

An Invitation to Explore Berlin, the City that Trees Built



“You can’t know who you are until you know where you are.” –WENDELL BERRY

Photographs are considered to be primary and valuable sources of information, actual records that have survived from the past. They provide evidence of a particular culture and its changes over time. The Brown Company Photographic Collection documents the history of the Brown Company paper mill of Berlin, NH, from the late nineteenth century through the mid-1960s. These photographs offer an open window into the past, giving observers a rich source of information about the social, cultural, and recreational lives of the workers, their families, and the place of these people in the life of the city of Berlin. They provide an opportunity for the viewer to step back into time and search for the story within each frame.

The following activities have been designed to teach students how to critically look at the visual images: to notice details, personally respond, ask questions, and reflect about the meanings; to discover for themselves the unique culture and history of the City that Trees Built. Students will explore the connection between a region’s natural resources, its economic dependence on them, and how that dependence changes over time. Students will be invited to look beyond the constraints of present time, to seek out the vital human connections that link us to our past.

The following site contains a selection of photographs:

http://go.plymouth.edu/beyondbrown_exhibition

ACTIVITY 1: BEYOND BROWN PAPER EXHIBIT QUEST

Can you find the photographs that are described in the poem?

Each photograph in this exhibit tells a historical story and informs us about the community of Berlin during this time period. Use the poem below to help you discover these stories by looking closely at the photographs to find clues about the Berlin community.

This quest will take you back in time.
Please follow the path of the rhyme.
You'll enjoy and learn as you go.
Pride and connections you should grow.

Find the print of a little girl.
She is giving knitting a whirl.
Charitable community
Supporting Red Cross charity.
Photograph _____

Let's move on now, get on the track.
Find transportation from way back.
Moving from Berlin to Gorham,
This diesel train would really hum.

Find a photo of dug-up ground
Laying sewer pipe in the town.
Creating jobs beyond its doors
A paper town, but so much more.
Photograph _____

Your next stop's a groundbreaking day.
The Brown Company's on its way.
Prosperity for young and old
In these pictures the story's told.

A community to renown
That a president came to town.
Find the print of Eisenhower,
For Berlin a shining hour.
Photograph _____

The next print is a nature scene.
Some life is cut, the other green.
When Mother Nature was a perk
And helped the loggers do their work.

Little water can someone see
As the river is full of trees.
Once a vision of industry,
What impact on ecology?
Photograph _____

Search to see the huge paper rolls
Closer to the mill's finished goal.
The machines and men work as one
Till beautiful paper is done.

Keep going now, look as you go.
What you see here helped a town grow.
Baseball, volleyball, and horseshoes
Were activities to amuse.
Photograph _____

Although our quest is now all done,
The true fun here has just begun.
Please go back now in your own time,
Enjoy these treasures so sublime!





What happened in the past? How has the world changed, and how might it change in the future?

ACTIVITY 2: SEEING-EYE DETECTIVE

Each photograph in this exhibit tells a historical story and informs us of the community of Berlin during this time period. The photographs show us people at work and people engaging in social activities. They also show us the city, the landscape, and the environment. Together, they tell us the story of Berlin and the Berlin community.

The questions below will help you to observe closely, analyze, interpret, reflect upon, and further discuss the exhibition with your friends, family, teachers, and fellow students. Examine each of these photographs closely to find the clues and answers to the accompanying questions. Answer the following questions and write your ideas in the space provided.

Select a photograph of people at work.

Photograph number _____

1. Who is in the photograph? What does the photograph tell you about this person (or people)?
2. What is happening in the photograph? What are people doing?
3. What other details can you find?
4. What do the clues tell you about life during this time?

Now select a photograph showing the landscape and environment.

Photograph number _____

1. List what you see in the photograph.

4. Why do you think the photographer took this photograph? What story was he/she trying to tell?

2. What is the setting, and when was the photo taken (date, time of day, year)? How can you tell?

What connections can be made to events, people, and places in current times?

3. What details can you see?

What have these photographs told us about the Berlin community? How did geography, climate, and natural resources affect the way people lived and worked?



ACTIVITY 3: THE MEMORY GAME

With a partner, select a photograph and carefully observe it for 60 seconds. Look carefully at all the details. After 60 seconds, look away from the photograph. What details can you remember and describe to your partner? How many details can you list? Use the space below to make your list. What do the details tell you about story in the photograph?

ACTIVITY 4: PORTRAITS TELL A STORY

Portraits can help us come to know someone from the past when we take the time to look closely and discover the clues. Choose a portrait of a person from the exhibit. As you look at the portrait, ask yourself these questions: Who might this person be? What are they doing? How are they feeling? What tells me this? How old are they? Where are they looking? What might they be hearing? What might they be seeing? Feeling? What might they be thinking? Can you imagine their story?

