

# His Pictures Document a 'Classic City'

By BOB RIEL

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When Patrick Burns looks at an old mill or abandoned building in Woonsocket, he doesn't see the decay that other people do. Rather, he sees a "classic industrial city" that needs to be appreciated.

That's why Burns recently spent \$1,800 for a special order of film. He takes pictures of the city with antique cameras and the film he uses can't be found in stores.

Standing on a hill overlooking the municipal parking lot on Main Street, Burns photographs a number of buildings and discusses the importance of Woonsocket's heritage.

"It's too bad that a lot of the things that were important (to Woonsocket) aren't here anymore," Burns says.

With a trace of disappointment in his voice, he speaks of vacant lots that once held mills and tenement houses. Once something is gone, people tend to forget about it, he says. "Tenement houses and mills. That's (mostly) what the city is about," he said.

There are two reasons he photographs the city with old equipment, Burns said. "Partly because it gives me a lot more control and partly because it matches the subject matter."

The pictures he is taking will be important someday, he believes, if only for historic reasons.

"There's a lot that goes unnoticed, and (the city) keeps changing. That's why the photos will be important," Burns says. "Most historic photographs were only taken as documents" originally.

For now, the pictures will serve as the basis for a college thesis. Burns, 27, expects to receive his master of fine arts degree in pho-

tography from Yale University this spring. He is a 1972 graduate of Woonsocket High School and has a bachelor's degree in photography from the San Francisco Art Institute.

Burns said he first became interested in photography when he was a teenager. "When I was 17, I got a job washing dishes, bought myself a 35mm camera, and said, 'I'm going to be a photographer.'"

Unfortunately, Burns said, local residents aren't greatly interested in photography. "Except for the Woonsocket Fine Arts Society, people are basically craft-oriented in this area. There aren't too many people who can look at a picture and really appreciate it."

Still standing on the hill, Burns focuses on the rear of the Lee's Block building with a vintage 1930s camera. "Look at that," he says. "Some people would think it's just decay. But it's more than an empty building. Woonsocket is a classic industrial town. If you think of that, then it really has a place."

After college, Burns hopes to find a "photo-related job" but isn't optimistic about his prospects. There just aren't that many jobs around for photographers.

Ideally, he would like to get a position teaching photography at a college or university, he said. The hours are good and he'd have a chance to devote more time to photography as an art.

Even in that situation, however, it isn't easy for a photographer to make it in the art world.

"My photographs might be pleasant to look at, but they're only documents for a moment. They're only truth for a moment. With photography, you try to transcend that click of the shutter."