

## Longfellow, poet, scholar, bibliophile — legend

Robert Cotner

Few poets in American literature have had the enduring quality among the American people as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882). Born in Maine and one of the first graduates of Bowdoin College — two of his classmates were Nathaniel Hawthorne and Franklin Pierce — he spent three years in Europe before accepting a professorship at Bowdoin. During his years in Europe, he developed a fluency in French, Italian, and German and reading knowledge of Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, Portuguese, and Dutch. He had already learned Latin and Greek in his early years. His first published books were, in fact, language textbooks, which he wrote because he could find no suitable texts for his classes.<sup>1</sup>

After a five-year stay at Bowdoin (1829-1834), Longfellow accepted the Smith Professorship of French and Spanish at Harvard College. During a preparatory year in Europe, Longfellow's wife Mary died in childbirth, "the first great sorrow of his life."<sup>2</sup> In December 1836, Longfellow returned to the United States to take up his assignment at Harvard. He moved into the historic Craigie House, where he lived the remainder of his life. His life of letters began in Craigie House with the publication of a romance called *Hyperion* in 1839.

Wagenknecht said that, in 1843, the "first stage of Longfellow's life in Cambridge came to a triumphant close with his marriage to Fanny Appleton,"<sup>3</sup> of the publishing family. He continued writing and publishing and established himself within the Cambridge-Concord Circle as the most important poet of his day. In 1847, he published *Evangeline*, the first great long poem in American literature, and one still in print and studied in schools across the country. In the early 1850s, his work at Harvard became secondary to him. In 1854, he resigned his professorship to devote his life to writing. One

biographer described his decision this way: "He dared to aspire to become a writer by vocation as opposed to a hobby at a time when no one in America had ever made a living by poetry before."<sup>4</sup> In 1858, his publication *The Courtship of Miles Standish* sold "more than 15,000 copies during the first day in Boston and London."<sup>5</sup>

The second great tragedy of his life occurred in 1861, when his wife Fanny burned to death in a fire at Craigie House, an event in which he was injured and which stopped his creative work almost entirely for a time.<sup>6</sup> As a solace for his grief, he turned to the translation of

Dante's *Divine Comedy*, with the aid of James Russell Lowell and Charles Eliot Norton. The men met weekly in a Dante Society they formed, and in 1867, Longfellow published his translation of Dante's masterpiece. (See page 5 for further details.) In the process of his Dante scholarship, Longfellow assembled what Caxtonian Paul Gehl calls one of the three great Dante collections in existence. (See page 7 for further details of this collection.) Wagenknecht reported that Longfellow found (what many Caxtonians know): "book-collecting [is] the most fascinating way of spending money that man has devised, and the last of our passion to leave us."<sup>7</sup>

The legacy of Longfellow is both broad and deep in American culture. Vernon Louis



Hiawatha carrying Minnehaha across Minnehaha Creek, Minneapolis, MN. Photo by and from the collection of Robert Cotner.

Parrington observed in 1927: he blended the romantic, the sentimental, and the moralistic "in just such proportions, and expressed themselves with such homely simplicity as to hit exactly the current taste and establish a reputation that later generations have difficulty in understand-

*The Song of Hiawatha*, Longfellow's epic of the American Indian, will serve as illustration of his lasting hold on the American mind. Created by the poet from his adaptation of history and myths about the Indians of his day, the poem introduces an Indian as hero — the first such in American literature. The Indian named Hiawatha,<sup>9</sup> harks back to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and a Renaissance among the Mohawk, Seneca,





# Musings...

## CAXTONIAN

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*"Without the love for the humanitas of the ancients, and without the readiness to be educated by it, there can be no Humanism; and without minds opened in sympathy to the values and ideals of the vita activa et politica of Greek and Roman citizens, civic Humanism could not come into being."*

Hans Baron

Fortunately for the world, and for western civilization, the citizens of Florence, Italy, in the early years of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century loved the *humanitas* of the ancient world, were educated by it, and held open minds to the values of *vita activa et politica* — lives of civic action. They gave us *Civic Humanism*, perhaps the greatest legacy of the Renaissance.

And fortunately for the people of America, Hans Baron (1900-1988), a devoted Renaissance scholar working at the Newberry Library, rediscovered and revealed in a most remarkable way the important truths of that early Civic Humanism. He gave us a book, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (1955), which preserves forever the distinguishing principles of Western Civilization.

Civic Humanism, first and foremost, emanates from a thorough education (not training) of the people in a dialog through which "citizens [become] humanists in mind, and soon humanists [become] citizens in mind." (p. 142) In fact, a "humanistic education [endeavors] to prepare citizens for engagement in the tasks of their own age and state — civic Humanism." (p. 457) The citizens of Florence withstood the intrusions into their democracy attempted by two great forces: tyranny and Medievalism. The threat of tyranny came from external powers that had been successful in capturing other Italian city-states at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century and the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup>. The threat of Medievalism came from within, from exponents of an archaic religious orthodoxy designed to carry the society backward rather than forward.

