

LONGFELLOW NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE:
A PRESERVATION HISTORY

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Millions of people visit historic sites every year. Most accept the interpretive presentation they receive at face value. That is, most visitors want the site to be the "original" or if it is not, then at least an accurate restoration or replication. The public should be less trusting and more inquisitive about the genuiness of these sites. The way historic sites have been managed in the past varies greatly from site to site. Each has a unique preservation and interpretation history. Each has a story to tell beyond that which made it of historic interest in the first place.

The first thing one learns about historic sites after delving into their institutional pasts, is that the visual image of the past that each presents is not created with the wave of a magic wand. "What a silly comment," you are probably thinking. We all know that restored historic sites have been re-created with diligence and integrity and the finest of research and historic preservation technology. Or do we? How often does the visiting public ask the keepers of these sites about the authenticity of the visual scene before them? My very subjective opinion is -- not very often. "So what," you are probably thinking. The Betsy Ross House in Philadelphia does a land office business and I suspect that few who make that pilgrimage question Betsy's connection with that flag or with that house. If they did, of course, they would discover that not only is the

Betsy Ross story a fabrication, but she never owned the house at 239 Arch Street.

My point is that historic sites, particularly historic house museums, are often not quite what they appear to be. Seldom are they handed down from generation to generation in pristine condition. Usually they are altered, moved, restored, reconstructed, refurnished, or in some way re-created with varying degrees of concern for their historic appearance. Such is the thoroughness of the re-creation, however, that they all appear to be equally authentic. The public in general, and historians in particular, should be inquisitive enough to analyze the backgrounds of officially recognized historic sites and determine for themselves the genuineness of each.

The history of the historic preservation movement in the United States is rife with examples of historic buildings that experienced a period of abandonment, decline, decay, and even removal before they were "saved" and restored to their earlier glory.¹ This necessity for ruins, so well articulated by J.B. Jackson in a book by the same title,² guarantees that each historic site will be restored differently with different goals in mind. Politics, personalities, the thoroughness of the research, and the presence or absence of preservation funds all affect the quality of the re-creation. Small changes in any of these elements will produce a different restored historic scene. How historic sites come to present the image they do is important to the visiting public, historic site administrators, and

historians of the historic preservation phenomenon in the United States.

The National Park Service has long recognized the importance of studies that analyze the institutional history of its parks--natural and historical, as well as recreational--and has recently begun to pay even greater attention to its administrative history program. Administrative histories; like their business world counterparts, corporate histories; examine the institutional history of a park or historic site and record major decisions, changes in conservation or preservation philosophy, and the development of the interpretive program. Topics addressed, of course, vary according to the nature of the site being researched. While many administrative histories are being written by National Park Service historians and others prepared through research contracts, there are endless subjects yet to be addressed that would lend themselves to topics for theses and dissertations. The scholarly examination of park histories is, as Professor Hosmer has demonstrated, a fascinating undertaking that reveals as much about how we see ourselves as it does about how we envision the past.

On a very practical plane, administrative histories provide park managers an understanding of how their park or site was managed in the past so that they may better manage in the future. A history of the preservation of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, now Longfellow National Historic Site, provides this and more. Like only a handful of

historic homes, the home of Longfellow was conscientiously preserved by family members for ninety years before they transferred that responsibility to the National Park Service in 1972. As a result, the history of this site is very much one of how one family perceived its preservation obligation and how well that perception was adhered to through several generations. It is also a window through which can be viewed the social history of those generations; a prominent New England family adjusting to and influencing changing conditions.

In 1974 the National Park Service formally assumed possession of the Longfellow home. The home, carriage house, and grounds had changed only slightly since 1882 when Longfellow died. The Park Service inherited not only the tangible aspects of the property, but also a tradition of care and a sense of history that dated from the poet's death. "I tried after your grandfather's death having the house open every day," wrote Longfellow's daughter Alice years later, "and nearly went crazy. Neither Abby nor I will ever try it again. Never."³ And she never did.

Alice continued to live at "Craigie House" or "Castle Craigie" as the family referred to it, and her brother and two sisters increasingly began to think of the house at 105 Brattle Street as a shrine of sorts, a memorial to Longfellow that should be maintained generally as it was when he lived there. To that end, the family, shortly after Longfellow's death, donated property between the home and the Charles River to the city of

Cambridge. In 1887 the noted landscape architect Charles Eliot developed the land into Longfellow Park. Although now overgrown and providing no view of the Charles, the park continues to serve as a monument to the poet.⁴ The desire to establish a permanent arrangement for the preservation of the home grew during the three decades following Longfellow's death until in 1913 the remaining children created the Longfellow House Trust.

