

IQP: Worcester Area Writers Report

Samuel Song

October 14, 2008

Abstract:

The project goal was to redesign and re-implement the old Worcester Area Writers website (<http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/Library/Archives/WAuthors/>). The project would add additional content and multimedia to a new website redesigned for ease of use. The website would be reviewed to correct previously erroneous information and copyright problems from the old website. The project focuses on researching, examining, and reporting on the literature and lives of writers related to Worcester. The project was advised by Professor Dempsey.

Process:

The project group meet for discussion for about one to two hours per week. Group member shared work and progress made during the week to the group and planned objectives for the next week. Each meeting would also have an additional focus, such as viewing movies of Robert Benchley, reading poetry of Kunitz and Bishop, visiting the special collections archive of the WPI Library, and guest visitors who discussed digitizing media for the website and copyright laws.

Readings:

Prior to the start of the project I was asked to read some works of Worcester authors during the summer. The books I read were:

The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier

The Benchley Roundup: A Selection by Nathaniel Benchley of his Favorites by Robert Benchley

The Collected Poems of Stanley Kunitz by Stanley Kunitz

Selected Poems by Frank O'Hara

Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara: A Memoir by Joe LeSueur

Of these books my favorite was Benchley's short stories. His humor was satirical of a common man's life told through short stories about himself as a clumsy fool. My interest in Benchley became a starting point for the project, which initially focused on him. The project group read and watched some of Benchley's works, and discussed them as an introduction to the Worcester writers before we each individually read and researched writers we had chosen. Cormier's *The Chocolate War* was an allegory for the corruption of uncontrolled authority. The protagonist is defeated in the stories to reflect what commonly happens in reality but not fiction. *The Collected Poems of Stanley Kunitz* were enjoyable but I had no interest in further pursuing research upon them for critical analysis. The works related to Frank O'Hara were uninteresting to me. I felt that his poetry was too biographical with no connections that I could relate to.

During the course of the project's term I read the following works:

In Worcester, Massachusetts": Essays on Elizabeth Bishop From the 1997 Elizabeth Bishop Conference at WPI by Laura Jehn Menides, Angela G. Dorenkamp, Elizabeth Bishop Conference

Army Life in a Black Regiment by Thomas Wentworth Higginson

Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web by Daniel Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig

Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920 by Roy Rosenzweig

"Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era" by Roy Rosenzweig

"Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past" by Roy

Rosenzweig

In Worcester, Massachusetts was a collection of essays about Elizabeth Bishop from a 1997 conference and celebration in Worcester of Bishop. The essays were critical analysis of her poetry, of which I had a small previous exposure to at the time of reading. *The Army Life in a Black Regiment* was a historical account a white man who had lead the first freed slave army regiment during the American Civil War. Higginson felt that the freed slaves were childlike and had not given the opportunities to mature. He believed the success of his regiment was vital to their future as it would set a precedent for future black regiments to be created and that army life would allow them to have the chance to become men. The works of Roy Rosenzweig were the most interesting to me because of its relations to computer science and my humanities focus of the history of science and technology. Rosenzweig advocates for the use of emerging medias, such as websites to reach new larger and diverse audience. He critically discusses the potential benefits and problems of using the web to maintain records of history. Rosenzweig's *Eight Hours for What We Will* is an in-depth case study of the social history of the working class' life in industrial Worcester during the 1870-1920s. The history delves deep into the history of Worcester to present a clearer understanding of the plight and triumphs of the lower working class.

Website:

A major part of the project work I completed was working on the new website.

Some of the technologies I used were Hypertext Markup Language (HTML), Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), and Perl for server side scripts. HTML is the basic language to structuring text information for web-pages. The Cascading Style Sheets are used to define the layout of the pages and how the HTML will be displayed. I had originally planned to use PHP, but the WPI servers has stopped supporting PHP. I used the recommended Common Gateway Interface (CGI) for Perl scripts instead.

