

WHITMAN

IN CAMDEN and PHILADELPHIA

Walt Whitman lived his last two decades in Camden, New Jersey, just across the Delaware River from Philadelphia. There Whitman's brother George was building a large house at 431 Stevens Street to accommodate their ailing mother Louisa and developmentally challenged brother Eddie. Louisa died on 23 May 1873, only months after Whitman himself had suffered a debilitating stroke while living in Washington, D.C. Whitman moved to Camden that summer to recuperate at his brother George and sister-in-law Louisa's house. He would live with them for over a decade.

At Stevens Street, his irregular habits were a source of irritation. Gradually Whitman came to spend more and more time away from the house, visiting friends near and far, for a day, a week, sometimes even months. During his first decade in Camden, Whitman regularly took the ferry over to Philadelphia or joined the Stafford family, first at their farm at Timber Creek and later at their store in Glendale, New Jersey. Whitman met the Staffords through their son Harry, an errand boy working in the Camden print shop where the reissue of the fifth edition of *Leaves of Grass* was being repackaged as the "Author's Edition" (see the "Publishing Whitman in Camden and Philadelphia" case).

Not wanting to follow his brother to Burlington, New Jersey, fifty miles from Camden, where George was building a farmhouse, Whitman bought a small wooden house for himself at 328 Mickle Street (now 330 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard) in 1884. Incapable of caring for himself, he eventually convinced Mary Oates Davis, a widow who lived nearby, to move into the Mickle Street house as his housekeeper. Warren "Warry" Fritzingler, Davis's foster son, served for a time as Whitman's nurse and companion, living with them at Mickle Street.

Friends came to the Mickle Street house increasingly frequently as Whitman's health declined during his final decade. They included the Philadelphia attorney Thomas Donaldson, who provided various forms of support to Whitman; the artist Thomas Eakins; Penn professor Daniel Garrison Brinton; biographer and critic William Sloane Kennedy, when working for a Philadelphia newspaper in the early 1880s; Shakespeare scholar and collector Horace Howard Furness; Camden lawyer Thomas B. Harned; and Horace L. Traubel, who recorded his daily conversations with Whitman over the last four years of Whitman's life. Traubel published the first three volumes of *Walt Whitman in Camden* during his own lifetime. Others came from greater distances, among them John Burroughs, Richard Maurice Bucke, and Edward Carpenter. Even Oscar Wilde and Bram Stoker crossed the Delaware to visit Whitman at home, when they journeyed to Philadelphia.

ANNE BURROWS GILCHRIST

and FAMILY

Anne Burrows Gilchrist, born in 1828, was the daughter of an English solicitor (a type of attorney) and his wife. After leaving school, she continued to educate herself in science and philosophy. In 1851, she married Alexander Gilchrist, an art and literary critic. During the decade she was married she published scientific essays and a children's book. After her husband died, leaving her with four young children, she completed his biography of William Blake, which remains a standard reference.

In 1869 she fell in love with the idea of Walt Whitman, whom she had met only in print after being introduced to his poetry by her literary friend, William Michael Rossetti. Rossetti published an expurgated version of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in an attempt to develop an English following for Whitman. Rossetti later loaned the unexpurgated *Leaves* to Anne, who read its embrace of sexuality for women as well as for men as liberating and inspiring. Excerpts from her letters to Rossetti regarding her emotional response to Whitman's words were later published anonymously in an article in the *Radical*.

After years of intense correspondence with Whitman, Anne packed up her family (except for her eldest son, who stayed in England) and moved to Philadelphia, much to Whitman's dismay. They arrived in Philadelphia in the midst of the Centennial Exposition. Whitman could no longer avoid visiting them. Gilchrist quickly came to understand that Whitman had no interest in marrying her, let alone fathering children by her. She resolved to continue their friendship, first in Philadelphia, at 1929 North 22nd Street, where the family lived during their year-and-a-half stay, and later after they returned to England.

Whitman became a kind of father figure in the household, where he had a permanent guest room, complete with a wood stove, where he could stay during extended visits. He was especially close to Herbert, an aspiring artist who had been a student at the Royal Academy of Arts, and his older sister Beatrice, who wanted to become a doctor. During their stay in Philadelphia, Beatrice, or Bee, studied at the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, the second medical school in the world to train women interested in earning the M.D. degree. At one point, Whitman warned her about studying too hard.

The family left Philadelphia in late April 1878, scattering for a little over a year. Bee completed her medical internship in Boston. Herbert studied with William Merritt Chase at the Art Students League in New York. On June 7, 1879, after a farewell meeting with Whitman, the Gilchrists headed back to England. Herbert, whose devotion to Whitman remained a major force in his life, would return in the summer of 1887 to paint the portrait of Whitman on display. Bee committed suicide in 1881. Anne died from cancer in 1885. Herbert himself committed suicide in 1914. Anne's younger daughter Grace, who sits at the table with Whitman and her mother in "The Tea Party" painting, studied voice. She became a member of the Fabian Society, where she met and fell in love with George Bernard Shaw in the late 1880s. A decade later she married Albert Henry Frend, an architect. Despite her initial dislike of Whitman, she would later publish "Chats with Walt Whitman" and "Walt Whitman as I Remember Him." She lived until 1947.

