



# Longfellow House Bulletin

Volume 11 No. 1

A Newsletter of the Friends of the Longfellow House and the National Park Service

June 2007

## Celebrating Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's Bicentennial

At the March 25, 2007, gala program celebrating the two hundredth anniversary of Longfellow's birth, public radio host and the event's emcee, Christopher Lydon, likened the beloved popular poet, whose words have permeated our lives, to a "rock star." He closed with an exhortation to the enthusiastic crowd of 900: "Let's hear it for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow!"

Besides taking place in the same Ruskinian Gothic splendor of Harvard's Sanders Theatre, the main public commemoration of the bicentennial year reflected the Cambridge celebration a hundred years ago in many ways. Both featured music associated with Longfellow, a local children's chorus, and eloquent tributes to the man and his poetry.

The Boston Landmarks Orchestra led off with Ole Bull's *Solitude on the Mountain*. Conductor Charles Ansbacher described the

Norwegian composer Ole Bull as "the greatest violinist during his time" and a close family friend of the Longfellows.

The orchestra also performed Longfellow's *Paul Revere's Ride*, a piece composed three years ago by Julian Wachner and recorded using Senator Edward M. Kennedy's narration. Ansbacher introduced the musical version of Longfellow's classic as being in the vein of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. In period costume David Con-



Ya-fei Chuang (with flowers) and conductor Charles Ansbacher at Sanders Theatre, 2007

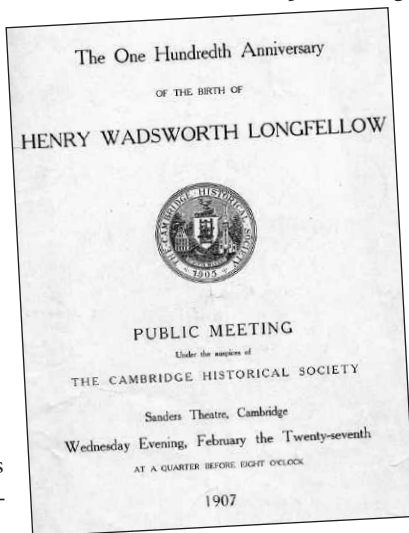
nor, an actor and long-time historical interpreter of Paul Revere, recited the poem alongside the orchestra's musical rendition.

(continued on page 2)

## Looking Back at the Centenary Celebration of Longfellow's Birth

Twenty-five years after the death of America's unofficial poet laureate, the Cambridge Historical Society called a "special meeting" held in Harvard University's Sanders Theatre on February 27th, 1907, "for the purpose of celebrating the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," according to the published records of the society. "Charles Eliot Norton presided. The meeting was open to the public."

"Among the invited guests were many persons distinguished in literature, science, and public life," including Massachusetts governor Curtis Guild Jr., the mayor of Cambridge, Julia Ward Howe, Sarah Orne Jewett, and William



Program cover for the Longfellow Centenary, 1907

James. The poet's daughters Alice Longfellow and Anne Allegra Thorp as well as his eleven living grandchildren also attended.

Richard Henry Dana III, the poets' neighbor and son-in-law, had helped found the Cambridge Historical Society in 1905 and became its first president. Alice Longfellow sat on the thirteen-member council of the historical society. In 1907 they published the first issue of the society's proceedings with a complete tran-

script of their centenary event. The transcript provides a unique contemporary glimpse into Longfellow's character.

Each of the five speakers (and/or their stand-ins) at the centennial event had known Longfellow and offered heartfelt personal recollections. Together they painted a vivid portrait of a kind, modest, and beloved man. In his opening address, Harvard art history professor emeritus Norton declared, "I will leave to others to set forth the charm of [Longfellow's] poems...it is the life rather than the poems...that I am drawn by affectionate memory to celebrate.... It is the man, the exceptionally good and pleasant man, no less than the delightful poet, who is everywhere cherished and honored; and here in the community which knew him best, the tones of love and admiration mingle in one harmony of blessing on his memory."

(continued on page 4)



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## New York Celebrated Longfellow's Centenary

Not only Longfellow's home town of Cambridge, Massachusetts, but other important cities marked Longfellow's centenary. The National Arts Club in New York City, as reported in an Illinois magazine called the *Villa Shield*, "invited guests and members to view the most notable Longfellow collection ever exhibited, viz:-portraits, songs of the poet set to music, first editions and modern volumes of works. In the center of the gallery was the chef d'oeuvre, the manuscript of 'Hiawatha,' kindly loaned by Miss Alice Longfellow, the only surviving maiden daughter of the poet..."

