

BY THE PEOPLE: THE PEOPLE'S MUSEUM OF BROCKTON

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While driving in downtown Brockton in the summer of 2016 in search for a particular store, I realized how different the landscape of downtown is from how it was when I was growing up in the 1970s and 1980s. Gone are the Polynesian restaurant, the high-end women's boutique, and business offices. In their place are empty storefronts and abandoned buildings, but also vibrantly colored restaurants and specialty stores, serving an ever-diversifying community new to the "City of Champions" and far removed from my own experiences as a child here.

My family moved to Brockton in 1968 from Stoughton, Massachusetts, when I was a year old. My Irish-American parents were both born and raised in Boston. My mother, Anne, grew up in Jamaica Plain, the daughter of an Irish-American police officer and Irish-Portuguese-American department store employee. My father, Bob, grew up in Dorchester, the son of a U.S. southern-born Irish-American roofer and an Irish-Canadian-American homemaker. My parents decided on Brockton because of its opportunities for raising a family: good schools, affordable homes, and easy access to the highway. They had no real connection to the 19th century history of this world-famous shoe-manufacturing city, although we did buy our shoes at the Taymor Shoe Company on Montello Street. That building is now gone.

The cityscape of Brockton seems to be in a state of transition, with questions about how to define its public identity as well as its public space, which appears to many to be in a state of decay, with higher crime and poverty than in the old days; Brockton now a shadow of the thriving city it once had been. Old timers look nostalgically on the days when manufacturing and industry defined the city, imagining a past that far outshines the present. This is the image of Brockton that I have seen illustrate its history, which mostly focuses on Brockton's preeminence as shoe manufacturer during the Civil War, the industry that would attract immigrants from Ireland and Italy and other European countries well into the 20th century. The official popular history also points to Brockton as "The City of Champions," referencing the years when Brockton High School's athletes won championships throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and with a nod toward its most famous residents, Rocky Marciano and Marvelous Marvin Hagler, both of whose tenacity and willingness to fight have defined the city in the modern day.

The manufacturing that served as the foundation for the city's initial prosperity is mostly gone, Rocky Marciano is now memorialized as a bronze figure at the high school, and Marvin Hagler moved on to a new life in Europe. Their departure mirrors the departure of many long-term residents and businesses, making room for the influx of newcomers. Still a city of immigrants, the face of the city has changed.

Museumification and Identity: Negotiating Official Histories and Reflections of the Self

By the People: The People's Museum of Brockton will celebrate the changing face of Brockton, generate local pride, and inspire the community to consider what gives them a sense of place and belonging. Envisioned as a storefront in downtown Brockton, this **community project** will feature personal objects and their histories donated by citizens who have a particular story to tell about their connection to this city and their own lives. The resulting **crowd-sourced collection** will demonstrate and celebrate the diversity of cultures and perspectives that tend to be absent from official histories of Brockton.

This project seeks to address the following questions: What and who are the makers of history? What stories are woven together that help us make sense of, remember, and celebrate the past? How does one's personal history define his or her relationship to place? How do artifacts and keepsakes memorialize and mediate the past? Further, what happens in the process of "museumification" of what may seem like ordinary artifacts? And how important is it for citizens to see themselves reflected in the official history of the place they call home?