Civic Humanism, thus, "is true liberty, this equality in a commonwealth: not to have to fear violence or wrong-doing from anybody, and to enjoy equality among citizens before the law and in the participation of public office. But now it is marvellous [sic] to see how powerful this access to public office, once it is offered to a free people, proves to be an awakening the talents of the citizens." (p. 419) The commonwealth established by the people of Florence at the beginning of the Renaissance burst forth from an enlightened

populace joining in equality to declare: the life of the open mind and spirit is more important to a society than the life of the closed mind. From their mutual pledge arose a new and beneficent peace, a safety for all citizens, and the awakened creativity of all people. The result is that "highly placed and humble persons, members of noble families and commoners, rich and poor work together with a common zeal for the cause of liberty." (p. 408)

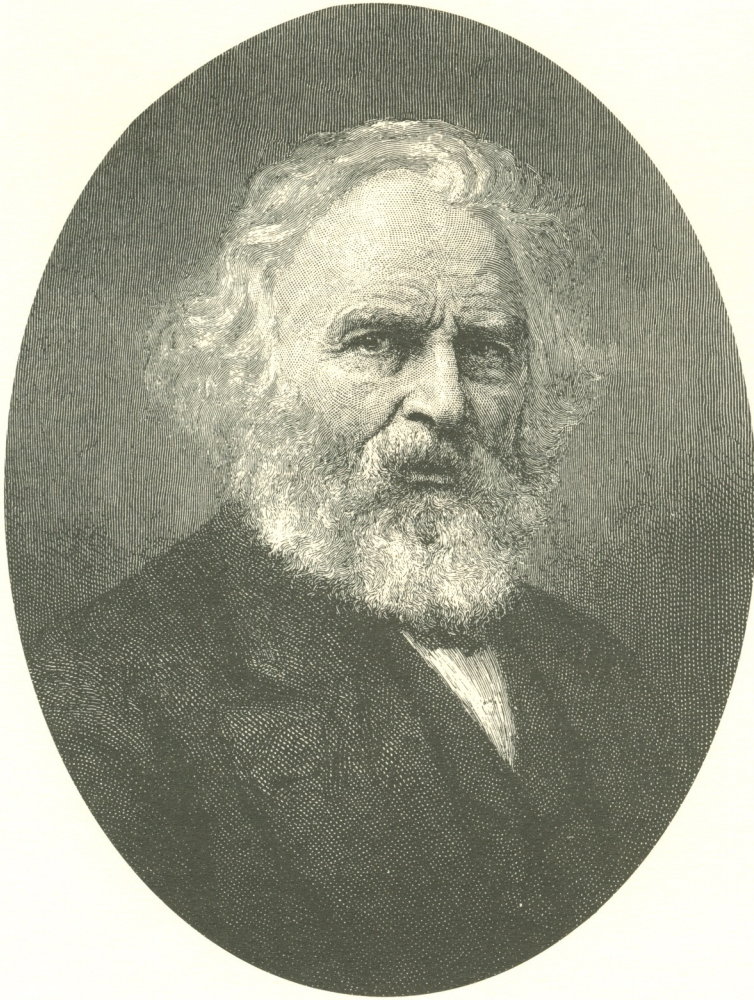
Civic Humanism alters the urban landscape: "The enjoyment of freedom makes cities and citizens great; But places under tyranny become deserted by their citizens. For tyrants fear the *virtus* of good citizens and engage in their extermination." (p. 386) It is only as citizens themselves arise to the cause of learning, liberty, and peace to carry forth with courage the insistence of equality for all citizens that such vital cityscapes become fully possible. Two "great and laudable" qualities emerged from Renaissance Italy: the "refusal to lose courage in adversity or to be flushed with success." (p. 386)

Civic Humanism brings forth, in natural consequence, a "citizen-army" to defend the state in time of need: "only the citizens themselves care enough for their own cause;" (p. 433) Florence, among all of the city-states in the early Renaissance, had its own citizen-army to withstand the advancing tyranny of Giangaleazzo and others. "[N]o city has ever been found to achieve first rank except by the *virtù* of her citizens and by their own hands." (p. 433)

These principles are preserved in the writings of the great Florentine citizens — especially Leonardi Bruni, who "broke ground for what may be called the new civic philosophy of life;" (p. 410) Hans Baron, in one of the most remarkable scholarly achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century retrieved in painstaking detail the history and the essences of the writings from Florence. His study is a remarkable celebration of the *Book* in Western Civilization. He reminds us what we have seen in every Renaissance, from that of the Iroquois Confederacy, to the Cambridge-Concord Circle, to our own time: the people prepare themselves for it and then accomplish it with courage and intelligence in the spirit of equality.

Robert Cotner  
Editor





Portrait engraving of Longfellow by Thomas Johnson. Reprinted by American Heritage Engravings, Alexandria, VA. From the collection of Ed Quattrocchi.

