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Worcester Authors on the Web

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Abstract

This project, prepared for WPI's Archives Department in George C. Gordon Library, describes Worcester area prose authors and the rare book trade with the intent to expand upon and publicize the Archives' current holdings of Worcester authors. We investigated the rare book trade and the authors' lives through primary works, secondary works, and interviews. We have created a web publication on the authors and holdings at Gordon Library and have made a list of recommendations to the Archives Department on the acquisition of appropriate books to expand the collection in a cost-effective manner.

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Problem Statement

WPI's Gordon Library has a relatively small collection of Worcester authors in its possession. Students and faculty have problems obtaining information on Worcester authors due to the limited availability of information on Worcester authors at Gordon Library and at other area libraries.

Goal Statement

The main goal of this project was to publicize and expand upon the current holdings of Worcester authors at Gordon Library. In order to accomplish this goal, we made a web publication on Worcester authors and the material at Gordon Library. In addition to the web publication, there is a list of recommendations, submitted to the Archives Department of Gordon Library, of books that could supplement the collection.

Introduction

Worcester County, over the years, has been home to many famous authors, particularly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. The authors who lived in this area include: S. N. Behrman, Esther Forbes, Milton Meltzer, Robert Cormier, Robert Benchley, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Although local libraries have special collections on certain local authors, none of the libraries in the area has a comprehensive collection of Worcester author publications. WPI's Gordon Library has a very limited collection of Worcester authors' books in comparison to Clark University's Goddard Library and Worcester Public Library. Students and faculty have difficulties obtaining detailed information on Worcester authors due to the limited collections at Gordon Library and other area libraries.

Artifacts, photographs, documents, and publications about WPI's history, from its founding in 1865, are included in the WPI Archives collection. The purpose of the Archives is to collect, preserve, and make available information on WPI's past to students, faculty, administration, alumni, and all interested researchers. Gordon Library's Special Collections are also housed in the Archives room. The Special Collections 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 significant source for Dickens materials in Central Massachusetts. The Dickens Collection includes: more than 150 volumes of Dickens' writings, more than 35 manuscripts and autograph letters, 325 volumes in sets, 168 volumes of Dickens-related periodicals, about 150 volumes of letters, biographies and illustrations, and about 275 volumes of reference works, criticism

and commentary on the novels, Dickens' England, the Victorian period, and related English authors

Each author has had a different impact on the Worcester area and the publishing world. Behrman wrote for stage and screen long before publishing book length prose works. Forbes had one of her novels adapted to the screen by Walt Disney. Benchley wrote both sketches and gave short presentations and comic lectures on his writings. Each author has his or her own style, yet they all share the common Worcester influence in some aspect of their publications. Some of them were born in Worcester, and some came to Worcester later in their lives, living here for a short while before moving on. However long they chose to be here, the impact of what they did and what they experienced in this New England city can be seen in their writing and stayed with them their entire lives.

Literature Review

Our topic is one without extensive previous research, thereby making one of our main goals to provide a basis for future research. The only previous research done at WPI that is available is an MQP done on three major poets in the Worcester area. Other scholarship, such as the research of Michael True, is also available. True's Worcester Area Writers 1680-1980, lists many Worcester area authors, although it offers less than comprehensive treatment of each author, providing only a short biography for each and a list of books written.

There are a limited number of studies on the individual authors we have selected. For Robert Cormier there is one biography, Presenting Robert Cormier, by Patricia J. Campbell, published in 1985. I Have Words to Spend: Reflections of a Small Town Editor is a collection of his personal short stories, it was published in 1991. This collection contains 85 stories that Cormier originally wrote as newspaper columns during his days as a journalist.

Milton Meltzer has only an autobiography, Starting From Home: A Writer's Beginnings: A Memoir, published in 1991. Meltzer does have an extensive collection of books he has published, and is still alive today.

In 1976, Margaret Erskine published a biography of Esther Forbes, her aunt. Her book shares personal moments experienced by her family. Jack Bales wrote both Esther Forbes: a Bio-bibliography of the Author of Johnny Tremain (1998) and "Collecting Esther Forbes" (1995). Neither is a full biography, but both provide useful information about Forbes.

Robert Benchley: A Biography, by Nathaniel Benchley, his son, was published in 1955. Also available on Benchley is Laughter's Gentle Soul: The Life of Robert Benchley (1997), by Billy Altman. Nathaniel Benchley gives a good account of his father's life, although, as his son, some of shadier parts of Benchley's life go unmentioned, while Billy Altman proceeds to delve into the darker side of Benchley as an alcoholic.

There are quite a few biographies of Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Mary Thacher Higginson, his wife, wrote Thomas Wentworth Higginson; The Story of His Life, published in 1914. Mary Thacher Higginson shares personal details of her husband's life and lets Higginson speak for himself in her biography. In 1967, Howard N. Meyer published Colonel of the Black Regiment; The Life of Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Meyer gives a good account of the life and times of the nineteenth century author, abolitionist, women's rights reformer, and soldier. However, he does not offer the intimate details that Higginson's wife included in her book. Anna Mary Wells wrote Dear Preceptor: The Life and Times of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, published in 1963. Wells gives a good account of Higginson's relationship with Emily Dickinson. Higginson also wrote an autobiography, entitled Cheerful Yesterdays, published in 1898. This book contains all the details on all aspects of his life; therefore, it also reveals much about his character and inner life. However, he may have been reticent about revealing some aspects of his life.

The only book length study written on S. N. Behrman was published in 1975 by Kenneth T. Reed entitled S. N. Behrman. S. N. Behrman wrote two books related to his life, The Worcester Account (1996) and People in a Diary; A Memoir (1972). Both books

by Behrman are his own subjective accounts of his life, and subject to the shortcomings of relying on memory as a fully accurate record.

In addition to consulting books about the authors, it is important to read books by the authors as well. Many of the authors wrote stories about their time in Worcester. While not histories, these books provide the authors' memories more than anything else. While books based on memory have some basis in actual events, they are almost always skewed in some way, as memory is never perfect, and tends to change depending on the person's perspective and experiences. Using books on the history of Worcester is a useful method to cross-reference some of the ways in which an author's memory perceives his past.

Procedure

As previously stated, not only is the goal of this project to present a discussion of Worcester area authors, but also to expand WPI's current holdings and to publicize these holdings and other information on the authors. It will be publicized on the Web in the form of a web publication that can easily be added to in future projects on the topic. Also included in our presentation are recommendations to the library on possible additions to the Worcester author holdings that they already possess, 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, etc.

Throughout the duration of the project, we both read books by and about our selected authors; S.N. Behrman, Esther Forbes, Robert Cormier, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Robert Benchley, and Milton Meltzer. The books by the authors gave us a sense of their significant themes, their varying styles, and possibly some insight into their lives. Each author lived in a slightly different time, and if in the same time, certainly in different areas, so each had a different view on how things were when they were writing.

During C term of 2002 we visited area libraries, including Worcester Public Library, the Goddard Library at Clark University, and Dinand Library at College of the Holy Cross. We compiled a list of books by our selected authors at each library. (Appendix A) We expected each of these libraries to have a section on Worcester area authors, with the Worcester Public Library having the most extensive holdings. Special collections existing at these libraries include Clark's Esther Forbes and S.N. Behrman collections and the Worcester Room at the Worcester Public Library.

Among other visitations was a visit to Ben Franklin Bookstore, located in Worcester. This bookstore specializes in rare books, specifically those by Worcester area authors. We interviewed the owner of the store, Don Reid, about collecting old and rare books. This interview and information was especially useful in building a list of recommendations to submit to the Gordon Library at WPI of possible additions to the current holdings. He had knowledge of the best times to buy certain older books, what is available at different price ranges, and what would be realistic additions to a library like WPI's.

To complete our interviews we talked to Margaret Erskine, the niece of Esther Forbes. She currently lives in Worcester, across the street from WPI. We gained some insight into the life of Esther Forbes, what she was like, and how she was viewed at the time she was living. The interview with Margaret Erskine was of the unstructured type. We asked a few specific questions, and Erskine gave us a narrative account on Esther Forbes's life.

Upon completion of the research phase of the project at the end of C term, we brought all this information together in a report and web publication. The report's introduction provides a brief history of Worcester. The history focuses on the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, when these authors were alive and brought to light some possible events or occurrences that may have influenced their writings. Following the history of Worcester, there is a section on each author that we are studying. Each section contains a brief biography, including descriptions of some of their works.

