



# Three Unpublished Whitman Letters to Harry Stafford and a Specimen Days Prose Fragment

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ISSN 0737-0679 (Print)

ISSN 2153-3695 (Online)

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## Recommended Citation

Folsom, Ed. "Three Unpublished Whitman Letters to Harry Stafford and a Specimen Days Prose Fragment." *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 25 (Spring 2008), 197-200.

Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13008/2153-3695.1851>

12 Plato, *The works of Plato: a new and literal version, chiefly from the text of Stallbaum*, vol. 1, ed. Henry Cary; vol. 2, ed. Henry Davis; vols. 3-6, ed. George Burges (London: Bohn, 1849-1854). The “Phaedrus” essay is in vol.1 (1854), and the “Banquet” essay is in vol. 3 (1850).

13 Whitman, *NUPM*, 5:1882.

14 Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives, Translated from the Original Greek: with Notes, Critical and Historical: and A Life of Plutarch*, ed. John Langhorne, D.D., and William Langhorne, A.M. (Cincinnati: Applegate & Co., 1856), 205-206. According to Floyd Stovall, Whitman read this particular edition of *Plutarch's Lives* (see Stovall, *The Foreground of Leaves of Grass* [Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974], 175).

15 Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 121.

### THREE UNPUBLISHED WHITMAN LETTERS TO HARRY STAFFORD AND A *SPECIMEN DAYS* PROSE FRAGMENT

Kendall Reed has recently added to his Whitman collection three previously unpublished letters from the poet to Harry Stafford. These letters add further documentation to the long, intense, sometimes stormy, often puzzling relationship between Whitman and Stafford, whom Whitman met in Camden in 1876 when Harry was just eighteen years old and running errands at the Camden *New Republic*, where Whitman often went to work on preparing the Centennial Edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Their close friendship lasted eight years, until Harry got married in 1884; after that, Whitman continued to write occasional brief letters to Harry and his wife Eva, and in his will he left Harry his silver watch.<sup>1</sup> These three new letters—identified in Edwin Haviland Miller’s edition of *The Correspondence* as “lost” and “formerly in the possession of Alfred F. Goldsmith”<sup>2</sup>—bring to over forty the number of known Whitman letters to Harry. Harry’s known letters to Whitman, now numbering more than thirty, have been published in various places.<sup>3</sup>

*Letter 1:*

Camden

Sunday

Sept: 10 [1882]

Dear Harry

Thanks for your good letter—I have had my hands full the last six or eight weeks getting my new book in shape, seeing to every thing, and watching the proofs day & night<sup>4</sup>—(I have had to read the proofs at night all through)—But now it is over & I begin to feel free again—(And yet I must say I kind of enjoy it, & should like to go through the same job two or three times a year)—I have had the mighty good luck to keep well this summer all through—my usual bad spell (I always expect one after I have felt pretty good awhile) has not come on—

[page break]

Dear boy I am glad you too keep so well & are having good quiet times—I envy you being down there in the country—(I always thought Clementon<sup>5</sup> a much pleasanter spot than you[r] folks appear'd to think it)—I could be satisfied to live there—  
—I got a long letter from Herbert<sup>6</sup>—he is getting along well—traveling and painting—I have also rec'd a letter from Edward Carpenter<sup>7</sup>—he is well—he sends his love to you—  
—Hank perhaps while I am writing this (Sunday noon) you are over home—I wish I was there with you all—  
—As I finish my letter a lady opposite is singing & playing the hymn “Nearer my God to Thee”—how beautiful it sounds—  
Love to you my darling young brother

W.W.—

*Letter 2:*

Camden

Sept: 4 '83

Dear Harry

Yours of to-day with the 10 has safely reach'd me. Why have you sent it? It is singular & unnecessary—you were entirely welcome, & always have been—<sup>8</sup>  
—I have been away most of the last five or six weeks at Germantown 9 or 10 miles out[side] Phila. on a visit to very kind Quaker folks, particular friends of mine<sup>9</sup>—had a good time—good grub—a horse to my use to drive every day, (which I did, a long drive)—a large library—&c. I am well as usual—nothing very new with my affairs (but the last six or eight months has kind of gone back on me)—I rec'd a letter from [page break] Glendale<sup>10</sup> from your mother ab't three weeks ago—I have written two letters to her—  
—I don't know whether this will reach you as I am not certain of the right address—Havn't seen Mont<sup>11</sup> for several weeks, but suppose he is here the same yet.

W W

Harry when you write tell me the exact way to address papers &c. to you through the PO

*Letter 3:*

Camden

Sunday Jan 13 [1884]

1 1/2 p m

I am going out to a small dinner party of friends,<sup>12</sup> & am sitting here in my 3d story room waiting for half an hour—  
—I have not heard from your folks directly—but a man at the ferry, (a relation of Joe Brownings) told me that “Debbie had had a baby, & that it was buried last Sunday.”<sup>13</sup> I asked him how Debbie was getting along since, & he said he believed pretty well—but I suppose you have heard more fully & exactly from home—Nothing else to write about specially—we have had over three weeks of severe winter weather, storms &c—many

wrecks on the coast—I am glad you keep well & in good spirits—pray God it may continue so, & believe it will—Good bye for this time, dear Hank—

W.W.

