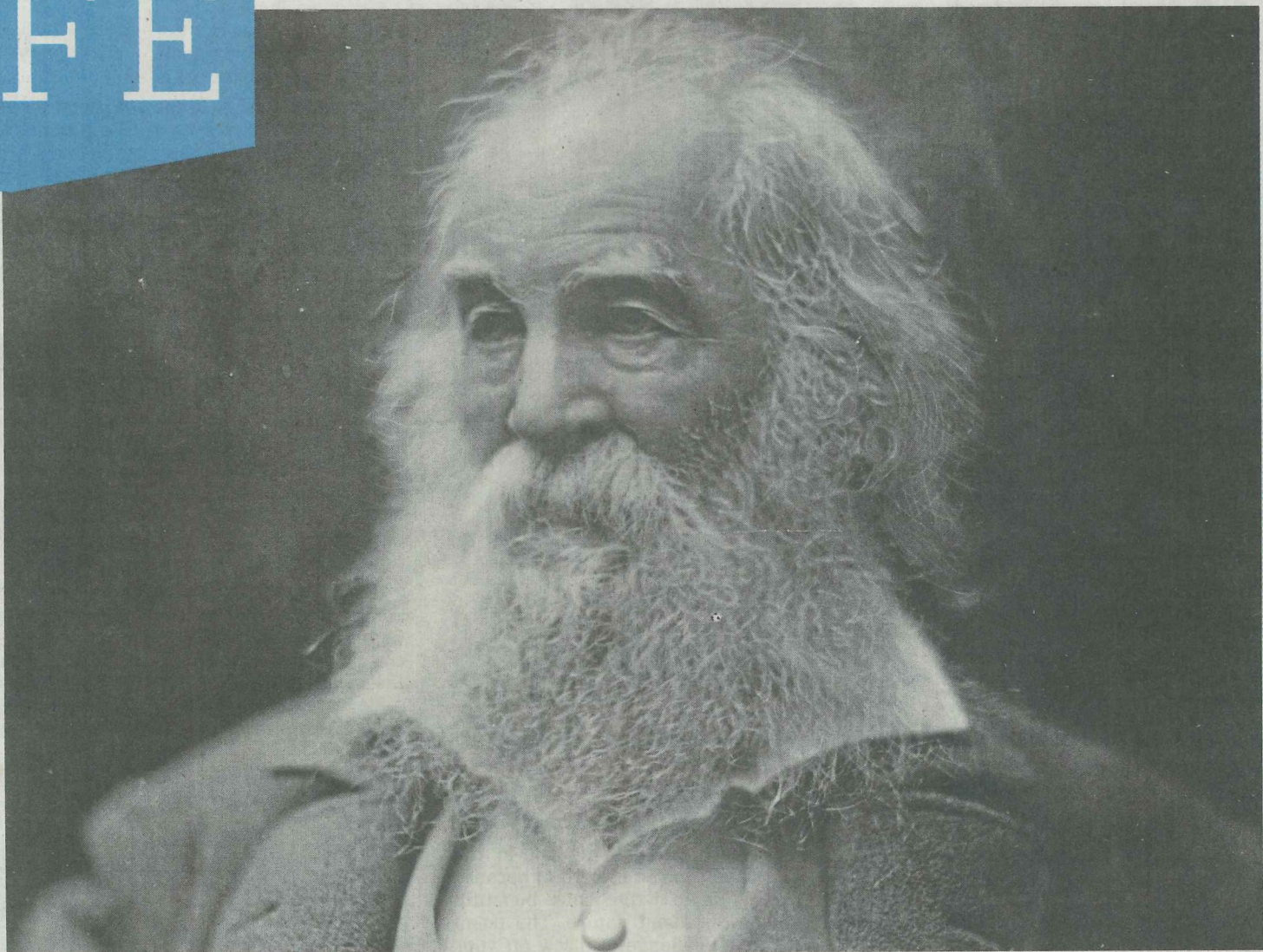


LIFE



Undated photograph of Walt Whitman, part of the Penn Libraries exhibition "Whitman Vignettes: Camden and Philadelphia." University of Pennsylvania Libraries

Celebrate himself

Activities and events in Philadelphia and Camden mark the 200th anniversary of Walt Whitman's birth.