I began with the design of the navigation bar, creating several horizontal and vertical types based on the CSS hover functionality. I tried to improve upon the navigation design on the old website, such as adding padding between writers names for a cleaner look. However, Internet Explorer does not support the CSS hover functionality correctly, so I had to add JavaScript within each HTML file to achieve the correct behavior. This was added to each of the HTML files which I then divided into five parts with CSS; header, navigation bar, information box, main area, and footer. The navigation bar links to the writers organized by alphabetical listing and genres types, a guestbook, history, sitemap, and “to top” of the current page. The alphabetical listing is split into five sections so users are not shown with an overwhelming list. The genres are divided into the types, biographical, historical, humor, novels, and poetry, to cover all of the genres of the current listing of writers. The “to top” feature is only useful if users do not use the Internet Explorer web browser (such as Firefox), as Internet Explorer does not support the CSS for absolute positioning of the navigation bar correctly.

I designed the writer pages into six parts; biography, works, photos, multimedia, references, and external links. The pages are split into the sections with anchors allowing the user to jump to any section from the top of the page (and back again with the

“to top” link in the navigation bar). I also copied over the old contents of the pages from the old website, and recreated miscellaneous pages such as links & history. The photos on the old website were copied over into a photo gallery that I had created with CSS to save space. Users can see smaller versions of all of the photos and hover over them to see an enlarged version with a caption.

I created an information box for each writer page to give users a quick summary about the writer. It includes the writer’s full name, a picture, date of birth, date of death (if applicable), famous works, major achievements and awards, and literary movement.

The CSS was used to control most of the presentation of the website. The typography of the font and the layout of the website used were defined with CSS. I used it to change line spacing, increasing it for more room for the superscripts in the biographies. The look of the navigation bar, how images are displayed, the header, footer, and writer information panels are all set up with CSS. The sitemap uses CSS for a visual hierarchy with nested lists and images. The homepage of the weekly quote and image links for writers was created with rules in CSS. I had spent much time testing different layouts, fonts, and sizes to create the website’s appearance.

Security for the website was added because of the concern for the public accessing copyrighted photos, erroneous information in either the old or uncompleted works. I added password protection to website which was being hosted by my user account. The .htaccess file I wrote restricts access by requiring a valid WPI UNIX username and password. I choose this method because the WPI servers were already configured to use this type of .htaccess file for security on the WPI servers.

To implement some of the interactive non-static features to the website, I needed

a server side scripting language. The WPI servers do not support the Hypertext Preprocessor (PHP) language but were configured for Common Gateway Interfaces (CGI) and recommended the use of Perl. After studying some Perl Web Programming tutorials, I wrote a script to increment a hit counter each time the main index page is loaded, and it saves the count to the file, counterfile. The CGI presented problems of needing specific permissions to work correctly and required thorough testing, as server scripts can potentially cause issues with system security in the WPI servers. The WPI web policies guidelines required my scripts to run with -wT flags; warnings and tainted modes for extra security.

The guestbook was a more complicated Perl script as it required form input from the users which must be checked for validity. The guestbook saves the up to 150 entries each with a 250 character maximum into the guestbook.txt file. The guestbook does not save HTML in the entries.

The Message of the Day script was created to display a quote of a Worcester writer onto the index page, and change periodically. The mod.cgi cycles through a list of quotes in the mod.txt file. It was decided for the quotes to change weekly (every Sunday) because a daily quote would require an large amount of quotes to stay fresh and it would be harder to maintain the quality in those chosen. I selected eight quotes for the website from Roy Rosenzweig's *Eight Hours for What We Will*. New quotes can be added to the site by other group members or other authors by adding them to the mod.txt and separating each quote with a new line. The quote source can be marked between HTML tags `<p id=source>` and `</p>` to display the quote's source to the lower right of the quote. The layout of the quotes and sources are set up using CSS, surrounded by an

image of large red curly quotes. The quotes I choose were:

“For what Worcester workers did in Institute Park, or in Alice Dignan's illegal kitchen dive, or at the Swedish Methodist Church's July Fourth picnic, or in Horace Bigelow's White City Amusement Park, or at Fred Fredeli's Bijou movie theater had a good deal of bearing on what happened inside the city's wire factories, its union halls, its voting booths, and even in the neighborhoods of its wealthiest citizens.”

Eight Hours for What We Will, 222

“Factory products remained diverse; factory owners remained native-born, locally rooted, unified, and paternalistic; factory workers remained ethnic and divided...Diversity best characterized Worcester industry.”

