbow on the Road*, published in 1954, is a book about a painter who travels through New Hampshire. It was made into a musical, called “Come Summer,” it was not very successful.

*The General’s Lady*, published in 1938, was based on the real story of Bathsheba Spooner, who hired two men to kill her patriot husband so she could run away with an Englishman. She was the only woman ever hanged in Worcester, for planning the murder of her husband. Her head is buried somewhere in Green Hill Park. *The New Republic’s* review of The General’s Lady stated, "To say that 'The General’s Lady' is a remarkable novel is specifically true. It isn’t exactly news. Miss Forbes has written remarkable novels before. This is something rarer than that." *(Book Review Digest 1938, 331)*

Paul Revere and the World He Lived In, published in 1942, relied heavily on letters of correspondence from Paul Revere. Esther made her readers feel that they knew Paul Revere, and she depicted Boston realistically at the time of the Revolution. It won the Pulitzer Prize in history for that year. "Not every historical novelist can write a good biography, but the right kind of historical novelist has some of the qualities most needed in a good biographer. Esther Forbes is that kind of novelist, and her biography of Paul Revere takes at once a high and lasting place in American Literature." *(Book Review Digest 1942, 266)*
When Esther sent her *Johnny Tremain: A novel for Young and Old* manuscript to Harcourt-Brace, publishers altered it a great deal. Esther was upset at the changes, so she sent it to Houghton-Mifflin and they said they would publish it unaltered. It was published in 1943. *Johnny Tremain* was unique because it told the story of the American Revolution through the eyes of a boy, not a leader of the Revolution. "Esther Forbes's power to create, and to recreate, a face, a voice, a scene takes us as living spectators to the Boston Tea Party, to the Battle of Lexington and of North Creek." ([The Saturday Review](https://www.saturdayreview.org), 1943)

*Johnny Tremain* has never been out of print. It won the John Newbery Medal for most distinguished contribution of the year to children's literature. Walt Disney made a movie out of the book and invited Esther to the opening in Boston. She was picked up by Disney's limousine and taken to the show.

*The Running of the Tide*, published in 1959, follows the history of Salem as a port. It won the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Novel Award that year. MGM bought the rights for the book and Clark Gable was supposed to play the lead. MGM had financial problems at the time, so the movie was not made.

Esther was working on another book about witchcraft, when she died on August 12, 1967. The first draft had been sent to the publishing company, but the work was never finished. Esther was the first woman member of the American Antiquarian Society and left the rights to her books to the Society.
Worcester Area Writers

Esther Forbes
Works

America's Paul Revere. 1946.
The General's Lady. 1938.
Johnny Tremain. 1943.
A Mirror For Witches; /with Woodcuts by Robert Gibbings. 1928.
Miss Marvel. 1935.
O Genteel Lady! 1926.
Paradise. 1937.
Paul Revere's Ride; A Deposition. 1963.
Paul Revere & The World He Lived In. 1942.
Rainbow On the Road. 1954.
The Running of the Tide. 1948.
PROSE WRITERS

S.N. Behrman
Robert Benchley
Robert Cormier
Esther Forbes
Thomas Wentworth Higginson
Milton Meltzer

POETS

Elizabeth Bishop
Charles Olson
Stanley Kunitz
L. E. Sissman
Bill Tremblay
Mary Fell
Fran Quinn
Frank O'Hara
Olive Higgins Prouty

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Esther Forbes House in Worcester
(Source: Esther Forbes)

Esther Forbes as a young lady
(Source: Esther Forbes)
Robert Cormier was born on January 17, 1925, in Leominster, MA. Lucien Joseph and Irma Margaret (Collins) Cormier had eight children. Robert was their second. Lucien was a factory worker. They lived in French Hill, the French-Canadian section of Leominster, in a triple-decker. Like many families during the Depression, Cormier's family moved many times during his life but never out of French Hill. They moved frequently in order to afford rent during the Depression, and they also moved as the family grew. Even when he moved out on his own, he never lived farther than three miles from the house he was born in.

Robert attended a private catholic school, St. Cecilia's Parochial School. His experiences at the school shaped his life in a few different ways. He first wrote a poem in sixth grade; a nun encouraged him to write. That was the first time he considered being a writer. When he was in eighth grade, he could see that his family's triple-decker on Laurel St. was on fire from the classroom window. The sister would not allow him to leave and check on his family until he had recited the rosary. Thankfully, no one was injured in the fire. This incident caused him to have some bitter feelings toward the church for many years.