By Shaun Brady
FOR THE INQUIRER

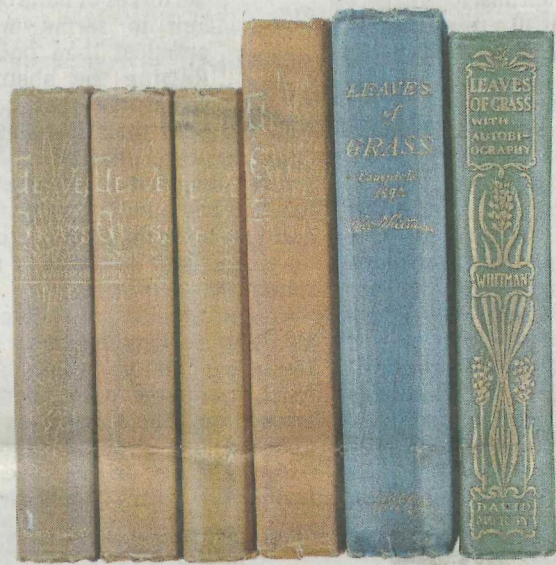
Long before the bridge that bears his name made it an easy commute, Walt Whitman crossed the Delaware River between Camden and Philadelphia countless times during the last two decades of his life. Whitman, the "Poet of Democracy," was born in 1819 and died in 1892. To celebrate his 200th birthday, cake will be served on both sides of the river this week.

The parties, at Rutgers University's Stedman Gallery on Wednesday evening and Philadelphia City Hall from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Friday, are timed to commemorate the bicentennial on May 31 and will host invited guests including Mayor Jim Kenney and punk legend Patti Smith (in Philly) and the late poet him-

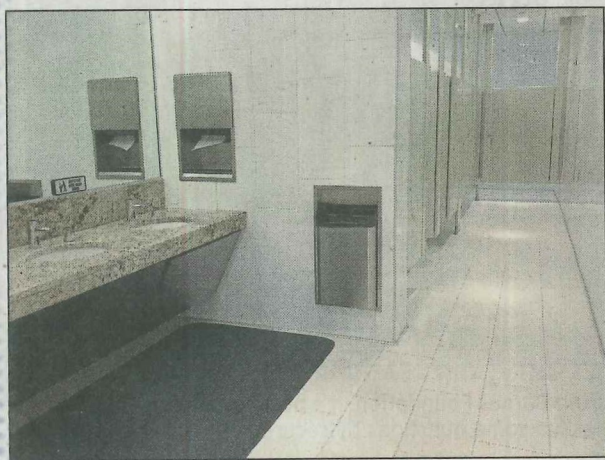
self as portrayed by historian Darrel Ford (in Camden).

The festivities arrive in the midst of a year-long commemoration of Whitman's bicentennial in both cities that includes exhibitions, performances, newly commissioned artworks, poetry readings, and discussions. (The full schedule is online at whitman200.org.) Smith will perform a Whitman tribute Thursday at the Museum of Art with her daughter Jesse Paris Smith, but that event is sold out.

"People cross the Walt Whitman Bridge every day without thinking about why it's named the Walt Whitman Bridge," says Lynne Farrington, project director of "Whitman at 200" and senior curator at the University of Pennsylvania's Kislak Center for Special Collections. See **WALT WHITMAN** on C2



Separate printings of the sixth edition of "Leaves of Grass" published between 1882 and 1900.



The bathroom in the concourse level of the Comcast Center. ANNA ORSO / Staff

Restrooms you can use without having to buy anything



Water can be treacherous for pugs and other short-snout dogs, so take precautions. istockphoto.com

Advice for the dog days.



Walt Whitman spent his last two decades in this Camden house on what is now Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.

Walt Whitman

Continued from C1

tions, Rare Books and Manuscripts. “Whitman is associated with New York and Washington and not as much with Philadelphia, so we’re trying to reconnect him to the region.”

Whitman spent the last two decades of his life in Camden in a house on what is now Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard. Camden Mayor Frank Moran will mark the occasion of Whitman’s birthday at the house at 10 a.m. on Friday, and special tours of the historic site in the weeks surrounding the date will focus on the poet’s work and life in Camden.

