

Sweet Auburn

The Newsletter of the Friends of Mount Auburn

Spring/Summer 1986

Mount Auburn in Literature

by Barbara Rotundo

Alan D. Chesney
President,
Mount Auburn Cemetery
Eden F. Sizemore
Newsletter Editor
Emily Hiestand
Designer

Soon after its founding, Mount Auburn Cemetery became not only familiar in Boston, but also well-known throughout the United States. Visitors to Boston always included it in the sights they wanted to see, and writers refer to it with confidence that their readers would understand the reference.

While staying with her aunt's family in Boston, Emily Dickinson wrote a friend in 1846: "Perhaps you might like to know how I have spent my time here. I have been to Mount Auburn, to the Chinese museum, to Bunker Hill." She then mentions concerts and exhibitions she had attended and returns to describe Mount Auburn. Her only poem mentioning the Cemetery shows that she expects her reader to know the significance of *Auburn* without even the *Mount*.

*When Roses cease to bloom, Sir,
And Violets are done —
When Bumblebees in solemn flight
Have passed beyond the sun —
The hand that paused to gather
Upon this Summer's day
Will idle lie — in Auburn —
Then take my flowers — pray!*

Both Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and James Russell Lowell found literary uses for Mount Auburn as they each lived a short walk away from the Cemetery and chose to be buried there. Perhaps the best was a poem written by Longfellow after the death of his friend, Senator Charles Sumner. The Charles River and Mount Auburn Cemetery formed the view from the doorway of Craigie House where Longfellow lived. In the poem he praises the gentle healing quality of the river as it flows past the curve in the trees where his friend Charles is buried. The poem ends:

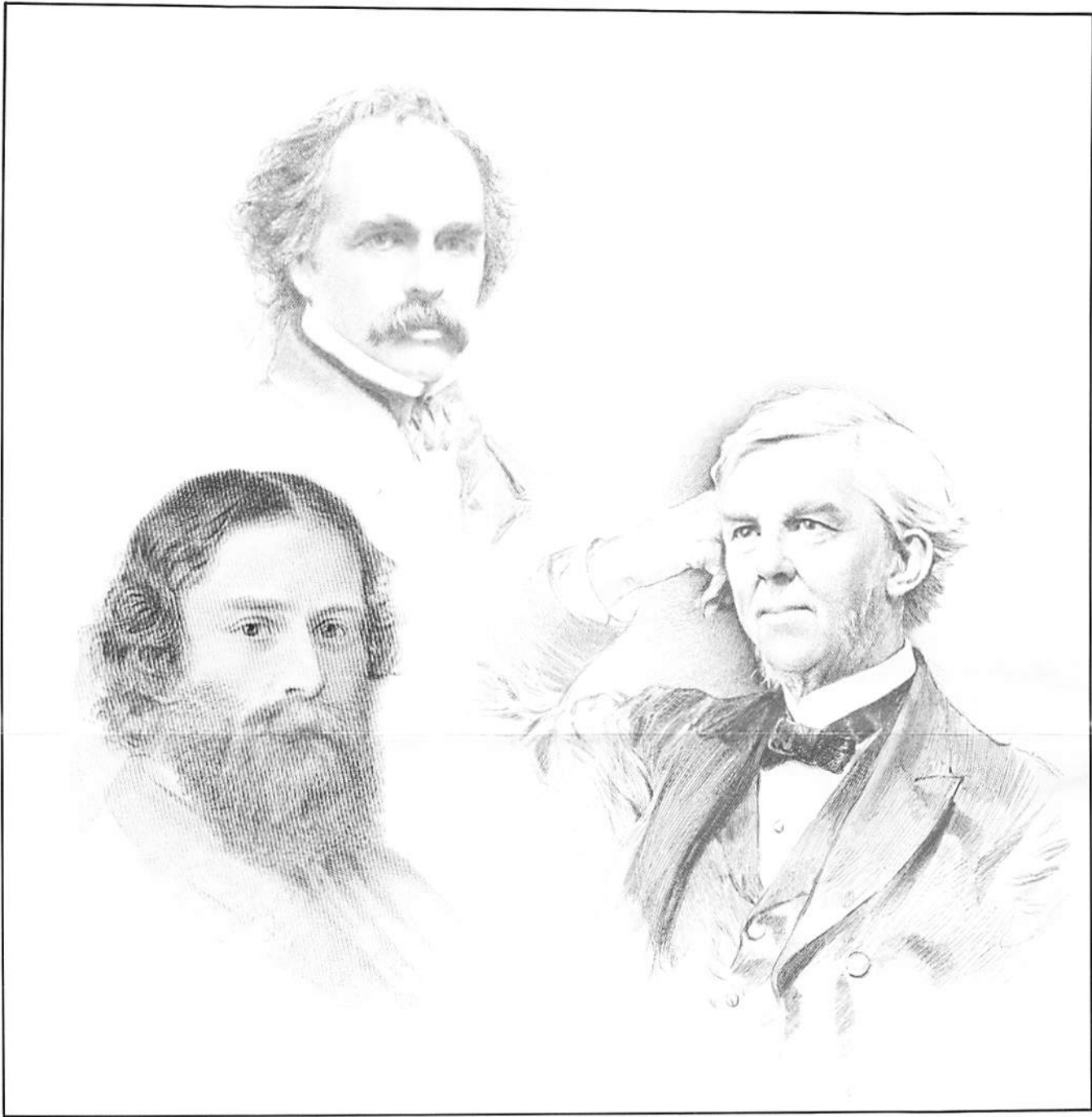
*'Tis for this, thou Silent River!
That my spirit leans to thee;
Thou hast been a generous giver,
Take this idle song from me.*