## In tribute to Longfellow

### The Owl

Meate-Nee-Say  
"Little Owl"

The Owl is the Eagle of the night.  
Ask the field mice — they know!  
Ask the rabbits — they know  
the Owl from way back!  
The Owl is the Eagle of the night,  
that late-night snacker of mice,  
the rabbit, the rat — Oh, yeah,  
the rat — how could I forget the rat.  
The Owl is Eagle of the night,  
that taker of life that floats on the wind  
without a sound.  
The Owl is the Eagle of the night.

Editor's note: The author is an Indian from the Menominee Nation in Wisconsin, who is currently living, writing, and performing in Chicago. His "christian" name is Marcus Zimmerman; he goes by "Emjayzee."

### From "Lines Composed on American Indian Effigy Mounds Near Aurora, Illinois, Columbus Day 1992"

Robert Cotner

"Someone must hear — it might  
as well be you: years ago, your grandfather's  
grandfather took as his bride  
an Iroquois woman, lovely, dark-skinned  
maiden, whose eyes illumined life —  
a woman of grace sufficient  
to establish a lineage of love  
encompassing you. Your family kept  
private counsel of the soul  
to secure safe passage through storms of hate  
and find a harbor of anonymity."

"I know,"

I murmur, aware of family lore admitting quietly  
among close friends this neglected history.



Craigie House, the Longfellow home in Cambridge, MA, from Appleton's Journal, ca. 1870. Reprinted by American Heritage Engravings, Alexandria, VA. From the collection of Ed Quattrocchi.



## Longfellow

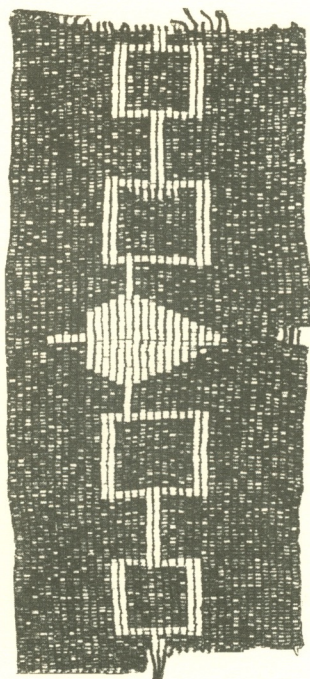
Continued from page 1

Onondaga, Oneida, and Cayuga Indian nations across the eastern half of the United States, who established the Iroquois Confederation under a constitution said to have had an influence on the American Founding Fathers.

The public acceptance of Longfellow's poem was immediate and enduring. On the day of its appearance, November 10, 1855, 4,000 of the 5,000 first copies were sold and in the four years following, 50,000 copies were sold.<sup>10</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote Longfellow from England in 1856, telling him that, because of *Hiawatha*, "Your fame is in its fullest blow; the flower cannot open wider."<sup>11</sup> Today, a half-dozen versions of *Hiawatha* are available in both children's and adult versions, some elegantly illustrated.

The legacy of Longfellow remains very great in Minneapolis, MN, where the myth of Hiawatha and Minnehaha began and is yet a constant presence through the efforts of caring citizens and the commitment of the city. A 300-acre park in south Minneapolis, along Minnehaha — "Laughing Water" — Creek, is the oldest state park in Minnesota. A lovely statue of Hiawatha carrying his bride across Minnehaha Creek is beautifully situated a few feet above the 55-foot Minnehaha falls, not far from where Minnehaha's father, the "ancient Arrow-Maker" lived. Jacob Fjelde created the statue in 1902. The bronze statue now standing in the park was underwritten by contributions of Minneapolis school children and erected in 1911.

A multimillion-dollar renovation plan by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board for Minnehaha Park was launched in 1992 and continues. This plan has altered the highways, bridges, and other features of the park and has relocated a two-third-sized replica of Craigie House, Longfellow's home in Cambridge, to a spot a few hundred feet from the Hiawatha statue. The home, built as a tribute to the poet in 1906, has served as a branch public library until recently. It will be utilized as a hospitality center in a portion of the park known as Longfellow Gardens. (See page 8 for design features of Minnehaha Park.) Jane King Hallberg wrote of the importance of



The Hiawatha Belt, representing the League of the Iroquois. (From William Nelson Fenton, *The Great Law and the Loghouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998, p.236.)

Longfellow's poem to the Twin Cities: *The Song of Hiawatha* "made Minnesota and Minnehaha Falls famous through the United States and in literary circles of the world."<sup>12</sup>

Longfellow's poem was celebrated in music, as well. In 1893, Czech composer Antonin Dvorak, inspired by Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, created what became his most famous symphony, *Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, Opus 25*, subtitled *From the New World*. Performed at Carnegie Hall in 1893 to a standing ovation, it is inspired by American Indian and African American musical motifs. The symphony is said to contain a part depicting the sobs of Minnehaha as she departed from Hiawatha in a forest funeral.