Supplementing and extending on the report is the web publication. The web publication focuses on the authors we are studying. The selected authors have their own

respective sections, each including a short biography, a list of works, and other illustrated materials such as photographs and illustrations. 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.

Worcester History

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 six hundred 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 Worcester. (Erskine, 54)

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 seventeen thousand. (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 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 thirty-two thousand 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 one thousand 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 three-hundred thousand 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 nineteenth century city living in the twentieth 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.

S.N. Behrman

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. He 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 attract more attention among the public. He died of apparent heart failure on September the 9, 1973, in New York.

Robert Benchley

Robert Charles Benchley, born Isle of Wight, September 15, 1807. Shipped as cabin boy on the Florence J. Marble, 1815. Arrested for bigamy and murder in Port Said 1817. Released 1820. Wrote Tale of Two Cities. Married Princess Anastasia of Portugal 1831. Children: Prince Rupprecht and several little girls. Wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin 1850. Editor of Godeys Ladies Book 1851-1856. Began Les Miserables in 1870, finished by Victor Hugo. Died 1871. Buried in Westminster Abbey.

(Robert Benchley, according to Robert Benchley)

When asked to describe his life, 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, 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, movie maker, and critic. As a professional, he brought a new sophistication to humor and stimulated others in the business to do likewise. He commanded a certain respect and inspired friendship among literary colleagues to an extent that few writers have been able to accomplish. Although Benchley was most likely influenced by the other writers of the Algonquin Round Table, it is hard to determine his real effect, as Benchley worked with many different groups of writers throughout his career.

Benchley was first famous as a humorist for his improvisational oral monologues. One of his most famous sketches was known as The Treasurer's Report, a sketch detailing, and making fun of, the report that the treasurer of an organization must give. As a writer Benchley was in demand even before he had ever been paid to write. As a senior at Harvard he was asked to write a daily humorous column for the *Boston Journal*.

Benchley's shift to the screen from written works came about mainly because the movie business was fun, easy, and lucrative. Writing his columns and short stories was a much more difficult task, and far less rewarding, monetarily speaking, than the screen. According to his son, Nathaniel, Benchley was "physically unable to save money," which made the higher profits of the screen much more attractive.

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 Cormier

Robert Cormier was born on January 17, 1925, in Leominster, Massachusetts. 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 Street was on fire from the classroom window. The sister would not allow him to leave and check on his family until he had recited on 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. From 1943 to 1944, 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, a 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 seventy-five. 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.

Esther Forbes

Esther Forbes was born in Westboro, Massachusetts, 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 pictorial 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*, 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.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson

Thomas Wentworth Higginson was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 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, Massachusetts 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, Rhode Island, 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, Massachusetts 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 give 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.

Milton Meltzer

Milton Meltzer was born on May 8, 1915, to Benjamin 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 fifteen dollars.

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 twelve, 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 fifteen 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 a hundred 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 thirty 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. Meltzer 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. 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 a hundred 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."

Book Recommendations

In order to expand WPI's current holdings, a list of recommendations of books to purchase will be given to the Archives Department. This list is composed of three categories: books already owned, 1st choice purchase, and 2nd choice purchase. The 1st choice purchases are biographies of the authors and their major works. The 2nd choice purchases are books that have less significance in the authors' literary career. (Appendix B)

A book's value is determined by its condition, how rare it is, the edition, subject matter, and how often a copy is sold. It is important in pricing not only that an item is rare, but also that the collection is comprehensive. Ideal conditions for a book would be that it would be in its original binding, with few marks on the cover or in the book. A book may be rare because it was the first book published by the author; thus not many copies were printed. Over time, books are lost and destroyed, thus decreasing the number of copies in circulation. A first edition is worth more than others; usually because it was the first printing of the book. A publisher's proof is a final draft of the work before the first edition of the book is released. Usually only minor changes are made to the publisher's proof before the first edition is published. It does not make sense to spend a large amount of money on a proof since there are very few differences between a first edition and a proof. A presentation copy, dedicated copy, or signed copy would all be worth a great deal more money because of their special significance.

Most of the books covered in this report are widely available and some still in print. Most of the first editions cost between thirty and one hundred dollars. Many of Cormier's books are still in print and could be purchased for very little expense. These

books cost approximately twenty dollars. Meltzer's books are inexpensive as are Cormier's because many are still in print. A first edition of Brother, Can You Spare A Dime; The Great Depression, 1929-1933, for example, costs only about forty dollars. Higher priced works such as No Time for Comedy by Behrman, signed by the cast of the play and the author, costing \$1,250, could be purchased if the library wishes to obtain a more valuable collectable. From Bed to Worse; Or Comforting Thoughts About the Bison by Benchley costs between \$60 and \$200, depending on condition and the presence of a dust jacket. Johnny Tremain by Forbes can be purchased new for \$15. A first edition of Johnny Tremain costs between \$20 and \$250. The first edition of Part of a Man's Life Books Unread by Higginson costs between \$25 and \$60.

Conclusion

In the course of this project, we read books by and about our selected authors; S.N. Behrman, Esther Forbes, Robert Cormier, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Robert Benchley, and Milton Meltzer. Books by these authors gave a sense of their significant themes, their varying styles, and some insight into their lives. Each author lived in a slightly different time, and if in the same time, certainly in different areas, so each had different views of events and social attitudes when they were writing.

During C term of 2002, we visited area libraries, including the Worcester Public Library, the Goddard Library at Clark University, and Dinand Library at The College of the Holy Cross. Special collections existing at these libraries include Clark's Esther Forbes and S.N. Behrman collections, and the Worcester Room at the Worcester Public Library. Clark had many manuscripts and documents in both the Forbes and Behrman collections. The Worcester Public Library has the best collection of the authors' books. The Worcester Public Library also has newspaper clipping files on Cormier, Behrman, and Benchley. Holy Cross had a small collection of books by the authors compared to WPI's collection.

We interviewed Margaret Erskine about her relative, Esther Forbes. Erskine showed us pictures of Esther and her family, books by Esther in other languages, and even the Newbery Medal that was awarded to Esther for Johnny Tremain. Erskine supplied us with biographical information on Esther's life and her works. (Appendix C)

We went to Ben Franklin Bookstore, located in Worcester, Massachusetts. This bookstore specializes in rare books, specifically those by Worcester area authors. We interviewed the owner of the store, Don Reid, about the collecting of old and rare books.

This interview and information were useful in building a list of recommendations to submit to the Gordon Library at WPI of possible additions to the current holdings. We learned about how the price of a book is determined. The price of a book depends upon its condition, how rare it is, the demand for the book, whether it is signed or not, and the area the book is being sold in. (Appendix D)

We compiled a list of recommendations for the Archives Department to use to purchase books for Gordon Library. (Appendix B) We also created a website that can be used by the students and faculty of WPI, as well as other scholars, to obtain more information on our local writers.

Web Site Information

To complement the report, we designed and created a web publication to be posted on the Gordon Library's Archives Department web site. It was specially designed to be used as a resource for WPI professors and students. It is also hoped that members of other schools, as well as the general public, will be able to use this as a resource for Worcester area author information.

Currently the publication includes the six authors discussed in this paper. It is hoped that in the future this site can be expanded by future projects to include other area authors. Possible additions to the site are area poets, playwrights, or expanding on other area prose authors.

The simple design of the web site allows for easy expansion by future projects. Each author's section includes four pages: an introduction, a biography, a page of photos of or related to the author, and a list of the author's publications. The pages and layout of the website can be viewed in Appendix E.

Future Projects

The website created should be continued to be updated and expanded with more Worcester area authors. A future project could include biographies of poets: Elizabeth Bishop, Stanley Kunitz, and Charles Olson. Other prose authors from the Worcester area that could be researched in another project include: Alice Morse Earle, John Dufresne, Jack O'Connell, Don Asher, Isaiah Thomas, George Bancroft, Abigail Kelly Foster, and Stephen Symonds Foster.

Authorship

Teammates include Andrea Hubbard and Michael LeBarron. Andrea focused on Esther Forbes, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Robert Cormier. Michael focused on S.N. Behrman, Robert Benchley, and Milton Meltzer.

