

UW Oshkosh gives Menasha students a history lesson

by **Grace McMurtrie** - Thursday, December 06, 2007

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/208/uw-oshkosh-gives-menasha-students-a-history-lesson/>

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is linking the past to the future, using cutting-edge technology to put historical records at the tiny fingertips of Menasha third-graders.

With the aid of a Teaching Academy for the Study of American History (TASAH) grant, UW Oshkosh archivist Joshua Ranger created a free, interactive Web presentation to help students learn the history of Menasha.

“The Area Research Center (ARC) here at Polk Library is dedicated to providing original historical records to the public,” Ranger said. “We have an obligation to help the citizens of Winnebago, Fond du Lac, Dodge, Green Lake and Marquette counties and to help residents understand the history of their own communities.”

Though historical records of Menasha are available to the public, Ranger said it is difficult for the elementary students to access the information due to travel and time constraints.

“This is an opportunity to share what we have as well as share records from other facilities,” Ranger said. “With the Internet, there are more and more opportunities, but without projects like this, kids will never get a chance to access really local historical records.”

While development of “Menasha History: Change over Time” began in 2006, ideas for the project were first formulated in 2002. A smaller-scale history teaching tool was created for the Neenah School District in 2006.

The Web-based tool uses historically significant maps, photos and descriptions to teach students local history, while including characters such as Officer Mustache to help students grasp the lesson.

“It was a tremendous amount of work — this is why textbooks cost so much money,” Ranger said. “It was a great experience, though. We learned a lot.”

Joel Johnson, a teacher from Jefferson Elementary in Menasha, praised the site after introducing it to his students.

“We received lots of very positive feedback — especially from the third-grade teachers, who were all pretty much in shock,” Johnson said. “Instead of reading about it from a secondary source, students can experience a little taste of what it must be like for historians to study history.”

The historical documents used for the program were compiled from the region’s records provided by the Menasha Historical Society, the Elisha Smith Public Library, the Wisconsin Historical Society and the ARC, which Ranger oversees. Community members are encouraged to explore the 3,500-cubic-foot

collection at Polk Library.

“Menasha History: Change over Time” was one of the projects funded by a \$762,000 grant from TASAH, which aims to provide teachers of U. S. history with new perspectives, particularly local and statewide, on the American past. The program aspires to assist teachers who want to improve teaching strategies in the area of history.

The online learning tool can be found at www.uwosh.edu/archives/menasha/ or www.mjsd.k12.wi.us/MenashaCOT/menasha/home.htm.