

Spring in Poetry and Photography

An Epistolary Ode to Spring

You asked me, Nelly, for a poem to greet the spring;
 But the weather has been so harsh since the Equinox
 And as I strive to sound hopeful and roundly sing
 Sweet praises of springtime it rings with paradox.

Of course I could now write a time-worn ode
 With derivative lines that echo the orthodox;
 And steal from bards both old and new a code
 That could only appeal to an inveterate philodox.

Here attached, then, is a poem I recently found
 And have slightly revised, one that speaks of a serenity
 And a sense of solace that are intimately bound
 To nature and remind us of the daunting forces of eternity;

A short poem which, though not particularly vernal,
 Was yet inspired by the manifest energy of that season;
 For hope, no doubt, can truly spring eternal
 As long as birds translate wind's rhyme and reason.

Eric SELLIN
Philadelphia, April 2019

A Midday Walk In May

We walk along the tow path through the college park,
 Beside the indolent waters of an old canal,
 Where, here and there, turtles lie along the banks,
 On fallen branches, sometimes basking there two deep.
 A quiet place it is, near the middle of the town,
 Where we can yet walk in peace along this path,
 Beneath a double helix of soaring, circling hawks.

Eric SELLIN
Indianapolis, May 2007



Photographs of Washington Square taken by Simon Roberts



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Celebrate Walt Whitman in His Bicentennial Year

Joseph Quinn

"Celebrate myself." So begins Walt Whitman's most famous poem, "Song of Myself."

This spring everyone can celebrate Whitman, as we recognize the 200th anniversary of his birth in 1819. The University of Pennsylvania is the primary sponsor and organizer of the festivities, called *Whitman at 200: Art and Democracy*. The celebration will culminate in Philadelphia on May 31st with a public event featuring proclamations, music, and birthday cake. (See the list of internet sites below for a link to the full schedule of events.)

Some might consider all this attention overkill for a man who never actually lived in Philadelphia. Furthermore, he published just one book of poems, *Leaves of Grass*. The first edition was issued in 1855, and Whitman spent the rest of his life updating, enlarging, and republishing it until a Deathbed edition was released in 1892. The book has since become one of the most read and influential in literary history, and his personality has continued to fascinate scholars and ordinary readers alike.

In June of 1873, after suffering a stroke and being dismissed from his position as a clerk in the U.S. Attorney General's office, Whitman reluctantly moved to Camden to live with his brother, George. In March of 1884 he moved into his own house

at 328 Mickle Street. He spent only 20 of his 73 years as our neighbor across the Delaware.

He initially bemoaned finding himself in what he called his "little Camden shanty." But he soon found compensations, in the faithful domestic circle that developed around him at home, and across the Delaware in cosmopolitan, artistically thriving Philadelphia.

Numerous contemporary sources document Whitman's life in Camden and his connections to Philadelphia. One invaluable resource is *Walt Whitman in Camden*, based on voluminous notes on the poet's activities compiled by a young disciple named Horace Traubel.

Before suffering a second debilitating stroke in 1888, Whitman had many opportunities to ferry over to Philadelphia for business and pleasure. He lectured at the Chestnut Street Opera House. He attended plays at the Walnut Street Theater and went to the opera at the Academy of Music, where he enjoyed a performance of Donizetti's *La Favorita*. Whitman expressed his love of opera, especially the florid *bel canto* works of Donizetti, Bellini and Rossini, in several passages of *Leaves of Grass*. He believed that "But for the opera I could not have written *Leaves of Grass*."

Along with thousands of others he toured the 1876 Centennial Exhibition. He visited the Mercantile



Whitman's "little Camden shanty" at 328 Mickle Street

Library, hung out with dock workers and streetcar drivers and, on occasion, idled in waterfront saloons. But gradually Whitman was drawn into a more genteel, professional, and artistic circle of Philadelphians. He became less the "hankering, gross, mystical, nude" bard of "Song of Myself," and more the "Good Gray Poet," as he was described by his Washington friend and patron, William Douglas O'Connor.

He was befriended by many prominent Philadelphians, including publishers, newspaper editors, lawyers, merchants, scholars, and artists. *The Philadelphia Press* and *Public Ledger* vigorously supported and defended Whitman in their pages.

One of Whitman's most important Philadelphia contacts was his publisher, David McKay. Starting

out as a bookseller for J. B. Lippincott, he established his own business in 1882. McKay took over the printing plates from the infamous 1881 "banned in Boston" edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Thanks in part to the obscenity controversy, the new 1882 edition issued by McKay became a bestseller.