In lighter, more current music, Dwight Latham, Moe Jaffe, and Clay A. Boland wrote "Hiawatha's Mittens," celebrating "Minjekahwum, / Magic mittens made of deer-skin / When upon his hands he wore them / He could smite the rocks asunder, He could grind them into powder."<sup>13</sup> This song has been recorded by the Ray Charles Singers on an album entitled *In the Evening by the Moonlight*.

The most singularly important result of Longfellow's poetic contribution, however, may lie in his influence on American poet Robert

Frost. Frost told an audience at Bryn Mawr in 1940: "One of the real American poets of yesterday was Longfellow. No, I'm not being sarcastic. I mean it. It is the fashion nowadays to make fun of him."<sup>14</sup> Frost respected Longfellow's poetic craftsmanship, his devotion to American themes, and the fact that he dared to earn a living as a poet. The title of Frost's first book, *A Boy's Will*, came from a line of Longfellow's "My Lost Youth." Lawrance Thompson, whose doctoral dissertation, published as *Young Longfellow* (Macmillan, 1938), was chosen by Frost as his official biographer in 1939. Thompson explained in 1971, it was "because of my study of and appreciation for Longfellow and his poetry."<sup>15</sup>

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow is one of the uniquely distinctive poets of early American culture. As a person, he represented in near-perfect fashion the refinements of America's first literary Renaissance. As a poet, he created some of the finest and most enduring literary and poetic traditions of American literature. ♦

### Author's Notes:

- 1 Edward Wagenknecht. *Longfellow, A Full-Length Portrait*, New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1955, pp. 3-4.
- 2 Wagenknecht, p. 4.
- 3 Wagenknecht, p. 5.
- 4 Lawrence Buell, in the introduction to his *Selected Poems of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, New York: Penguin Books, 1988, p. xiii.
- 5 *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*, ed. James D. Hart, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 492.
- 6 Caroline Ticknor, "The Poet Longfellow," *Glimpses of Authors*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, Co., 1922, p. 44.
- 7 Wagenknecht, p. 10.
- 8 Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, Vol. II, New York, Harcourt Brace & Co., 1927, p. 439.
- 9 See Thomas R. Henry, *Widerness Messiah: The Story of Hiawatha and the Iroquois*, New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1955, for a detailed history of the original Hiawatha and his work.
- 10 Tichnor, p. 50.
- 11 Tichnor, p. 52.
- 12 Jane King Hallberg, *Minnehaha Creek: Living Waters*, Minneapolis: Cityscape Publishing Co., 1995, p. 123.
- 13 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha*, Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1901, p. 40.
- 14 Quoted by Lawrance Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph, 1915-1938*, New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1970, p. 619.
- 15 Conversation between Robert Cotner and Lawrance Thompson, Princeton, NJ, April 23, 1971.



# Longfellow's enduring influence across America

Edward Quattrocchi

Like most young persons, I enjoyed some of Longfellow's old chestnuts, "The Ride of Paul Revere," "The Village Black Smith," and remnants of *Hiawatha* and *Evangeline*. But in college, Longfellow seemed old-fashioned, and in my graduate school days, he was out of fashion. For me, he was a respected name in American culture and imagination, but not a poet for a serious reader trained in the school of the "New Criticism."

Only recently, as I have discarded some of my ingrained attitudes about poets and poetry, have I come to appreciate the depths of Longfellow's contribution to American letters, scholarship and culture. I began this rediscovery a few years ago quite serendipitously. Carolyn and I took a trip to Cambridge, MA, in September 1998 to celebrate the birth of our 11<sup>th</sup> grandchild, Elianna. The newborn's parents, Lisa and Steve Knight, live in a house about six blocks down the street from Craige House, the Longfellow National Historic Site. We took the two-week-old Elianna for a walk in her carriage for a tour of the Longfellow house; it was an educational and enjoyable experience for all of us. Unlike some other historic sites we have visited, the Longfellow house gave us a sense of the themes of arts and literature for which Longfellow became revered. For almost half a century (1837-1882) this was the home of one of America's and the world's foremost poets, scholars, and educators.

The Longfellow House is also significant in America's colonial history. George Washington headquartered and planned the Siege of Boston in the house between July 1775 and April 1776. What made our tour of the house especially vivid and educational was the eloquence of our tour guide. He was a veteran park ranger with a passion for his job, an abiding loyalty to Longfellow's legacy, and an enthusiasm to spread the "good news" of his poetry to anyone who would listen. He escorted us through the numerous rooms, upstairs and down, bringing each one to imaginative life by quoting lines from the poet's vast repertoire of versed wisdom.

The Longfellow House is a delight to any bibliophile/historian. It was a favorite gathering place for many prominent philosophers and artists including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Julia Ward Howe, and

Charles Sumner. Extensive museum collections include an array of American and European decorative arts from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; a fine arts collection representing a broad range of important 19<sup>th</sup> Century painters and sculptors; Longfellow's personal library and family papers, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; and an estimated 700,000 items in manuscript/archives collections that include letters from George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Dickens, and Abraham Lincoln. Longfellow's Dante collection, now housed in the Houghton Library at Harvard, is generally recognized as one of the world's finest.