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- Behrman, S. N., Wine of Choice; A Comedy in Three Acts. 1938.
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- Benchley, Robert., Benchley Beside Himself. 1943.
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- Benchley, Robert., Inside Benchley. 1942.
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Cormier, Robert., The Rag and Bone Shop. 2001.

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and Death of Famous Doll Bilby. 1963.

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- Higginson, Thomas Wentworth., John Greenleaf Whittier. 1926.
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- Higginson, Thomas Wentworth., Malbone an Oldport Romance. 1869.
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- Behrman, S. N., Biography; A Comedy. 1933. Multiple holdings.
- Behrman, S. N., Brief Moment; A Comedy in Three Acts. 1931.
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- Behrman, S. N., But for Whom Charlie. 1964.
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- Meltzer, Milton., Theodore Roosevelt And His America. 1994.
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- Meltzer, Milton., The Truth About The Ku Klux Klan. 1982.
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- Meltzer, Milton., Weapons & Warfare : From The Stone Age To The Space Age. 1996.
- Meltzer, Milton., Winnie Mandela : The Soul Of South Africa. 1986.
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- Meltzer, Milton., World Of Our Fathers; The Jews Of Eastern Europe. 1974.
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- Cormier, Robert., After the First Death. 1979.
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- Cormier, Robert., Beyond the Chocolate War. 1985.
- Cormier, Robert., Beyond the Chocolate War. 1986.
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Cormier, Robert., A Little Raw on Monday Mornings. 1980.

Cormier, Robert., A Little Raw on Monday Mornings. 1992.

Cormier, Robert., Now and At the Hour. 1960. Multiple holdings.

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Cormier, Robert., Other Bells For Us to Ring. 1990.

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Cormier, Robert., Take Me Where the Good Times Are. 1991.

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Cormier, Robert., Tenderness. 1998.

Cormier, Robert., Tunes for Bears to Dance to. 1992.

Cormier, Robert., We All Fall Down. 1993.

Appendix B

Books the already owned

1st choice

2nd choice

- Behrman, S. N., 4 Plays: The Second Man, Biography, Rain from Heaven, End of Summer. 1955.
- Behrman, S. N., Biography; A Comedy. 1933. Multiple holdings.
- Behrman, S. N., Brief Moment; A Comedy in Three Acts. 1931.
- Behrman, S. N., The Burning Glass; A Novel. 1968.
- Behrman, S. N., But for Whom Charlie. 1964.
- Behrman, S. N., Cold Wind and the Warm. 1959.
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Appendix C

Transcription of Interview with Margaret Erskine

Erskine: Her mother was a historian and writer and a very interesting person. She didn't marry until she was 28. Which was very old for young ladies to be married in those days. She then proceeded to have six children in seven years, which is enough to make you tired. The youngest child died in infancy. The five children who grew up in the house were Will, Alan, Cornelia, Esther, Catherine. They were actually born in Westboro (Massachusetts.) Their grandfather, whose name was Merrifield, (when he) died he left this property (Forbes house located on it) and his daughter, Esther's mother, inherited it. Then they discovered when they tried to modernize it ... all the walls were solid masonry. So you couldn't get in them to run pipes or run wires so they had to demolish that house and they built this house which was finished in 1898 and the whole family came here to live and grew up here. The boys went to the Worcester public schools and the girls were among the first students at the Bancroft School. Which had just started and at that time was over on Elm Street. It was a very small private school. All the children were very brilliant students except Esther. Esther was a very imaginative person. She was extremely near-sighted and I think this was a big handicap. She was also dyslexic but nobody knew what that was except that you never learned how to spell. Written language was very difficult but spoken language was her thing. She always made up stories all the time to entertain her sisters. When she was at the Bancroft School, they apparently had a pretty cut-and-dry curriculum. One day the teacher told her she could write anything she wanted to. So Esther wrote a story that was out of her own imagination. The next day the teacher hauled her up in front of the class and accused her of plagiarism. Which was a telling blow to Esther, she said that never again did she

show a teacher her work. She would show her what she thought the teacher wanted for schoolwork but she would never show her what she called her serious work. She dilly-dallied along through school. When she finished Bancroft she went to the Art Museum School for a while. She took some poetry classes in Boston, I think at Boston University. Her older sister Cornelia had graduated from Vassar and went to the University of Wisconsin to do graduate work. When Cornelia came back from Wisconsin her sister Katherine went to Wisconsin, she apparently had gone out to visit Cornelia and the people at the university said that if Katherine took a course at Wellesley in Physical Education that they would hire her at the university. So she did that. When she went back to Wisconsin to teach, she took Esther with her. Esther took courses, she never really took a curriculum. Meanwhile, Esther had spent 2 years at Bradford Academy. She used to say that when she was at Bradford she was rather a trial to her teachers there. When she was crazy to write she would skip all her classes and write, write, write. But then of course she wouldn't show it to the teachers, the teachers didn't know what she was doing. When she was at Wisconsin she found one teacher who took a great interest in her. She wrote a short story called "Breakneck Hill," which was about a horse. Of course she was wild about horses. Her teacher encouraged her to submit it to a magazine and the editor of the magazine wrote back and said it was a really wonderful story but he couldn't publish it because it had a sad ending. So the story was published in the Grinelle Review and it won the O. Henry Prize for short stories for that year. She and her sister Katherine came back to Worcester. Esther had a recommendation from her teacher in Wisconsin to Houghton-Mifflin Company, which is a publishing company in Boston. They recommended that she would be a good person to work in a publishing company. So they put her to work typing letters and they

discovered she couldn't spell. They couldn't ever send out a letter she typed. Then they put her to work reading unsolicited manuscripts, which is the lowest form of life in the publishing world. She plowed through these manuscripts from budding authors. She found one that she thought was interesting and she went to her boss and said this would be a wonderful adventure story if we could get this guy to cut it down. It was a book called Scaramouche by Rafael Sabatini. Sabatini had published before but then had had this long dry period and then he produced this gigantic manuscript that had been submitted to other publishers. Esther worked with him and Houghton-Mifflin worked with him and it was published. At that time she had been living in Boston with two friends. She met a young man. She had written a novel. At the same time her first novel was published she was married. His name was Albert Hoskins. He came from Philadelphia. He was a lawyer. Her first novel was called O Genteel Lady! and it was the second selection of the newly formed Book of the Month Club. Now if you got your book accepted by the Book of the Month Club it guaranteed the sale of so many volumes. So for the first time she was making money. She went off to Europe with Albert and they traveled for about a year. They came back and lived in New York for a while. She knew the Algonquin Club members. Esther in her childhood had rheumatic fever, so she had a damaged heart. She thought if you stood around laughing and joking with everyone, you exhausted your energies. So she never really got into that group of people. Albert took a job in Boston and they lived in Westin (Massachusetts.) He worked for the probation department of Boston police department. The marriage was not happy and she was divorced. She moved back here to live with her mother, her sister, and her brother Alan. Her brother, Will, was a professor at Cornell University, he was an entomologist. Her brother, Alan, was a graduate of Worcester Tech.

He had no sense of business though. Esther's mother was a trained historian and published a lot. Esther's eyesight was poor enough that when she wanted to do research it was difficult to read handwritten letters. Her mother's eyesight was wonderful. She and her mother were very compatible. She continued to publish. As time went on and she published one thing after another, she wrote Mirror for Witches. Mirror for Witches has been a ballet, a movie, it has never been out of print. Then she wrote Miss Marvel. Miss Marvel is a funny story. Copies of it are scarcer than hen's teeth. Esther never really liked it. Then she wrote Paradise. Paradise came out the same time as *Gone With the Wind*. It was a really interesting tale. It was translated into many languages. Paradise was a success. She then went on to publish The General's Lady. Which is a fascinating story, because it was based on a real story. The real story was of Bathsheba Spooner, (she) came from Hardwick, Ma, (she) married General Spooner. Her father was a loyalist General and went to Canada during the Revolution. Bathsheba stayed with her husband General Spooner. She took up with an English officer who was on parole. She hired two thugs to push the General down a well. They got drunk and told everyone what they did. Bathsheba was the first and we hope the last woman ever hung in Worcester (Massachusetts.) Her English officer friend was shipped to England where he was hung. The story has been a play... The Revere family owned letters and they were at the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston. They went to Houghton-Mifflin and said they wanted to do something with the letters. They asked Esther and she absolutely jumped at the chance. Her mother helped read through the letters. Her mother at this time was in her eighties but thought nothing of getting up in the morning and working and coming home and making dinner. She wrote Paul Revere and the World He Lived In as straight history. What she wanted you to be able to do was to read that book

