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— The Long Island Traveler —

Then and Now...



*As I write, the whole experience presses back to me — the soothing
rustle of the waves, and the saline smell — boyhood's times, the
clam-digging, barefeet and wild trousers rolled up — trudging down
the creek — the purple of the sedge meadows — the hay-boat, and
the chowder and fishing excursions. — WALT WHITMAN*

**WALT WHITMAN
BICENTENNIAL**

1819-2019



Peconic Bay SHOPPER

...preserving North Fork History

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On the Cover—

This wonderful shot of the Long Island Traveler building was taken during the summer of 1898. It's location was (and still is) on Beckwith Avenue in Southold. Here the weekly publication heralded the news of the week with tidbits (or brevities as it was called) of visitors and the small goings-on in a rural town.

Photo courtesy of Jenny Schlecht, Southold.

Also on the cover is a photo of the building as it stands today, still wearing the rooftop gingerbread. We are glad to see ongoing renovations.

To the right is another historic picture of this building.



Birds and Barns



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WALT WHITMAN BICENTENNIAL 1819-2019

Follow America's Poet and Long Island's Native Son Out of Doors

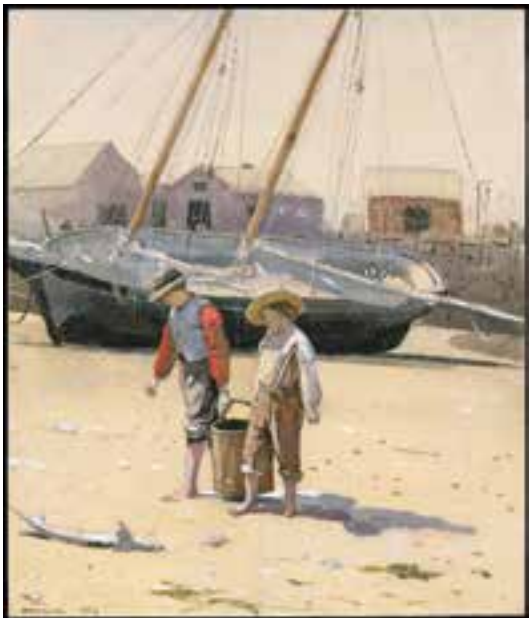
by Gerard Matovcik, Reference Librarian, Mattituck-Laurel Library

Walt Whitman was born in West Hills, near Huntington, Long Island, in May 1819. Whitman spent a good deal of his youth roaming about the island and absorbing her wonders. This summer, in commemoration of his 200th anniversary, we suggest that our readers do the same. You too can ramble about the island with nature walks along trails in the woods and along her bay, sound, and ocean shores. You too can absorb the stunning beauty of nature around you. Whitman calls you to follow in his footsteps and enjoy some of the happy hours he had experienced as described in his reflection on his island boyhood many years later in *Specimen Days*:

Here, and all along the island and its shores, I spent intervals many years, all seasons, sometimes riding, sometimes boating, but generally afoot, (I was always then a good walker,) absorbing fields, shores, marine incidents, characters, the bay-men, farmers, pilots – always had a plentiful acquaintance with the latter, and with fishermen — went every summer on sailing trips — always liked the bare sea-beach, south side, and have some of my happiest hours on it to this day.

As I write, the whole experience comes back to me — the soothing rustle of the waves, and the saline smell — boyhood's times, the clam-digging, barefoot, and with trousers roll'd up — hauling down the creek — the perfume of the sedge-meadows — the hay-boat, and the chowder and fishing excursions.

Those same later years, while living in Brooklyn, (1836-'50) I went regularly every week in the mild seasons down to Coney Island, at that time a long, bare unfrequented shore, which I had all to myself, and where I loved, after bathing, to race up and down the hard sand, and declaim Homer or Shakespeare to the surf and sea gulls by the hour.



Winslow Homer, *A Basket of Clams*, 1873. In this watercolor painting, Homer responds to the spirit of the post-Civil War era, when the desire for national healing and the challenges of urban and industrial growth made children symbols of a simpler and more innocent time and of America's hope for the future. Painting attribution: The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Walt Whitman, 1884. (Library of Congress)



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Greenport and Montauk Point, 1849

In the autumn of 1849, a thirty-year-old Whitman took the new branch of the Long Island Railroad out to Greenport to visit his sister Mary and her shipbuilder husband Ansel Van Nostrand. No one would have paid much attention to young Walt; he wasn't a famous poet yet. That recognition came much later in his life. His career up to this point was one as a journalist and newspaper editor. In fact, that autumn Whitman had just resigned as the editor of the *Freeman*, an abolitionist newspaper published in Brooklyn, and he was seeking a retreat in the lovely landscape of sea and shore.