WHITMAN'S HAND

Whitman's relationship with manuscript was informed in part by his background as a printer, editor, and publisher. Whitman had local job printers print slips with poems that he was working on, for purposes of revision, and later, when he would have quantities of 25 to 30 printed, for correction and distribution to friends and admirers interested in having something from his hand. Penn professor Peter Stallybrass refers to this practice as "printing for manuscript." Whitman usually wrote his correspondence on stationery. He also often wrote verses and other short texts on scraps of paper, including the backs of envelopes and letters sent to him, and sometimes pasted these bits of text together.

As the years went on and more people became interested in having something written in Whitman's hand, he began to sign the title pages of his books and the photographs included as frontispieces, especially in special editions of his works. For less expensive editions, a facsimile of his signature, stamped in gold on the cover of the binding, would suffice.

Works in Whitman's hand became such a valuable commodity that facsimiles of his handwriting were used to create forgeries. Stallybrass has recently shown that the manuscript version of the poem "Going Somewhere," written on the pages of a printed copy of Brainard's *Occasional Pieces of Poetry* (1825) in the Feinberg Collection at the Library of Congress, was a "manufactured manuscript" made possible by the publication of the facsimile in Thomas Donaldson's *Walt Whitman the Man* (1896).

POSTHUMOUS WHITMAN

Whitman's sense of his own mortality intensified after his 1873 stroke. As his health deteriorated in the 1880s, he began thinking about his final resting place, spending a great deal of time on the construction of a physical tomb for himself and members of his family. He was offered a plot in Camden's Harleigh Cemetery gratis in 1889, but the construction of his tomb proved an expensive proposition. It cost him more than his Mickle Street house and its \$4000 price tag caused him great concern. Eventually his friends settled the remaining debt and saw to the transfer of the mausoleum's deed to Whitman just weeks before his death.

As Whitman's reputation rose following his death, books, articles, art, and even realia like medallions, appeared with increasing frequency. A number of them were linked to Whitman's time in Camden. These included Joseph Pennell's etching of Whitman's Mickle Street residence, Thomas Harned's essay, "The Good Gray Poet in Camden," and R. Tait McKenzie's Whitman centennial medallion.

PUBLISHING WHITMAN

in CAMDEN and PHILADELPHIA

With the exception of the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* and British editions of his poems, Whitman's books were self-published through the 1880s. Whitman oversaw and paid for both printing and binding his works. Earlier books declared Brooklyn, New York, or Washington, D.C., as their place of publication. By 1876, Whitman was repackaging leftover sheets of the 1872 second printing of the fifth edition of *Leaves of Grass* with a new title page. This so-called "Centennial Edition" and "Author's Edition" were bound in Philadelphia and bore his personal signature on the title-page of each copy. This was also the first edition to bear Whitman's name on its title-page.

Whitman's true desire, however, was to see *Leaves of Grass* published by a reputable mainstream publisher. When Boston publisher James R. Osgood agreed to publish a "definitive" edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman provided assistance, integrating twenty-two new poems from *Two Rivulets* into the manuscript for Osgood's 1881 sixth edition. In March 1882, the Boston district attorney notified Osgood that portions of his edition of *Leaves of Grass* were considered "obscene," demanding their excision from the book. Whitman at first agreed to make some "revision & cancellation" in order to keep Osgood as his publisher. When he saw the full list of excisions required by the district attorney, however, he broke with Osgood. The stereotype plates, the 1855 steel plate engraving, and 225 unbound copies remaining from the third printing were returned to him along with a royalty check for \$100. These Osgood plates would be used for all later printings of the sixth edition *Leaves of Grass*, first by Rees Welsh, and then by David McKay, who became Whitman's publisher for the remainder of his life.

FINE PRESS and ILLUSTRATED EDITIONS of WHITMAN

FROM the PENN COLLECTIONS

Whitman's words have inspired artists as well as composers. Some examples in the collections of the Kislak Center come from artists from the Philadelphia/Camden region or from local collectors, including the fine press collections of Jeffrey Cooper and Jean-François Vilain and Roger Wieck, both recent acquisitions of the Penn Libraries.

THE WALT WHITMAN BRIDGE

CONTROVERSY

In 1951 the Delaware River Port Authority (DRPA) recommended building a new bridge three miles south of the current bridge, then known as the Delaware River Bridge and later officially named the Benjamin Franklin Bridge. An April 1954 article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, “The Bridge Without a Name,” was the impetus behind public discussions regarding the naming of the new bridge, referred to at the Gloucester City Bridge by New Jerseyites and the Packer Avenue Bridge by Philadelphians. Suggested names for both the old and new bridges sent to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* included national political leaders, famous local figures, and geographic designations.

