

Thank You, Herman Melville

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How many times have those of us blessed with the name Worden endured its mispronunciation? The conversation goes something like this. Me: "Hi, my name is Robert Worden." Them: "Robert Warden?" Me: "No, Worden." Them: "How do you spell that?" Me: "W-O-R-D (pause) E-N." Them: "Oh, Warden!"

And then there was the time that the Worden Winery of Spokane, Washington, declared in a 1995 advertisement that the names Worden and Warden were both derived from the occupation of warden. Although I issued a written protest to their odd line of thinking about their company name, and offered an explanation of the separate derivations of the two names, I never received a reply and the company soon thereafter went out of business. Their wine was not too bad and was happily used at various family occasions over the years.

Or imagine the frustration of painter, sculptor, and printmaker Worden Day (1916–1986) of always being called "Warden Day." Her first name was her mother's maiden name and she knew how it was pronounced. But many others did not and she eventually altered the spelling of her first name to Wörden. Of course, that umlaut over the letter O was not exactly phonetically correct either and leads to still other mispronunciations. But it is distinctive.

In my own family we have tried to give people an easy and slightly humorous way to correctly pronounce our name. "Worden rhymes with burden," we always say. Unfortunately, most people do not get it. Sometimes I will add that the name originally was spelled Werden and is still pronounced that way. Small glimmers of understanding occasionally creep in.

In 1992 the late Waite W. Worden, a founding member of the Worden Family Association, privately published a 159-page book entitled *Worden: "A Weir in the Valley"; Its Origins as the Name of a Place, a Hamlet, an English Manor, and a Surname*. In his book, he not only recounted the family genealogy in America, with lots of information on his own branch, but he added details about the origins of the family name and included maps of ancient Werden/Worden holdings in Lancashire. In this endeavor, he reprinted several articles by George Bolton from *Wordens Past*, which also were published in book form in 1997 under the title *Worden Origins*. Bolton, citing an authority on Lancashire place names, Ellert Ekwall, explained that the name Werden/Worden is based on two Old English elements, "wer," which is a weir or dam, and "denu," which is a deep valley—thus the subtitle of Waite's book. Bolton points out, too, that "Warden is a surname in its own right," based on an occupational name, or a place name in Kent.

As a brief aside, although Waite Worden privately published his book for immediate family members, he had the foresight to donate a copy to the Library of Congress in 1993. Besides his book, the Bolton book, most issues of Wordens Past, Oliver Norton Worden's seminal work of 1868, and several others listed in my source list below, there is precious little on the subject of our family name preserved in the Library of Congress. If you have published a serious work of Worden genealogy, consider donating a copy to the Library of Congress.

In August 2006, my extended family visited the Burden Iron Works Museum in Troy, New York. The museum has a small exhibit with photographs and artifacts left over from the construction of the U.S.S. Monitor. Deck and hull iron, rivets, bar iron used for the pilot house, and iron frames were manufactured for the Monitor in Troy, where a consortium had been formed to oversee the construction of the ironclad (the assembly of which was accomplished by a subcontractor in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, New York). Because our guide, the executive director of the Hudson Mohawk Industrial Gateway, Dr. P. Thomas Carroll, pronounced Worden correctly, I could not resist thanking him for this and commenting that it is appropriate that Worden, the commander of the Monitor, was associated with the rhyming Burden Iron Works. The Hudson Mohawk Industrial Gateway has plans afoot to construct a full-scale, seaworthy replica of the Monitor.

So, by now you are asking what all this has to do with Herman Melville (1819–1891). In the course of never-ending Worden research, I came across a reference to a poem Melville published in 1866 about the Battle of Hampton Roads, the clash between the U.S.S. Monitor and the C.S.C. Virginia that took place on March 9, 1862. In the opening stanza of "In the Turret" Melville rhymes Worden with burden! "Thank you, Herman Melville," I said to myself and vowed to write this piece for Wordens Past.

Melville's poem appeared in his collection entitled *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*. It was published in New York by Harper and Brothers in 1866. Frank Day, writing an analysis of the poem in 2002, says "'In the Turret' is an imaginative presentation of the ordeal undergone by Lieutenant Worden during the encounter between the two ironclads.... [The] hopes of all the North were resting on this ironclad... [and] Worden was aware of the confidence placed in him and his ship...." Day continues, "It is this sense of responsibility apparently felt by Worden that Melville capitalizes on, speaking of Worden's 'honest heart of duty' and of the way he 'bore the first iron battle's burden/Sealed as in a diving-bell.'"

So, we see that Melville honored the great Civil War hero and he knew how to pronounce his name correctly. Thank you, Herman Melville. Now, on to the poem.

"In the Turret."
(March, 1862)

Your honest heart of duty, Worden,
So helped you that in fame you dwell;

You bore the first iron battle's burden
 Sealed as in a diving-bell.
 Alcides, groping into haunted hell
 To bring forth King Admetus' bride,
 Braved naught more vaguely direful and untried.
 What poet shall uplift his charm,
 Bold Sailor, to your height of daring,
 And interblend therewith the calm,
 And build a goodly style upon your bearing.

Escaped the gale of outer ocean—
 Cribbed in a craft which like a log
 Was washed by every billow's motion—
 By night you heard of Og
 The huge; nor felt your courage clog
 At tokens of his onset grim:
 You marked the sunk ship's flag-staff slim,
 Lit by her burning sister's heart;
 You marked, and mused: "Day brings the trial:
 Then be it proved if I have part
 With men whose manhood never took denial."

A prayer went up—a champion's. Morning
 Beheld you in the Turret walled
 by adamant, where a spirit forewarning
 And all-deriding called:
 "Man, darest thou—desperate, unappalled—
 Be first to lock thee in the armored tower?
 I have thee now; and what the battle-hour
 To me shall bring—heed well—thou'lt share;
 This plot-work, planned to be the foeman's terror,
 To thee may prove a goblin-snare;
 Its very strength and cunning—monstrous error!"

"Stand up, my heart; be strong; what matter
 If here thou seest thy welded tomb?
 And let huge Og with thunders batter—
 Duty be still my doom,
 Though drowning come in liquid gloom;
 First duty, duty next, and duty last;
 Ay, Turret, rivet me here to duty fast!—"

 So nerved, you fought wisely and well;
 And live, twice live in life and story;
 But over your Monitor dirges swell,
 In wind and wave that keep the rites of glory.

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**Wordens in the New York Genealogical and Biographical Record and DAR
Genealogical Records**

Compiled by Jean Davis Worden

Continued from November 2006

Danforth Worden, married Nancy Dunkin 19 Feb. 1816 at Syracuse, Onondaga County, NY. DAR Cemetery records Vol. 198, p. 174

Irving Worden, 1859-1941, buried Mt. View Cemetery, Olean, Cattaraugus County, NY, wife was Elizabeth Sartwell, 1873-1939. . DAR Cemetery records Vol. 188, p. 15