Needless to say, there are many amateur poems addressed to the Cemetery in an age when writing poetry was considered a proper accomplishment like sketching or playing the piano. Even foreign visitors were inspired. Without knowing Italian, the reader can understand much of a poem by Pietro d'Alessandro that begins "Placido Auburne."

Fiction writers also found Mount Auburn appealing. Henry James set a not-very-successful story in the Cemetery and titled it "A Ghost Story," while Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote one he called "The New Adam and Eve." The titles show that both writers were playing with people's normal reactions —



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
1807–1882



Left, *James Russel Lowell*, 1819–1891
Center, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 1804–1864
Right, *Oliver Wendell Holmes*, 1809–1894

the one to cemeteries through the ages, the other to the newer idea of the cemetery as a garden. With his concern for the effects of sin, Hawthorne was naturally fascinated with a place that echoed the Garden of Eden, yet was a burial place for the dead. That men and women became mortal, and thus subject to death only after the fall and the expulsion from the garden, was an irony Hawthorne couldn't resist.

Perhaps a more effective use of Mount Auburn comes in the more casual references by novelists. William Dean Howells, a good friend of Henry James' and a more popular writer while they were alive, characterized his heroine in *A Modern Instance* through her visits to the Cemetery. "Marcia liked the marble lambs, and the emblematic hands pointing upward with the dexter finger, and the infants carved in stone, and the angels with folded wings and lifted eyes, better than the casts." The

casts referred to were of Greek and Roman statues found in the Athenaeum or any museum of the day with cultural pretensions. They would have represented the restraint and decorum associated with the classical age. Since Marcia's lack of control is basic to the plot, Howells emphasized her weakness by her preference in sculpture.

Novelists and poets continue to be inspired by Mount Auburn. A scene in the Cemetery is a sad portent in *Faithful Are the Wounds* by May Sarton. Our readers have probably found other references in modern literature, for writers will continue to use Mount Auburn as long as the living still enjoy this City of the Dead.

Barbara Rotundo teaches English at the State University of New York at Albany, and has published several articles on the history of Mount Auburn Cemetery.

The Story Behind the Monument:

Charles Wilkes' Great Expedition, 1838-1842

by Eden F. Sizemore

This CENOTAPH is erected
By
Their Associates,
The Officers and Scientific Corps
of the
U.S. Exploring Expedition

The irony and humiliation of a court-martial after returning from the most successful scientific naval expedition ever attempted by the United States, did not escape Lt. Charles Wilkes.

The four year expedition, which resulted in the collection of more than 4,000 zoological specimens, 50,000 plants and 2,500 artifacts, was difficult and dangerous for all, deadly to many. When he left in August of 1838, Wilkes commanded an armada of six ships carrying a total of 490 sailors, officers and civilian "scientifics." When he returned, only the flagship *Vincennes* sailed into New York's harbor, where a luke-warm reception greeted what was left of the exhausted squadron. Although one ship had been delayed in Rio de Janeiro and would later return to the United States, the remaining ships had either been sold, scrapped, or lost at sea during the treacherous 87,000 mile voyage.

Most of the squadron's 53 officers and the remaining sailors and civilian scientists returned to America detesting their brilliant but demanding commander. They had witnessed their comrades' death by disease and attack by cannibals, watched scores of others desert, and themselves fell prey to Wilkes' suspicious and brutal nature. The extreme tensions which had grown out of the voyage resulted in a court-martial for Lt. Wilkes and four of his officers upon their return. The sentence of public reprimand by the Navy Secretary was perhaps the cruelest punishment of all to the proud Wilkes, even as he was found innocent of many of the major crimes with which he was charged.

Lt. Wilkes' Great Expedition left a far more lasting impression on the world, however. The existence of Antarctica was confirmed and 280 islands and scores of harbors around the world were charted, and many of these charts were still in use as late as WW II. The expedition circumnavigated the globe, studying and charting the American Northwest, the islands of the Pacific, much of the South American coastline, and Antarctica. A massive work of scholarship was created based on the study of the artifacts that were brought back, one result of which was the establishment of the Smithsonian Institution as a museum in 1857.