"Arranged in cases around the shrine which contained this treasure were [other] autographed manuscripts..." "To the average visitor, the portrait exhibit appealed most strongly" which displayed paintings, engravings, and busts.

All of these items "were on view until [February 27, 1907] which closed the celebration with a dinner, given by the National Arts Club in commemoration of

the centenary of the birth of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and in honor of the poets of today. It was perhaps the most notable literary gathering New York has ever known. Distinguished orators, editors, writers and poets, graced the festive board, and charmed their listeners by the brilliant scintillations of their toasts..."

"National by birth, national by spirit, and national by purpose, it is meet and fitting that this Club should lead in the commemoration of the birth of our national poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Although New England claims him for her own, Longfellow belongs to us as a nation, for he is the historian of the sentiment of the young republic. He belongs to us individually for every American heart responds to the music of his verse. He sings his simple songs and they have been sung for nigh a hundred years, and will echo in each soul

*'As long as the heart has passions,  
 As long as life has woes.'* \*

\* lines from Longfellow's poem "The Bridge"



Speakers at the National Arts Club Longfellow centenary dinner, New York City, 1907

## Celebrating Longfellow's Bicentennial (continued from page 1)

Author of *The Dante Club*—a historical novel about Longfellow's translation group—Matthew Pearl spoke of how he, as a Harvard student, had discovered that Longfellow was a "real person" and an important part of Cambridge. Pearl came to appreciate Longfellow's accessibility and his patience: "He waits for us to come to him."

Pianist Ya-Fei Chuang played two works with which Longfellow was surely familiar: Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 9* and two opuses from Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*. A bound copy of the Mendelssohn sheet music is displayed in the Longfellow House library.

Baritone Brett Johnson sang Longfellow's poem "Psalm of Life," set to music by C.C. Miller in the late nineteenth century. Elementary schoolchildren of the Haggerty School Chorus in Cambridge also performed a contemporary musical

setting of a Longfellow poem—Lauren Bernofsky's "Snow-Flakes."

To mark the occasion of the bicentennial, Ted Hansen of the Cambridge Historical Society presented to the Longfellow National Historic Site—represented by NPS Superintendent Myra Harrison—one of two hundred copies of the Longfellow medal issued in honor of his centenary. (See p. 4 for more about the medal.)

Officials from the U.S. Postal Service presided over the unveiling of the Longfellow commemorative stamp, the twenty-third in their literary arts series. Boston postmaster Marsha Cannon described the "universality of stamps" and the "repetitive relationship we all have with stamps that makes them so significant."

The Longfellow Bicentennial Committee organized this gala Sanders Theatre event.

## Interview with a Friend...Meet Dana Gioia, Poet and NEA Chairman

In September, Dana Gioia—award-winning poet, critic, and current chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts—will be the host and keynote speaker at a Cambridge Forum on Longfellow. Recently, with his two sons, he visited the House and spoke with us about Longfellow.

**Longfellow House:** How were you first introduced to Longfellow?

**Dana Gioia:** Longfellow was among my earliest experiences with poetry. My mother, who was a working-class Mexican-American of no advanced education, recited poems from memory, and she knew several poems by Longfellow. So I grew up hearing Longfellow. I regret to say that nowhere in my formal education at any level was I ever assigned a poem by Longfellow—except in eighth grade when Sister Mary Damien made the class diagram the formidable opening lines of *Evangeline*.

**LH:** How and when did you develop a critical interest in his poetry?

**DG:** In my mid-thirties I co-edited a bilingual anthology of Italian poetry. I was surprised by the quality and extent of Longfellow's translations. I began reading his poetry seriously for the first time, and I was struck by its range and excellence. He seemed to me a conspicuously underrated author. When I was invited a decade later to contribute to the new *Columbia History of American Poetry*, I was asked what poet I wanted to write about. I requested Robert Frost, but the editor, Jay Parini, wanted Frost since he was about to begin a biography of the poet. I then asked if anybody had taken Longfellow. Parini immediately exclaimed, "No one wants Longfellow—he's yours!" My chapter, "Longfellow in the Aftermath of Modernism," unexpectedly became the most widely discussed chapter of the book.