Eight Hours for What We Will, 12

“Worcester is an unlikely industrial city. Lacking the usual prerequisites of antebellum industrial and urban development - a navigable body of water, waterpower, and raw materials - it nevertheless developed into a major industrial center, the twenty-eighth largest city in the United States by 1880.”

Eight Hours for What We Will, 11

“Worcester workers created tight ethnic communities with elaborate organizational infrastructures - churches, clubs, kinship networks, saloons - which served as alternatives to trade unions and political parties.”

Eight Hours for What We Will, 27

“For many Worcester workers the saloon offered a variety of attractive activities from social services to informal socializing to singing and gambling.”

Eight Hours for What We Will, 58

“By 1930 the movie theater had brought workers closer to the mainstream of American society, but the assembly line- particularly in non-unionized, unsafe, low paying factories - kept them out of it.”

Eight Hours for What We Will, 221

“Eight Hours for Work, Eight Hours for Rest, Eight Hours for What We Will.”

Eight Hours for What We Will, 1

“No matter how much autonomy Worcester workers achieved in their leisure space and time, they still had to confront the factory whistle. Its sound returned them to a sphere of life in which power and control resided outside their class.”

Eight Hours for What We Will, 152

The project presented issues with the copyright of the photos that were from the old website and any new potential images or multimedia that we would want to add to the new website. I was unsure of which images the group would wish to search for copyright ownership and which would simply be dropped from the website, so I did not delete any. The group should be able to easily remove any photos they do not find within public domain or find permission to use from the website before public publication.

I searched the Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/index.html>) and Internet Archive (<http://www.archive.org/index.php>) for public domain multimedia to link or add to the website. The Library of Congress has an online resource for Stanley Kunitz which I added links to, along with the embedding an audio file of the Library of Congress's Poet and the Poem Audio Webcast; an interview with Kunitz on October 20, 2000. The method I originally used to embed the mp3 file required users to have

installed the QuickTime plug-in and forced users to start downloading the file upon the page loading. I switched to a flash player, as then users will not have to download the file unless they attempt to play it and it prevents the delay in the loading of the page. Additionally I added links to works of Higginson in his page which were no longer under copyright and audio, video, and text links for Benchley.

I wrote a document for whoever would host the website, explaining the files I had created and how they may continue to build upon them. I included information for setting the website up with the correct user permissions, adding new content such as embedded audio, and brief explanations of some of the files. The website was passed over to another group member of the project, whom I held a meeting with to transfer the files, give the website information document, and explain and answer any question about the website. I offered to be contacted and help with any problems that may arise over the next terms related to the work I had done as the remaining group builds upon the website.

Roy Rosenzweig:

After reading some of the works of Stanley Kunitz, Frank O'Hara, Robert Cormier, Robert Benchley, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson; I chose to focus on Roy Rosenzweig for the project. Although I enjoyed reading Benchley, Kunitz and Cormier, I wanted to focus on an author not already chosen by a collaboration in the local library to compile essays for the writers of Worcester. Roy Rosenzweig was an social and digital historian. He authored *Eight Hours for What We Will*, a detailed case study of the Worcester during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The digital

history related to both my computer science interests and the project's goal of recording the history of writers related to Worcester using the internet as a media to reach our audiences. My humanities studies have focused on the History of Science and Technology which directly relate to Rosenzweig works on Digital History in his articles "Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era" and "Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past".

The majority of my research was done through online resources such as obituaries and reading his works. I contacted the Center for History and New Media, a department in George Mason University founded by Roy Rosenzweig in 1994 about the IQP project. Tom Scheinfeldt, the managing director of the Center for History and New Media replied and helped me by reviewing a draft of the biography of Rosenzweig. He also passed it along to Rosenzweig's widow. Tom corrected a few errors in the biography and said he would look into any photos or media of Roy that we could use for the website. He wished to be contacted upon the website's publication (jscheinf@gmu.edu). I will forward any media to the group if he is granted permission to share anything for the project.

To avoid references cluttering the biography, I used links and superscripts for references. All of the references used can be found near the bottom of Rosenzweig's page along with a selected list of his works and external links to websites he has contributed to or articles he has written.