as though it were a novel and not get bogged down with footnotes. It came out and won the Pulitzer Prize. Esther was quite stunned that she won the top prize for history, not for novels. She was interested in writing for adolescents. In a tremendous hurry, she wrote Johnny Tremain. She packed up the manuscript and sent it to Harcourt-Briggs. She took off for New Mexico, while she was there she met D. H. Lawrence's widow. She came home and the manuscript was completely altered, the story line, the wording, everything, with no cover letter explaining the changes. Esther was horrified. So she called up the people at Houghton-Mifflin and said if I show you this will you publish it exactly as I've written it. They knew her well enough so they said yes. It won the Newbery Medal for children's literature. It has never been out of print. She got a telephone call one day, it turned out that Walt Disney was making a movie about Johnny Tremain. He had already begun filming, it had never occurred to him that there was an author, that the author had to be paid, that the author was a woman, and was very much alive. When you stop and think about it he had never done anything that wasn't out of his own imagination like Mickey Mouse or Sleeping Beauty. Esther didn't want to have anything to do with the negotiations with Walt Disney. Finally the movie was finished and it opened in California and she didn't go. Mr. Disney's staff called one day and asked if she wanted to go see the movie. She said she would take the ten o'clock bus and she would meet them at Houghton-Mifflin. There was dead silence, this is a famous author and she was going to take a bus. They called back and said that Mr. Disney's limousine would come and pick her up. She really didn't like the movie very much, on the other hand she felt she never knew anything about how to make a movie. She then published two quick books, The Boston Book and America's Paul Revere. These are just picture books, she wrote the text. Then she wrote The Running of the Tide, this is

about Salem (Massachusetts.) It follows the history of the town of Salem, which is where the clipper ships sailed out across the Pacific. Then Salem dies as a port because it's harbor is shallow enough so that more modern boats go to Boston. The rights to it were sold to MGM, she won the MGM prize. Clark Gable was supposed to play the lead. Then MGM got into terrible financial problems so it has never been made into a movie. Then she wrote Rainbow on the Road which was about an itinerant painter going through NH painting portraits. That was made into a musical. It was not a great success. A lot of her work and her mother's work was done at the American Antiquarian Society. She felt as she came to the end of her life there's a real problem if you own the rights to publications because the IRS can come and say to you well now you're going to sell another 150,000 of these and you may never sell another. She left her literary remains to the American Antiquarian Society (to solve the problem.)

Appendix D

Transcription of Interview with Don Reid

Andrea: How do you price the books? Do you price them by whether they're first editions, signed, the condition of the book? Does whether the author just passed away affect the price of the book?

Reid: Well there's several different classes of books. There's the collectible book. There's the ordinary used out-of-print book and there's the book that is currently in print but used. There are other things too but that's primarily it. So let's get into the ordinary used in print book. You can buy a paperback that's still in print for five or six dollars. If it's in good condition we price it at half-price. It's pretty simple. In fact, there's a chain of bookstores across the country, not in New England, but they have at least fifty stores of half-priced books. Most of their books are half the original price. So they don't get into old books as we do. The second is the out-of-print book. The out-of-print book is based on experience, what I think the market would bear. It's not a rare book, it's a book which I feel has some market. It's valuable in some utility. I price it whatever I think, based on my experience, the book would sell for. The third thing is the collectible which includes first editions, signed books, leather bound books, anything slightly unusual. A lot of these you don't encounter very often. Limited editions would be another one (collectible.) So we have to do some research and it turns out that the internet can become a great resource tool for the market value for a lot of these books. We do check the bibliographic material we have and check competing prices on the internet. For instance I just finished pricing a copy of Mary McCarthy's, the renowned novelist, The Stones of Florence. It came out initially in a regular edition and she was a popular writer and it was a popular topic. So they put out an

illustrated edition, which I have right here. There's lots of great photographs, but this is not as common as the other. It's worth a lot more than just an ordinary copy of The Stones of Florence not necessarily a first edition. So I don't know how scarce it is, I looked it up it didn't seem to be that common. So we'll price it accordingly and try to sell it on the internet.

Andrea: Relating to the internet, how has the internet affected book collecting?

Reid: It's made books accessible to people in remotely common locations, who could never have access to these books. Many books are quite scarce. If you look on the internet in all of the search services and so forth, you still find only one or two copies of the books that are available. In the pre-internet days, you didn't have a ghost of a chance of finding that book. Now, it has opened up a whole new world to the person who is looking for something slightly unusual, whether it be a first edition, we list a lot of scholarly books and we sell quite a few of them too to libraries. So it's opened up the market for a lot of very specialized books, which were previously very difficult to find. There were copies around, but where were they? Somewhere across the country in this vast world of ours. As far as the bookseller is concerned, on the other hand, we have more opportunity of selling books which we'd probably never sell. It's so specialized in interest. For example, literary historical works are a relatively specialized interest and we wouldn't have much chance of selling them at a very great price in the old days when we just had to depend on walk-in trade. Now we can list them at a much higher price, because after all the used book market is wonderful. It's not like the new book market. It's a free market economy, where we have supply and demand dictating prices for things. So we list it as what we think is a reasonable price and hopefully sell it. It's made possible to sell books to remote places quickly, which

we never could have sold before. Many books are not worth listing, they're far too common.

Andrea: Is a Worcester author's book worth more in Worcester?

Reid: Of course, but not necessarily.

Andrea: Not necessarily?

Reid: Not necessarily.

Andrea: It depends on what book it is?

Reid: Right. It depends on the author too. A lot of authors are not necessarily regarded highly in even their own town. For instance, many people have had their books of reminiscences or poetry or whatever privately printed, they're Worcester authors. However, the poetry may not be very good, or nicely published and they maybe long since forgotten. Consequently, there is not much demand for their books. The people that you picked for your project are people who have a international reputation but there are a lot of authors who don't have a very big reputation.

Andrea: How do you obtain the books? What kind of resources do you use?

Reid: I obtain them many ways. The bulk of my books come from people who are disposing of private collections. But I get them in many ways.

Andrea: So basically you get them from private collections, you buy them off of other people?

Reid: Right, some people either bring them in or they say we're moving. Older people moving from a house to an apartment can't keep all these books, so I go buy cartons and cartons of things. There's just all sorts of places to get books. That's where the bulk of mine come from, private collections and libraries. Everybody has a collection, you have a

collection of books, not a very big one, mostly textbook oriented, but that's your collection of books. In three years, you may decide to dump your collection. So you approach some sort of dealer like me and hopefully get rid of them.

Andrea: How do you determine when a good time to buy is?

Reid: Now.

Andrea: Right now.

Reid: Now. There isn't any good or bad time to buy. There's a bad time to buy when you get overstocked. So then you have to become perchance a little more discriminating. Because of the nature of this particular store, as opposed to many stores, we're very eclectic in our interests. So we buy books in so many areas, used paperbacks and current editions of novels, or all sorts of things besides rare books and specialist books. When we get overstocked I tend not to buy the ordinary kind of stuff because that's what you get so much of. In fact, I won't even buy another Tom Clancy novel I'm so overstocked. Well there's some demand for it, these were bestsellers and they sold hundreds of thousands if not millions of copies of these books and people keep them. There's just too many of them around for the second hand market.

Andrea: Will Worcester authors' books be growing more valuable in the future?

Reid: Well, if the authors' reputations are sustained yes. But if the author is eclipsed or no one much cares...It's hard to predict the future of the market. If your talking about a market for fiction that's much more fickle and unpredictable than the market for people who write non-fiction. I think most of the authors (you choose) except for Higginson (wrote fiction.) Forbes did biographies too, but fiction also. Cormier (wrote) fiction. Meltzer (wrote) fiction and non-fiction both. It's hard to tell about his books whether they

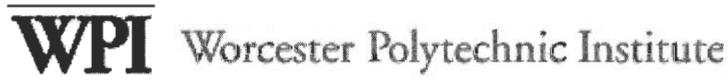
will increase in value or not. He does have a book of personal reminiscences, it's not very scarce but that would be a nice thing to have. Behrman's place in fiction may get kind of dated. His Worcester Account is not going to get dated because that's something else. I don't think Benchley ever wrote much about growing up here. But his humor seems to have stood the test of time.