In June 1954, DRPA appointed a Special Committee on Bridge Names, its mandate expanded to include both bridges. The 250th anniversary of the birth of Benjamin Franklin prompted many to argue for naming the old bridge after him. The committee agreed that, if one bridge was named after a prominent Philadelphian, the other should be named after a celebrated figure from south Jersey. A year later, the Committee recommended the bridges be named for Benjamin Franklin and Walt Whitman, the latter a suggestion from a member of DRPA’s staff.

Displeasure with the new name came initially from Gloucester City, but soon escalated in late 1955 when, on behalf of the Holy Name Societies of six south Jersey counties, Reverend Edward Lucitt sent a letter to DRPA protesting naming the bridge after Whitman. Lucitt wrote: “Walt Whitman himself had neither the noble stature or quality of accomplishment that merits this tremendous honor, and his life and works are personally objectionable to us.” Catholics, incited by local priests, began a major anti-Whitman write-in campaign using mimeographed forms provided to them for their signatures. This quickly spawned a pro-Whitman campaign. Despite the objections, the bridge’s name was not changed and the Walt Whitman Bridge opened to the public in 1957.

WHITMAN and MUSIC

in PHILADELPHIA

Whitman-inspired music has long been composed, printed, conducted, and performed in Philadelphia. Such compositions continue to be created to this day. A handful of examples illustrate how Whitman’s words have both inspired instrumental music and provided lyrics for vocal works. Philadelphia native Harrison Boyle’s 1986 *Whitmania*, like Penn music professor James Primosch’s “Two Whitman Love Songs,” which premiered in April 2019 as one of ten new commissions by Philadelphia’s own Lyric Fest, show Whitman’s ongoing influence on music in the Philadelphia region.

COLLECTING WHITMAN

Many collectors have concentrated on Walt Whitman. Interest in both his printed books and manuscripts started with his three literary executors, Thomas Biggs Harne, Richard M. Bucke, and Horace Traubel. They swept in after his death to gather all Whitman's extant papers in his Mickle Street home, then splitting what they had retrieved among themselves. Harned's collection remained together; it was given to the Library of Congress in 1918. Bucke and Traubel's collections were disbursed, with many items coming on the market to be acquired by other collectors.

One such collector was Harriet Chapman Jones Sprague (Mrs. Frank Julian Sprague). In "My Whitman Collection," published in the June 1942 issue of the



Harriet Chapman Jones Sprague and daughter Frances Althea ca. 1912
Courtesy of John L. Sprague

Library Chronicle, she wrote that her "collection . . . originated from a controversy and from a realization of my own abysmal ignorance of the work of our greatest poet." Her greatest coup was the acquisition of the Gilchrist letters, photos, and books relating to Whitman from the family, something Harned had been unable to get. Sprague's collection was exhibited at the Library of Congress in 1939 and at the University of Pennsylvania in 1942. In 1944, thanks to Penn English professor E. Sculley Bradley, her collection was acquired for Penn. Bradley collected Whitman too, primarily printed and secondary materials to serve his own scholarship. In 1980, he published his edition of *Leaves of Grass: A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems*.

Collectors are often beholden to other collectors, as was Sprague. In 1947, she acknowledged Henry Scholey Saunders's role in her own collecting. Part of her Whitman collection, works compiled or written by Saunders, she referred to as "my own Saunders Collection." Saunders gave Sprague the first copy (of five typed copies, signed and bound) of the catalogue of his collection as "a token of friendship and appreciation of her Whitman work." Saunders also compiled works about other Whitman topics which he "published" in limited numbers. He gave Sprague copies of these for her collection.

Another type of "collecting" is exemplified by Horace Traubel. He recorded his almost daily conversations with Whitman between 1888 and 1892. They eventually found their way into print. Just this year a selection from this nine-volume set of their conversations has been published as *Walt Whitman Speaks: His Final Thoughts on Life, Writing, Spirituality, and the Promise of America*.

AUTHENTICATING WHITMAN

Sprague collected important materials relating to Anne Gilchrist, an early female devotee of Whitman, and she also gathered materials from another of Whitman's female admirers. Dr. Clara Barrus, a physician and secretary, confidant, and companion of the naturalist John Burroughs, whom she met in 1901, joined Burroughs in collecting, researching, discussing, and writing about Whitman. Both Barrus and Burroughs were dedicated to authenticating information circulating about Whitman's life and ensuring that his legacy reflected the real man. It is now well known that Whitman misrepresented and misconstrued facts to create his public persona and influence public opinion of him. Barrus was an early investigator of how Whitman transformed himself into a celebrity. The marginalia, questions, and annotations in her books, many gifts to her from Burroughs, show how meticulous was her research in separating fact from fiction and determining which words were Whitman's and which those of his acolytes. Barrus's own *Whitman and Burroughs, Comrades* was published in 1931, shortly before her death.



Dr. Clara Barrus seated on stone fence at Woodchuck Lodge [between 1890 and 1920] Library of Congress