**LH:** What effect did that essay have?

**DG:** It was the first long, serious critical defense of Longfellow in decades. There had not even been much recent scholarly work. (The editors of the annual *American Literary Studies* had a running joke that no one ever wrote about Longfellow.) In the previous forty years only two American poets had written about his work with any conviction—Horace Gregory and Howard Nemerov—and both of those pieces had been introductions to new paperback editions of his work. My piece was a far more ambitious, stand-alone essay. It surprised most readers both in the U.S. and England. I think my arguments opened a new con-

versation on his work.

**LH:** In your essay you speak of Longfellow's broad cultural influence.

**DG:** Longfellow's cultural influence is inestimable. At Harvard he helped create what we now think of as standard literary studies in American universities. He was a major translator and was responsible for introducing Americans to much European literature. But, most important, he was the most popular author in any genre in nineteenth-century America. Longfellow created cultural myths that are still central to



American society. Our notion of the American Indian, for example, was forever changed by Longfellow. His liberal and respectful attitudes prefigure what we now think of as multiculturalism. Paul Revere would never have become a national figure had it not been for Longfellow's poem. We take these things for granted because his influence has become largely invisible over the last century.

**LH:** Did you encounter a reaction against your favorable view of Longfellow?

**DG:** I found that many people who dismissed Longfellow had never read him. He was so famous that modern literati reacted more to his earlier reputation as a Victorian white-bearded sage than to the reality of his work. He is one of the four best American narrative poets (along with Robert Frost, Edwin Arlington Robinson, and Robinson Jeffers). He is also the best American sonneteer of the nineteenth century. He is nearly unsurpassed as the writer of a direct, simple, but elegant kind of lyric—a popular lyric that is almost immediately comprehensible on first hearing but stands up to repeated hearings. Much beloved by com-

mon people, this sort of poem confounds critics because it lacks interpretive difficulties. But poems do not exist to generate criticism. They exist to create human expression.

Longfellow was a man about whom one can make almost no moral criticism. He lived an exemplary life. This is not something one can say about many great poets. But for the very reason of his goodness, he lacked tragic insight into human existence. In the last part of *Hiawatha*, for example, Longfellow is unable to understand the tragic consequences of the arrival of the Europeans. He quite literally has his hero paddle off into the sunset. That same Unitarian New England liberalism was also Longfellow's strength—he saw the goodness in human existence, but it keeps some of his best work from achieving true greatness.

**LH:** As head of the NEA, do you encourage people to read poetry and Longfellow?

**DG:** We support many literary projects, and recently a few have involved Longfellow. For example, we are helping the Longfellow House in Portland, Maine, put on a bicentennial celebration. We are also co-sponsoring with the Poetry Foundation of Chicago a national poetry recitation contest for high school students with well over 100,000 participants this year. The students pick poems to memorize from an anthology and website. We offer everything from classic to contemporary works. Longfellow is a consistent favorite among the students.

**LH:** In 1907 Harvard's president asked, "What higher function, what nobler work...is there than the writing of poetry?"

**DG:** Charles Eliot's comment would never be uttered by a contemporary university president. Poetry has declined in importance in our culture. Even our memory of a time in America when poetry was a universally honored public art has dimmed. This is one reason why Longfellow's career has special relevance. He was a national figure in a way no literary author is today. We must understand the importance that poetry and literature had in the early republic. And we need to recognize what we have lost. A democracy is healthier when people read and when imaginative literature is one of the things people read. A culture is more robust when poetry can speak to a broad and mixed audience. Literature need not only address a small subculture of poets and critics. Longfellow's example might inspire our age to create a literary culture worthy of a democracy.

## Longfellow Centenary (continued from page 1)

There followed the reading of letters from persons invited but unable to attend—from all over the country and around the world—including “eminent persons” such as Hoosier poet James Whitcomb Riley and British social reformer F. Herbert Stead.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson—colonel of the first black Union regiment, abolitionist, and author—also chose to reflect upon his friend’s character: “[Longfellow] was at once genial and guarded; kind and cordial in greeting, but with an impassable boundary line of reserve; dwelling in a charmed circle of thought, and absolutely self-protecting; essentially a poetic mind, but never out of touch with the common heart. . . .

“When worn with overwork, he could sit down to write a hundred autographs for a fair in Chattanooga; or perhaps go out and walk miles to secure kindness for some old friend troubled with chronic and insuperable need of money. He was choice in his invited guests, yet drove his housemaids to despair by insisting on the admittance of the poorest children in Cambridge, to tramp through his study daily and sit triumphantly in the chair which their little school subscriptions had bought for him.”