While staying at his sister's house, Whitman decided to write a series of brief articles or "letters" for the *New York Sunday Dispatch*, recording his rambles about the countryside. In two letters, he describes scenes from a sailing excursion around to Montauk Point. In the first scene, Whitman captures the "hauling in" of bluefishermen, a cadre among all the common men he would sing homage to in *Leaves of Grass*. These muscular men were fashioned like Greek gods and as preternaturally adroit in their "dare-devil" maneuvering:

Two hundred men, in a hundred skiffs, catching bluefish by trailing! Imagine the skiffs, real beauties, too, darting like swallows, and managed by five-score bold and expert water-dogs, each ambitious of doing some dare-devil maneuver that would eclipse his fellows—the sails bulging like the puffed cheeks of an alderman, and anon dipping in the water, or making the boat turn sharper corners than I ever saw boat turn before—a hundred men ceaselessly employed in hauling in the lines, taking off the fish, and casting out again—and then such casting out! Such a length as they made the bones fly! such a twirl of the rope!



"Trolling for Bluefish," Currier & Ives, 1866, by F. F. Palmer. As cities were spreading and the nation becoming more industrialized, many observers promoted communion with nature as a way of healing the ills of "civilization." Whitman, however, did not identify with gentlemen of leisure trolling for Sunday dinner. Instead, he imagined himself as one of the "roughs," one of the Montauk "blue fishers" with whom he fraternized.

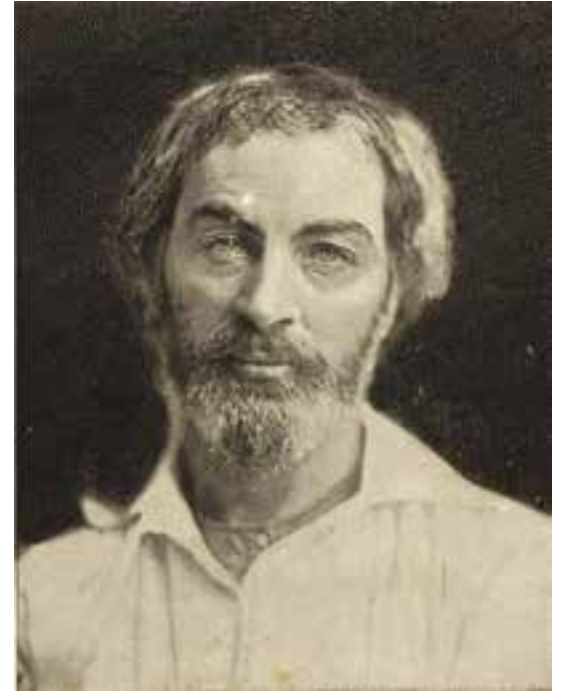
no twisting, although the coils be many! such superb attitudes, equal to anything in Greek statues! such ready expedients to avoid any obstacle to the incessant hauling in, and throwing out of those lines, and the rapid depositing of fish in the boats, which seemed, to my eyes, to rival the celerity with which a "faster compositor" deposits type in his stick!

In the next scene along the rocky shore at Montauk Point, Whitman describes some revels he enjoyed, with boyish glee, in the company of some acquaintances he had met:

(At Montauk Point.) There were earths of all colors, and stones of every conceivable shape, hue, and density, with shells, large boulders of pure white substance, and layers of those smooth round pebbles called "milk-stones" by the country children. There were some of them tinged with pale green, blue or yellow – some streaked with various colors – and so on.

We rambled up the hills to the top of the highest – we ran races down – we scampered along the shore, jumping from rock to rock . . . We pranced forth again, like mad kine – we threw our hats in the air – aimed stones at the shrieking seagulls, mocked the wind, and imitated the cries of various animals.

Why not follow in Whitman's footsteps and take an excursion to Montauk Point this summer? You can leave very early in the morning to avoid traffic, park near the lighthouse at the point, and watch the sunrise. Think of the following Whitman poem as you watch the sunrise:



Walt Whitman, 1854. (Library of Congress)

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Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun

GIVE me the splendid silent sun, with all his beams full-dazzling;
 Give me juicy autumnal fruit, ripe and red from the orchard;
 Give me a field where the unmow'd grass grows;
 Give me an arbor, give me the trellis'd grape;
 Give me fresh corn and wheat—give me serene-moving animals, teaching content; . . .
 Give me odorous at sunrise a garden of beautiful flowers, where I can walk undisturb'd; . . .
 Give me to warble spontaneous songs, reliev'd, recluse by myself, for my own ears only;
 Give me solitude—give me Nature—give me again,
 O Nature, your primal sanities! — WALT WHITMAN



Sunset, John Frederick Kensett, 1872. This remarkable scene probably represents sunrise, since such would have been more readily observable over open water from the artist's studio near Darien, Connecticut, facing Long Island Sound to the south and the Atlantic Ocean to the east.