Perhaps the most important result of the expedition, however, was the establishment of the United States as a major naval and scientific presence in the world. The studies of botany, geology and anthropology became a science, rather than the hobbies of gentlemen naturalists. America had entered a new era as a leader in scientific exploration and experimentation, and for that, we can be forever indebted to Charles Wilkes and his crew.

Tree Labeling Continues

The horticultural staff at Mount Auburn, headed by arborist Philip Sands, is gradually re-labeling the majority of the Cemetery's 2500 trees. New 3" x 6" black anodized aluminum sunfast labels will replace the coated steel labels that were placed on many of the trees in the mid-1960's by noted horticulturalist Dr. Donald Wyman.

The new labels are specially made for Mount Auburn Cemetery, and should last for the foreseeable future. The engraving of both the scientific and common names is being done by Cemetery staff to insure accuracy, and the identification of each tree is double-checked before new labels are made.

A long-range plan to measure the growth and health of more than 250 selected trees is also underway. Small round brass tags are being attached to the identification labels of the trees under study. At five year intervals, the diameter, height, and overall condition of these trees will be recorded. The resultant information will aid landscape designers, foresters, and homeowners to plan for the future of their grounds and gardens.



Monument

An obelisk memorializing some of those who died on the voyage was erected at Mount Auburn Cemetery by the officers and scientific crew of the expedition. It is located on Central Avenue near Bigelow Chapel, behind the statue of Nathaniel Bowditch.

For more information about the United States' Exploring Expedition, see: "Around the World in 1,392 days with the Navy's Wilkes—and his 'Scientifics,'" by Donald Dale Jackson, *Smithsonian Magazine*, November, 1985. A new show at the National Museum of National History in Washington, D.C. highlights many of the expedition's treasures.

Thank You Charter Friends!

The new Friends of Mount Auburn is an idea whose time has come. A few short months after the initial introduction of the Friends, more than 300 people have taken a leadership role by becoming Charter Members. Many have made generous contributions over their membership dues to help defray the costs of the program. Anyone who joins the Friends in 1986 will be a Charter Member, and will receive special recognition with our gratitude for showing their support for Mount Auburn Cemetery.

As of this writing, the spring program series sponsored by the Friends has been a great success, with a total of more than 200 people attending the first five lectures. We hope that you will take advantage of these programs as much as possible, and that you will share with us your interests and ideas for programs, lectures, and tours in the future. Of course, a walk or drive through Mount Auburn in solitude or with friends and family in any season is refreshing and rewarding, and we encourage you to take advantage of this oasis in a hectic world.

We sincerely thank everyone who has demonstrated their support for Mount Auburn Cemetery by joining the Friends. Your interest in and affection for the Cemetery is important, and is shared by many.



Spring blossoms at Mount Auburn

Mount Auburn Welcomes Group Tours

Mount Auburn Cemetery welcomes and encourages organized groups to visit the Cemetery to learn more about this natural and historic treasure. Tours of the Cemetery by bus or on foot are becoming increasingly popular. Organizations including the Cambridge Historical Society, Habitat Institute for the Environment, The New England Wild Flower Society, Arnold Arboretum, Brookline Bird Club, Radcliffe Seminars, and the New England Chapter of the Victorian Society all have sponsored organized visits to the Cemetery.

Often a group will provide their own expert leaders. However, members of the Cemetery's staff are also available to lead tours focusing on either the horticultural or historical resources of Mount Auburn Cemetery. If your organization would like to arrange for a guided tour, please contact Eden Sizemore, Program Director, at the main office.



Weeping Higan Cherry

Did You Know...

... that this year the greenhouse is growing 48 different varieties of bedding plants to be planted in the Cemetery?

... that the reason that virtually all headstones in Mount Auburn are upright and straight—unlike those in many colonial graveyards—is that foundations as much as seven feet deep are required for every monument?

... that the first monument to be erected in Mount Auburn was to historian and author Hannah Adams (1775–1831), and that it was placed on the corner of Central and Walnut Avenues by her “female friends”?

... that for a brief period in 1833, non-transferable tickets were issued to all lot representatives for the admission of one horse and carriage and its occupants? This unsuccessful attempt at reducing dust and erosion of the unpaved roads was so unpopular with the lot owners and general public alike, that it was soon discontinued in favor of unrestricted access.

Mount Auburn Cemetery.

ADMIT *Miss Helen M. Bell*
as a Proprietor of Lot No. *4989* and the
members of her household, with one vehicle,
under the Regulations on the back; the violation
of any of which involves the forfeiture of this
privilege.