Harvard’s president Charles William Eliot extolled Longfellow’s contribution to the university and his students: “A university contains the flower of the youth of the land; and these youth live with a selected body of teachers who present before them the great subjects of human thought, of human aspiration. What higher function, what nobler work of man is there than the writing of poetry?” Clearly, the poet’s role was regarded more highly in 1907 than it is today.

Poet Thomas Bailey Aldrich and author William Dean Howells had been scheduled to speak at the centenary, but both were absent due to illness. Harvard English professor Charles Townsend Copeland read Aldrich’s poetic tribute to Longfellow, not

once but twice, at the request of the chairman who stated: “That poem is enough to make an evening memorable.” Bliss Perry, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, read a chapter about Longfellow from Howells’s collection of essays *Literary Friends and Acquaintances*, which discussed both the poet and his work. Howells wrote: “No poet ever uttered more

perfectly what was characteristically best in his time, and none ever informed that time more completely with the good and the truth which were in himself.”

A children’s chorus from “the Cambridge Public Schools” accompanied by the orchestra of the Cambridge Latin School performed a cantata by Charles F. Noyes of Longfellow’s poem “The Village Blacksmith” set to music.

Earlier, in the afternoon, the Cambridge Historical Society offered tours of the poet’s home, Craige House. Lines formed ahead of time, and one thousand people visited.

At the Cambridge Public Library for a week beginning February 25th, the Cambridge Historical Society presented “The Longfellow Centenary Exhibition of rare editions, manuscripts, portraits, and other memorabilia.” The local paper commented: “Many teachers of public and private schools will take this opportunity [to bring their pupils], . . . as such a rare opportunity is not likely soon to recur.”

Many other newspapers and magazines—local, national, and foreign—reported on the centenary. The

*Outlook* and the *Pathfinder* magazines, for example, ran special February issues focused on Longfellow. The *Nation* devoted an entire issue to “An Account of the Cambridge Celebration, with Extracts from Some of the Tributes to Longfellow Which Have Recently Appeared.” Writing in the *London Spectator*, the Bishop of Durham mused: “Take the poet and the poems together, and I do not know where to look in the English literature of the whole nineteenth century for quite so beautiful an ensemble.”

## Bela Pratt Medal

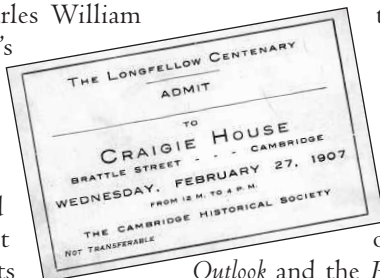
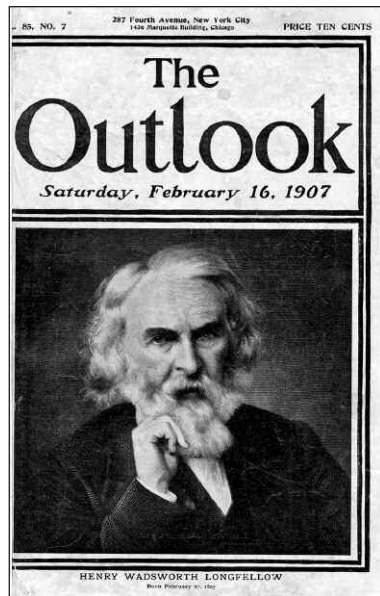


In connection with the Longfellow Centenary celebration on February 27, 1907, the Cambridge Historical Society commissioned Cambridge sculptor Bela L. Pratt to design a commemorative medal. Pratt had previously designed a similar medal in honor of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the accession of Charles William Eliot to the presidency of Harvard College.

The Longfellow medal was three and a half inches in diameter and, as stated in the announcement, “will be a rare, beautiful and noteworthy memorial.” Two hundred bronze medals were struck and offered for sale to libraries, museums, and individual collectors for ten dollars apiece. Subscriptions were filled in the order they were received.

On March 25, 2007, at Sanders Theatre in honor of Longfellow’s bicentennial, the Cambridge Historical Society presented one of the medals to the National Park Service. Bela Pratt’s granddaughter, Cynthia Sam, was in the audience.