Andrea: How has the market changed over the years?

Reid: You're asking the right person because I've been in this business since 1962, not many people have been around that long. I would say the advent of the paperback. They're printed cheaply with relatively poor paper. Anything that's printed in paperback may not last very long because the paper's acid turns brown turns brittle and breaks. The biggest revolution in books, of course, is the advent of the computer and internet. It's an information resource for current material. They have yet to find a niche for hand held novels (e-book). They've tried these thing and they haven't been successful.

Andrea: How many inquiries do you get for Worcester authors?

Reid: It's probably one of my best sections and we certainly get a fine display. People collect all aspects of Worcester history, they're interested in town history. Your Worcester authors are of interest in their growing up phase. I think people identify with them somewhat.



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Worcester Area Authors on the Web

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ROBERT BENCHLEY

ROBERT CORMIER

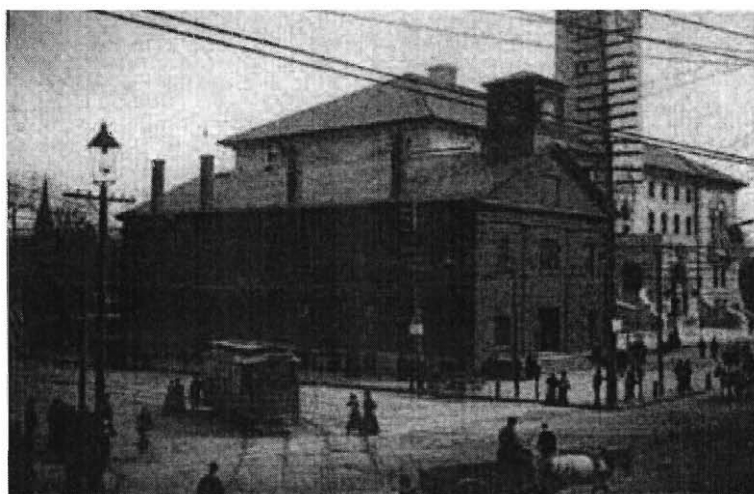
ESTHER FORBES

**THOMAS WENTWORTH
HIGGINSON**

MILTON MELTZER

WORCESTER HISTORY

OTHER LINKS



Worcester's old and new City Hall

Worcester 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 Worcester area authors and their works. Look for this website to be expanded to include more authors in the future.

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Andrea Hubbard

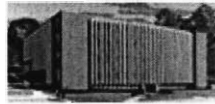


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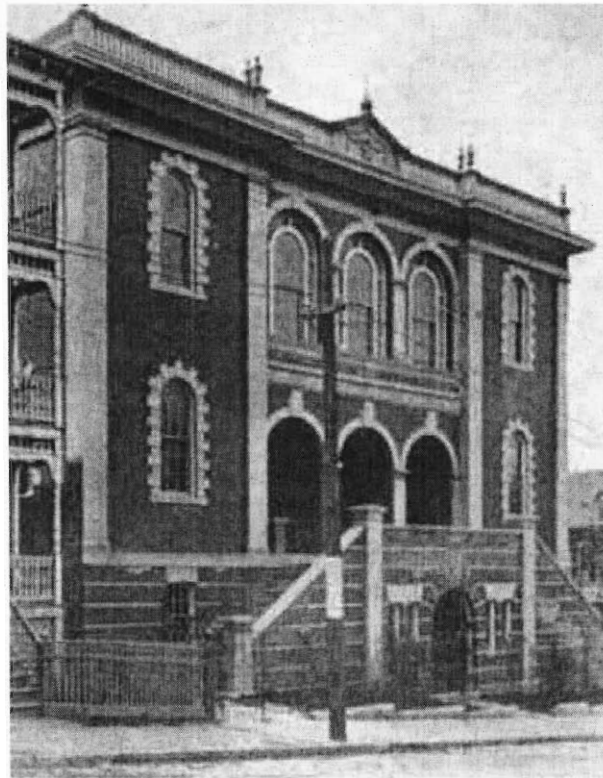
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Shaarai Torah Synagogue

(Source: *Images of America: Worcester Vol II*, 1998)

Samuel Nathaniel Bel

[Biography](#)

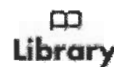
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Psychoanalysis makes quite sir
feel they're complex.
-S. N. Behrman

The ability to laugh at its own j
and shortcomings is a true mar
civilized nation, as it is of the c
human
- S.N. Behrman

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HIGGINSON****MILTON MELTZER****WORCESTER HISTORY****OTHER LINKS**

Samuel Nathaniel Behrman was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, on June 9, 1888, the third child of Joseph and Zelda Behrman, Jewish immigrants living on Worco Side. He was the first of their children to be born in America, his two older siblings born when his parents were still in Lithuania. His father was a religious man, and often sit in silence for hours studying his books of the Jewish religion. This most occurred when his parents had some sort of argument, something that Behrman r understood when he was growing up. His mother was a quiet person, and Behrm always bewildered with his parents' relationship. The relationship seemed to him impersonal, with all their tenderness spent on the children instead of on each oth

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

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

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

Massachusetts, from 1893 to shortly after he moved to New York City in 1917. It 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 his stories were originally published in *The New Yorker* magazine. In his book he changed 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; reading simply excited him. He would spend hours in the library, and would buy new 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 had 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 was essentially his first real work that was performed. He returned to Worcester in 1912 in 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 Magazine*, where the more scholarly students printed their compositions. He became an assistant editor of the Clark publication board, but eventually was suspended from Clark for his refusal to take Physical Education classes. Upon suspension from Clark, he entered Harvard, where he published his first story, "La Vie Parisienne," for fifteen dollars. He graduated from Harvard 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. He 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 writing. Behrman had been offered a job teaching for the University of Minnesota for a two 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 mood. I had to face the fact that he was unable to make a living and, even worse, that he had no ideas to work on for his writings.

A turning point in Behrman's career occurred in 1926 when he collaborated with the established playwright, Owen Davis, on a play called The Man Who Forgot. The breakthrough of his career occurred soon afterwards when the Theatre Guild produced 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

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 known for his plays, but his prose works attract more attention among the public. He died of an apparent heart failure on September the 9, 1973, in New York.

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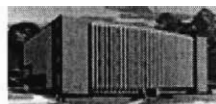
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4 Plays: The Second Man, Biography, Rain from Heaven, End of Summer. 1955
 Biography; A Comedy. 1933. Multiple holdings.

ROBERT CORMIER

Brief Moment; A Comedy in Three Acts. 1931.

ESTHER FORBES

The Burning Glass; A Novel. 1968.

But for Whom Charlie. 1964.

**THOMAS WENTWORTH
HIGGINSON**

Cold Wind and the Warm. 1959.

Dunnigan's Daughter; A Comedy. 1946.

Duveen. 1952.

MILTON MELTZER

End of Summer; A Play in Three Acts. 1936.

Fanny. 1955.

WORCESTER HISTORY

Jacobowsky and the Colonel. 1944.

Jane. 1952.

OTHER LINKS

Lord Pengo; A Comedy in Three Acts. 1963.

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.

Wine of Choice; A Comedy in Three Acts. 1938.

The Worcester Account. 1954.

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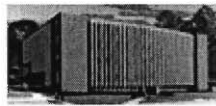
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WORCESTER HISTORY

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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 V.*)

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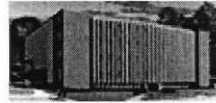


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MILTON MELTZER

WORCESTER HISTORY

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(Source: *Laughter's Gentle Soul: The Life of Robert Benchley*)

Robert Benchley

[Biography](#)

[Works](#)

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Robert Charles Benchley, born September 15, 1807. Shipped a on the Florence J. Marble, 1815 bigamy and murder in Port Saic Released 1820. Wrote *Tale of 7 Married Princess Anastasia of F Children: Prince Rupprecht and girls*. Wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin of Godeys Ladies Book* 1851-1 *Les Miserables* in 1870, finishe Hugo. Died 1871. Buried in We Abbey.