Make a diagram or sketch of this person (to the right) and write down your interpretation of these questions. What is the story that you have discovered?

I Am

Now try writing an “I Am” poem, imagining yourself as the person in the portrait. Fill in the blanks to create your poem. Be descriptive and use lots of details.

I am _____
(who are you?)

I have _____
(two special characteristics you have)

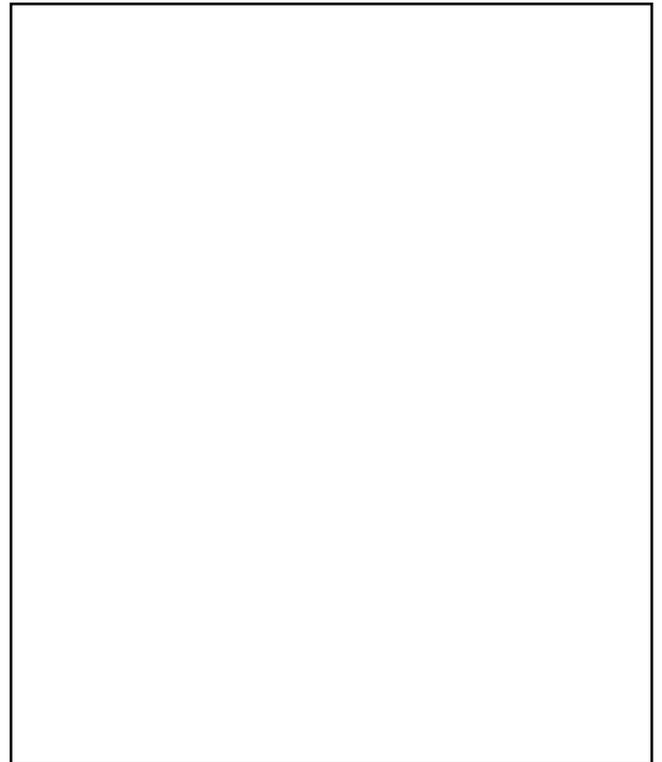
I wonder _____
(something you are curious about)

I hear _____

I see _____

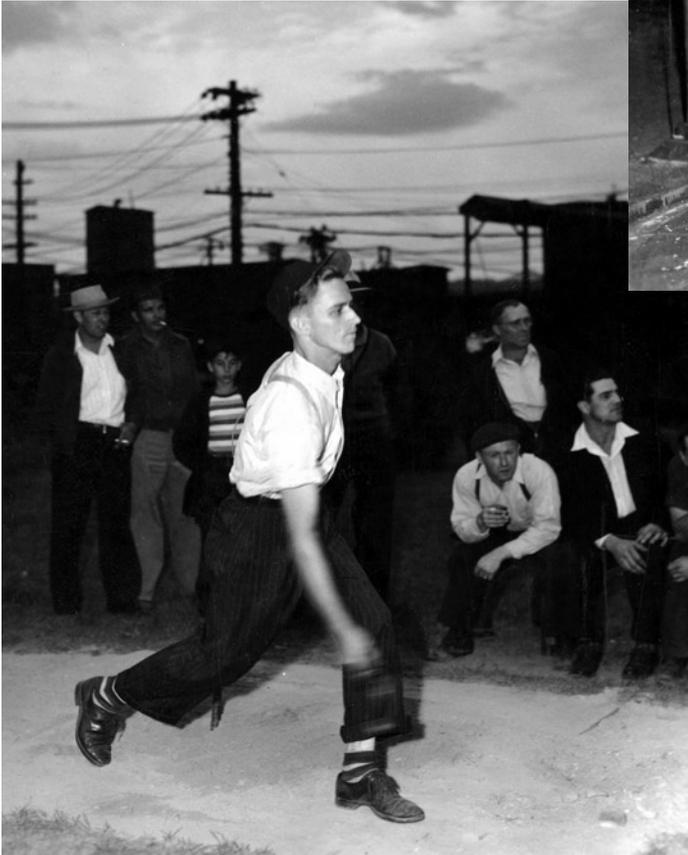
I hope _____
(an actual desire)

I am _____
(the first line of the poem repeated)



How are we the same and how are we different from these people in the past?

List three things that you can do to positively impact your community and environment.



Produced by the Karl Drerup Art Gallery at Plymouth State University

These resources were developed by Carol Young-Podmore and Wendy Oellers, adjunct faculty members with the Plymouth State University College of Graduate Studies. Editorial consultation was provided by Cynthia Vascak, professor of art and art education at PSU.

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For more information about Beyond Brown Paper, visit <http://beyondbrownpaper.plymouth.edu>.