

Mapping Worcester in Poetry News, March 2024

<https://worcestercountypoetry.org/mapping-worcester-in-poetry/>

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Here's the latest news about **Mapping Worcester in Poetry**, an initiative funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (through Scholarship in Action at Holy Cross) and directed by Susan Elizabeth "Beth" Sweeney, with the Worcester County Poetry Association as community partner and Katherine Gregoire as liaison with the WCPA. **MWiP** identifies, documents, and marks sites related to some of the city's best-known poets—including Stanley Kunitz, Elizabeth Bishop, Charles Olson, Frank O'Hara, Etheridge Knight, Mary Fell, and Chris Gilbert—while nurturing brand-new poetry about places in Worcester and Central Massachusetts.

MWiP Project Update

Beth is working with two new student research associates, Ava Marena and Anahi Paulino Rumaldo, who locate historical photos, conduct research, edit copy, and are planning an event to celebrate poems set in our city's parks. Another student applied for a summer research grant to help complete two tours related to Frank O'Hara and study aspects of his art. MWiP was the subject of articles in the *Telegram*, *Worcester Magazine*, and *Holy Cross Magazine* and a Scholarship in Action poster.

SUSAN ELIZABETH SWEENEY earned an MFA in poetry and a Ph.D. in American Literature from Brown University. In 2018, she was named the Henry Professor of Arts and Humanities at Holy Cross, and in 2019 she received the Distinguished Faculty Scholar Award for an exceptional record of scholarly achievement. Sweeney has won numerous literary and editorial awards including the Frank O'Hara Prize in 2020 and most recently the The States Association Gargis Prize in 2022 for her novel *Written on Fire* in the preceding year. In addition to her scholarship and her creative writing, Sweeney is a teacher and can be found reading books out of class. Recently she founded an intercollegiate poetry competition in Worcester that is now in its fourth year.

WORCESTER COUNTY POETRY ASSOCIATION (WCPA) was founded in 1979 by Dr. Samuel Bayliss and Professor Michael Truitt and incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 2002. It now has 500 poets of various ages in poetry. It remains one of the longest running non-profit poetry organizations in the United States. The WCPA celebrates the rich literary history and creative energy of Central Massachusetts through public readings, workshops, festivals, literary conferences, and other programs.

NEW STUDENT RESEARCHERS
Kate Koster '22

mapping worcester in poetry

Mapping Worcester in Poetry

The Mapping Worcester in Poetry (MWiP) project identifies, marks, and celebrates places in the city associated with the life or work of nationally known Worcester poets (Stanley Kunitz, Elizabeth Bishop, Charles Olson, Frank O'Hara, Etheridge Knight, Mary Fell, and Christopher Gilbert) while encouraging new poems about public spaces by contemporary poets from various neighborhoods, cultures, and communities. Among its actions, MWiP has developed driving/walking tours of poems related to Bishop and Kunitz, hosted biannual readings at Bishop's graveside, and commissioned pen-and-ink portraits of major Worcester poets by Emma Kuper '18, and sponsored public workshops on writing poems about place. MWiP has hosted the Poems in and out of Places contest to select the best new poems about public spaces in the city. MWiP also has plans that will include an interactive website, a symposium, a Worcester Historical Museum exhibit, and publication in *The Worcester Review*.

with Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, English and Worcester County Poetry Association, Elizabeth Bacon, President Katherine Gregoire, Project Liaison

Learn more about Prof. Sweeney here

QUESTIONS ?

HOW HAVE PLACES AROUND US INSPIRED POETRY?

HOW ARE WE INSPIRED BY PLACE? DO YOU KNOW A SPACE IN WORCESTER WORTHY OF A POEM?

Oct. 2022 White Room Workshop on Writing about Worcester's Changing Neighborhoods

Learn more here about MWiP

Worcester Poetry Tours



A unit on Worcester poets in Beth's African American Poetry class (spring 2023) included a visit by Catherine Reed and a tour featuring the site of Etheridge Knight's Free People's Poetry Workshop; an on-site reading of Chris Gilbert's "Pleasant Street"; stops on the Worcester Black Heritage Trail; and dinner at Fatima's Café. Students in Poetry & Poetics (fall 2023) toured sites related to Stanley Kunitz (Green Street and Vernon Hill) and Mary Fell (South Main), and visited Bishop's grave. The Bishop tour

and one Kunitz tour are available online; others are nearly complete. Eventually, we will build these tours' narrative, thematic, historical, and biographical facets into an interactive story-mapped website.

Elizabeth Bishop Graveside Readings

MWiP hosted two annual readings at Bishop’s grave in Hope Cemetery. Our celebration of her birthday on February 8 featured a cake made by Claire Mowbray Golding and inspired a new poem by Susan Roney-O’Brien, available on our website. On Oct. 6, Kate Gregoire’s daughter Grace listened raptly to several poems—including a choral reading of “Twelve O’Clock News”—beneath an umbrella.



Triple-Decker Poems

Each year, Preservation Worcester—a stakeholder in MWiP—celebrates Jane Week to honor Jane Jacobs, a journalist and advocate for thoughtful urban development. In May 2023, the celebration featured “A Closer Look: Worcester’s Three Deckers,” an illustrated talk by docents Marilyn Polito and Jan Parent that included discussion of triple-deckers associated with Stanley Kunitz, Charles Olson (pictured below: 4 Norman Street), Christopher Gilbert, and Mary Fell, based on research by MWiP.



Poems in and out of Places

MWiP’s one-time contest to inspire new poems about public spaces in the city attracted almost a hundred entries by poets from established authors to schoolchildren. The contest was launched in April 2022 with “City in Motion,” a reading of published poems set in Worcester, and free public workshops on writing poems about historical spaces (with Susan Edwards Richmond) and Worcester’s changing neighborhoods (with Tony Brown). A collaborative poem about the physical space of “The White Room”—where one workshop was held—is now displayed there and is now available on our website.

In April and May 2023, we sponsored two more free public workshops (one with Katherine Gregoire and one with Irena Kaci and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney) to draft poems or receive feedback before the contest deadline in June 2023. The contest, judged by Worcester Poet Laureate Oliver de la Paz, has resulted in two dozen winners as well as several honorable mentions. Selected poems will be shared with the community through readings, displays on site, video recordings, publication, and an exhibit.