The Longfellow papers do not reveal who first suggested a trust for the house or when, but it probably originated in the legal minds of Richard Henry Dana, 3rd and Joseph Gilbert Thorpe, the husbands of Longfellow's daughters Annie and Edith. It is possible that William Sumner Appleton, a cousin who had three years earlier created the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, could have suggested a trust, but there is no written evidence to support this theory.

The family clearly intended for the house to be preserved in perpetuity for educational and inspirational purposes. It is equally clear that they were aware of and sensitive to the complete history of the house not merely its association with Longfellow. The third provision of the Trust directed the trustees, after a period of three years during which no family member chose to occupy the house, to convey the property to a corporation "to be held, preserved, maintained and managed for the benefit of the public as a specimen of the best Colonial architecture of the middle of the eighteenth century, as an historical monument of the occupation of the house by General

Washington during the seige of Boston in the Revolutionary War, and as a memorial to Henry W. Longfellow..."⁵

The Trust provided, among other things, that Alice could remain in the house, that the home's contents could remain in the house unless directed elsewhere by the children, and that the Trust funds could be conveyed to a "corporation" or divided among the Longfellow heirs at the cessation of the Trust. Several modifications to the provisions of the Trust allowed certain household goods to be removed from the house including a painting by Tintoretto that the heirs wanted to donate to Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. (Subsequent research by the museum determined that the painting was not a Tintoretto.)

As finally negotiated, the Trust paid the taxes, insurance premiums, and external and structural repairs to the house while Alice paid \$2,500 annual rent and all other expenses. To ensure that a member of the family could always occupy the house, the Trust provided that following Alice's death any family member alive at the time of the execution of the Trust could live at 105 Brattle Street under the same terms as Alice. So concerned was Alice that the house continue to serve as a home for the family, she willed \$60,000 to cover the annual rent should any member choose to live there after her death.

Three trustees managed the Longfellow House Trust and between 1913 and 1972 eight men served in this capacity. With one exception all were graduates of Harvard, one was a member of the family, and all had some previous connection with the

Longfellow. Edmund M. Parker, the strongest member of the first trio of trustees, was an established Boston lawyer who managed the Thomas Gold Appleton trust (T.G. Appleton being a half brother of Longfellow's second wife Fanny), and in 1912, as a Justice of the Peace, married in the Longfellow garden Edmund (Ned) Dana (a grandson of Longfellow) and Jessie Holliday an English suffragist. Parenthetically, the wedding caused a stir in Boston for both Dana and Holliday were Socialists and in place of the traditional wedding cake "a large green basket adorned with white flowers stood on a table and filled with Socialist tracts neatly tied up with ribbons and everybody took one."⁶

John F. Moors, the second of the initial trustees, was Alice's attorney, a prominent Boston philanthropist, and a board member and early financial advisor to Radcliffe College. Dudley L. Pickman, Jr., it seems was the only non-practicing lawyer among the trustees. He was president of Newmarket Manufacturing Company which made cotton and silk goods. Pickman's connection to the Longfellow/Dana family is not yet known.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow "Harry" Dana, was the family member most interested in the house, its possessions, and its preservation as a memorial to his grandfather. Born in 1881, the year before his grandfather's death, Dana graduated from Harvard in 1903 and received his Ph.D. in comparative literature seven years later. He taught at Columbia University until 1917 when he, along with James McKeen Cattell, was dismissed for his outspoken opposition to the involvement of the United States in

World War I. It was the major turning point in his life. Long a favorite of "Aunt Alice," Dana returned to Cambridge to 105 Brattle Street where he lived for the next thirty years, researching the history of the Dana family, arranging his grandfather Longfellow's papers, and lecturing on Socialism and the Russian drama.

Following his dismissal from Columbia, Dana lectured at New York's Workers School, the Rand School of Social Science, and Will Durant's Labor Temple School. "Your tennis made me feel like breaking my raquet and throwing it away;" wrote Durant in 1924, "and your lectures made me despondent. Now, I suppose, you will come out with a history of nineteenth century civilization that will make mine look like an after-birth. But go to it. I'll get square by stealing some of your drama stuff. I took copious notes last Saturday & Sunday."⁷ In 1919 he along with Harold Laski, Zechariah Chafee, and George Nasmyth formed the Trade Union College in Boston where he taught along with numerous professors from Harvard and MIT.

Dana took an interest in the house even before taking up residence there following his removal from Columbia. His concern for the house was matched by a personal fear that the Trustees did not have the best interests of the house at heart. In 1915, while Harry was still teaching at Columbia, Aunt Alice unknowingly penned a prophetic note to Harry. "At all events you know, I am sure that the Craigies is always a second home for you to come to at any time and I trust you will soon cease to have

any dread of those silent trustees, who certainly give me no concern."8 Harry, of course, did soon make Craigie House his second home, but his "dread" of the trustees continued until his death in 1950.