Cormier attended Leominster High School and graduated as president of his senior class in 1942. In 1943-44, he attended Fitchburg State College, where he also served as president of his class.

His mother would always encourage him to write and she would read his works without criticizing unlike the teachers he shared his work with. She predicted he would be a writer. It seemed unlikely that a boy whose father was only a factory worker could become a writer, because he believed writers came only from wealthy families.

When Cormier was a freshman at Fitchburg State College, a teacher read one of his compositions and encouraged him to write another. He went home that night and wrote a short story which she read the next day. She kept it and sent it to a magazine without telling him. Six weeks later, she handed him a check for seventy-five dollars and told him that his story was going to be published.
Cormier's first job came about serendipitously; he was looking for a job with the *Worcester Telegram and Gazette* but instead went into the WTAG radio office which was in the same building. From 1946 to 1948 he worked at WTAG writing news briefs and advertisements.

Cormier met Constance Senay through a younger sibling who was in the same class as her. He and Constance were married in 1948. The couple had four children: Bobbie Sullivan, Peter J. Cormier, Chris Cormier Hayes, and Renee E. Wheeler. They had 10 grandchildren.

Cormier did work as a reporter for the *Telegram and Gazette* from 1948 to 1955; he was also a writing consultant from 1980 to 1983. He then became a reporter for the *Fitchburg Sentinel* (which became *Fitchburg-Leominster Sentinel and Enterprise*) from 1955 to 1959. From 1959 to 1966 he served as the wire editor for the paper. He became an associate editor of the paper in 1966 and held the position until 1978. In 1969, he was asked to write a human interest column. He agreed to write it under the condition that he could use a pseudonym so he would not embarrass anyone. In 1973 the column won the K. R. Thomson Newspaper Award for the best column among writers in the international group that owned the paper. So everyone found out who John Fitch IV (John Fitch was the founder of Fitchburg) was that year. The column continued to run until 1978. He continued freelance writing for the paper from 1978 until he died. He was awarded the best human interest story of the year award, chosen by the Associated Press in New England, in 1959 and 1973.

His first novel, *Now and At the Hour*, was published in 1960. Cormier's father had just passed away, and to deal with his father's death, Cormier began to write. He wrote about a man who has lung cancer and knows that he must be dying but tries to hide the pain that he's feeling from his family in order not to burden them. He wrote two more adult novels before he became well known as a young adult author.

Cormier became inspired to write *The Chocolate War* when his son Peter refused to sell chocolates for the Catholic school he attended. Cormier began to ponder the question "what if?" The book deals with peer pressure and even faculty pressure, and with the theme of the individual against society. It shows a dark side of the Catholic Church, which was probably inspired from his incident with the fire. The book was published in 1974.

The book caused a great controversy in schools because of the profanity and sexual content. While many teachers thought the book would teach valuable lessons, many parents objected to the content. Many cities banned the book. Cormier even visited a city in Massachusetts that was going to vote on banning the book.

His next novel *I Am the Cheese* stirred up the same controversy when it was published in 1977. *I Am the Cheese* was about a boy whose father testified against organized crime figures, but even new identities did not protect the family from harm. Cormier got the idea from reading about the U. S. Witness Relocation Program. Both *I Am the Cheese* and *The Chocolate War* were made into movies.

Cormier always held close ties to his town. Most of the books take place in a town called Monument, actually based on Leominster. He cared about his readers and even used his phone number in *I Am the Cheese*. 
so that he could talk to the young readers. They would call and ask for Amy, the character in the book, and he would say that she was not available but that he was her father.

Cormier received many awards for his books, including the Carnegie Medal nomination, 1983, for *The Bumblebee Flies Anyway*; the Reader’s Choice Award, 1983, for "President Cleveland, Where Are You?" which is a short story in *Eight Plus One* a book of nine short stories; the Margaret A. Edwards Award, from the American Library Association, 1991, for *The Chocolate War, I Am the Cheese, and After First Death*; and Massachusetts Author of the Year award from the Massachusetts Library Association, 1985.

