

Wednesday, May 18, 2016  
Worcester Telegram & Gazette

# Wired for a good time: Preservation Worcester's Ichabod Ball to celebrate manufacturing era



From left, Ryan Jarvis holds a plastic torso while Olivia Christy and Gwen Callahan put the shell together at the Worcester Center for Crafts on Tuesday. The forms they create will be part of an installation at Preservation Worcester's annual gala, the Ichabod Ball. T&G Staff/Christine Hochkeppel

**By Cyrus Moulton**  
**Telegram & Gazette Staff**

Posted May. 17, 2016 at 8:10 PM  
Updated May 17, 2016 at 8:16 PM

WORCESTER - It's gearing up to be the celebration of the year at the North Works factory - but the year is 1899, and the guests wearing wire corsets and hoop skirts will be made of shrink-wrap and packing tape.

“We try not to have the typical chicken dinner in a rented hall,” said Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester, while walking through the factory courtyard. “The goal is to have a party that involves art and where you can also learn a little history lesson.”

Preservation Worcester will hold the Ichabod Ball - Wired in Worcester as its annual gala and fundraiser on June 4. The theme celebrates the city’s golden manufacturing era, when Ichabod Washburn’s Washburn and Moen Manufacturing Co. merged with the American Steel and Wire Co. to become the largest wire conglomerate in the world.

In its heyday, more than 3,000 employees worked at three city factories, including the company’s headquarters, the North Works factory, and entire neighborhoods of the city’s iconic three-deckers were built to house workers for the booming facility producing piano wire, telegraph line, wire for corsets and hoop skirts and, most notably, barbed wire.

But from the cobbled alleyways of the factory complex, today’s North Works factory building looks a little bit different than it did in 1899. Some of the factory is empty and boarded up; other wings have newly replaced windows and repointed brick and look ripe for new lofts or office space. Part of the main block of the building includes offices, furniture showrooms and restaurant spaces.

Catherine Wilcox-Titus, an art professor at Worcester State University and director of the school’s gallery, has recruited students to recreate some of the figures seen in historical photos from the era.

The students will strike poses like those in the photographs, and then will be shrink-wrapped and wrapped in packing tape to create body casts. Wire-sculpted props such as corsets or hoop skirts might also appear. The Royal Worcester Corset Co. was the city’s largest employer of women in the late 19th century, Ms. Wilcox-Titus noted.

The resulting sculptures will be placed around the venue - perhaps relaxing against the factory wall on a lunch break, overlooking the dancers from a roof, or looking up at historical images projected on the wall of the factory.

Attendees can be shrink-wrapped to create a unique party favor or dancing companion when The Annulments or We and Mrs. Jones perform their sets.

One historical amendment will be made, however, in the interest of a good time.

Ms. Packard noted that in addition to being known for founding the Washburn and Moen Co., Ichabod Washburn was a notorious teetotaler who protested about alcohol being served too close to his factory.

The Ichabod Ball - Wired in Worcester will be held June 4 in the brick and cobblestone alley behind the North Works at 100 Grove St., Worcester. Tickets are \$60 general admission, \$50 for Preservation Worcester members, \$30 for students through June 3. Tickets will be \$80 the day of the event. Reservations may be made by calling Preservation Worcester at (508) 754-8760. The event includes live music, a cash bar, food and more. Festive attire is recommended, as well as footwear appropriate for dancing in a cobblestone alley laid in the 19th century.



Clockwise from left, Gwen Callahan, Denise Nephew, Ryan Jarvis, Dillon Caya, Nikki Howland and Olivia Christy tape together a plastic torso shell at the Worcester Center for Crafts on Tuesday for the Ichabod Ball. T&G Staff/Christine Hochkeppel



Sculpture and mixed media professor Stacey Parker cuts a plastic mold from Ryan Jarvis, with Nikki Howland helping, at the Worcester Center for Crafts on Tuesday. T&G Staff/Christine Hochkeppel



Preservation Worcester executive director Deborah Packard and Catherine Wilcox-Titus of Worcester State University discuss spots for decorations at the Ichabod Ball. T&G Staff/Cyrus Moulton