Whitman regularly traversed the Delaware by ferry to visit friends and business associates in Philly, giving the city its own claim to the Good Grey Poet’s legacy.

Throughout the summer, riders who follow in Whitman’s wake on the RiverLink ferry can ponder the colors of nature in much the same way the poet did, thanks to *When You Look on*

the River and Sky, an installation by New York artist Spencer Finch (through Sept. 3). Using two spinning wheels of Pantone colors swatches, ferry passengers can match the colors of the river and sky during different times of day.

On a colorfully corroded barge docked at the Navy Yard last week, Carolyn Healy and John JH Phillips had no choice but to contend with the forces of nature, albeit in terms more practical than poetic. Rigging the abstract structures that compose their installation piece *RiverRoad*, the artists struggled to dispose of the inch and a half of water that had just been dumped on their floating gallery by the day’s torrential thunderstorms.

RiverRoad will take audiences from Penn’s Landing down the Delaware on a presumably much drier barge for four performances on June 4 and 5, as actor and opera singer James Osby Gwathney Jr. dramatically recites Whitman’s “Song of the

Open Road.”

In between thunderclaps, Healy said, “Being out in the open seemed important because Whitman wrote such beautiful words about nature. The poem is a challenge to throw off your everyday life, so we thought we could possibly capture some of that under the night sky.”

The same piece inspired Philadelphia Jazz Project director Homer Jackson to take audiences for a walk through both the elements and history. His Whitman at 200 commission, *New Songs of the Open Road*, consists of walks through diverse Philadelphia neighborhoods led by singers and accompanied by a gospel choir, with visitors encouraged to sing along with new compositions that echo Whitman’s sentiments through the lens of the civil rights movement.

The performance comes to Germantown on June 8, South Philly on June 22, and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway on July 6.

“I’m not a Whitman expert,” Jackson says. “But one thing that I do know that makes him interesting is that he liked to hike and walk. So I thought about what it meant for folks during the ‘50s and the ‘60s to get out there and protest and walk. Whitman gave us a map of what freedom could be.”

WHITMAN AT 200 EVENTS

Here is a short selection of Whitman bicentennial events this week and next. The full list — it’s extensive and continues all year — is online at whitmanat200.org.

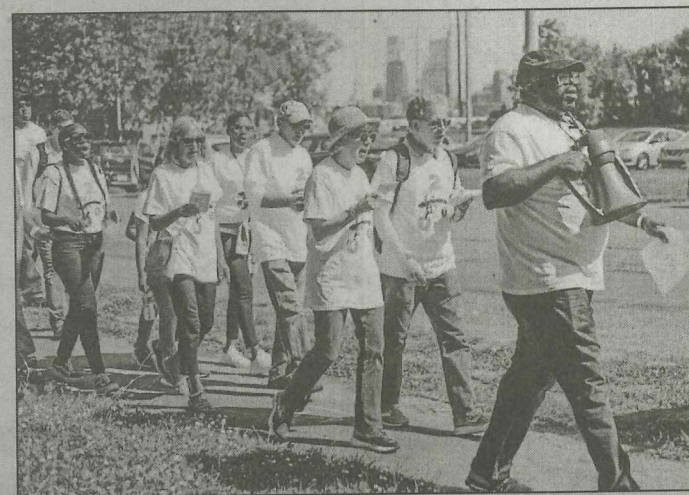
► **Contradict This! A Birthday Funeral for Heroes**, May 28-June 2. The Bearded Ladies Cabaret troupe performs a raucous “trial” for Whitman. Dress rehearsals May 28 and 29, performances May 31-June 2, all at 7:30 p.m., Cherry Street Pier, 121 N. Christopher Columbus Blvd., reservations at beardedladiescabaret.com

► **Walt Whitman House Historic Site Legacy Tours**, May 29-June 2. Tours focus on Whitman’s time in Camden and on Camden history related to the house. By appointment only at the Walt Whitman House, 330 Mickle Blvd., Camden. Call 856-964-5383 to reserve a spot. Appointments also available June 5-9.