On November 2, 2000, Cormier died of lung cancer at the age of 75. He left his legacy through his books. Cormier wrote powerful and disturbing novels for young adults, most of which caused controversy. His fiction analyzed the turmoil of adolescence for young people. The teen protagonist in his stories often faced difficult situations. He never compromised what he felt to be the truth in order to please the reader. He also did not like the fact that his books were intended for young adults because he did not want adults to think they were too old to read them.
Worcester Area Writers - Robert Cormier - Works

Robert Cormier

Works

After the First Death. 1979.
Beyond the Chocolate War. 1985.
The Bumblebee Flies Anyway. 1983.
Frenchtown Summer. 1999.
Heroes. 1998.
I Am the Cheese. 1977.
I Have Words to Spend: Reflections of a Small Town Editor. 1991.
In the Middle of the Night. 1995.
A Little Raw on Monday Mornings. 1963.
Now and At the Hour. 1960.
Other Bells For Us to Ring. 1990.
The Rag and Bone Shop. 2001.
Take Me Where the Good Times Are. 1965.
Tunes for Bears to Dance to. 1992.
We All Fall Down. 1993.
Worcester Area Writers

Robert Cormier

Photos

St. Cecelia's Parochial School
(Taken By: Andrea Hubbard)

Robert Cormier's Home
(Taken By: Andrea Hubbard)

St. Cecelia's Church
(Taken By: Andrea Hubbard)

(Edward Bulwer-Lytton, according to Robert Benchley)

Robert Benchley offered this mock autobiographical sketch. In truth, he was born on September 15, 1889, in Worcester, Massachusetts. There is not extensive information available about his childhood, except for several facetious references in his sketches. He describes the city of Worcester in the following manner:

I lived in a New England town which nestled among seven hills. It was often compared to Rome, Italy, by public speakers, because of the seven hills, but the life that we boys led was in no way comparable to the life led in the effete civilization of Rome. We derived from the more sturdy races of the Aegean, with quite an intermingling of Swedes and people from Providence, RI.

(What of Our Children?, Handout from Professor Ljungquist)

Benchley's younger years were spent during a time that most called the "Gay Nineties," a period of enjoyment for many in America during that decade. This was a time period that was as anything but gay for Benchley. In his earliest recollection of the period, he was chased and stung by a bee. He goes on to describe his first memory of a Fourth of July celebration during which he was so terrified that he tried to crawl under the seats, resulting in his hands and arms slipping through the boards of the flooring and leaving a nasty cut on his chin.

He describes his early schooldays in 1895 with his first day of kindergarten. On his first day, he had his chair pulled out from under him by one of the girls in the class. He immediately went home, only to have his mother bring him back, one of the many experiences of the
decade he describes as "definitely not gay." He goes on to describe the rest of his schooldays in the 1890's as being sent home by 10:30 and sent back to school by 11. The reasons for which he was sent home varied. On one such occasion he recited a poem in front of class that his brother Edmund had taught him. It was as follows:

My mother-in-law has lately died,  
For her my heart doth yearn;  
I know she's with the angels now,  
For she was too tough to burn.

His distaste for the 1890's most likely stemmed from a tragedy that befell the family. In 1898 his older brother, Edmund, was killed in the Spanish-American War. He had been close to Edmund, having looked up to him for most of his childhood. As the elder brother, Edmund would take him out for walks and play with him. This loss had a significant impact on Benchley, and all members of his family.

Benchley attended South High School from 1904, until 1907, when he was able to transfer to Phillips Exeter Academy. This was made possible through the aid provided by Lillian Duryea, his brother's fiancée, who turned her attention to Robert after Edmund's death. While he was at Phillips Exeter he belonged to the Dramatic Club and drew illustrations for the yearbook and literary magazines. Upon graduating from Phillips Exeter, in 1908 Benchley was able to enroll at Harvard University, again with financial aid from Lillian Duryea.

While at Harvard, Benchley acted in a few plays, among them The Crystal Gazer, Ralph Roister Doister, and Below Zero. He was also elected editor of The Lampoon. He eventually received a Bachelor's degree, although it was withheld at first due to failure in one class. He had failed one class, so he did not receive his degree until 1913, although he graduated with the Class of 1912.

After receiving his degree from Harvard, Benchley went to live and work in New York City. He became managing editor of Vanity Fair, and also began working for Life. From 1920 to 1929 he ran the drama department of Life, referring to the theatre, not the genre of dramatic writing. The first issue under his direction yielded very little humor, although as the decade progressed, Benchley's love of satirical works began to surface. In 1929, when he left Life, he went to work as a drama columnist for The New Yorker, for which he wrote until January 27, 1940. While in New York, Benchley became a regular at the so-called Algonquin Round Table, a social circle of New York wits that also included such people as Harpo Marx, George S. Kaufman, and Dorothy Parker.