Painting attribution: The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Eel Fishing on the Great South Bay

In *Specimen Days* (1882), Whitman's collection of fragments and reminiscences from his life, the poet recalls a eel-spearing scene from his boyhood on Long Island:

Inside the outer bars or beach this south bay is everywhere comparatively shallow; of old winters all thick ice on the surface. As a boy I often went forth with a chum or two, on those frozen fields, with hand-sled, axe and eel-spear, after messes of eels. We would cut holes in the ice, sometimes striking quite an eel-bonanza, and filling our baskets with great, fat, sweet, white-meated fellows. The scenes, the ice, drawing the hand-sled, cutting holes, spearing the eels, &c., were of course just such fun as is dearest to boyhood. The shores of this bay, winter and summer, and my doings there in early life, are woven all through Leaves of Grass. One sport I was very fond of was to go on a bay-party in summer to gather sea-gull's eggs. (The gulls lay two or three eggs, more than half the size of hen's eggs, right on the sand, and leave the sun's heat to hatch them.)

— SPECIMEN DAYS

Eel Spearing at Setauket, William Sidney Mount, 1845.

The painting was commissioned by George W. Strong, whose Long Island boyhood was similar to Mount's in that slaves or family servants taught each of the boys to fish. The dignity and grace with which Mount invests his human subjects make "Eel Spearing" a painting that has few equals in American art.

Painting attribution: Fenimore Art Museum



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William Sydney Mount, **Dancing on the Barn Floor**, 1831

William Sidney Mount, the renowned Setauket artist, offers his delightful sensory depiction of farm life in *Dancing on the Barn Floor*. One can almost hear the fiddle music and the stuf of dancing feet on the wooden floor and enjoy the sweet smell of the hay stored in the barn. Perhaps from visits to his grandparents' farm, Whitman also captured another joy of agricultural life: riding the hay wagon toward the open doors of the barn and then rolling head over heels in fall grass. (You can enjoy hay in a barn at Hallockville Museum Farm on Sound Avenue in Riverhead.)

The big doors of the country barn stand open and ready,
The dried grass of the harvest-time loads the slow-drawn wagon,
The clear light plays on the brown gray and green intertinged,
The armfuls are pack'd to the sagging mow.

I am there, I help, I came stretch'd atop of the load.
I felt its soft jolts, one leg reclined on the other,
I jump from the cross-beams and seize the clover and timothy,
And roll head over heels and tangle my hair full of wisps.

Section 9, *Song of Myself*

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At the Cider Mill and on the Open Road

In Section 33 of "Song of Myself," Whitman offers a sensory catalogue of the world around him, a catalogue whose extensive range begins to suggest the massiveness of the hearings, sights, and touches that flow around us. You might want to keep a "Summer Notebook" in which you catalogue, in long lines as Whitman did, your summer experience on the North Fork:

*At the cider-mill tasting the sweets of the brown mash, sucking the juice through a straw,
At apple-peelings wanting kisses for all the red fruit I find,
At musters, beach-parties, friendly bees, huskings, house-raising;
Where the mocking-bird sounds his delicious gurgles, cackles, screams, weeps,
Where the hay-rick stands in the barn-yard, where the dry-stalks are scatter'd, where the brood-cow waits in the hovel,
Where the bull advances to do his masculine work, where the stud to the mare, where the cock is treading the hen,
Where the heifers browse, where geese nip their food with short jerks.
Where the humming-bird shimmers, where the neck of the long-lived swan is curving and winding,
Where the laughing-gull scoots by the shore, where she laughs her near-human laugh,
Where bee-hives range on a gray bench in the garden half hid by the high weeds,
Where band-neck'd partridges roost in a ring on the ground with their heads out
Where the yellow-crown'd heron comes to the edge of the marsh at night and feeds upon small crabs,
Where the splash of swimmers and divers cools the warm noon,
Where the katy-did works her chromatic reed on the walnut-tree over the well,
Through patches of citrons and cucumbers with silver-wired leaves.
I am afoot with my vision
Walking the path worn in the grass and beat through the leaves of the brush,
Where the quail is whistling betwixt the woods and the wheat-lot,
Where the bat flies in the Seventh-month eve, where the great goldbug drops through the dark,
Where the brook puts out of the roots of the old tree and flows to the meadow,
Where cattle stand and shake away flies with the tremulous shuddering of their hides.*