Bela Lyon Pratt (1867–1917) graduated from Yale University’s School of Fine Arts and continued his studies at the Art Students League in New York, where Augustus Saint-Gaudens was his mentor. Pratt became an influential teacher for more than twenty-five years at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. During this time he sculpted a series of busts of Boston’s intellectual community and the well-known standing figure of Edward Everett Hale in Boston’s Public Garden. In addition, he designed Indian head and eagle coins for the U.S. mint, featuring an unusual intaglio (recessed) design technique. In 1918 the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, held a retrospective exhibition of 125 of his sculptures.



## Schoolchildren & Others Across America Marked Longfellow's Centenary

“The children of the country love Longfellow, and the children of Cambridge will hold special observances of his birthday, in all the city's schools, both public and parochial, to pay his memory honor. Each school principal will provide a speaker to address his school, and there will be readings of essays on the poet's life and works, by the scholars and the appropriate musical numbers,”

stated a Boston Sunday newspaper on February 17, 1907. The number of schools across America honoring Longfellow on his one hundredth birthday gives the sense of the centenary as a national celebration. A public school in the Bronx, New York, (center image), and a school in Maine named after the poet (left image) were but a few. Numerous communities throughout the states also dedicated and named schools in honor of the poet.

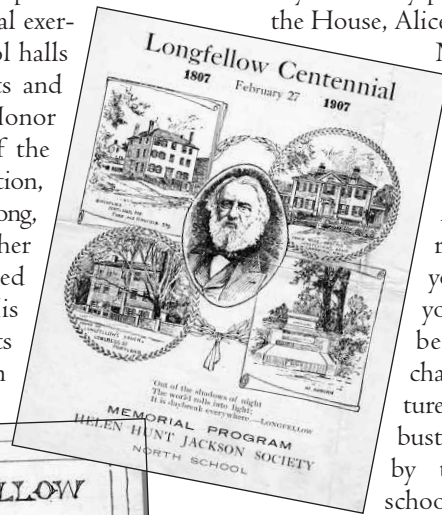
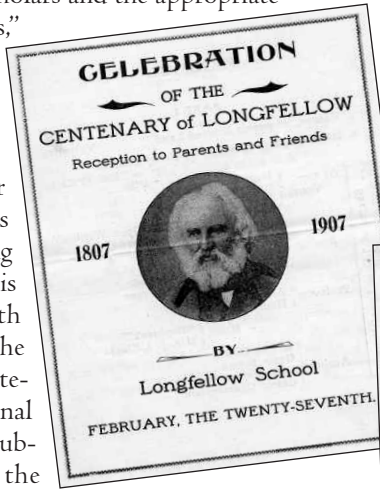
Another local newspaper article entitled “Memory of Famous Poet Honored by Special Exercises Throughout the City” portrayed the festivities in Boston, probably

similar to those in other cities: “Longfellow Centenary observances were generally held throughout the Boston public schools today. The special exercises held in many school halls were attended by parents and friends of the pupils. Honor was done the memory of the great poet by recitation, essay, declamation, song, tableaux and other ways that proved interesting. His busts and portraits were decorated in national colors,

Hundreds of letters to Alice Longfellow and her sisters poured in from across the country. For many people, by remaining in the House, Alice embodied her father.

Miss M.A. Wetherell, the principal of the Longfellow Grammar School in Fairfield, Maine, wrote to Alice of her “school-room on whose walls you will find many of your father's and our beloved school-poet's characters shown in pictures and bas-reliefs and a bust of himself presented by the alumni of the school.” She asked Alice if she might “have a few words from you that we may have your autograph.”

From Canada came a letter from Elliott Richmond to Alice with a description of a centenary celebration: “A small group of young people in the little village of St. Jacobs, Ontario, formed a ‘Round Table’ last November for the purpose of studying your father's poems, and we have been so pleased with our study, we are making a special effort to have a ‘Longfellow Evening’ on Feb. 27, the 100th anniversary of [his] birth.” He asked her for a “note of recognition” of the program and a map of Cambridge/Boston.



and one or the other of these has found a resting place in every school in Boston.”

### The Atlantic Monthly & Longfellow

Henry W. Longfellow was a founder of and lifelong contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*, which coincidentally is marking a milestone anniversary this year—its 150th.

On May 6, 1857, Longfellow wrote in his journal: “Dined in town at Parker's, with Emerson, Lowell, Motley, Holmes, Cabot, Underwood, and the publisher, Phillips, to talk about the new magazine the last wishes to establish.”