Autobiography, by Robert Benc

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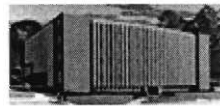


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HIGGINSON**
MILTON MELTZER
WORCESTER HISTORY
OTHER LINKS

Robert Charles Benchley, born Isle of Wight, September 15, 1807. Shipped as *ca the Florence J. Marble*, 1815. Arrested for bigamy and murder in Port Said 1817. 1820. Wrote *Tale of Two Cities*. Married Princess Anastasia of Portugal 1831. (Prince Rupprecht and several little girls. Wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 1850. Editor *Ladies Book* 1851-1856. Began *Les Miserables* in 1870, finished by Victor Hugo 1871. Buried in Westminster Abbey.

(Robert Benchley, according to Robert Benchley)

When asked to describe his life, Robert Benchley offered this mock autobiographical sketch. In truth, he was born on September 15, 1889, in Worcester, Massachusetts. 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 breathe in no way comparable to the life led in the effete civilization of Rome. We derive 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" 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 in his hands and arms slipping through the boards of the flooring and leaving a mark on his chin.

He describes his early schooldays in 1895 with his first day of kindergarten. On that 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 at 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 was very close to Edmund, having looked up to him for most of his childhood. As the eldest 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 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 1907 Benchley was able to enroll at Harvard University, again with financial aid from Duryea.

While at Harvard, Benchley acted in a few plays, among them The Crystal Gazer, Roister Doister, and Below Zero. He was also elected editor of *The Lampoon*. He received a Bachelor's degree, although it was withheld at first due to failure in or had failed one class, so he did not receive his degree until 1913, although he graduated 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 dramatic writing. The first issue under his direction yielded very little humor, but as the decade progressed, Benchley's love of satirical works began to surface. In 1930 he left *Life*, he went to work as a drama columnist for *The New Yorker*, for which he worked 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 figures as Harpo Marx, George S. Kaufman, and Dorothy Parker.

Benchley never wrote an entire book from start to finish; he simply organized his stories and sketches into book length publications. Many of his short stories were performed as short presentations, or they were given as speeches or lectures by Benchley. In 1943, Benchley announced that he had finished writing, for few humorists' work 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, movie maker, and producer. As a professional, he brought a new sophistication to humor and stimulated other writers to do likewise. He commanded a certain respect and inspired friendship among literary colleagues to an extent that few writers have been able to accomplish. Although Benchley was most likely influenced by the other writers of the Algonquin Round Table, it is hard to determine his real effect, as Benchley worked with many different groups of writers throughout his career.

Benchley was first famous as a humorist for his improvisational oral monologues; his most famous sketches was known as The Treasurer's Report, a sketch detailing making fun of, the report that the treasurer of an organization must give. As a writer Benchley was in demand even before he had ever been paid to write. As a senior he was asked to write a daily humorous column for the Boston Journal.

Benchley's shift to the screen from written works came about mainly because the business was fun, easy, and lucrative. Writing his columns and short stories was a more difficult task, and far less rewarding, monetarily speaking, than the screen. To his son, Nathaniel, Benchley was "physically unable to save money," which made the higher profits of the screen much more attractive.

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 thoughtful, something that is a rare find in today's fast paced world.

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20,000 Leagues Under the Sea; Or, David Copperfield. 1929.
 After 1903—What? 1938.

ROBERT CORMIER

Benchley Beside Himself. 1943.

ESTHER FORBES

The Best of Robert Benchley. 1983.

**THOMAS WENTWORTH
HIGGINSON**

Benchley Beside Himself. 1943.

MILTON MELTZER

Benchley Lost and Found; 39 Prodigal Pieces. 1970.

WORCESTER HISTORY

Benchley—Or Else! 1947.

OTHER LINKS

The Benchley Roundup; / a Selection by Nathaniel Benchley of His Favorites. 19

The Best of Robert Benchley. 1983.

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.

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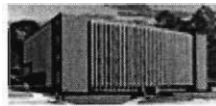
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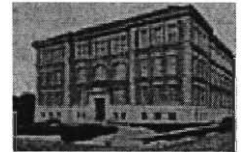
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Robert and brother Edmund, Robert on left

(Source: *Laughter's Gentle Soul: The Life of Robert Benchley*)



South High School

(Source: *Worcester Old Home Car*)

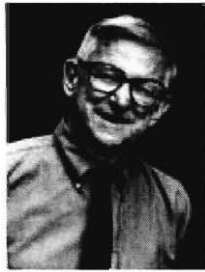
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Robert Cormier



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St. Cecilia's Church (Leominster, MA)
(Taken By: Andrea Hubbard)

Robert Cormier

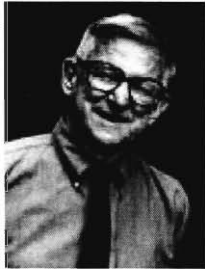
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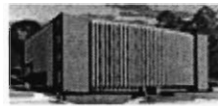
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I never felt the need to go else-
material... I love the feeling of
town and meeting someone I w
grade with...
-Robert Cormier, in an interview

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Robert Cormier



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HIGGINSON**

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WORCESTER HISTORY

OTHER LINKS

Robert Cormier was born on January 17, 1925, in Leominster, MA. Lucien Joseph 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 several times during his life but never out of French Hill. They moved frequently in order to get a better rent during the Depression, and they also moved as the family grew. Even when he was 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 experience 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 visible from the classroom window. The sister would not allow him to leave and check on his family until he had recited on the rosary. Thankfully, no one was injured in the fire 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 and criticize unlike the teachers he shared his work with. She predicted he would become 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 with her name on it. Six weeks later, she handed him a check for seventy-five dollars and told him his story was going to be published.

Cormier's first job came about serendipitously; he was looking for a job with the *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. He and Constance were married in 1948. The couple had four children: Bobbie S

Peter J. Cormier, Chris Cormier Hayes, and Renee E. Wheeler. They had 10 grand

Cormier did work as a reporter for the *Telegram and Gazette* from 1948 to 1955; 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 1959 to 1966 he served as the wire editor for the paper. He became an associate 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. F. Newspaper Award for the best column among writers in the international group of 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 writing for the paper from 1978 until he died. He was awarded the best human interest of the year award, chosen by the Associated Press in New England, in 1959 and

His first novel, Now and At the Hour, was published in 1960. Cormier's father had passed away, and to deal with his father's death, Cormier began to write. He wrote a man who has lung cancer and knows that he must be dying but tries to hide the pain 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 eat chocolates for the Catholic school he attended. Cormier began to ponder the question "if?" The book deals with peer pressure and even faculty pressure, and with the individual against society. It shows a dark side of the Catholic Church, which was 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 included a phone number in I Am the Cheese so that he could talk to the young readers. The characters could call and ask for Amy, the character in the book, and he would say that she was not his daughter but that he was her father.

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

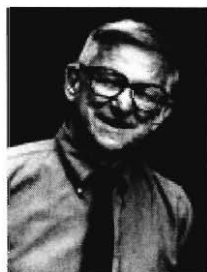
On November 2, 2000, Cormier died of lung cancer at the age of 75. He left his legacy through his books. Cormier wrote powerful and disturbing novels for young adults which caused controversy. His fiction analyzed the turmoil of adolescence for young people. The teen protagonist in his stories often faced difficult situations. He never compromised what he felt to be the truth in order to please the reader. He also did not think 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.

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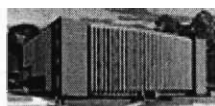
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Robert Cormier



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ROBERT BENCHLEY

After the First Death. 1979.

Beyond the Chocolate War. 1985.

ROBERT CORMIER

The Bumblebee Flies Anyway. 1983.

ESTHER FORBES

The Chocolate War. 1974.

Eight Plus One: Stories. 1980.

**THOMAS WENTWORTH
HIGGINSON**

Fade. 1988.

Frenchtown Summer. 1999.

MILTON MELTZER

Heroes. 1998.

I Am the Cheese. 1977.

WORCESTER HISTORY

I Have Words to Spend: Reflections of a Small Town Editor. 1991.

In the Middle of the Night. 1995.

OTHER LINKS

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.

Tenderness. 1997.

Tunes for Bears to Dance to. 1992.

We All Fall Down. 1993.

