

## Worcester Nativity students spotlight structures that ‘matter’



Nativity School of Worcester fifth graders joined Preservation Worcester Wednesday to show that Mission Chapel "matters." [T&G Staff/Cyrus Moulton]

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The lettering above the door says “all are welcome,” but fifth-grade pupils at the Nativity School of Worcester observed that Mission Chapel on Summer Street is, in fact, locked and abandoned.

Nevertheless, the students said the chapel mattered.

“It was a church and also helped people and gave them food,” said student Ray Rivera while standing outside the building on Wednesday. He said that preserving such a place is important. “It symbolizes how old Massachusetts is. People who went here and lived here ..., they remember this place a little.”

This is the second year the Nativity School has partnered with Preservation Worcester on a “This Place Matters” event. Students learn about local buildings at risk, or formerly at risk, of destruction and then “heart bomb” the building - according to Preservation Worcester Executive Director Deborah Packard - by creating signs and standing outside the building to show that “This Place Matters.”

This year, Preservation Worcester highlighted the Mission Chapel and the Fire Alarm and Telegraph Building on Park Avenue.

“We wanted to pick one building that was endangered and one that was a success,” Ms. Packard said Wednesday while standing outside Mission Chapel. “This building definitely is endangered...”

Mission Chapel was built in 1854 by Ichabod Washburn, a wealthy and influential industrialist and philanthropist, for the poor to have a place to worship. The 8,268-square-foot building has been used as a chapel for many different immigrant groups, as a food distribution center, and as office space, according to Preservation Worcester. It has fallen into disrepair and has been vacant for decades, according to the nonprofit.

The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is currently for sale.

The Fire Alarm and Telegraph building is a model of a successful historical renovation. Formerly the site where all the fire notifications came in for the city, it was unused for 20 to 30 years until a public/private collaboration among Preservation Worcester, the city and Spencer Bank broke ground in 2013. The first floor of the circa 1925 building has community space available for nonprofits and the public, while the second floor is used by the bank. The building is also on the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to learning about the two buildings, the students at Nativity School reflected on which buildings mattered to them.

“You need a home for care and comfort ... and need a home to store all your stuff,” said Zavian Black, 11. He was one of several students who chose his house as a place that mattered.

Student Noah Miles, 10, chose his church, the Pleasant Street Seventh-day Adventist Church, as a place that mattered. He said the church had a community supper every Saturday and reminded him of the Mission Chapel.

“It was a place that people could meet and go inside for church services,” he said.

Mr. Miles said he enjoyed the “This Place Matters” project.

“It shows that Worcester has its important things that make it different from other cities,” Mr. Miles said.