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Vassar a big man on campus

School founder finally gets his own statue

By Kathleen Wereszynski Murray
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Matthew Vassar's wishes have finally been fulfilled.

Today, as part of its Alumnae Association's annual reunion, Vassar College President Frances Fergusson will unveil a life-size bronze statue of the college's founder that was 139 years in the making.

"This person who made such a big difference to this community has the monument that I think everyone wanted him to have originally," said James Mundy, director of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center.

The statue, which is 5 feet, 7 inches tall, stands on a bronze base on top of a granite plinth. The entire height of the artwork is 83 inches, said sculptor David Frech of Beacon.

"I thought very strongly that he should be raised up," Frech said. "He becomes a man with a vision."

Mundy discovered a plaster maquette of Vassar in a storage room in the college's library.

Model made in 1880

The small model was made by Poughkeepsie sculptor Laura Hofmann Pomeroy around 1880, 12 years after Vassar's death and 13 years after the college's board of trustees stated a desire to commission a bronze statue of the founder.

"It has a lot to do with the fact that Vassar died when he did," Mundy said. "After his death, just through inertia and probably trying to make ends meet as the college got off the ground, this got postponed."

Vassar himself had offered to loan the young college's trustees, who were dragging their feet in funding the statue, the money to pay for it — at 7.5 percent interest.

In 2005, the college, through the efforts of an



Vassar College

A life-size statue of Vassar College founder Matthew Vassar, sculpted by David Frech of Beacon, will be unveiled today at the school's campus in Poughkeepsie.

Please see **Vassar**, 3F

Vassar: Class of '69 commissioned sculpture

Continued from 1F

anonymous local history buff and the Vassar Class of 1969, commissioned Frech to finish the Pomeroy maquette for casting at Tallix Foundry in Beacon.

Frech, whose clients have included the U.S. Historical Society, National Parkinson Foundation and Leonardo da Vinci Horse Inc., is a sculptor in the figurative tradition.

Pomeroy's model, which Frech compares to an architectural plan, gave him the foundation for the finished piece.

"The maquette is a first step," Frech said. "It gets you in the right place, but a lot of time an artist will leave certain details out."

To bring it to life, Frech visited the college's archives and used original photos of Matthew Vassar as reference.

Mundy said the statue is truthful to Matthew Vassar's image.

"The sculpture idealizes him a bit, but no more so than the paintings that we have of him, and the photographs tend to prove that," Mundy said.

The public is invited to view the statue, located in front of the south pavilion of Main Building on the Poughkeepsie campus, beginning next week.

"There is a sense of completion and closure for something that began as the best of intentions and never emerged until a few people decided to make it happen," Mundy said.

For information, visit www.vassar.edu or www.davidfrech.com.

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