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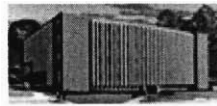
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Robert Cormier

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MILTON MELTZER

WORCESTER HISTORY

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



Robert Cormier's Home
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St. Cecelia's Church
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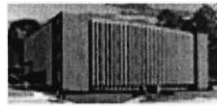
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Esther Forbes



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ESTHER FORBES

**THOMAS WENTWORTH
HIGGINSON**

MILTON MELTZER

WORCESTER HISTORY

OTHER LINKS



(Source: *Mirror For Witches*, Woodcutting by Robert Gibbings)

Esther Forbes

[Biography](#)

[Works](#)

[Photos](#)

...books are only the shadow ar
thing. I believe this as strongly
I hold. I also believe that writir
worthwhile and vitalized only t
and exciting life.

-Esther Forbes
in a letter Katharine Harrington
1916

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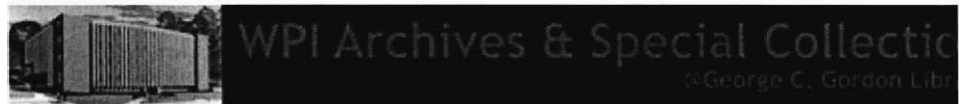


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ESTHER FORBES

**THOMAS WENTWORTH
HIGGINSON**

MILTON MELTZER

WORCESTER HISTORY

OTHER LINKS

Esther Forbes was born in Westboro, MA, on June 28, 1891. She was the fifth of children born of William Trowbridge Forbes and Harriette Merrifield. Her father from Amherst College and taught mathematics at Robert College in Constantinople a short time before moving to Westboro and opening a law office there. Her mother from Oread Academy, in Worcester, and traveled the United States until she married 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. She went to Worcester public schools, and the girls were among the first women to attend 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 children to read about anything they wanted. Esther was very imaginative and told stories to her classmates during the time, so she was excited at the chance to write about anything. Esther turned her story into a creative story. After reading Esther's story, the teacher accused Esther of plagiarizing from 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 she 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 who was teaching at the University of Wisconsin. She took a few courses there and met a teacher with whom she could share her work. She wrote a short story entitled "Bancroft 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 1913.

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 Month Club, which guaranteed thirteen-thousand five-hundred copies of the book. The April 21, 1926 *Boston Transcript* review stated, "A distinguished first novel 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 telephone department. The couple was unhappy and divorced in 1933.

Esther moved back to Worcester 1933 and lived with her mother, sisters and brother. Esther's mother would read through handwritten letters and documents for Esther 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 is narrated from the point of view of a Puritan defending the actions against the witch. A *New York Herald Tribune* review stated, "This is a terrific novel, a marvelous novel of history torn open ruthlessly and thrust before our eyes." (Book Review Digest) *Mirror for Witches* was made into a ballet, a movie, and it has never been out of its initial publication.

Miss Marvel, published in 1935, is a story about a strange Worcester family. Esther wrote the book the least out of the books she had written. *Paradise*, a book about the early settlement in New England, was published in 1937, and was translated into many different languages. She published two pictorial essay books, *The Boston Book*, in 1947, and *American Revere*, in 1948. *Rainbow on the Road*, published in 1954, is a book about a pair of travelers through New Hampshire. It was made into a musical, called "Come Summer" but not very successful.

The General's Lady, published in 1938, was based on the real story of Bathsheba 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 a remarkable novel. 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 and 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. The right kind of historical novelist has some of the qualities most needed in a good biography. Esther Forbes is that kind of novelist, and her biography of Paul Revere takes a permanent 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 Houghton-Mifflin, 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 a face, a voice, a scene takes us as living spectators to the Boston Tea Party, the Battle of Lexington and of North Creek." (*The Saturday Review*, 1943)

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

The Running of the Tide, published in 1959, follows the history of Salem as a port

the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Novel Award that year. MGM bought the rights for it 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 19, 1945. The first draft had been sent to the publishing company, but the work was never published. Esther was the first woman member of the American Antiquarian Society and left her books to the Society.

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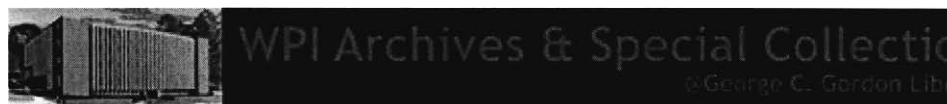
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ROBERT BENCHLEY

America's Paul Revere. 1946.
The Boston Book. 1947.

ROBERT CORMIER

The General's Lady. 1938.
Johnny Tremain. 1943.

ESTHER FORBES

A Mirror For Witches; /with Woodcuts by Robert Gibbings. 1928.

**THOMAS WENTWORTH
HIGGINSON**

Miss Marvel. 1935.
O Genteel Lady! 1926.
Paradise. 1937.

MILTON MELTZER

Paul Revere's Ride; A Deposition. 1963.

WORCESTER HISTORY

Paul Revere & The World He Lived In. 1942.

OTHER LINKS

Rainbow On the Road. 1954.
The Running of the Tide. 1948.

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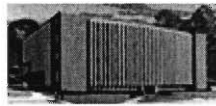


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MILTON MELTZER

WORCESTER HISTORY

OTHER LINKS



Esther Forbes House in Worcester
(Source: *Esther Forbes*)



Esther Forbes as a young lady
(Source: *Esther Forbes*)

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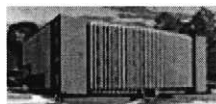


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Thomas Wentworth Higginson



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- ROBERT CORMIER**
- ESTHER FORBES**
- THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON**
- MILTON MELTZER**
- WORCESTER HISTORY**
- OTHER LINKS**



Sketch of Higginson's House in Worcester, MA
(Source: *Some Historic Houses of Worcester*, 1919)

Thomas Wentworth

[Biography](#)

[Works](#)

"Worcester was so important to me as a means of development; my country was the Worcester of fifty years ago, active and varied; and I was connected with many of its early enterprises, though I always remained near my hearth."

-Thomas Wentworth Higginson in a letter to Alfred S. Roe

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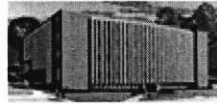


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**Thomas Wentworth
Higginson**



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**THOMAS WENTWORTH
HIGGINSON**

MILTON MELTZER

WORCESTER HISTORY

OTHER LINKS

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 H. Storrow's fifteenth. Louisa was Stephen's second wife, but she lived in the Higginson house during the lifetime of his first wife. She took care of the children because Stephen's 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 to attend Harvard at the age of thirteen in 1837. He graduated second in his class in 1840.

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

Higginson married Mary Channing in 1847. The same year he moved to Newburyport and served as a nondenominational minister for the Unitarian First Religious Society. Higginson felt that he was intellectually superior to the seafaring townspeople, although she was socially superior. Despite their snobbery, they adjusted to their relationship. 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 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 William Lloyd Garrison and Stephen Foster, whose farm was a stop of the Underground Railroad, and Lucretia Mott, 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 wrote many more articles in the magazine.

In 1853, Mary had a crippling attack of rheumatism. Barbara Channing, a nurse, Mary while Higginson escorted Stone and Abby Foster to the World's Temperance Convention in New York. When Higginson nominated Susan B. Anthony and they to serve on the committee on credentials, a debate erupted: some of the men present felt that women should serve on the committee. Higginson said that if women were to participate in the World's Temperance Convention, then it would only be the World's Convention. He left and invited people to attend a Whole World's Convention 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 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 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 regiment of former slaves organized by the Union Army in the Civil War. He served 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 anywhere else.

He continued his writing in Newport. Emily Dickinson sent four poems to Higginson, 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 Mab 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 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 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 writing presented scientific facts in a fashionable literary style. The biographical sketches of England reformers he knew give unique perspectives on their subjects. His biography writing was best when he knew the person or had experienced the event. *Margaret 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. He

return he had lost weight and was in poor health. Higginson and Samuel Clemens (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 attention in that turbulent decade again, his works were given more serious study

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Higginson



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The Afternoon Landscape. 1889.

ROBERT CORMIER

The Alliance Between Pilgrim and Puritan in Massachusetts: An Address
Delivered Before the Old Plan. 1900.

ESTHER FORBES

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**THOMAS WENTWORTH
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Atlantic Essays. 1871.

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Descendants of the Reverend Francis Higginson, First "Teacher" in
Massachusetts Bay Colony. 1910.

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Letters and Journals of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 1846-1906. 1921.

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Life and Times of Stephen Higginson, Member of the Continental
Congress and author of the "Laco" Letters, Relating to John Hancock. 1907.