During 1916, Harry became concerned over the clause in the first Trust indenture of 1913 that the contents of the house could be divided among the children and grandchildren. He was particularly concerned that paintings and portraits of ancestors could be removed from the house and scattered to the four winds. He lobbied family members on the grounds that the house should remain as it was when Longfellow lived there, that the pictures belonged to the house as much as the rest of the furnishings, and if left in the house they could be seen together in the places where they had been placed by the poet. His opinion prevailed and the provisions of the Trust were changed in 1919 to allow the art to remain in the house.

Following Alice's death in 1928, Harry continued to live in Craigie House, alone except for renters and occasional guests. But as fearful as he was of the trustees, and as concerned as he was over the future of the property, Dana took no steps to ensure its ultimate preservation through transfer to a "corporation." The idea was never far from his mind. At least as early as 1936, cousin William Sumner Appleton began badgering Harry about the final disposition of the house. "You may remember that you have on occasion wondered what would be come of this Society after my death. Let me return the compliment by saying that I have often

wondered what would become of the Craigie house after your death...I hope you will be able to give the place the impress that you want before you cash in your chips and hie you elsewhere so by all means get good and busy on the matter...."9

Sumner was tireless in his pursuit of Craigie House and never passed up an opportunity to press the family for a commitment. "Recently the subject of the future of the Craigie house has been much on my mind and leaves me wondering whether you and I could talk it over some time soon," he wrote to Harry's cousin Anne Thorpe in 1937.¹⁰ Ten years later he was still at it. "...if you have any influence whatsoever with the future of the Craigie house, swing it our way, for we are the logical folk to look after it."¹¹ He was, of course, speaking for the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA). Appleton died in 1947 and was not to know that thirteen years later when the trustees were actively searching for a permanent "corporation" to take over the Longfellow house, they contacted Bertram K. Little the Director of SPNEA. It is unclear what happened during the ensuing discussions, but after a promising beginning negotiations fell through and the trustees looked elsewhere.

The 1960 effort on the part of the trustees to find a suitable and permanent agency to administer the house was not their first attempt to do so. The trustees tried twenty-five years earlier to "convey the premises to a corporation," they failed, and in the process engendered no small amount of ill-will

between themselves and members of the family. This rather ugly episode in the history of Craigie House was sparked with the arrest of Harry in April of 1935 on a morals charge. He was acquitted the following month and after a summer in Cambridge left for Europe for six months. In his absence, the trustees, particularly Edmund Parker, became increasingly incensed over the morals charge believing this public suggestion of Harry's homosexuality reflected adversely on the house, and the trustees designed to avoid embarrassment in the future by transferring the house to Harvard, a corporation. Although the deal with Harvard fell through, the trustees were able to interest Radcliffe in assuming responsibility for the house as the president's home.¹²

Wishing to legalize the transfer, the trustees polled the family members regarding the possibility of conveying the house to Radcliffe suggesting that use by the college's president would preserve the structure's "monumental character...as a living thing, not as a dead museum."¹³ The family's response was emphatic. They wanted no discussion of transfer of the house to a corporation as long as a member of the family, notably Harry Dana, chose to reside there.¹⁴ But Harry wasn't altogether victorious. After October, 1936, he was allowed to use the Longfellow house for "literary purposes," but was forbidden to board or lodge there.¹⁵ Sixteen months later Edmund Parker died and shortly thereafter Harry moved quietly back into the house.

Although Alice Longfellow did not open the house to visitors after her initial unpleasant experience, Harry Dana and Anne

Thorpe began allowing the public to tour the first floor rooms at least as early as 1934. In 1941, at the suggestion of cousin William Sumner Appleton, they began charging entrance fees: .25 for individual visitors, .15 for group visitors, children were free. In 1945 fees were raised five cents, and nine cents was charged for children. The odd amount was consciously chosen to avoid paying a federal tax that was assessed on fees of ten cents and above.

Following Harry's death in 1950, no family member chose to live in the house. The trustees began their search, once again, for a corporation and contacted the National Park Service in 1952, but the Park Service apparently was not interested. (It should be noted that in 1952 the National Park System contained no site commemorating a writer. The first home of this type acquired by the Service was Nathaniel Hawthorne's home in Concord, Massachusetts which was purchased as a part of Minute Man National Historical Park in 1965. Over the next twelve years, Congress added four more author's homes to the System: Carl Sandburg's in 1968, Longfellow's in 1972, Eugene O'Neill's in 1976, and Edgar Allan Poe's in 1978.)