A number of Longfellow's poems first appeared on the pages of the *Atlantic*. In fact, for the premier issue of the magazine in November 1857, Longfellow contributed “Santa Filomena.” “Paul Revere's Ride” was first published in the *Boston Transcript* (1860) and then in the *Atlantic Monthly* (1861) before appearing as the first story told in *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, a book of Longfellow's narrative poems.

In its March 1907 issue, the *Atlantic* printed two pieces in relation to the centenary of Longfellow's birth: Thomas Bailey Aldrich's poem called “Longfellow, 1807-1907” and an essay by its editor, Bliss Perry, entitled “The Centenary of Longfellow.” Perry sent Alice Longfellow an advance copy of the issue with a note saying he hoped that she would read his article “with an indulgent eye.” He had written of the relationship of popularity to excellence: “It is inevitable that there should be some reaction against the extraordinary popularity which Longfellow's poetry enjoyed during his lifetime. . . . I know a shrewd and slightly cynical publisher who insists that the popularity of a piece of literature is always in inverse proportion to its excellence. This pleasing and easily-remembered formula collapses when you say ‘Hamlet’ . . . and I think. . . ‘Evangeline.’”

Charlotte Fiske Bates, poet and friend of Henry Longfellow who had edited the Longfellow Birthday Book in 1881, composed this prescient tribute for the centenary as if she were writing a hundred years later:

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.  
February 27th.  
2007 Looking Back on 1907.

The pens and voices that so honored thee  
One hundred years ago, now silent are:  
Which of them all, with eye of Prophecy,  
Foretold thy fame, in centuries afar?

For, so it heightens, men have come to say,  
No nation owns thee, but the whole wide  
world;  
And, at the shining of the natal day,  
Flags of all shores are yet to be unfurled.

—Charlotte Fiske Bates  
February 24th, 1907

## Longfellow House in the Media

In the *Boston Sunday Globe's* February 25, 2007, article called "Longfellow's Other Tale," Michael Kenney wrote about the poet's role in the anti-slavery movement before the Civil War.

The *Times Literary Supplement* of London's cover story on January 5, 2007, proclaimed "Longfellow Lives Again." It contained an article entitled "Hiawatha Returning" by Christopher Benfey, reviewing Christoph Irmscher's book. The c. 1870 painting on the cover by John Faed depicts "The Parting of Evangeline and Gabriel."



The *Harvard University Gazette*, February 1-7, 2007, issue featured a lengthy illustrated piece: "The Many Lives of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow" by Corydon Ireland.

*Bowdoin News*—a monthly newsletter for Bowdoin College alumni, parents, and friends—in February 2007 published two articles related to Henry Longfellow's bicentennial, one by Charles Calhoun illu-

minating Longfellow's Bowdoin days.

On March 22, 2007, the *Cambridge Chronicle* devoted a full page with photos, facts, and a quiz to "Celebrating Longfellow's Legacy" by Kristen Grieco.

The March-April 2007 issue of *Harvard Magazine* in their College Pump Department speaks of the Longfellow exhibit at Houghton.

George F. Will wrote "Longfellow: A Founder" in *Newsweek's* March 12, 2007, issue. The subtitle notes: "That his 200th birthday passed unremarked is redundant evidence of this forward-leaning democracy's historical amnesia."

In the March 30, 2007, *Cape Cod Times*, Libby Hughes reported on the "Gala Concert for Longfellow's Bicentennial: Sanders Theatre rocked with song and poetry."

On February 27, 2007, from Louisiana to New Mexico to Rhode Island, the blogosphere was abuzz with Longfellow birthday acknowledgements by historians, novelists, Cajuns, and other enthusiastic citizens.

## Recent Research at the House

The Longfellow House archives contain over 700,000 manuscripts, letters, and signed documents and are used extensively by researchers from around the world. Here are a few recent researchers of the several hundred who use the archives annually.

Edward Connery Lathem, Emeritus Dean of Libraries and Counselor to the President of Dartmouth College, came to research the British Longfellow Memorial Committee, which was responsible for erecting the bust of Longfellow in the poet's corner of Westminster Abbey in 1884. Mr. Lathem made his first inquiry to the staff of the Longfellow House fifty years ago in April 1957 from Oxford University.

Esha Senchaudhuri, a former ranger at Longfellow NHS, examined Charley Longfellow's stay in India, particularly his travels in West Bengal, for an article in *Prabasi*, a magazine for Bengali families in Massachusetts. She hopes that introducing Indian-American children to the Longfellow family and demonstrating the long historic cultural interaction between these two countries will encourage the children to learn more about both their Bengali and Boston roots.