Louis G. Plamer SEC'Y.
This Ticket to be shown at the Gate.
NOT TRANSFERABLE.

Hosea Ballou

1771-1852

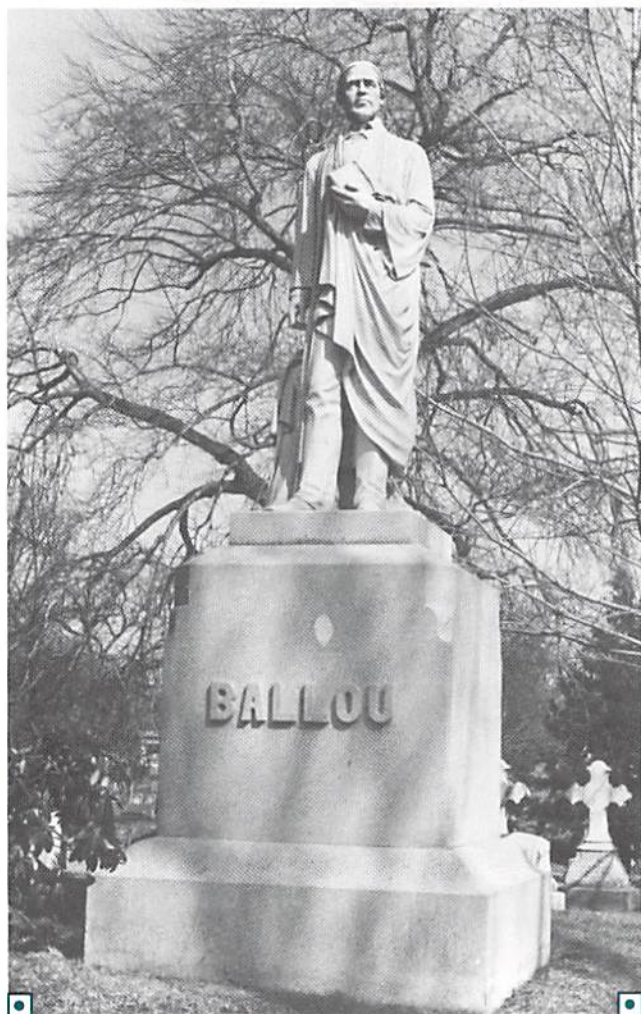
Universalist clergyman, religious writer and editor. A remarkable, self-taught, roving school-teacher and minister who covered on horseback wide areas of lonely New England to study the religious needs of the farmer.

Although until 1809 he preached in schoolhouses, homes and barns, he was soon recognized as a gifted man who had rejected settled and more lucrative pastorates.

A man of elevated character and masterly intellect, he developed a remarkable preaching style—lucid, fluent and impressive—with a strange gift of coining parables and illustrations. When he decided to put his knowledge to use in the founding of one Universalist magazine, the editing of another, the founding of associations of Universalist ministers, and the writing of books, he won a wide following.

His "A Treatise on Atonement" (1805), which anticipated every point of the liberal philosophy of the present day, is one of the great products of New England's theology. He steered the movement away from the hybrid Calvinist teachings of John Murray and placed it on the sound foundations of broad theology, where it has ever since rested. His leadership was unquestioned, and from 1818 he preached in Boston three times every Sunday to crowded congregations at the Second Universalist Church. A life-sized statue marks his grave on Central Avenue (D6 on the map).

Reprinted from Mount Auburn Biographies, "A Biographical Listing of Distinguished Persons Interred in Mount Auburn Cemetery, 1831-1952" by Foster W. Russell.



An Invitation to Join The Friends of Mount Auburn

Please enroll me as a member of the Friends of Mount Auburn.

Individual \$10

Household \$20

Senior Citizens and Students \$5

In addition to my membership dues, I would also like to contribute \$ _____ to help defray the costs of the Friends.

Contributions over membership dues are deductible from income taxes to the extent provided by law.

Enclosed is my check for \$ _____ payable to *Mount Auburn Cemetery*.

M

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

If you would like this to be a gift membership, please enclose your name and address so that we may notify the recipient.

Friends of Mount Auburn
Mount Auburn Cemetery
580 Mount Auburn Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138
617/547-7105

The Deserted Village




Oliver Goldsmith

Sweet Auburn! Loveliest village of the plain,
Where health and plenty cheer'd the labouring swain,
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,
And parting summer's lingering blooms delay'd:
Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please,
How often have I loiter'd o'er thy green,
Where humble happiness endear'd each scene!



Friends of Mount Auburn
Mount Auburn Cemetery
580 Mount Auburn Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

Inside:

-  **Mount Auburn in Literature**
by Barbara Rotundo
-  **The Story Behind the Monument:**
Charles Wilkes'
Great Expedition 1838-1842
-  **Tree Labeling Continues**