Benchley never wrote an entire book from start to finish; he simply organized his short stories and sketches into book length publications. Many of his short stories were also performed as short presentations, or they were given as speeches or lectures by Benchley. In 1943, Benchley announced that he had finished writing writing, for few humorists, he felt, remained funny much beyond fifty. It was in 1938, when he was 49, that he had published his last collection of original works.

Robert Benchley died on November 21, 1945 at the age of 56 of a cerebral hemorrhage.

Robert Benchley was not only a humorous writer, but also an actor,
Robert Benchley was one of the pioneering humorists in his field. He bridged the gap between short stories and screen, and wrote comedy that could have his audience laughing out loud, or simply smiling, yet both tones were equally satisfying. His humor that required thought, something that is a rare find in today's fast paced world.
Robert Benchley

Works

20,000 Leagues Under the Sea; Or, David Copperfield. 1929.
Benchley Beside Himself. 1943.
Benchley Beside Himself. 1943.
Benchley—Or Else! 1947.
The Benchley Roundup; / a Selection by Nathaniel Benchley of His Favorites. 1954.
Chips Off the Old Benchley. 1949.
From Bed to Worse; Or Comforting Thoughts About the Bison. 1934.
Inside Benchley. 1942.
Love Conquers All. 1925.
Mind’s Eye Trouble.
My Ten Years in Quandry and How They Grew. 1940.
No Poems; Or, Around the World Backwards and Sideways. 1932.
Of All Things. 1921.
Pluck and Luck. 1925.
The Treasurer’s Report, and Other Aspects of Community Singing. 1930.
Worcester Area Writers

Robert Benchley

Photos

Robert and brother Edmund, Robert on left
(Source: Laughter's Gentle Soul: The Life of Robert Benchley)

South High School
(Source: Worcester Old Home Carnival, 1907)
Samuel Nathaniel Behrman was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, on June 9, 1893. He was the third child of Joseph and Zelda Behrman, Jewish immigrants living on Worcester's East Side. He was the first of their children to be born in America, his two older siblings were born when his parents were still in Lithuania. His father was a religious man, and would often sit in silence for hours studying his books of the Jewish religion. This most often occurred when his parents had some sort of argument, something that Behrman never really understood when he was growing up. His mother was a quiet person, and Behrman was always bewildered with his parents' relationship. The relationship seemed to him almost impersonal, with all their tenderness spent on the children instead of on each other.

Growing up in Worcester, Behrman lived at 31 Providence Street, across from the Shaaria Torah Synagogue, in one of the many triple-deckers in the Worcester area at the time. Although most of the triple-deckers were in need of some sort of repair, the backyards were filled with all sorts of cherry, pear, and apple trees.

Summers on Providence Street, Behrman suggests in The Worcester Account, were almost a blur, all mixing together save for a few moments that always stand out. He tells about his obsession with Ada Summit, the belle of Providence Street, even though she had a steady boyfriend in Morton Leavitt. Behrman tells of his dislike of Leavitt when he talks about his baseball playing days as a child. Behrman was near-sighted and had trouble throwing, which led to his always being sent to play the outfield, where he would cause the least amount of interference with the rest of the game. To go along with his relegation to the outfield, Leavitt always held Ada over his, and anyone else's, head. He would let any of the other boys hold her hand, albeit while he stood with a stopwatch for a minute, seemingly amused by his control.

It was fortunate that Behrman had a best friend to spend time with, Daniel Asher, or Willie Lavin as Behrman calls him in his book The Worcester Account. At the end of the book Lavin commits suicide. This suicide brings about a curious question that Behrman had wondered
about in his childhood. His father had told him about the true Name of God, but had warned against seeking it. If one got too close to the Name, or actually discovered the Name, one would cease to exist, for it was too great a thing for any mortal being to know. Asher had always been the type of person who questioned everything, a trait that Behrman admired. The question came to Behrman of whether or not Asher had actually searched for the Name, and possibly got too close to discovery of the sacred Name.