For her forthcoming book about Ten Hills Farm, Catherine Manegold, a research fellow at Harvard University's W.E.B. DuBois Institute for African and African American Research, is investigating the Vassalls and their slaves. Ten Hills Farm included land that is part of the Royall estate (and now Tufts University) in Medford, Massachusetts. The Vassalls and Royalls held some slaves in common.

## Longfellow Monument in Washington, D.C.

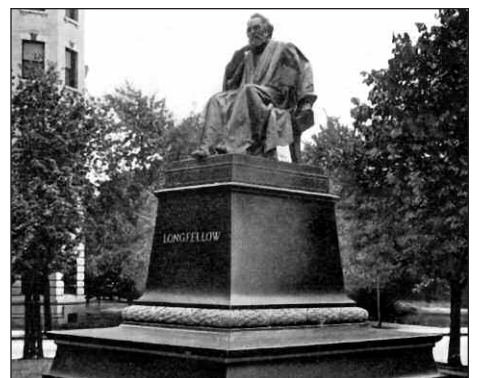
Despite its prominent location at the intersection of Rhode Island and Connecticut Avenues near Dupont Circle, few visitors to Washington, D.C., today are aware of a large statue of a contemplative Longfellow seated high on a pedestal.

It is "one of the most graceful and beautiful at the national capital," proclaimed the Longfellow National Memorial Association in its program for the unveiling on May 7, 1909. Sculpted by William Couper of New York, the statue shows the poet dressed in academic robes, long hair, and beard.

In 1900 the Right Reverend Alexander Mackay-Smith invited "a number of the foremost citizens of Washington" to his house "to consider the possibility of organizing an association to erect a statue in memory of...the poet of the American fireside." He made the case by citing that England had already "placed [Longfellow's] image among her own honored dead in... Westminster's poet's corner."

With Theodore Roosevelt as honorary regent, Grover Cleveland as first regent, and Supreme Court Chief Justice Melville Fuller as president, the association raised funds for the statue and lobbied Congress to provide a site and pedestal. The association formed local committees in Boston/Cambridge, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, Pittsburgh, and Portland. Many people bought "subscriptions" to finance the monument.

At the unveiling, the U.S. Marine Band played, and notables spoke. Erica Thorp, the poet's granddaughter, officially unveiled the statue. The attorney general accepted it because President Taft was too ill to attend. Mackay-Smith summed up his address: "But his statue stands here, and will stand, if for no other reason than simply because we can say that everyone loved the poet."



Statue of H.W. Longfellow, Washington, D.C., 1909

## Musical Celebrations of Henry Longfellow, “America’s Song King”

Charles Kaufmann, music director of the First Parish Church in Portland, Maine, conceived of and conducted “The Henry Wadsworth Longfellow 200th Birthday Choral Concert,” performed on February 25, 2007, and comprised entirely of musical settings of Longfellow’s poems. Having researched extensively in the House archives sheet music collection, Kaufmann created a fitting tribute to Longfellow, once called “America’s Song King” because of the preponderant use of his verse as lyrics for nineteenth-century parlor songs.

The eighty chorus members presented almost two dozen songs, including three musical versions of Longfellow’s “A Rainy Day” by different composers, one of whom was Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert & Sullivan) and two contrasting musical settings of “Footsteps of Angels.” Solo vocal renditions brought out the beauty of such pieces as “Afternoon in February” and “Beware!” The concert ended with segments of the three-hour setting of “Song of Hiawatha” by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, a turn-of-the-century Afro-British composer renowned in both Britain and the U.S.



The concert took place at the First Parish Church in Portland, Maine, which generations of Longfellows had attended. As a child, Henry Longfellow learned to play the flute. His interest in music continued throughout his life. After graduating from college, he brought home from his first trip to Europe a handwritten songbook of German poems and accompanying melodies, the beginning of a lifetime of collecting poetry set to music.

By 1839 Longfellow himself became the poet whose work was set to music. His first book of poems, *Voices of the Night*, proved popular with musicians writing solo songs and choruses. Families, in turn, purchased these published songs for music-making in the parlor—thus was born a genre known as the parlor song.

Longfellow songs were popular across the United States, in Europe, Australia, and India. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Longfellow settings were created by some of the world’s most famous—and most obscure—musicians. Not surprisingly then, in an 1879 letter Thomas Lorenzo Jephson, a Minnesotan composer, addressed Long-

fellow as “America’s Song King.”

