

Worcester Canal District Wagon Tours – Evaluation

Summer 2010



The Worcester Canal District Wagon Tour Project just completed an extraordinarily successful run offering three to four tours at 5, 6, 7 and 8pm every Thursday night in July in August, proving that Worcester citizens are hungry for stories about their heritage. The hour-long tours wove through Worcester's Canal District on a hay wagon pulled by teams of Belgian draft horses. Serving an average of 65 people per night throughout the eight weeks (for a total of 519 individual rides), the tours stepped up from three to four rides per night after the second week because of the demand. Running rain or shine, by the end of August, they were turning away an estimated 10-15 people every night. The wagon, holding 20 people comfortably, was often fully booked by 5pm with people lining up as early as 4:30 to get a seat.

This project was the result of a unique and committed partnership consisting of the representatives from the local business, nonprofit and education communities. Everyone came together in support of the students who ran all aspects of the tour from collecting business sponsorships to promoting the tour at citywide events to selling t-shirts and supporting each other during their presentations. Building on the success of last summer's effort, six new interpreters were hired through a very competitive process at South High School. Throughout a week-long training program, the students self selected,

researched (at the Worcester Historical Museum), developed narratives for and learned to present (in the first person) unique characters from Worcester’s past. These 2-5minute narratives were then placed at strategic intervals along the wagon tour’s farm to factory story that was delivered by seasoned guides, and former South High graduates, Rubby Wuabu and Iris Sanxhaku, now students at Simmons College and The College of the Holy Cross respectively. The idea behind the presentations was that these students, all recent immigrants themselves, could deliver a unique experience, rich in the nuance and pathos of Worcester’s Industrial Revolution past when scores of immigrants flooded the city, a phenomenon that is still occurring today. In fact, it became more than that. Alexandra Gicas, Michelle Li, Nancy Nguyen, Stephanie Felix-Torres, David LeBeouf and Ann Quaioco participated in a delivery that included a unique mix of spirited fun (tour goers WOO! WOO!ed the local businesses supporters *and* stopped traffic in Kelley Square), hands-on history (the interpreters used original objects - such as a box of barbed wire – and old maps and photographs to illustrate their stories) and social activism as they celebrated the 75th Anniversary of Social Security and passionately advocated for the replication of the Blackstone Canal on Harding Street.

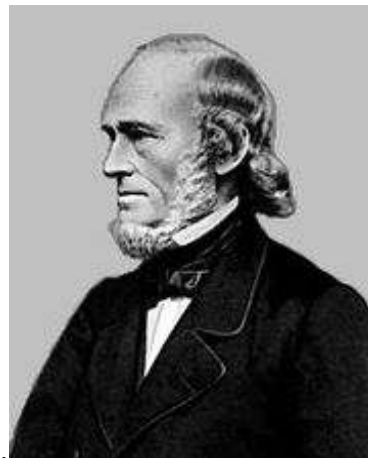
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Alexandra Gicas as...

Frances Perkins

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Stephanie Felix- Torres as...

Ichobod Washburn

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and Nancy Nguyen as..

Emma Goldman.

Comments from the public were outstanding (see evaluation sheets enclosed), and by the end of the summer each of the six newcomers had stepped up to deliver both parts of the main narrative during the last two weeks. This sets the stage for the project's sustainability as we can now hire a new group of interpreters next summer in hopes of enlisting two wagons and doubling the number of tours per night. To that end, we are already in communication with South High School and the City of Worcester.

Therefore, it is with tremendous gratitude that we submit this report to The Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission. Your initial \$3000 grant leveraged an additional \$5,813.30 in support of the project. This figure does not include an additional \$400 in *Free the Blackstone* T-shirt sales. With total expenditures of \$8,660.96, the remaining \$552.34 has been committed towards next summer's tours and as of now every student has committed to return. Additionally, this summer's project generated 346 hours of volunteer time.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or anyone involved in this uniquely successful project should you require additional information.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Bacon, Supervisor
Bacon64@charter.net

Additional photographs for your review:

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The wagon is preparing to load.

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decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Teamster, Bob Largess, explaining the fine points to a tour goer in the front while Iris and David lead a group of participants in the back. Every seat, front and back, was often filled to overflowing while the interpreters walked along behind.

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are needed to see this picture.

Interpreter, Ann Quaiocoe, takes the mike as Canal Contractor Tobias Boland.

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Children always received special attention from everyone involved.



Our tour's contagious, central spirit – Bob Largess, Rubby Wuabu and Iris Sanxhaku.

We would like to thank these organizations, individuals and businesses for their ideas, energy, financial and collaborative support:

The John H. Chaffee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission
Ranger Chuck Arning
The Canal District Alliance
Sue Moynagh
Gene Zabinski
Allen Fletcher
John Giangregorio
Bill Chase
Bob Largess
This is MYCity! – a program of CultureLEAP, Inc.
Wayne Whittier and fellow teamsters Ali and Dean
Pat Perry of Sneak Peak Productions
Lynne McKenny Lydick of The Worcester Women's History Project
The Worcester Historical Museum and Librarian, Robin Christensen
Preservation Worcester and Education Director, Susan Cecacci
The City of Worcester - Mayor Joe O'Brien and
Cultural Development Officer, Erin Williams
St. John's Church
The staff at Union Station
Maureen Binienda, Principal of South High School
Alexis Grace Consignment Boutique
The Banner Bar and Grill

DZian Gallery
Wings Restaurant
The Perfect Game
Narragansett Brewing Company
Fairway Beef
The Smokestack Urban Barbecue
Worcester Publishing, LTD.
Blackstone Freshway Pizza
Joseph's Lock and Safe Company, Inc.
The Broadway Catering
Luciano's Cotton Club
And
Blackstone Vignettes Resale Coop.