

Sampling of images available:



Morning Grey by Frances & Mary Allen



Leyden Hayfields by Daniel A. Brown



Students from Frontier Regional School's Humanities class

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Museum-School Collaboration Brings Youth Perspective to Exhibition: *Harvesting Yesterday, Cultivating Tomorrow*

*Inspired by Willa Cather's beloved novel of the land, **My Ántonia**, the **Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association/Memorial Hall Museum** is celebrating **THE BIG READ** with a family-friendly exhibition at the Great Falls Discovery Center, in Turners Falls, during the month of March. Co-curated with Frontier Regional School students, "*Harvesting Yesterday, Cultivating Tomorrow*" uses words, pictures and objects to invite reflections on the land in the Connecticut River Valley.*

Deerfield, MA – February 12, 2008 – When the 13 students in Jeremy Rogers' Humanities class at Frontier Regional High School in South Deerfield were invited to co-curate an off-site art exhibit focused on agriculture, they enthusiastically accepted the challenge. Through this unique museum-school partnership between the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association/Memorial Hall Museum and Frontier Regional School, the students brought a fresh perspective to every step of the process—from discussing what makes an exhibit compelling, to developing the *Big Idea*, to creating the floor plan, to designing the postcard announcement. A second team recruited through the school's Community Service Learning program will help install the exhibition at the Great Falls Discovery Center in Turners Falls. *Harvesting Yesterday, Cultivating Tomorrow*, inspired by **THE BIG READ: My Ántonia**, will be open free to the public every Friday and Saturday during March from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm, with a free Community Reception on Saturday, March 14th from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm.

In a 2005 article published by the American Association of Museums, "Dude, Where's My Museum? Inviting Teens to Transform Museums" Deborah Schwartz states that teens "bring

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with them a highly developed curiosity and a willingness to experience new ideas...” Echoing Schwartz’ comments PVMA project leader, Sheila Damkoehler, spoke of the vibrancy the students brought to the project, “All the examples of compelling exhibits the class discussed involved some kind of environment other than a room with four walls. We talked about who our audience would be, and the students all wanted to create a family-friendly exhibit with things to do and to touch that *everyone* could enjoy.” Thus part of the Great Hall will be transformed into a kitchen-like setting with several interactive areas for tactile learners of all ages to experience.

From early 20th century photographs of the land (from Memorial Hall Museum’s Frances and Mary Allen Collection), to current paintings and 3-D works by local artists (Daniel A. Brown, Louise Minks, Elise Davis Pieropan, Tim DeChristopher and James Kitchen), to art created by local students (Frontier Regional, Bernardston Elementary, Sunderland Elementary and Whately Elementary schools), to a drawing and writing area with cookbooks and resources on sustainable agriculture, the exhibit is designed to be thought-provoking and inspiring. “The students didn’t want to preach. They want to encourage people to think, not tell them *what* to think.”

The Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association in Deerfield, MA is a vibrant regional historical society supporting Memorial Hall Museum, a research library, Indian House Children’s Museum and the Deerfield Teachers’ Center. *Harvesting Yesterday, Cultivating Tomorrow* is one of several culminating BIG READ 2008-2009 events, exploring history through literature and art. THE BIG READ is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Institute of Museum and Library Services and Arts Midwest. The exhibition was also made possible by a Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Community Service Learning grant in partnership with Learn & Serve America and the Massachusetts Service Alliance. The Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association is also supported in part by a grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency, and donations from members and friends. For information about PVMA and other BIG READ events, visit www.deerfield-ma.org or call 413-774-7476 x 10. For information about the Great Falls Discovery Center, visit www.greatfallsma.org or call 413-863-3221.

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