What most impressed and awed me, however, was viewing the first edition of Longfellow's translation of Dante's *Commedia* in the very room in which it may well have been composed. The influence of Longfellow on subsequent readers of Dante is not widely appreciated outside the network of specialists in Dante and Italian literature, but it is profound. That Dante's *Commedia*, and especially the *Inferno*, continue to appeal to a large audience is evidenced by the number of modern translations into English, at least 50 in this century alone. Almost all modern American translators owe their inspiration to Longfellow. This debt was made manifest to me recently in reading the transcript of an interview with the Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky, the most recent translator of the *Inferno*.

Shortly after the publication of Pinsky's widely acclaimed translation of the *Inferno* in 1994, he was the first poet to participate in a live online conference with *The Atlantic Monthly* on April 19, 1995. Pinsky acknowledges that any translator must rely on previous translations and commentators in undertaking such an ambitious task. He depended largely on Charles Singleton's scholarly, painstakingly literal prose translation (1970), and on the verse translation, by Longfellow (1867). His pre-cursor Longfellow helped found that venerable publication in 1857. Not only did Longfellow nurture the fledgling



Evangeline Oak Park, located along the Bayou Teche in the heart of St. Martinville, LA.

*Atlantic Monthly*; he was one of the founders, in 1881, of the Dante Society of America, along with James Russell Lowell and Charles Eliot Norton (the Society's first three presidents). The Dante Society of America is the second oldest officially constituted organization in the world dedicated to the furtherance of the study of Dante Alighieri.

Carolyn and I had another serendipitous reminder of Longfellow's influence on a trip to New Orleans for the 1997 meeting of the Committee on Accreditation of the American Library Association, of which I was then a member. We left Chicago in a blinding snow-storm in January, a day early so as to visit old friends, Walter and Ann Dobie in sunny Lafayette, LA. As good hosts the Dobies took us on a tour of the main cultural and culinary attractions in and around Lafayette. Two fine Cajun/French restaurants compared favorably with our best in Evanston. Among the many surprising tourist attractions in what we considered to be a backwater was the old St. Martin de Tours Catholic Church in St. Martinsville, a small town on the road back to New Orleans. The Church has become a famous landmark, mainly because, in front of it, stands the oak tree, under which Evangeline and Gabriel, the star-crossed lovers in Longfellow's poem were said to have met after being separated during the Acadian Exile of the mid-1700s.

I am reminded, as I write, of the integral associations between literature and life in this nation and how richly our fellowship in *The Caxton Club* and through the *Caxtonian* links us all to so much that is important and beautiful in our history. ❖



# DOFOBS preview Stanlis program on Robert Frost

JoAnn Martin Baumgartner

Members of the DOFOBS — that is, for those who don't know, Damned Old Fools of Books (although some dispute the "old" portion) — an active club composed of bibliophiles (14 of whom are Caxtonians), were recently my guests, to view a two-hour TV interview, which I conducted as producer for Naperville's public access station NCTV. The interview featured Caxtonian Peter Stanlis, noted expert on Robert Frost.

Peter Stanlis, author and Distinguished Professor of Humanities (ret.) at Rockford College, was a close friend of Robert Frost. Stanlis knew Frost first as a student at Middlebury College, VT in 1939, and then as a graduate student at the University of Michigan and at Bread Loaf, VT, until the poet's death in 1963.

In the interview, Stanlis recalled humorous and touching moments with Frost in evenings spent as a frequent visitor at Frost's farm house, a mile west of Bread Loaf. Frequently the poet and Stanlis would stay up all night talking informally about poetry, Frost's philosophy of life, and poets and writers Frost admired. Stanlis discussed the experience at Bread Loaf, which is well known among academic and literary circles for its outstanding faculty and excellent curricula. Frost came to Bread Loaf in the 1920's and continued to lecture and read there nearly every year until his death. Photographs of famous poets and writers, who were at Bread Loaf with Stanlis and Frost, were exhibited by Stanlis.

With a generosity of spirit, Stanlis treated viewers to readings, discussions, and interpretations of selections from Frost's poetry. He also addressed biographers who have called Frost a "regional" poet and answered critics who dismissed Frost's poetry as less than intellectual.

According to Stanlis, Frost was, without dispute, the most quoted American poet. Recently Nobel prize winning poet, Seamus Heaney, referred to Frost in a *New York Times* article with a great deal of admiration. Stanlis shared this admiration and love of Frost, recalling that Frost was one of the most "brilliant conversationalists" he has ever known. The NCTV interview is "must-viewing" for Stanlis' recollections of Frost's salient comments alone.