— Section 33, Song of Myself



In Cider Making, William Sidney Mount faithfully captures a scene of rural life at a cider mill that once stood in Setauket, Long Island. In the painting, some scholars find allusions to the hard fought political election of 1840 (the date printed on the barrel in the foreground) when William Henry Harrison was promoted as a candidate of the common man who preferred hard cider and life in a log cabin. Mount, a conservative Democrat, opposed the populist Jackson and his disastrous financial policies. (Note: President William Henry Harrison's wife, Anna Symmes, spent some years of her early childhood in Southold with her grandparents.)

Painting attribution: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

A Meditative Stroll along the Shore of Sea, Sound, or Bay

If you're not splashing barefoot in ripples along the shore, then a meditative stroll along the sea, sound, or bay is one of the most pleasurable excursions one can enjoy on Long Island during the summer. In his poem, "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life," Whitman describes his feeling of intimacy with the objects found in the sea-drift along the shore, as though his being is part of an overwhelming infinitude. The "hoarse and sibilant" waves washing onto Paumanok (Whitman's "aboriginal name" for Long Island) are none other than the procreant impulse of life. This excerpt, from the beginning of the poem, shows how Whitman is "seiz'd" with an impulse to give voice to those things around us that are so other than ourselves, so separated from us, and yet so much a part of creation. By the end of the poem, Whitman sees himself as part of the sea drift buoyed along in the currents and eddies of the ocean of life:



Sanford R. Gifford, *Fire Island Beach*, 1878.

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As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life

As I ebb'd with the ocean of life,
 As I wended the shores I know,
 As I walk'd where the ripples continually wash you Paumanok,
 Where they rustle up hoarse and sibilant,
 Where the fierce old mother endlessly cries for her castaways,
 I musing late in the autumn day, gazing off southward,
 Held by this electric self out of the pride of which I utter poems,
 Was seiz'd by the spirit that trails in the lines underfoot,
 The rim, the sediment that stands for all the water and all the land
 of the globe.

Fascinated, my eyes reverting from the south, dropt, to follow those
 slender windrows,
 Chaff, straw, splinters of wood, weeds, and the sea-gluten,
 Scum, scales from shining rocks, leaves of salt-lettuce, left by the tide,
 Miles walking, the sound of breaking waves the other side of me,
 Paumanok there and then as I thought the old thought of likenesses,
 These you presented to me you fish-shaped island,
 As I wended the shores I know,
 As I walk'd with that electric self seeking types

Whitman had a mystical sense of the self as being larger than all attempts to divide it. This freed the poet to "dilate" himself, to widen himself to the point that he could imagine making love to the entire world, to the earth and sea and the night that held them:

*Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!
 Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
 Earth of departed sunset—earth of the mountains misty-topt!
 Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!
 Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!
 Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!
 Far-swooping elbow'd earth—rich apple-blossom'd earth!
 Smile, for your lover comes.*

Belted Kingfishers,
 John James Audubon, 1831.



One part of *Specimen Days* contains meditative descriptions of the natural world written in 1873 when the poet lived at the Stafford Farm on Timber Creek near Philadelphia, in part attempting to recover from a paralytic stroke he suffered. Here we follow the change in the bodily rhythms of the poet as he puts himself in "rapport" with trees, water, and clear skies. Whitman's reflections should give readers a sense that they, too, should immerse themselves in nature and find a healthful rapport with the world around them:

SUMMER SIGHTS AND INDOLENCES

June 10th.—As I write, here by the creek, nothing can exceed the quiet splendor and freshness around me. We had a heavy shower, with brief thunder and lightning, in the middle of the day; and since, overhead, one of those not uncommon yet indescribable skies . . . of limpid blue, with rolling silver-fringed clouds, and a pure-dazzling sun. For underlay, trees in fullness of tender foliage—liquid, reedy, long-drawn notes of birds—based by the fretful mewing of a querulous cat-bird, and the pleasant chipping-shriek of two kingfishers. I have been watching the latter the last half hour, on their regular evening frolic over and in the stream; evidently a spree of the liveliest kind. They pursue each other, whirling and wheeling around, with many a jocund downward dip, splashing the spray in jets of diamonds—and then off they swoop, with slanting wings and graceful flight, sometimes so near me I can plainly see their dark blue-gray feather-bodies and milk-white necks.