The trustees waited ten years and tried again. After contacting the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, they returned to the National Park Service. This time the climate was different and in 1962 the Service conducted a field survey of the site that concluded that Craigie House did meet the Service's

standards for inclusion in the System. On that positive note H. Brooks Beck, counsel to the trustees, (and son-in-law of Samuel Eliot Morison), began negotiating with Park Service officials to conclude the transfer.¹⁶ A legal decree in 1969, requested by the trustees, paved the way for legislation by confirming that the National Park Service could be considered a "corporation" under the terms of the initial 1913 Trust.¹⁷ In October 1969, Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill requested the Park Service to draft a bill authorizing the site's establishment, and on March 5, 1970 he introduced HR 16329. Two years later Congress authorized Longfellow National Historic Site and in 1974, the Park Service assumed management of the property.

The Longfellow and Dana families did well. During the very formative years of the historic preservation movement in New England, they created a legal preservation agreement that literally stood the test of time. The Longfellow Trust survived the vicissitudes of a succession of trustees and protected and preserved the site while a suitable and permanent administrator was found. Its careful wording prevented whimsical actions, and established exacting criteria for its eventual disposal. Yet, one can't help but wonder what the eventual fate of the house might have been had Harry Dana not been dismissed from Columbia. The last family member to chose to live in Craigie House would have been Alice who died in 1928. Would William Sumner Appleton have been successful in acquiring the house for the SPNEA? Would it have gone to Harvard or Radcliffe even without the catalyst of

Harry, or would the Trust have held together until an organization such as the National Park Service came along? One cannot, of course, answer such questions.

What is apparent, is that the Trust was a very early, very carefully crafted, and very private New England family effort to preserve the home of an internationally acclaimed American poet. Its success is a tribute to its creators which, as far as can be discerned, knew little if anything about the growing preservation movement and sought no counsel during their deliberations. The existence of the Trust and its longevity ensured that the house today, three quarters of a century later, is not a restored, refurnished, or otherwise re-created representation, but an original survivor of Washington's brief occupancy and Longfellow's extended one.

NOTES

1. Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965); Hosmer, Preservation Comes of Age; From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926-1949 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 2 vols.
2. John Brinckerhoff Jackson, The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980). _
3. Alice M. Longfellow to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana, September 28, 1913, in File "Alice M. Longfellow to Harry Dana-1913," Box 29 "Letters from Alice M. Longfellow," Longfellow Papers, Longfellow National Historic Site, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
4. Alan Emmet, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Changing of a Landscape (Cambridge: Harvard University Printing Office, 1978), p. 44.
5. Indenture, October 28, 1913, Middlesex Registry of Deeds, Book 3931, page 233, copy among Longfellow Papers.
6. Edith Longfellow Dana to H.W.L. Dana, 1912, in File "Letters of Edith L. Dana to H.W.L. Dana (1881-1950)", Box 4 "Edith Longfellow Dana (1853-1915), Letters and Related Materials," Longfellow Papers.
7. Will Durant to H.W.L. Dana, July 22, 1924, in File "New York: Labor Temple School," Box "H.W.L. Dana Miscellaneous Materials," Longfellow Papers.
8. Alice M. Longfellow to H.W.L. Dana, December 17, 1915, in File "Alice M. Longfellow to Harry Dana -- 1914-1915," Box 29 "Letters from Alice M. Longfellow," Longfellow Papers.
9. William Sumner Appleton to H.W.L. Dana, June 25, 1934, Longfellow Papers.
10. William S. Appleton to Anne Thorpe, March 26, 1937, in File "Sumner Appleton," Box "Longfellow House Rental Arrangements," Longfellow Papers.
11. William S. Appleton to H.W.L. Dana, November 20, 1946, in File "Sumner Appleton," Box "Longfellow House Rental Arrangements," Longfellow Papers.

12. "Statement Regarding the Longfellow House Trust," June 1936, in untitled file, Box "Longfellow House, Rental Arrangements & Misc. Longfellow Trust," Longfellow Papers.
13. John F. Moors to Francis G. Goodale, June 23, 1936, in untitled file, Box "Longfellow House, Rental Arrangements and Misc. Longfellow House Trust," Longfellow Papers.
14. H.W.L. Dana to Anne Thorpe, August 25, 1936, in untitled file, Box "Longfellow House, Rental Arrangements & Misc. Longfellow Trust," Longfellow Papers.
15. Edmund M. Parker to Anne Thorpe, October 14, 1936, in untitled file, Box "Longfellow House, Rental Arrangements & Misc. Longfellow Trust," Longfellow Papers.
16. File "Letters re. Transfer of Longfellow House to NPS," Longfellow Papers.
17. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Decree, April 30, 1969, Probate Court Equity No. 908, copy in File "L58," Longfellow Papers.