Several months ago, Stanlis presented a paper on Frost at a Bread Loaf Conference of scholars and is currently at work on a book about Frost's intellectual convictions. Further documentation on Frost can be read in Stanlis' monograph, *Robert Frost: The Individual and Society*. ❖

*Author's note: Following a decade as vice president of marketing at FirstStar Bank, Naperville, I turned my energies to NCTV as a producer specializing in the humanities. These have included a recent joint program featuring Caxtonians Alice Schreyer, discussing the Special Collections of the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library, and Frank Piehl, collector and authority on Eugene Field.*

*I have dedicated the Frost programs to my colleagues in The Caxton Club, to the memory of my former teacher, poet Paul Carroll, and to people everywhere, who share the love of poetry. Copies of the interview (two video tapes) are available from Naperville Community Television, 800 W. Fifth Ave., Naperville, IL 60540. The cost of both Robert Frost tapes is \$30, plus delivery. For information, phone 630/355-2124.*

## Caxtonian reports on San Francisco FABS trip

Daniel Hayman

I have been on two previous excursions of the Fellowship of American Bibliophilic Societies (FABS), one to Philadelphia and one to Detroit. The most recent trip, to San Francisco, March 16-19, lived up to the high level of our expectations. The first stop was the Green Library at Stanford University. The building had been seriously damaged in the 1989 earthquake and had only opened again three months ago. The librarians allowed us to handle all of the rare books that they had assembled on the open tables. Our intellectual feast included an Aldine copy of Plato's works, a beautiful 19<sup>th</sup> Century binding of Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, and a first edition of Foxes' *Book of Martyrs* with

graphic woodcuts of scenes of torture. We also viewed an exhibition of John Steinbeck's papers.

After a marvelous lunch at the faculty club, we traveled to the University of San Francisco. We viewed a selection of materials associated with the subject of love that had been assembled for St. Valentine's Day. The head librarian unlocked one of the glass cases and let me handle the first edition of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). The binding appeared to be an early 19<sup>th</sup> Century binding from England.

The next day began with a delightful drive across the Bay Bridge to Berkeley. The Bancroft Library has been working on an extensive project of Mark Twain material. We had some fascinating conversations with the curator of those papers. Some other gems in the visit were Egyptian papyrus fragments from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century A.D., where were pieces of Book Two of Homer's *Iliad*. We saw how the ancient writer wrote on only one side of the papyrus with a very beautifully controlled hand. He also carefully followed the grain so that his script remained visually smooth. We also had the opportunity to compare a handwritten Euclid with an early printed version.

After another wonderful faculty club lunch, we returned to San Francisco for the rare book symposium, which was broadcast live over C-SPAN. The panel was composed of two major collectors and three dealers. Each addressed various issues associated with the collection of rare books and manuscripts. Our evening ended with dinner at a lovely local private club. All agreed that this excursion had been another great opportunity for viewing unusual pieces, gaining new knowledge, and having great intellectual dialogues. We felt as Erasmus did when he said that, when he dined with Sir Thomas More, he supped on intellectual ambrosia. ❖

*Idemmy M. Longfellow*



# Longfellow and Dante in Houghton Library collections

Dennis C. Marnon

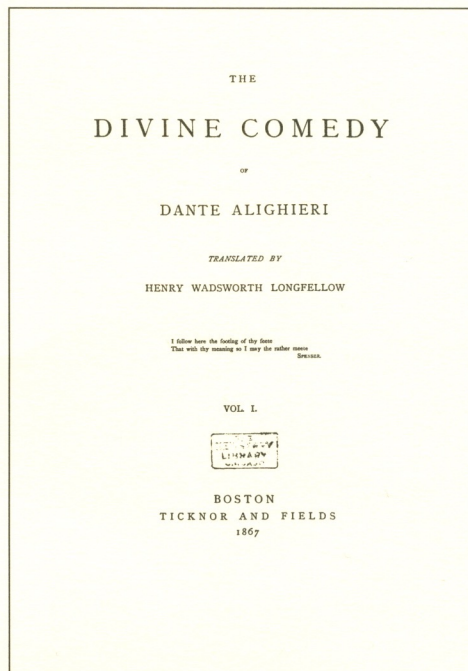
Three important Dante collections were built in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by notable figures with strong ties to Harvard. George Ticknor (1791-1871), the first Smith Professor of the French and Spanish Languages and Literatures, collected 18<sup>th</sup>-Century and 19<sup>th</sup>-Century editions, translations, biographies, and studies of Dante. In 1831, Ticknor offered the first course at Harvard devoted to *The Divine Comedy* and its author. His collection, which reflects his linguistic interest in the text of Dante, came largely intact to the College Library. The collection's early editions are now housed in Houghton Library, and its later editions and secondary works form their own classification in Widener Library.

Charles Eliot Norton (1827-1908), Professor of the History of Art, built an impressive, wide-ranging library, of which his Dante collection was a distinguished part. He lectured frequently on Dante and published a prose translation of *The Divine Comedy* in 1891-1892. Norton's early editions of Dante, along with his many important 15<sup>th</sup>-Century and 16<sup>th</sup>-Century books, are now part of Houghton's collections.