► **Whitman Vignettes: Camden and Philadelphia**, May 28-Aug. 23. The exhibition focuses on the poet’s Camden/Philadelphia connection, both during Whitman’s life and in the decades that followed (including the naming of his bridge). Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center, University of Pennsylvania, 215-898-7555, library.upenn.edu

► **We Contain Multitudes: Celebrating Walt Whitman’s 200th Birthday**, May 31. Philadelphia celebrates Whitman’s birthday on his birthday, with poetry, song, and cake. City Hall courtyard, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Details at whitmanat200.org.

► **New Songs of the Open Road**, June 8. Philadelphia Jazz Project director Homer Jackson leads a song-filled walk through Germantown, examining Whitman’s poem through the lens of the civil rights movement. Walk begins at 3 p.m. at the Joseph E Coleman NW Regional Library, 68 W. Chelton Ave. The performance comes to South Philly on June 22 and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway on July 6. Details at whitmanat200.org.



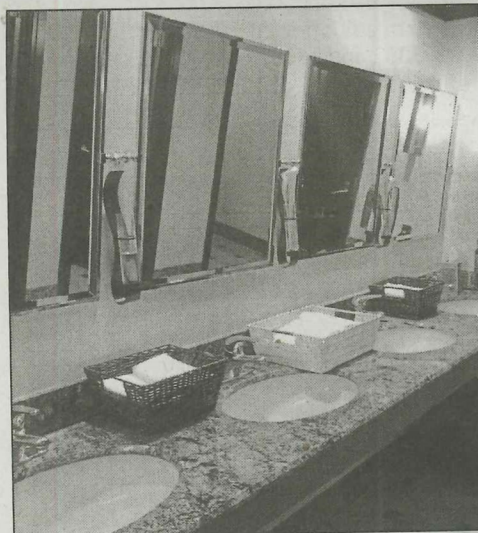
Choirmaster Waverly Alston (with megaphone) leads Homer Jackson’s “New Songs of the Open Road.” ALEXA GOLD

The ideas raised by Whitman’s work resonate with a number of issues we face today, including freedom, immigration, LGBT rights, conservation, and others. The sweep of his imagination was one reason, according to Whitman at 200 artistic director Judith Tannenbaum, that the project grew to such a monumental scale. Events and exhibitions will continue throughout the year.

“The nature of Whitman is so expansive and takes in everything,” Tannenbaum says. “We’re living in a time that

seems very polarized, and in the post-Civil War period, Whitman was also. Hopefully, we can learn about ourselves and do better in the future if we pay attention to some of these issues.”

Drawing on the Kislak Center’s collections, the exhibition “Whitman Vignettes: Camden and Philadelphia” will provide an overview of Whitman’s final years in the area. “The relationship between Whitman and this region is close and fascinating,” says Farrington, who curated the exhibition. “It’s worthy of further exploration.”



Left: The sinks in the second-floor Sofitel Hotel bathroom, complete with baskets of disposable cloth towels. Right: The entrance to the private stalls.



Inside the downstairs bathroom at the Barnes Foundation. It’s possible to use it without paying admission, but you may be asked some questions by security and ticket-sellers.

Bathrooms

Continued from C1

Please never use the bathrooms in Suburban Station. Instead, walk through the concourse level to the food court-type area under the Comcast Center and treat yourself to cleanliness, decent smells, and marble counters.

9. Reading Terminal Market

51 N. 12th St.

This bathroom is way cleaner than

6. Sugarhouse Casino

1001 N. Delaware Ave.

To get to the bathrooms, walk in through the main entrance — you’ll need to show ID — past the slots and the table games. You’ll encounter modern-style bathrooms with so much faux gold, you’ll think you stepped into Trump Tower. Generally clean, with floor-to-ceiling stalls, and everything is automatic. The restroom is also one of the only places in the casino that doesn’t smell like old cigarettes.

5. The Ritz-Carlton Hotel

4. Free Library of Philadelphia - Parkway Central

1901 Vine St.

The first-floor bathrooms are sleek, and the best part was the powerful, stainless steel hand dryers that are known for making your hands bone-dry in seconds. I would testify in court on their behalf.

3. Sofitel Philadelphia at Rittenhouse Square

120 S. 17th St.

I said, “ Jackpot” out loud when I entered this second-floor bathroom. Like you would expect other hotels making