Dr. Reed has also added a prose fragment, related to the Staffords, to his collection. Entitled “By the Pond,” it is the record of a day wandering near Timber Creek on the Staffords’ farm. It was published in *The Critic* (April 9, 1881) as part of “How I Get Around at Sixty and Take Notes,” and most of it then appeared in *Specimen Days* as “Horse-Mint.”<sup>14</sup>

*By the pond*

Aug: 22, '77.—As I leisurely write this, (with a French water-pen dipping every two or three minutes in the water ^brook^.) and pause and look around from time to time, nothing could be more primitive, secluded, ^or^ naturally free, cool, luxuriant, than the scene I am in the midst of. Not a human being, ^and hardly^ not the evidence of one, in sight. After my semi-daily bath, I sit here for a bit, the brook musically gurgling vexing ^brawling^, to the chromatic tones of a fretful cat-bird somewhere off in the bushes.

On my walk hither two hours since, through fields and the old lane, I stopt to view, now the sky, now the mile-off woods on the hill, and now the apple-orchards. ^What a contrast from walking a New York’s or Philadelphia’s streets!^ ~~romantic walk indeed~~ Everywhere great patches of dingy-blossom’d horse-mint, wafting a spicy odor through the air, (especially evenings.) Everywhere the flowering boneset and the rose-bloom of the wild bean.

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NOTES

1 For discussions of the Whitman-Stafford relationship, see Edwin Haviland Miller, “Introduction: Walt Whitman 1876-1885,” in Miller, ed., *The Correspondence* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 3:1-9; Ed Folsom, “An Unknown Photograph of Whitman and Harry Stafford,” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 3 (Spring 1986), 51-52; Charley Shively, *Calamus Lovers: Walt Whitman’s Working Class Camerados* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine, 1987), 137-149; Ed Folsom, “Whitman’s Calamus Photographs,” in Betsy Erkkila and Jay Grossman, eds., *Breaking Bounds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 193-219; Gary Schmidgall, *Walt Whitman: A Gay Life* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 214-219; David G. Miller, “George and Susan M. Stafford,” and Arnie Kantrowitz, “Harry L. Stafford,” in J. R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings, eds., *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 1998), 685-686; Jonathan Ned Katz, *Love Stories: Sex between Men before Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), Chapter 15, 220-231; and Ed Folsom, “Trying to Do Fair: Walt Whitman and the Good Life,” *Speakeasy* no. 10 (March/April 2004), 14-18.

- 2 See *The Correspondence* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 5:437-438. Goldsmith was an early Whitman collector and, with Carolyn Wells, the compiler of the first comprehensive bibliography of Whitman's works.
- 3 See Miller, "Introduction," 5-6, 9; Shively, 149-171; Arthur Golden, "A Recovered Harry Stafford Letter to Walt Whitman," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 5 (Spring 1988), 40-43; Ed Folsom, "Another Harry Stafford Letter," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 5 (Spring 1988), 43-44.
- 4 *Specimen Days & Collect* was published on September 8, 1882, by Rees Welsh in Philadelphia.
- 5 Clementon, New Jersey, is a town about twelve miles from Whitman's home in Camden; it is right next to Kirkwood, where Harry's parents, George and Susan Stafford, lived on a farm that Whitman frequently visited. Harry worked in Clementon at this time.
- 6 Herbert Gilchrist (1857-1914), the artist-son of Anne Gilchrist, was a frequent visitor with Whitman to the Stafford farm.
- 7 Carpenter (1844-1929) was a British socialist writer and devoted follower of Whitman.
- 8 Whitman, to help out with expenses, paid the Staffords when he stayed at their farm, so it is possible that Harry decided to reciprocate on a recent occasion when he visited Whitman in Camden.
- 9 Whitman began in early 1883 to make frequent visits to the home of Robert Pearsall Smith and Hannah Whitall Smith in Germantown; their daughter, Mary Whitall Smith, had admired Whitman's work during her studies at Smith College and talked her father into taking her to Camden to meet the poet. Whitman became good friends with this wealthy Quaker family and stayed with them from August 4-28 (a little over three weeks, not the "five or six weeks" he claims in the letter).
- 10 Glendale is near Kirkwood, New Jersey. At various times, Whitman and the Stafford family seem to refer to the contiguous communities of Kirkwood and Glendale interchangeably, as if Kirkwood were part of the larger community of Glendale.
- 11 Montgomery ("Mont") Stafford was Harry's younger brother.
- 12 In his daybook for this date, Whitman records "dinner at J M S's—good time" (William White, ed., *Daybooks and Notebooks* [New York: New York University Press, 1978], 327); "J M S" is James Matlack Scovel, one of Whitman's Camden friends.
- 13 Joe Browning married Harry's sister Debbie, who also lost a baby the next year; see *Correspondence*, 3:405n.
- 14 See Floyd Stovall, ed., *Prose Works 1892* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 1:164 and 164n, and, for the complex history of how Whitman, for *Specimen Days*, mined his six-part *Critic* series on "How I Get Around," see 1:347-351.