Like Ticknor and Norton, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) collected Dante with both scholarly and bibliophilic rigor. Longfellow succeeded Ticknor to the Smith Professorship in 1835 and continued to offer the popular course on Dante until he resigned from his position in 1854. During his first years teaching at Harvard, Longfellow significantly increased his collecting of Dante. By the time of his death, Longfellow had more than 100 titles on his shelves related to his study of the Florentine poet. With the precision and intelligence he showed in buying books for Bowdoin's and Harvard's libraries, Longfellow collected for his own use Italian editions of Dante (including several 16<sup>th</sup>-Century editions), English, Dutch, and German translations, biographies, critical studies, illustrated editions, and even an album of postcard scenes and images associated with Dante. In his later years, a statuette of Dante and wooden fragments from Dante's coffin were accorded places of honor in Longfellow's library.

Most of the books in Longfellow's Dante collection remain at the Longfellow National Historic Site, Craigie House. More than 10,000 books from Longfellow's library are housed and cataloged there (though all of the volumes have been temporarily removed for safe storage during renovations of that house, which should last another two years).

Of the approximately 500 printed books placed at Houghton Library over the years by the Trustees of the Longfellow House, the most significant Dante item is the two-volume Italian edition of the poet's works (Paris: Lefevre, 1823)



Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.

that Longfellow had interleaved and rebound in four volumes. These volumes are filled with Longfellow's manuscript notes and glosses and contain some of his earliest attempts at translation of portions of *The Divine Comedy*. Houghton Library also owns first editions of Longfellow's complete translation of *The Divine Comedy* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1865-1867. 3 volumes.), including two of the 10 copies of *Inferno* printed as a special edition in advance of the regular edition so that five copies could be sent to Florence in time for the celebrations of

600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dante's birth. Among the Library's holdings are first editions of the translation inscribed by Longfellow to Ticknor and Norton.

Houghton Library's collection of manuscript material documenting Longfellow's long interest in Dante is extensive. Notable examples include his lectures on Dante in 1838; his notebooks, journals, commonplace books, and his vast correspondence over six decades, all with frequent references to the poet; his preliminary translation of *Purgatory* that he worked on intermittently from 1843 through 1863; and revised proof sheets for the first editions of his Dante translations. But the undisputed high-point of Houghton's Longfellow-Dante holdings is the splendidly-bound six-volume manuscript of the complete translation of *The Divine Comedy* and Longfellow's accompanying Notes.

Longfellow's devotion to Dante was not a solitary pursuit. The Dante Club, principally Longfellow, Norton, George Washington Greene, James T. Fields, the publisher, and James Russell Lowell, who had succeeded Longfellow to the Smith Professorship at Harvard, met at Craigie House from 1865 to 1867 to discuss critically but amicably Longfellow's translation prior to the publication of each of the three volumes. That small circle served as a forerunner of sorts to the Dante Society, founded in Cambridge in 1881 with Longfellow serving as its first president. Houghton now owns the bound manuscript volume of Minutes of the Dante Society meetings for the years 1881-1928. It was the sad duty of Norton to deliver a commemorative address in honor of Longfellow, who had died on March 24, at the first annual meeting of the Dante Society on May 16, 1882. ❖

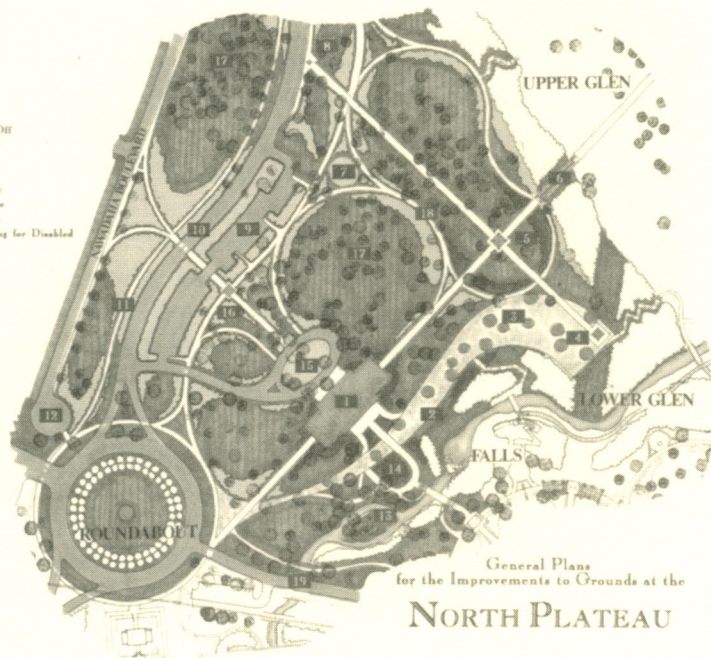
*Editor's note: Dennis Marnon is an Administrative Officer at the Houghton Library of Harvard University. At the invitation of the editor, he kindly agreed to write this essay on the Longfellow collection.*