Whitman met Thomas Eakins in 1887, a year after Eakins was involved in his own obscenity controversy. He was forced to resign from The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts for using undraped models in his mixed-gender life drawing classes. The two established a close rapport, no doubt based on their mutual admiration for the natural, realistic presentation of the human body, clothed and unclothed. They spent a lot of time

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Philadelphia History Museum's Uncertain Future

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Philadelphia's remarkable history are determined to find a new home for the museum—a centrally located, bricks-and-mortar place where visitors near and far can come to look and learn. One suggestion was to convert the old Family Court building on Logan Circle into a new museum. But that was scotched with word that the long-delayed conversion of that building into a hotel is back on track. Its developer reportedly is

soon to start work on that project. An even more intriguing, and possibly less costly, proposal is to clear most of the rooms on the ground floor of our vast City Hall to house the museum. Evidently, space exists elsewhere in facilities occupied by city government for the various offices which now use those first-floor chambers, many of which are high-ceiling and ornate, representing Philadelphia's grand dream of itself a cen-

tury-and-a-half ago. These should make ideal settings for showing off our history.

Here is how this matter looks from the viewpoint of the writer. It would be an enormous loss for everyone who has regard for Philadelphia if its history museum remains under wraps. Virtually every world-class city on the globe maintains a museum of its own history. Philadelphia is such a city.

Not long ago, we were named the first World Heritage City in North America. It would be contrary to everything that designation represents for the city to give up on presenting its history to the world-wide public. To present that story at City Hall seems a match made in heaven. All that is needed is a determined citizen-led campaign to make it happen. Volunteers anyone? ■

Celebrate Walt Whitman in His Bicentennial Year

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together as Eakins worked on Whitman's portrait throughout 1887-88. He claimed that of all the portraits made of him, he liked Eakins' best, saying "it comes nearest to being me."

But it has not been all praise and adulation. During his lifetime he was dismissed by many, including some staid Philadelphians, as a purveyor of immoral trash. The pious John Wanamaker banned *Leaves of Grass* from his stores.

And locals may still recall the controversy that erupted in 1955 when the Delaware River Port Authority proposed naming a new bridge connecting South Philadelphia with Gloucester, New Jersey, after the "Good Gray Poet." Whitman's fitness for such an honor was questioned, largely on the basis of the sexual frankness of some of his poems, especially ones that ventured into the realm of homosocial/sexual

relations. Pro- and anti-Whitman forces battled it out in the local news media for two years until the initial proposal was finally adopted and the bridge christened in 1957.

Want to get personally involved in the Whitman celebration?

Visit the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts to see Eakins' moving, autumnal portrait of Whitman.

Visit two easily accessible Whitman landmarks. The home where Whitman lived his last years in downtown Camden, which then was numbered 328 Mickle Street, is today's 330 Mickle/Martin Luther King Boulevard. It is just three blocks from the Broadway stop of the PATCO line. The modest wood-frame house, maintained by the New Jersey State Park Service, offers guided tours that give

visitors a chance to stand in the room where Whitman slept, worked, received visitors, and died.

His tomb is located in Harleigh Cemetery, a short walk from the PATCO Ferry Avenue stop. Designed by Whitman himself to look like a small stone house built into a hill, it contains not only Whitman's remains, but those of his parents, brothers George and Edward, sister Hannah and George's wife.

Finally, read the poems. Read and listen as Whitman howls his "barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world" ("Song of Myself").



Whitman designed this tomb for himself and his family.

Below are some internet sources where you can get more information about Whitman at 200 events and about Whitman himself, some of which I have relied on for quotes and details in this article. ■

Further Reading

Whitman at 200: www.whitmanat200.org/

The Walt Whitman Archive: www.whitmanarchive.org/

The Walt Whitman Association: www.thewaltwhitmanassociation.org/

The Walt Whitman House in Camden, New Jersey: www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/historic/whitman/

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Telling Stories

Martha Cornog

Suppose Ötzi the Iceman had made it home, wounded and bleeding.

“What happened to you?!”

“I went up the mountain, and those men from the other valley jumped me.”

“?&*#! And then what happened?”

The body of a man dubbed “Ötzi” was found in the Alps in 1991—he had been killed some 5,000 years ago. But had he survived his wounds and staggered back to his village, we can easily imagine that his story would have been in great demand, as much for information (Are their weapons better than ours?) as for entertainment around the fire.

Today, storytelling based on the drama of real life is celebrated as an art form, accessible to anyone. Whether you yearn to tell your own stories or simply listen enraptured, you can find right here in Philly a variety of places to get your tale on live, tragedy or comedy.

The Moth StorySLAMs

World Café Live
3025 Walnut Street
Every first Monday evening, the mic is open for all interested comers who drop names into a bag. The ten selected randomly will tell their true stories in five minutes without notes, while audience teams judge them; winners qualify to compete later in higher-level slams. Tickets go on sale a week in advance and sell out quickly. The non-profit Moth organization



The Moth StorySLAMs

hosts live storytelling around the world as well as putting out a podcast, books of stories, and the Moth Radio Hour. <https://themoth.org/events>

First Person Arts (FPA)

The Playground at the Adrienne
2030 Samson Street
Celebrating the “power of the personal,” FPA holds monthly StorySlams, special customized programs, and an annual festival of memoir and documentary art that includes classes. StorySlam winners receive cash prizes and qualify to compete in the season’s Grand Slam. “We believe that everyone has a story to tell, and that sharing our stories connects us with each other and the world.” You can find FPA also on YouTube and by listening to its podcasts. <https://firstpersonarts.org>