Magnificent Activist: The Writings of Thomas Wentworth Higginson.
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Margaret Fuller Ossoli. 1884.

Margaret Fuller Ossoli. 1981.

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Sunday, June 4, 1854. 1854.

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The Monarch of Dreams. 1887.

Mrs. Helen Jackson ("H. H.") (e-book) 1998.

Negro Spirituals. 1995.

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The Nonsense of It: Short Answers to Common Objections Against Women Suffrage. 189-.
Old Cambridge. 1899.
Oldport Days. 1873.
Out-door Papers. 1863.
Part of a Man's Life Books Unread. 1997.
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.
The Works of Epictetus. Consisting of His Discourses, In Four Books, The Enchiridion, And Fragments. 1866.
Young Folks' History of the United States. 1875.

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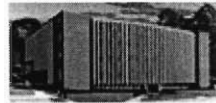


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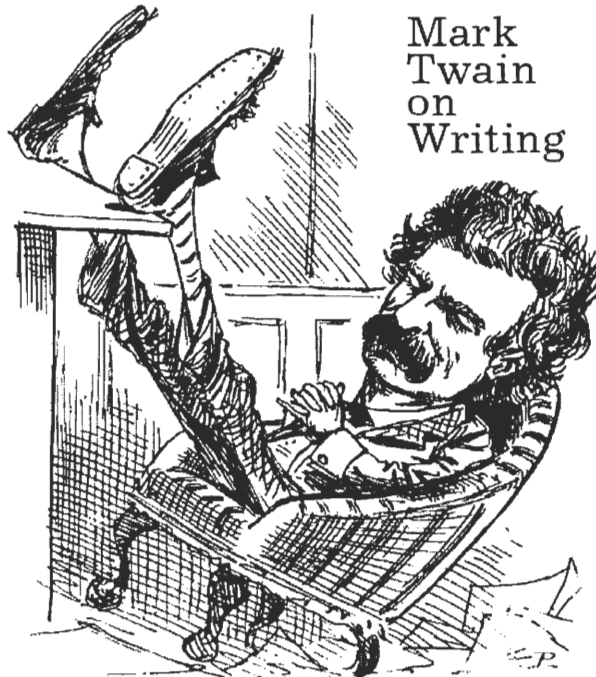
ESTHER FORBES

**THOMAS WENTWORTH
HIGGINSON**

MILTON MELTZER

WORCESTER HISTORY

OTHER LINKS



Mark
Twain
on
Writing

(Source: Mark Twain Himself)

Milton Miltzer

[Biography](#)

[Works](#)

"Meltzer's contribution to Ame literature for children spans fiv continues to be a model for infi writing today."

- Pat Scales,
chair of 2001 Laura Ingalls Wi

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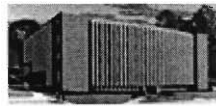
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Milton Meltzer



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ESTHER FORBES

**THOMAS WENTWORTH
HIGGINSON**

MILTON MELTZER

WORCESTER HISTORY

OTHER LINKS

Milton Meltzer was born on May 8, 1915, to Benjamin 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 worked in Worcester, working as a window washer. Meltzer mentions looking back on his childhood in Worcester in his book Starting From Home:

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

(Starting From Home, p. 6)

Even as he says this, Meltzer recalls how "stupid" and "self-centered" he was when 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 other side he knows his parents, and on his father's side, just the year his grandfather was killed. He has 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 many three-deckers in Worcester. At the time, Worcester was home to so many three-decker homes that it was sometimes known as "the City of Three-Deckers". Meltzer's family lived on 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 take Milton home after he had dropped Milton off. Once Allen left, Milton quickly subsided and went 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 spelling 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

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 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 he moved to Edward Stratemeyer, whose syndicate specialized in children's books like Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys.

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

It was not until Meltzer was in junior high that he started to work. He was expected to help in and help the family, so that is what he did. He started out delivering the afternoon paper, 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 in 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, 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 them; they simply wanted the students to remember facts, dates, and names. One exception 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 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 that 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 saving 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. Meltzer received a 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 1935 until 1939. For the next 30 years he held various jobs, including writer for CBS-TV, assistant director of public relations at Pfizer Inc. He only held one of his jobs for five years, when he worked for Science and Medicine Publishing Co. Inc. in New York 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 freelance work since becoming a full-time writer, including lecturing, and serving as an advisor.

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 political discrimination, and slavery. Meltzer 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, 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 Meltzer has had on the literary world compared with other authors. The impact Worcester has on him is quite obvious, however, showing up in many of his works, whether it be his writing about the city or simply how he was influenced by growing up in "the City of Triple-Deckers."

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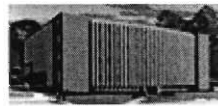
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Milton Meltzer


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Ain't Gonna Study War No More : The Story Of America's Peace Seekers. 1985.
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HIGGINSON**

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 Winnie Mandela : The Soul Of South Africa. 1986.
 Witches And Witch Hunts. 1999.
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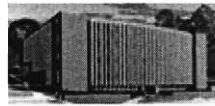
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Photos of Old Worcester

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ROBERT BENCHLEY

Most of the writers discussed in this report lived in Worcester between 1850 and 1875. Some essential history of Worcester before this time period will be discussed.

ROBERT CORNIER

ESTHER FORBES

In 1668, a tract of land called Worcester was proposed as a plantation. New settlers 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)

THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON

MILTON MELTZER

WORCESTER HISTORY

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

OTHER LINKS

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 Worcester. Residents of Worcester kept to their houses and only worked in fields. They 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 five towns from Middlesex County. (Erskine, 25) While Worcester lacked waterpower, 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 for the mills elsewhere. There was a great demand for highly skilled and sober workers, which led to the growth of the textile industry.

initiation of a temperance movement in Worcester. (Erskine, 54)

In 1829, the legislature proposed a railroad from Boston to Worcester and continuing to Springfield. The first locomotive arrived in Worcester on July 4, 1835. People were optimistic 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 city prospered in the same year. (Erskine, 58)

Worcester became a city in 1848, with a population of about 17,000. (Southwick) The first mayor elected was Levi Lincoln, a distant relative of Abraham Lincoln. (Erskine) The Mechanical industry prevailed in Worcester with Ichabod Washburn's wire factories and other 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 a 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) He was nearly lynched by a crowd, but George Hoar, Stephen Foster, Martin Stowell, and other prominent 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 sent 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 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, gunpowder, and leather goods, were manufactured in Worcester and, in turn, this helped the city's 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 sunlight. Triple-deckers proved to be healthier housing than tenements in other cities. (Erskine) 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 30 percent of the 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 & Moen, Morgan Construction Company, Wyman-Gordon Company, Leland Gifford & Company, and the Worcester Iron Works.

over 1,000 other companies. Shrewsbury Street was mostly Irish. Quinsigamond Belmont Hill, and the Greendale area were occupied by Swedes. The French live Wall Street-Hamilton Street area. Water Street and Providence Street were heavy (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 them. There was no waterway to carry off the sewage, so people used the canal to carry away 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 city 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 relief with employment; it was finished in September, 1932. (Erskine, 124)

World War II brought with it a revived economy. Worcester factories filled with orders for 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, but 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 deal with 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. State 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.

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ROBERT BENCHLEY

ROBERT CORMIER

ESTHER FORBES

**THOMAS WENTWORTH
HIGGINSON**

MILTON MELTZER

WORCESTER HISTORY

OTHER LINKS



City Hall - Old and New
(Source: *150 Years of Worcester: 1848-1998*, 1998)



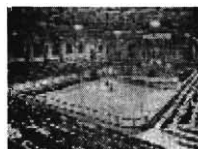
The Merrifield Building Burning
(Source: *Heart of the Commonwealth, Worcester, an Illustrated History*, 1981)



Sketch of Worcester
(Source: *150 Years of Worcester*, 1998, 1999)



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



Mechanics Hall Interior
(Early Photo)



Mechanics Hall
(Early Photo)



Washburn & Moen Manufacturing Co.
(Current Photo)



South Baptist Church
(Source: Worcester Historical Museum)



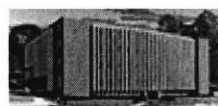
Elm Park
(Source: Worcester Historical Museum)

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ESTHER FORBES

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WORCESTER HISTORY

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