Recently Kaufmann announced the formation and incorporation of the Longfellow Chorus, devoted to performing Longfellow’s poems set to music. On the lawn at the Longfellow NHS on July 15, the Longfellow Chorus will add several new vocal pieces to their repertoire. Because the site is close to the blacksmith shop described in the poem, they will present a full choral setting of “The Village Blacksmith” by English composer John Hatton, a friend of the poet. Bass soloist John D. Adams will sing from the manuscript version of “My Arm Chair” that Jephson sent to Longfellow and still remains in the House archives.

At New York City’s Cooper Union on May 5, 2007, Harold Rosenbaum will direct the Canticum Novum Singers in a birthday tribute to Longfellow. The program features Longfellow-inspired works by important composers from the 1800s to the present. Longfellow’s great-great grandchildren will read selections of his poetry, and Stephen Schwartz, and David Del Tredici will speak on their contemporary musical settings of Longfellow’s poems.



### Fellowships Awarded

Bryan Sinche, assistant professor of English at the University of Hartford, received the Paterson Fellowship from the Friends of the Longfellow House for his book project “Sailors, Slaves, and Savages: The Contest for Citizenship in Antebellum Sea Narratives.” He will use the archives to find material on R.H. Dana Jr. and others.

Crawford Mann III, a Yale University doctoral candidate in the history of art, received the Korzenik Fellowship for his project “When in Rome: Italian Travel and the Pursuit of the Ideal Male Body in Antebellum American Art.” Painter Washington Allston’s papers in the House collections are vital to his project, and the Longfellows’ objets d’art are also of interest.

### Recent Visitors & Events at the House

People from all walks of life have always come to the Longfellow House for cultural activities. Today the House continues to host numerous people and events. The following items represent only a small portion of what has taken place here recently.

Thirty members of the **Goethe Society of New England** enjoyed a special behind-the-scenes look at the substantial German-related collections at the House.

**Thomas Horrocks**, Associate Librarian for Collections at Harvard’s Houghton Library, and author **Nicholas Basbanes** brought thirty-five members of the Ticknor Society to view a special display of rare and unusual books from Longfellow’s library.

To honor Longfellow’s 200th birthday, the **Dante Society of America** held a conference on Longfellow and Dante in America in the carriage house.

Cambridge schoolchildren from the **Kennedy-Longfellow School**, **St. Peter’s School**, **Peabody School**, **Fayerweather Street School**, and **Haggerty School** came to the House this past winter and spring in honor of Longfellow’s bicentennial.

## Spotlight on an Object

In each issue of the newsletter, we focus on a particular object of interest in the Longfellow House collection. This time our spotlight shines on the two-foot-high statue of Goethe in Longfellow's library. The white-painted plaster image dates from the mid-nineteenth century, but the sculptor's name is unknown.

German Romantic poet, novelist, playwright, and natural philosopher, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was one of the greatest figures in Western literature. He was best known for *Faust*, his poetic drama in two parts.

Longfellow taught German language and literature at Harvard University and in 1837 gave the first lectures ever on Goethe. Showing his high esteem for the German writer, Longfellow had two statues of him in the house: one in the study and this larger one in the library.

With generous contributions from Goethe scholar Thomas Hansen and the Friends of the Longfellow House, this statue will soon be conserved, and the etagère upon which it stands will be repaired. Visitors may once more look upon Longfellow's muse.



## Longfellow National Historic Site, National Park Service

Longfellow National Historic Site joined the national park system in 1972. Its many layers of history, distinguished architecture, gardens and grounds, and extensive museum collections represent the birth and flowering of our nation and continue to inspire school children and scholars alike. The Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House most notably served as headquarters for General George Washington in the early months of the Revolutionary War. It was later the home of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, one of America's foremost poets, and his family from 1837 to 1950.

*For information about the Longfellow House and a virtual tour, visit:*

[www.nps.gov/long](http://www.nps.gov/long)



## Friends of the Longfellow House

Since 1996, the Friends of the Longfellow House, a not-for-profit voluntary group, has worked with the National Park Service to support Longfellow National Historic Site by promoting scholarly access to collections, publications about site history, educational visitor programs, and advocacy for the highest quality preservation.

*To find out more about the Friends of the Longfellow House, visit:*

[www.longfellowfriends.org](http://www.longfellowfriends.org)

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