Patchwork Storytelling Guild

Mt. Airy Nexus
510 Carpenter Lane
“Patchwork remains dedicated to the survival of the art form and

provides opportunities for training, performance, and education, along with encouragement and an open forum for storytellers and audiences to connect.” Regular story swaps are open to all tellers and listeners; members may attend monthly coaching sessions. The Guild maintains a register of professional storytellers for hire and is affiliated with the National Storytelling Network. <https://patchworkstorytelling.org>

Tell Me a Story

Shot Tower Coffee
542 Christian Street
Tell me a story holds semi-monthly community storytelling events, with performers curated from story pitches submitted

in advance. Each storyteller accepted receives a 30-minute rehearsal prior to show date, and gets a video of their story afterwards. They also offer coaching and instruction for storyteller wannabes, either in terms of personal performance or for corporate folks looking to “find a comfortable, confident, and energizing way to communicate with clients, colleagues, and customers” (substantial fees charged). You can browse past shows on their Vimeo channel. www.tellmeastory.info/ <https://vimeo.com/channels/tellmeastory>

Once Upon a Nation Storytelling Benches

Independence Historical Park plus nearby museums and landmarks
“History that speaks to you.” From Memorial Day through Labor Day, professional storytellers hang out at 13 Storytelling Benches throughout Philadelphia’s Historic District and share short, entertaining tales about Philadelphia history. Did you know that Betsy Ross was also a munitions maker? www.historicphiladelphia.org/once-upon-a-nation/storytelling-benches/
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Once Upon a Nation Storytelling Bench

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Telling Stories

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Philly Improv Theater (PHIT)

2030 Sansom Street

PHIT offers improvisational comedy jams and performances, many free or inexpensive and welcoming of walk-ins. Long Story Short events present improv inspired by real life. A variety of classes instruct about improv, sketch comedy, acting, and stand-up, some targeted to tweens and teens. One of the youth classes, or PHIT's improv comedy summer camp for teens, would make a unique gift for a young relative! phillyimprovtheater.com/

Good Good Comedy Theatre

215 North 11th Street
(11th & Race Streets)

"We're an intimate, BYOB black box theater that houses up to four wildly different live comedy shows per night. This includes stand-up, sketch, improv, storytelling and (especially) everything in between..., live, mercilessly unpredictable independent comedy." Apparently no open mic events, but they do offer classes in improv. www.goodgoodcomedy.com

Helium Comedy Club

2031 Samson Street

Helium presents live shows with mostly professional comics. The Club also holds open mic events every Tuesday and provide both courses and workshops in stand-up, improv, and sketch comedy. An annual Philly's Phunniest competition welcomes entries from anyone, first come, first served. www.philadelphia.heliumcomedy.com/

ComedySportz Philadelphia (CSz Philadelphia)

The Adrienne Theater
2030 Samson Street

Two teams of improv comedians compete for laughs and prizes, with audience input and participation. A late-night, R-rated Blue Show is held monthly. CSz Philly also runs the Philadelphia School of Improv, a year-long curriculum of classes plus one-shot workshops. www.comedysportzphilly.com/

My personal addiction is the Moth, where last year one storyteller captured our hearts with the tale of her son's birthday party—planned around the theme of broccoli. And then what happened? Wow, that was a great story... ■



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Jim's Famous Maryland Crab Cakes

Jane Hickman

My father-in-law's family ran Callahan's Seafood, which operated in the legendary Lexington Market in Baltimore

for over 50 years. Jim would often make crab cakes for us in the summer, but we never knew why they were so good. One day, I watched

him carefully and wrote down everything he did in this very easy preparation. The key is good crabmeat: only use the best. ■

Chefs' Corner

Note: If you have a favorite recipe, we would love to test it and put it in this column. Send your recipes or requests to jhickman@upenn.edu. Thank you!

Maryland Crab Cakes

2 pounds jumbo lump crab meat

$\frac{3}{4}$ roll Ritz crackers, crumbled

2 eggs, beaten

1½ tablespoons mayonnaise

1½ tablespoons wet mustard

1-2 tablespoons parsley, chopped

Few dashes Worcestershire sauce

Few shakes of Old Bay Seasoning, optional

Vegetable oil, if frying

1 Carefully pick crab meat to remove all shells.

2 Beat eggs, add other ingredients, and gently fold in the crab meat.

3 Heat 1/4 inch of vegetable oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Fry crab cakes; turn once until brown on both sides. Crab cakes can also be broiled.

4 Serve with cocktail sauce (catsup and horseradish) or tartar sauce (mayonnaise, pickle relish, mustard, and lemon juice) and lemon wedges.

Yield: 12-14 large crab cakes. Half the recipe makes about 30 small crab cakes, perfect as an appetizer. For small crab cakes, form balls of the mixture with a round tablespoon.



Photo by Jane Hickman



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