# Bookmarks...

## LEGEND:

1. Restored Refectory
2. Restored Stone Walls
3. The Concourse
4. Overlook Landmark
5. Toilet Building
6. Inclined Elevator
7. Children's Playlot
8. Orientation Marker and Drop-Off
9. Parking Area
10. Golfers Road Realignment
11. Typical Bicycle Trail
12. Nawadaha Boulevard Cul-de-sac
13. Minnehaha and Hiawatha Statue
14. Native American Interpretation
15. Refectory Drop-Off and Parking for Disabled Persons
16. Orientation Shelter
17. Picnic Grounds
18. Typical Walking Trail
19. Minnehaha Avenue Bridge

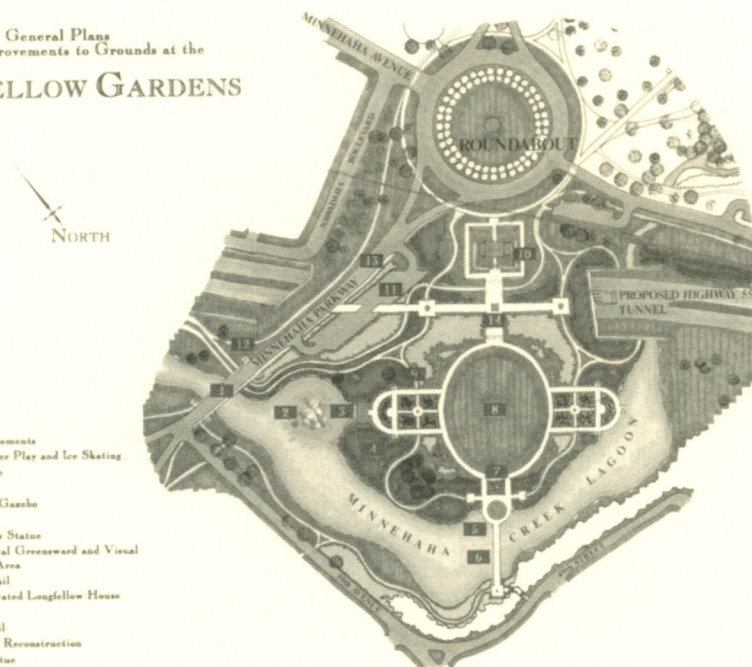


General plans for the North Plateau of Minnehaha Park, Minneapolis, MN. From The Minnehaha Park Renovation Plan. Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, 1992, p. 66.

## Chronology of Books by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

- French Grammar* (1830)
- French Exercises* (1830)
- Manuel de Proverbes Dramatiques* (1830)
- Novelas Espanolas* (1830)
- Syllabus de la Grammaire Italienne* (1832)
- Saggi de Novellieri Italiani d'Ogna Secolo* (1832)
- Coplas de Jorge Manrique, trans.* (1833)
- Outre-Mer: A Pilgrimage Beyond the Sea* (1833-34)
- Hyperion* (1839)
- Voices of the Night* (1839)
- Ballads and Other Poems* (1841)
- Poems on Slavery* (1842)
- The Spanish Student* (1843)
- The Belfry of Bruges and Other Poems* (1845)
- The Poets and Poetry of Europe, ed.* (1845)
- The Waif, ed.* (1845)
- The Estray, ed.* (1846)
- Evangeline* (1847)
- Kavanagh, a novel* (1849)
- The Seaside and the Fireside* (1849)
- The Golden Legend* (1851)
- The Song of Hiawatha* (1855)
- The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1858)
- The Tales of the Wayside Inn* (1863)
- The Divine Comedy, trans.* (1867)
- Flower-de-Luce* (1867)
- The New England Tragedies* (1868)
- The Divine Tragedy* (1871)
- The Tales of the Wayside Inn, Three Books of Song* (1872)
- Christus, a Mystery* (1872)
- The Tales of the Wayside Inn, Aftermath* (1874)
- The Masque of Pandora and Other Poems* (1875)
- Poems of Places, ed. 31 vols.* (1876-1879)
- Keramos and Other Poems* (1878)
- Ultima Thule* (1880)
- In the Harbor* (1882)
- Michael Angelo* (1882-83)

## General Plans for the Improvements to Grounds at the **LONGFELLOW GARDENS**



## LEGEND:

1. Creek Bridge Replacements
2. Water Feature, Water Play and Ice Skating
3. Warming/Boat House
4. Wildlife Habitat
5. Picnic and Wedding Gazebo
6. Gazebo Footbridge
7. Relocated Longfellow Statue
8. Formal Gardens, Oval Greenward and Visual Arts & Exhibition Area
9. Typical Walking Trail
10. Relocated and Renovated Longfellow House
11. Parking Area
12. Typical Bicycle Trail
13. Minnehaha Parkway Reconstruction
14. New Longfellow Statue

General plans for Longfellow Gardens, Minneapolis, MN. From The Minnehaha Park Renovation Plan, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, 1992, p. 84.