The Worcester Account is an account of Behrman's childhood and growing up in Worcester, Massachusetts, from 1893 to shortly after he moved to New York City in 1917. The book is not so much a continuing narrative as a set of individual short stories that form his childhood. Characters remain constant, and each separate story is arranged in chronological order, although one may have nothing to do with the previous or the next. Most of the stories were originally published in The New Yorker magazine. In his book he changes his best friend's name, Daniel Asher, to Willie Lavin. Many attribute this name change to Asher's mental illness and suicide at the end of the book. The Asher family felt great sensitivity about revealing the circumstances of Daniel's death.

In 1899 Behrman entered Providence Street School; in 1907 he began attending Classical High School. It was in school that Behrman developed his passion for literature; the written word simply excited him. He would spend hours in the library, and would buy nickel paperbacks when he could. Mostly they were stories by Horatio Alger, Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys style, but anything would do. While at Classical High School he even started an after school reading club of sorts. He and a group of his friends would get together with a particular teacher to discuss literature that they had been recently reading.

In 1911 Behrman toured with the Poli vaudeville circuit performing in a skit that he wrote, essentially his first real work that was performed. He returned to Worcester in 1912 due to failing health and entered Clark College, now Clark University, as a special student. His father died in October of that year.

While at Clark College he had several essays published in The Clark College Monthly, where the more scholarly students printed their compositions. He became an assistant on the Clark publication board, but eventually was suspended from Clark for his refusal to attend Physical Education classes. Upon suspension from Clark, he entered Harvard, where he sold his first story, "La Vie Parisienne," for fifteen dollars. He graduated from Harvard in 1916 with a Bachelor's degree.

In 1917 he moved to New York City to try to live and work as a writer. While in New York, he worked towards his Master's degree from Columbia, studying under Brander Matthews. His received his Master's in 1918, and spent the next two years working for The New York Times. Dan Asher played an advisory role by encouraging Behrman to continue his writing. Behrman had been offered a job teaching for the University of Minnesota for a twelve hundred dollar salary. He took the job on recommendations from Asher.

In the early 1920s, Behrman had written a few plays, although they were never produced. In 1925, Behrman recalls reaching "a low point in my material condition and in morale." He had to face the fact that he was unable to make a living and, even worse, that he did not have ideas to
work on for his writings.

A turning point in Behrman's career occurred in 1926 when he collaborated with a more established playwright, Owen Davis, on a play called *The Man Who Forgot*. The breakthrough of his career occurred soon afterwards when the Theatre Guild presented his play, *The Second Man* (1927), which Behrman had dedicated to his brothers.

Throughout the rest of his life Behrman could not resist the economic lure of writing for Hollywood. For the next twenty-five years Behrman wrote screenplays and plays for Hollywood and Broadway productions. In total, he wrote eighteen plays, two of which were collaborations with other authors. His first non-fiction book, *Duveen*, appeared in 1952. Shortly afterwards, in 1954, *The Worcester Account* was published, perhaps his most significant book length piece of prose, detailing the stories of his boyhood in Worcester. He continued to write and publish until his death. For literary historians, Behrman is noted for his plays, but his prose works are attract more attention among the public. He died of apparent heart failure on September the 9, 1973, in New York.
Biography; A Comedy. 1933. Multiple holdings.
Brief Moment; A Comedy in Three Acts. 1931.
The Burning Glass; A Novel. 1968.
But for Whom Charlie. 1964.
Cold Wind and the Warm. 1959.
Dunigan's Daughter; A Comedy. 1946.
Duveen. 1952.
End of Summer; A Play in Three Acts. 1936.
Fanny. 1955.
Jacobowsky and the Colonel. 1944.
Jane. 1952.
Meteor. 1930.
No Time for Comedy. 1939.
People in a Diary; A Memoir. 1972.
Pirate. 1943.
Portrait of Max; An Intimate Memoir of Sir Max Beerbohm. 1960.
Rain From Heaven; A Play in Three Acts. 1935.
The Second Man; A Comedy in Three Acts. 1927.
The Suspended Drawing Room. 1965.
The Talley Method; A Play in Three Acts. 1941.
Worcester Area Writers

S. N. Behrman

Photos

Behrman in 1937, on the day his son was born
(Source: The Worcester Account, 1996)

Behrman in 1952
(Source: The Worcester Account, 1996)

Typical Triple Decker in Worcester
(Source: Images of America: Worcester Vol II)

Shaaria Torah Synagogue
(Source: Images of America: Worcester Vol II)

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