In honor of Walt Whitman on his bicentennial, we encourage our readers to get outdoors and experience the therapeutic value of nature. Lose yourself in the beauty of your surroundings, leave everyday stress behind, and reach a place of greater calm and wellness. We recommend a visit to the Walt Whitman Birthplace, Historic Site & Interpretive Center; 246 Old Walt Whitman Road, Huntington Station, NY 11746. At the Southold Town website, in the drop-down menu for "Visiting," there are links to several beautiful town preserves for hiking (Arshamomaque Preserve, Marratooka South Preserve, Mill Road Preserve, Downs Farm Preserve, Goldsmith's Inlet Park, The Wolf Preserve, and Sound View Dunes Park). On Wickham Avenue in Mattituck is the scenic Wolf Pit Lake. In Laurel, there is the Laurel Lake Preserve. In Riverhead, there is the Hallockville Museum Farm located at 6038 Sound Avenue. Quogue Wildlife Refuge at 3 Old Country Road has fine walking trails, forests, and ponds.

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Walt Whitman, 1890/1891. (Library of Congress)

At Mattituck-Laurel Library, Thursday, June 20, 6:30 – 7:30 pm.

Join Jerry Matovcik for an engaging PowerPoint celebration of Whitman's life and poems:

"I Shall Be Good Health to You": 1819-2019 Whitman Bicentennial Celebration

He was the son of American soil, a child of its hope, America's unwavering champion and the creator of America's own poetic voice, a voice to be reckoned with. He believed his Leaves of Grass would unite the nation and prevent a civil war, but when the war came, he faithfully nursed injured soldiers from both sides and composed salutary lines to heal the nation's wounds.

POSTSCRIPT:

The Mattituck Presbyterian Church building of 1830.

It is interesting to try to envision the landscape Whitman looked out upon when his train stopped at Mattituck Station in 1849 and he looked out of the train window. The Long Island railway out to Greenport had opened only recently in 1844. At the time Mattituck was a quaint and quiet little hamlet with very few houses and not a great many people. Looking south, Whitman would have seen Hubbard's Tavern (on Sound Avenue and Love Lane where Mattituck Florist is today), a two-story tavern and hotel that housed the oldest store of Mattituck. The store had limited goods, but from the earliest times it included gin.¹ Across the street stood the former Presbyterian Church building, a modest structure without a steeple, built in 1830, and later moved away to the west side of the cemetery to be occupied by the Methodists. There was no Glenwood Hotel, which was built after the Civil War. There was no Octagon House; that would be built by Andrew Gildersleeve in 1854.

Whitman would have certainly been interested in the Octagon House because the concept for the circular-shaped structure was invented by Whitman's friend, Orson Squire Fowler, the foremost proponent of Phrenology in the United States at the time. Phrenologists would study a person's head shape, its bumps and depressions, as an indicator of one's character and mental abilities. On July 6, 1849, Walt Whitman's head was analyzed by Fowler who found him endowed with "large hope and comparison...and causality." In fact, Whitman became an editor of Fowler's publications, and it was Fowler who first published Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

One can assume, then, that the landscape Whitman saw outside the train in 1849 was fairly bare except for a few homes. At the end of Love Lane (then Railroad Avenue) and across Main Road (then "the highway") was the home of Widow Elizabeth Reeve. On the Glenwood property was the home of Luther and Elmyra Reeve, and in its upper floor a private school was kept. At that time families cleared only a small part of farm land to raise such vegetables as the family required. Cattle and sheep were raised in large numbers, and large sections of the farms were devoted to pasturage. There were no vast plowed fields planted with potatoes, corn, or cauliflower for New York City markets. This agricultural enterprise would develop decades later when local farmers began cultivating crops for city consumption. In 1849, there were some homes with their plots for vegetables, orchards for fruit trees, and pasture for livestock. To the north of the station was Deacon Nathaniel Hubbard's home, Mattituck Creek, thickly wooded areas, and along Cox's Neck was a cow lot comprised on one hundred and fifty acres.²

¹Gildersleeve, Charles (1857-1929). "Mattituck Sixty Years Ago," 1905. The Mattituck-Laurel Historical Society.

²Craven, Reverend Charles E. *A History of Mattituck*, 1906. pp. 224-226.



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Then and Now...



This 1898 view shows the original home of Southold's Protection Engine Company No. 1, the first of three Southold Fire Department Companies. Photo courtesy of Jenny Schlecht, Southold.

The building later became the Grange Hall and various subsequent owners and businesses.

To the right is the corner as it looks today.



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